



RESEARCH PAPER

**Gaslighting, Emotional Invalidation and Well-Being in Married Individuals**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study investigated the relationship between gaslighting, perceived emotional invalidation, and well-being among married individuals. Gaslighting and emotional invalidation were examined as independent variables, while well-being was treated as the outcome variable. The study aimed to determine whether harmful relational experiences within marriage are associated with reduced psychological well-being. A correlational research design was employed, and data were collected from married individuals using standardized self-report measures, including the Gaslight Questionnaire Urdu version, Perceived Invalidation of Emotion Scale, and WHO-5 Well-being Index Urdu version. The instruments demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present study. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed that gaslighting had a significant negative correlation with well-being ( $r = -.62$ ), indicating that higher gaslighting was associated with lower well-being. Similarly, perceived emotional invalidation by a spouse was significantly and negatively correlated with well-being ( $r = -.61$ ). Multiple linear regression analysis further showed that gaslighting and emotional invalidation significantly predicted well-being, collectively explaining 41.7% variance in well-being,  $F(2,147) = 54.19$ . Individually, both gaslighting ( $\beta = -.32, p < .001$ ) and emotional invalidation ( $\beta = -.33, p < .001$ ) emerged as significant negative predictors. Overall, the findings highlight the detrimental role of gaslighting and emotional invalidation in marital relationships and emphasize the importance of emotional validation, psychological safety, and healthy communication for promoting well-being among married individuals.

**Keywords:** Gaslighting, emotional invalidation, well-being, married individuals, marital relationships, psychological abuse, WHO-5

**Introduction**

This thesis investigates the relationship between gaslighting, emotional invalidation, and well-being in married individuals. It examines how psychologically harmful relational experiences, particularly gaslighting and perceived emotional invalidation by a spouse, may negatively influence the emotional and psychological well-being of married individuals. Gaslighting involves manipulation that causes individuals to question their perceptions, memories, or sense of reality, whereas emotional invalidation refers to the dismissal, rejection, or minimization of one's emotional experiences. Together, these relational patterns may weaken emotional security, reduce self-worth, and contribute to poorer well-being within marriage.

Marriage is one of the most significant interpersonal relationships in adult life and is often considered a source of emotional support, companionship, security, and psychological stability. However, the quality of marital interaction plays a central role in

determining whether marriage becomes a protective factor or a source of psychological distress. While mutual respect, empathy, and emotional responsiveness can nurture resilience and self-worth, certain relational patterns, particularly those involving emotional manipulation, can severely damage a person's psychological well-being. In culturally collectivistic societies such as Pakistan, marriage is not only a personal relationship between two individuals but is also influenced by family expectations, social norms, gender roles, and extended family involvement. These sociocultural factors may shape how spouses communicate, resolve conflicts, express emotions, and respond to each other's psychological needs (Qadir et al., 2013).

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation in which one person repeatedly causes another person to doubt their perceptions, memories, judgments, or sense of reality. In intimate and marital relationships, gaslighting may occur through denial of events, blame-shifting, contradiction, trivialization of feelings, withholding information, or making the partner feel irrational, overly sensitive, or mentally unstable (Darke et al., 2025). Unlike open conflict, gaslighting is often subtle and gradual, which makes it difficult for the victim to identify. Over time, the affected individual may begin to lose confidence in personal judgment and may increasingly depend on the manipulative partner for interpretation of reality (Darke et al., 2025).

Emotional invalidation refers to a response in which a person's emotional experience is dismissed, rejected, minimized, ignored, or judged as inappropriate (Dennison, 2024). In simple terms, it occurs when an individual expresses an emotion and the other person communicates that the feeling is wrong, exaggerated, unnecessary, or unacceptable. In marital relationships, emotional invalidation may appear in statements such as "you are overreacting," "you should not feel this way," "it is not a big deal," or "you are too sensitive." Perceived emotional invalidation refers to an individual's experience of being invalidated, ignored, or judged negatively by others' emotions as described by Zielinski and Veilleux (2018) when developing the Perceived Invalidation of Emotion Scale (PIES). Since the current study is focused on the invalidating person's perceived emotional response of the other person to their invalidating message, this definition is particularly applicable in this context as it considers the emotional response of the other person, as well as the intention of the invalidating person (Zielinski & Veilleux, 2018).

Well-being is taken very generally as a multi-faceted phenomenon that involves subjective judgments about one's life, emotional reactions, life satisfaction and meaning and purpose (Park et al., 2022). It incorporates both hedonic elements (positive affect and happiness) and eudaimonic elements (personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance) (De-Juanas et al., 2020).

## **Literature Review**

Bellomare et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between gaslighting and increased symptoms of emotional dysregulation, anxiety and depression in a cross-sectional study of romantic relationships among emerging adults. This study examined the relationality of gaslighting and the corrupting power dynamics it generates, and the emotional dependency that supports it. In his exploration of gendered experiences of gaslighting, Adair (2025) also determined that women were more likely to be the victims of gaslighting and that the psychological impact frequently had a lasting quality. The findings revealed that the gaslighting experience was highly related to the PTSD symptoms and low self-efficacy and learned helplessness, particularly when the social network individuals failed to acknowledge the abuse (Adair, 2025).

Psychological consequences of gaslighting are now increasingly the subject of empirical studies on the subject. Jaspal and Lopes (2025) examined the relationship between ghosting, gaslighting, and coercion with mental health outcomes for people in the

United Kingdom. The findings, in turn, revealed a positive correlation between gaslighting and depression – that is, those who reported being gaslit were more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression. The authors recommended that psychological services should be provided to the individuals who have suffered from problematic behaviours in their relationships as these could contribute to mental health issues (Jaspal and Lopes, 2025).

Zielinski and Veilleux (2018) developed a Perceived Invalidation of Emotion Scale (PIES) to assess their perceived experience of others ignoring and/or dismissing and/or judging them negatively for their emotions. Their research indicates that both theoretically and empirically, emotion invalidation has been correlated with mental and physical unhealthy issues. This scale played an important role in its development, because it provided for the measurement of perceived invalidation as a psychological construct. Zielinski et al. (2022) further examined perceived emotional invalidation in relation to daily affective experiences. Their findings provided evidence that perceived emotional invalidation predicts daily emotional states, indicating that individuals who feel emotionally invalidated may experience more negative affect and poorer emotional adjustment. This study supports the idea that invalidation is not only a past relational experience but may also influence everyday emotional functioning (Zielinski et al., 2022).

In addition, studies using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index have shown that low well-being is associated with psychological distress and depressive symptoms. A systematic review of the WHO-5 reported that the scale is widely used as a valid measure of subjective psychological well-being and can also serve as a screening tool for depression (Topp et al., 2015).

This is relevant to the present research because the WHO-5 captures positive mental well-being, which may decline when individuals experience repeated emotional invalidation or gaslighting within marriage.

The emotional development, attachment security and psychological functioning of adults are important aspects of marital relationships. While supportive marriage patterns can lead to a variety of positive consequences, such as life satisfaction, emotional stability and life meaning, dysfunctional marriage patterns can have a significant impact on a person's well-being. In recent years, there have been two types of behaviors that are working their way into the public eye that are both subtle but psychologically damaging: gaslighting and emotional invalidation. Gaslighting can be manipulative, causing individuals to doubt their perceptions and reality, impacting their self-trust and emotional clarity. Emotional invalidation (when the partner's emotional state does not matter or is discredited) may also play a role in decreasing emotional security and belongingness.

## **Hypotheses**

H1: Gaslighting in marital relationships will be significantly correlated with well-being.

H2: Perceived emotional invalidation by a spouse will be significantly correlated with well-being.

H3: Gaslighting and emotional invalidation will significantly predict well-being in married individuals.

H4: There will be significant differences in the levels of gaslighting, emotional invalidation, and/or well-being across demographic variables (age, gender, education, marriage duration).

## **Material and Methods**

### **Research Design**

The present study uses correlational research design to explore the prediction of gaslighting and emotional invalidation to the wellbeing of married people. This design is designed to give credit to the relationship and its direction that exist between variables without manipulation.

### **Sampling Technique**

A convenient sampling technique was used for selection. Convenience sampling involves selecting individuals who are readily available who are willing to participate in the research. This was found to be a viable approach as it was carried out in educational settings and a voluntary participation of students was needed.

### **Participants**

This research is going to be done on the married people living in urban areas of Pakistan. Purposive sampling is employed to select the individuals as they comprise of those individuals who have been married for at least 1 year which gives adequate exposure to marital dynamics.

### **Research Procedure**

Participants were reached and access and participation enhanced through in-person and online data collection methods. The face-to-face method entailed delivering print questionnaires to married people in community settings, such as the workplace, family/whānau settings, social/community settings, or community residences. In the “online” approach, the questionnaires were distributed amongst married individuals through WhatsApp and the email addresses for married persons were created specifically for this purpose. With this objective, the data collection method adopted in this study was Urdu questionnaires to cover a wider education spectrum.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The data collected was entered, organized, and managed using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Prior to analysis, the dataset was screened for data entry errors, missing values, and outliers to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were computed to summarize demographic variables and study constructs. To assess the internal consistency of the scales used, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated.

To explore relationships among the variables, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were computed. Furthermore, to examine the predictive role of gaslighting and perceived invalidation on well-being, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was conducted. Independent sample t-tests and One-Way ANOVA were performed to explore group differences based on demographic factors. All statistical tests will be conducted using a significance level of  $p < .05$ .

### **Results and Discussion**

Reliability was measured using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Moreover, descriptive statistics was computed to assess the normality of data. In order to find the relationship

between study variables, correlation was computed. ANOVA and t-test was computed to find the mean difference between demographic variables.

#### Reliability Estimate and Descriptive Statistics of Measures

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Properties of the Study Measures**

Measures	K	A	M (SD)	Range		Skew	Kurt
				Actual	Potential		
Gaslighting	18	.95	43.01 (37.75)	0-155	0-162	1.031	.179
Emotional Invalidation	10	.96	22.40 (12.61)	10-50	10-50	.907	-.575
Well-being	5	.93	15.57 (6.61)	0-25	0-25	-.606	-.565

Note. Skew=Skewness; Kurt= Kurtosis

Results in table 1 show that alpha coefficient for the study variables is in acceptable range. Values of skewness and kurtosis show that data is normally distributed. The values of standard deviations indicate that the responses are scattered and widespread from the mean position.

In order to examine the relationship between the study variables, Pearson product moment correlation was performed.

**Table 2**  
**Correlation among Study Variables and Demographic Variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gaslighting	-	.79**	-.62**	-.09	-.09	.07	-.06	.06
2. Emotional Invalidation		-	-.61**	-.03	-.04	.17*	.02	.10
3. Well-being			-	.11	.14	-.02	.08	.02
4. Age				-	.33**	.19*	.92**	.70**
5. Monthly Income					-	.48	.36**	.25**
6. Age Difference						-	.19*	.19*
7. Marriage Duration							-	.76**
8. No. of Children								-

$p < 0.05$ \*  $p < 0.01$ \*\*

Table 2 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between the study variables that supports hypothesis 1 and 2 which is stated as “Gaslighting in marital relationships will be significantly correlated with well-being” and “Perceived emotional invalidation by a spouse will be significantly correlated with well-being.” The demographic variables have no significant correlation with the study variables.

#### Comparison of Demographic Related Differences on Study Variables

Mean differences were computed across various groups of samples based on demographics of sample. The demographics having two groups were analyzed through independent sample *t*-test and demographics having three groups were analyzed through ANOVA.

*t*-test was employed to assess gender-based differences in gaslighting, emotional invalidation and well-being in married individuals.

**Table 3**  
**Gender Differences on Study Variables (N=150)**

Variables	Men	Women	T	p	95% CI	
	M (SD)	M(SD)			Lower	Upper
Gaslighting	39.96(35.43)	45.15(39.36)	.83	.35	-7.19	17.57

Emotional Invalidation	20.95(11.83)	23.42(13.10)	1.18	.21	-1.65	6.59
Well-being	16.38(6.71)	15.00(6.52)	-1.26	.45	-3.56	.77

$p < 0.05$ \*  $p < 0.01$ \*\*

Table 3 demonstrates the result of independent sample t-test that reflects that women score higher on gaslighting as compared to men. The mean score for females in emotional invalidation is slightly higher than for males. Furthermore, the mean score for males in well-being is slightly higher than for females. However, the difference is not significant.

One-way ANOVA was employed to assess mean differences in the study variables across education. The participants were divided into three levels of education, i.e., undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate.

**Table 4**  
**Differences between Study Variables in Education Groups (N=150)**

Variables	Undergraduate (n=16)	Graduate (n=95)	Postgraduate (n=39)	F	p	95% CI	
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)			Lower	Upper
Gaslighting	36.93(37.86)	45.16(38.77)	40.28(35.62)	.46	.63	36.92	49.10
Emotional Invalidation	18.00(8.98)	22.66(12.45)	23.56(14.08)	1.16	.31	20.36	24.43
Well-being	15.93(7.20)	15.75(6.54)	14.97(6.71)	.22	.80	14.50	16.64

$p < 0.05$ \*  $p < 0.01$ \*\*

Table 4 shows ANOVA analysis for different education groups. The average mean score of gaslighting is highest in the second group that of graduate married individuals. Emotional invalidation score is lowest for the first group that is undergraduate married individuals. However, the difference is not significant. The scores for well-being are almost equal in all groups.

One-way ANOVA was employed to assess mean differences in the study variables based on employment status. The participants were divided into three levels of education, i.e., undergraduate, and postgraduate.

**Table 5**  
**Differences between Study Variables in Employment Groups (N=150)**

Variables	Unemployed (n=36)	Job (n=93)	Business (n=21)	F	p	95% CI	
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)			Lower	Upper
Gaslighting	46.27(41.75)	41.99(36.00)	41.95(39.76)	.17	.84	36.92	49.10
Emotional Invalidation	21.97(12.56)	22.95(12.93)	20.71(11.59)	.29	.74	20.36	24.43
Well-being	14.19(6.28)	16.15(6.65)	15.38(6.94)	1.46	.32	14.50	16.64

$p < 0.05$ \*  $p < 0.01$ \*\*

Table 5 shows ANOVA analysis for different employment groups. The average mean score of gaslighting is highest in the first group, that is of unemployed married individuals. However, the difference is not significant. The scores for emotional invalidation and well-being are almost equal in all groups.

T-test was employed to assess mean differences between dual income and single income couples. Dual income couples are those where both the spouses earn.

**Table 6**

Variables	Dual Income (n = 64)	Single Income (n=86)	t	p	95% CI	
	M (SD)	M(SD)			Lower	Upper
Gaslighting	41.59(37.88)	44.07(37.84)	-.39	.71	-14.83	9.87
Emotional Invalidation	22.46(12.73)	22.34(12.59)	.06	.93	-4.00	4.25
Well-being	15.93(6.78)	15.30(6.52)	.58	.39	-1.53	2.79

*Mean Differences in Study Variables between Dual Income and Single Income Couples (N=150),  $p < 0.05^*$   $p < 0.01^{**}$*

Table 6 demonstrates the result of independent sample t-test reflecting a slightly higher gaslighting score in dual earning couples. However, the difference is not significant. Moreover, the scores for emotional invalidation and well-being are almost equal in both groups.

T-test was employed to assess mean differences across family systems in gaslighting, emotional invalidation and well-being in married individuals scores. Two family system groups are joint family system and nuclear family system.

**Table 7**  
**Mean Differences in Family system on Study Variables (N=150)**

Variables	Joint (n = 61)	Nuclear (n=89)	t	p	95% CI	
	M (SD)	M(SD)			Lower	Upper
Gaslighting	57.36(42.53)	33.17(30.64)	4.04	.00	12.37	35.98
Emotional Invalidation	25.50(13.26)	20.26(11.74)	2.54	.04	1.17	9.31
Well-being	13.37(6.93)	17.07(5.98)	-3.39	.04	-5.79	-1.60

$p < 0.05^*$   $p < 0.01^{**}$

Table 7 demonstrates the result of independent sample t-test reflecting a significantly higher gaslighting score in those married individuals who live in joint family system. Furthermore, those individuals living in a joint family system scored higher on emotional invalidation too. On the other hand, higher well-being score is seen in those married individuals who live in nuclear family system.

T-test was employed to examine mean differences in scores of the study variables on the basis of how the spouse was chosen yielding two distinct marriage arrangement categories, i.e., arranged marriages and love marriages.

**Table 8**  
**Differences between Study Variables in Marriage Arrangement Groups (N=150)**

Variables	Arrange (n = 99)	Love (n=51)	t	p	95% CI	
	M (SD)	M(SD)			Lower	Upper
Gaslighting	47.13(38.91)	35.01(34.35)	1.87	.31	-.64	24.86
Emotional Invalidation	23.95(12.86)	19.37(11.64)	2.13	.10	.34	8.83
Well-being	14.42(6.68)	17.80(5.92)	-3.04	.20	-5.57	-1.18

$p < 0.05^*$   $p < 0.01^{**}$

Table 8 shows independent sample t-test for marriage arrangement groups. The average mean score of gaslighting and emotional invalidation is higher in those who had an arranged marriage. Whereas the score of well-being is seen as higher in the lover marriage group. However, the difference is not significant.

T-test was employed to assess mean differences between co-residing and long-distance couples. Long-distance couples are those where both the spouses live separately due to work.

**Table 9**  
**Mean Differences in Living Arrangement on Study Variables (N=150)**

Variables	Co-residing (n = 116)	Long-distance (n=34)	t	p	95% CI	
	M (SD)	M(SD)			Lower	Upper
Gaslighting	37.70(35.29)	61.11(40.73)	-3.28	.00	-37.50	-9.32
Emotional Invalidation	21.46(12.05)	25.58(14.08)	-1.68	.09	-8.95	.71
Well-being	16.30(6.44)	13.08(6.69)	2.54	.01	.71	5.72

Table 9 demonstrates the result of independent sample t-test reflecting a significantly higher gaslighting score in those married individuals who live apart. Those individuals living apart have scored higher on emotional invalidation too. On the other hand, higher well-being scores are seen in those married individuals who live together.

#### Predictability of Gaslighting, Emotional Invalidation and Demographic Variables on Well-being

In order to examine the predictability of gaslighting, emotional invalidation and demographic variables on well-being, multiple linear regression was performed.

**Table 10**  
**Multiple Linear Regression Showing the Predictors of Well-being (N = 150)**

Variables	Beta	SE	B	P
Constant	22.15	.86	-	.00
Gaslighting	-.06	.02	-.35	.00
Emotional Invalidation	-.17	.05	-.33	.00

$p < 0.05^*$   $p < 0.01^{**}$

Table 10 shows the impact of gaslighting and emotional invalidation on well-being. The  $R^2$  value of .417 revealed that the gaslighting and emotional invalidation together explained 41.7% variance in the outcome variable well-being with  $F(2,147) = 54.19$ . Individually, both gaslighting ( $\beta = -.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and emotional invalidation ( $\beta = -.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ) emerged as significant negative predictors of well-being

#### Discussion

The current study aimed to find out the relationship between gaslighting, emotional invalidation and well-being in married individuals. The study was conducted through the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of a informed consent, demographic sheet, Gaslight Questionnaire, Perceived Invalidation of Emotions Scale, and WHO-5 Well-being Index. Demographic variables included age, gender, monthly income, family system, marriage arrangement.

In the present study, the correlation research method was utilized. Pearson product moment correlations, t-test and One Way ANOVA were used to analyze the data in order to obtain the results. Multiple linear regression was also conducted to determine the variance caused by the predictors. Descriptive measurements for scales were calculated. The investigation focused on exploring the connection between gaslighting, emotional invalidation and well-being in married individuals, a link of notable significance. The study's results indicated a substantial and negative correlation between the predictors gaslighting, emotional invalidation and the outcome well-being in married individuals. This observation aligns with research on intimate partner psychological abuse, which shows that gaslighting and related manipulative behaviors are associated with poorer psychological health,

distress, anxiety, depression, and reduced well-being. Recent findings by Ciabatti et al. (2025) also indicate that gaslighting experience significantly and negatively predicts psychological health and eudaimonic well-being. Similarly, it was found that gaslighting and emotional abuse were negatively linked with mental well-being among individuals in romantic relationships (Anza Imtiaz et al., 2025).

The finding is further supported by Brandão (2024), who reported that perceived emotional invalidation is clearly linked with psychological distress and lower relationship satisfaction in couples. Moreover, a systematic review found strong associations between psychological violence and adverse mental health outcomes including PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Dokkedahl et al., 2022).

## **Conclusion**

The present study explored the relationship between gaslighting, emotional invalidation, and well-being in married individuals. The findings of the study indicated that both gaslighting and emotional invalidation are significantly and negatively correlated with well-being. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed that higher levels of gaslighting and emotional invalidation are associated with lower levels of psychological well-being among married individuals. Furthermore, multiple linear regression analysis demonstrated that gaslighting and emotional invalidation significantly predict well-being, collectively explaining a substantial proportion of variance in the outcome variable. In addition, the role of demographic variables was examined. The results indicated that most continuous and categorical demographic variables did not show significant differences across the study variables. However, significant differences were observed based on family system and living arrangement. Married individuals residing in joint family systems reported higher levels of gaslighting and emotional invalidation and lower levels of well-being compared to those living in nuclear families. Similarly, individuals in long-distance marital arrangements reported higher levels of gaslighting compared to those co-residing with their spouses.

The results of this study overall emphasize that the hurtful effects of gaslighting and emotional invalidation on psychological well-being of married people. The study highlights the need for emotional communication, emotional validation and supportive relational environments for marital well-being.

## **Recommendations**

- The researchers are urged to use mixed method techniques, in which the qualitative method (e.g., interviews) is used to support the analysis in depth.
- It would be useful to have larger and more varied samples (geographically, culturally and socio-economically) to ensure greater generalizability.
- Emotional intelligence, coping strategies, marital communication and personality traits are some potential mediating and moderating variables that could be explored in future studies.
- Comparative research might be carried out among different relationships (e.g., unmarried couples, divorced people) for to provide more general knowledge about the dynamics of relationships.
- If possible, it is recommended to test the scales in the other population in urdu language, to improve the psychometric properties of the scales.

Studies may also examine intervention-based approaches to reduce gaslighting and emotional invalidation and improve well-being.

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