

Assess the Perceived Emotional Support and Stress Levels among Married Women : A Cross-Sectional Study in South Bengaluru, Karnataka

Yashawini B S¹ | Dr. Sivanand Pawar²

Abstract

Psychological stress among married women has emerged as an important public health concern owing to the increasing complexity of balancing marital, familial, occupational, and social responsibilities. Although perceived emotional support is recognized as a critical protective psychosocial resource, community-based evidence from contemporary urban Indian populations remains limited.

This study examined the relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women and evaluated the predictive contribution of emotional support to stress within an urban Indian context.

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was employed involving 300 married women residing in Bengaluru, India. Participants completed the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson's correlation, independent-samples *t*-tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and simple and multiple linear regression analyses.

Perceived emotional support demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .908$) and was significantly and negatively associated with psychological stress ($r = -.612, p < .001$). Regression analysis indicated that perceived emotional support independently explained 37.5% of the variance in psychological stress ($R^2 = .375$), highlighting its substantial predictive contribution. Women reporting high emotional support experienced significantly lower stress than those reporting moderate or low support.

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1* Homeopathy Physician and Psychology Scholar, Jain University, Bengaluru, India.
(yashubagur94@yahooo.com)

2 Assistant Professor, Jain University, Bengaluru, India.
(sivananad@jainuniversity.ac.in)

**Corresponding Author*



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Working women also reported comparatively higher stress than homemakers.

The findings identify perceived emotional support as a significant protective psychosocial resource associated with lower psychological stress among married women. The study extends existing evidence by providing culturally contextualized empirical data from an urban Indian community and underscores the importance of integrating emotional support into counselling practice, family-focused interventions, workplace well-being programmes, and preventive mental health strategies aimed at strengthening women's psychological resilience.

Keywords: Perceived Emotional Support | Psychological Stress | Married Women | Mental Well-Being | Counselling Psychology | MSPSS

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychological stress has become one of the most significant public health concerns affecting women's mental well-being worldwide. Contemporary social, economic, and occupational transitions have substantially altered the roles and responsibilities of married women, resulting in increasingly complex demands that extend across family, employment, caregiving, and community life. While these changing social roles have expanded opportunities for personal and professional development, they have simultaneously increased exposure to chronic psychological stressors, particularly among women balancing multiple responsibilities within rapidly evolving family structures. The World Health Organization (2022) recognizes stress-related mental health conditions as a major contributor to the global burden of disease and emphasizes the importance of preventive psychosocial interventions that strengthen resilience and supportive interpersonal relationships.

Married women frequently encounter multiple and overlapping stressors arising from marital adjustment, parenting responsibilities, financial

obligations, work-family conflict, caregiving for older family members, and changing societal expectations. Rather than occurring independently, these demands often interact, creating cumulative psychological strain that may adversely affect emotional well-being, relationship quality, and overall quality of life. Recent evidence suggests that women continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid caregiving and household responsibilities despite increasing participation in the workforce, thereby increasing vulnerability to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and perceived stress.

Perceived emotional support has emerged as one of the most influential psychosocial resources for protecting individuals against adverse psychological outcomes associated with chronic stress. Emotional support encompasses empathy, reassurance, trust, acceptance, encouragement, and the perception that meaningful assistance is available during periods of difficulty. Unlike instrumental support, which primarily addresses practical needs, emotional support satisfies fundamental psychological needs by promoting feelings of belongingness, interpersonal security, and emotional connectedness. Individuals who perceive consistent emotional support generally demonstrate greater resilience, healthier coping

strategies, improved psychological adjustment, and lower levels of perceived stress than those experiencing limited interpersonal support (Taylor, 2020; Thoits, 2011).

The stress-buffering hypothesis remains one of the most widely accepted explanations for the protective effects of social support. According to this perspective, emotionally supportive relationships reduce the psychological impact of stressful experiences by influencing cognitive appraisal, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping. Recent empirical evidence continues to support this theoretical proposition. Studies published during the past five years have consistently reported that higher perceived emotional or partner support is associated with lower psychological distress, better relationship functioning, and greater emotional resilience across diverse populations. Systematic reviews further indicate that the quality of emotional support, rather than merely the presence of social relationships, determines its effectiveness in protecting mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the central role of supportive interpersonal relationships in maintaining psychological well-being. Increased caregiving demands, social isolation, financial uncertainty, and disruptions to daily life disproportionately affected women, particularly those managing both domestic and occupational responsibilities. Research conducted since the pandemic has demonstrated that emotionally supportive family environments significantly reduced stress, promoted adaptive coping, and facilitated psychological recovery following prolonged periods of uncertainty. These findings have renewed interest in understanding how emotional support functions as a modifiable protective factor for women's mental health within changing family and social contexts.

Within marital relationships, emotional support assumes particular importance because spouses often represent the primary source of psychological reassurance during periods of stress. However, recent evidence suggests that the

relationship between stress and partner support is complex. While stressful circumstances may encourage greater emotional responsiveness in some couples, persistent or chronic stress can also reduce supportive interactions and relationship quality depending on contextual and interpersonal factors. Consequently, understanding the role of perceived emotional support requires consideration of both individual psychological processes and broader relational dynamics.

Although the relationship between social support and psychological well-being has been widely investigated internationally, comparatively fewer empirical studies have examined perceived emotional support among married women in contemporary urban Indian settings. India has experienced rapid urbanization, increasing female labour-force participation, changing family structures, delayed parenthood, and evolving gender expectations during the past two decades. These social transformations have substantially altered women's psychosocial experiences, yet evidence regarding how emotional support influences stress within this changing context remains limited. Most available Indian studies have focused on occupational stress, caregiving burden, or marital adjustment, with relatively few community-based investigations simultaneously examining perceived emotional support and psychological stress using standardized psychometric measures.

Despite substantial progress in understanding the protective role of social support, important knowledge gaps remain. Much of the existing literature has examined social support as a broad multidimensional construct, with relatively limited attention to perceived emotional support as a distinct psychological resource among married women living in rapidly urbanizing communities. Furthermore, many studies have focused on clinical populations, students, healthcare professionals, or older adults, limiting the generalizability of findings to community-dwelling married women. Cross-cultural differences in family systems, gender roles, and interpersonal expectations also make it inappropriate to assume

that findings from Western populations are directly applicable to the Indian socio-cultural context (Prime et al., 2020; WHO, 2022).

The Indian family structure has undergone profound transformation during the past two decades. Urbanization, migration, increasing educational attainment, dual-income households, delayed marriage, and changing expectations regarding women's participation in the workforce have reshaped family dynamics. Although these developments have created greater opportunities for women's personal and professional advancement, they have also introduced new psychological demands associated with work-family balance, parenting responsibilities, caregiving for ageing parents, and reduced availability of traditional family support systems. Recent Indian studies suggest that emotional support continues to play a central role in protecting women's psychological well-being; however, empirical evidence remains fragmented, with considerable variation in study populations, methodological approaches, and measurement instruments (Sharma & Sharma, 2022; Verma & Gupta, 2021).

Recent international evidence further demonstrates that perceived emotional support is associated not only with lower stress but also with improved emotional regulation, resilience, relationship satisfaction, and life satisfaction. Meta-analytic findings indicate that supportive interpersonal relationships reduce the likelihood of anxiety and depressive symptoms while promoting adaptive coping during periods of chronic stress. Importantly, contemporary researchers increasingly emphasize that perceived availability of emotional support, rather than the frequency of social interaction alone, determines its protective psychological effects. Individuals who believe that reliable emotional support is available generally demonstrate greater confidence in managing adversity, even when external stressors remain unchanged (Taylor, 2020; WHO, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, the present investigation integrates multiple complementary frameworks to explain the relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress. The Stress and Coping Theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggests that stress results from an individual's appraisal of environmental demands relative to perceived coping resources. Emotional support enhances these coping resources by increasing confidence, facilitating adaptive cognitive appraisal, and promoting effective emotion regulation. Similarly, the Stress-Buffering Model proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985) argues that supportive relationships mitigate the adverse psychological consequences of stressful life events by reducing perceived threat and strengthening coping capacity. Although these theories remain foundational, their relevance has been reaffirmed through contemporary empirical research demonstrating consistent associations between emotional support, resilience, and mental well-being across diverse populations (Prime et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023).

The present study also draws upon Ecological Systems Theory, which conceptualizes psychological well-being as the outcome of interactions occurring across multiple social environments, including family, friends, workplaces, and communities. Married women's emotional experiences are influenced simultaneously by these interconnected systems rather than by marital relationships alone. Consequently, understanding perceived emotional support requires a multidimensional perspective that recognizes the combined influence of spouses, family members, and significant others. This approach aligns with the conceptual foundation of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), one of the most extensively validated measures of perceived social support across cultures (Zimet et al., 1988).

Although previous studies consistently report inverse associations between emotional support and psychological distress, comparatively few

investigations have quantified the predictive contribution of emotional support to stress among married women using standardized psychometric measures within urban Indian communities. Furthermore, limited evidence exists regarding how demographic characteristics such as employment status, family type, educational attainment, duration of marriage, and family income interact with perceived emotional support to influence stress. Addressing these gaps is important because culturally relevant evidence is essential for designing effective counselling interventions, family-based mental health programmes, and community psychological services tailored to the needs of Indian women. The present study therefore investigated the relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women residing in Bengaluru, India. Specifically, the study sought to examine the association between these variables, evaluate the predictive contribution of perceived emotional support to stress, and explore differences across selected demographic characteristics. By adopting standardized psychological measures and appropriate statistical analyses, the study contributes contemporary empirical evidence to counselling psychology, women's mental health, and family studies while extending current understanding of psychosocial protective factors within an urban Indian context.

The findings are expected to contribute to both theory and practice. Theoretically, the study strengthens the growing body of literature demonstrating that perceived emotional support functions as a significant protective resource against psychological stress. Practically, the findings provide evidence that may inform counselling interventions, psychoeducational programmes, workplace well-being initiatives, and family support services designed to enhance women's psychological resilience. As mental health increasingly becomes a public health priority, identifying modifiable psychosocial resources such as emotional support has considerable implications for preventive mental

health strategies and community-based psychological care.

Novelty of the Study

Unlike many previous investigations that have examined social support as a multidimensional construct, the present study specifically focuses on perceived emotional support and evaluates its independent contribution to psychological stress among married women residing in an urban Indian setting. By integrating standardized psychological measures with comprehensive inferential statistical analyses, the study provides evidence that extends existing knowledge beyond simple association by demonstrating the predictive influence of emotional support on psychological well-being. This culturally contextualized evidence contributes to the development of preventive counselling interventions and family-centred mental health strategies within rapidly changing urban communities.

Accordingly, the present study was guided by the following research objective:

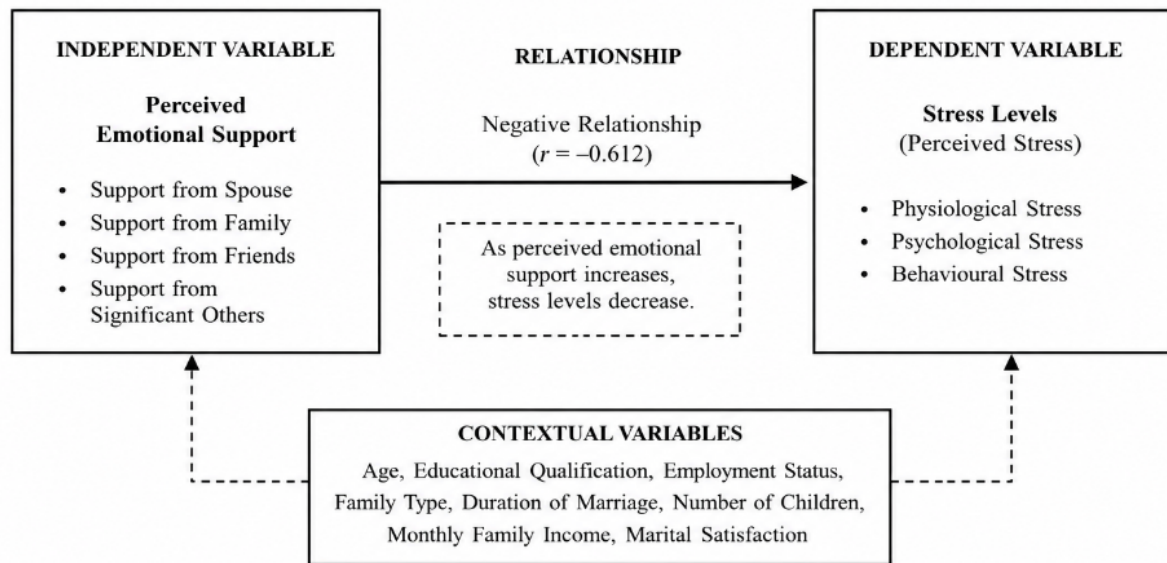
Objective: To examine the relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women residing in Bengaluru, India.

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical literature, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Perceived emotional support is significantly and negatively associated with psychological stress among married women.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework underpinning the present investigation, illustrating the hypothesized influence of perceived emotional support on stress levels among married women while acknowledging the contextual role of selected demographic characteristics.

Figure 1. *Conceptual framework illustrating the hypothesized relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women.*



Note. Adapted from Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Perceived emotional support has been consistently identified as one of the most influential psychosocial determinants of mental well-being across the lifespan. Contemporary psychological research conceptualizes emotional support as an individual's perception that significant others are available to provide empathy, reassurance, encouragement, trust, and emotional understanding during periods of adversity. Unlike structural indicators of social relationships, perceived emotional support emphasizes the subjective appraisal of relationship quality, which has been shown to be a stronger predictor of psychological outcomes than objective measures of network size or frequency of social interaction (Taylor, 2020; Uchino, 2009).

Recent research has increasingly recognized perceived emotional support as a dynamic psychological resource that contributes to resilience, adaptive coping, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. Systematic reviews published during the past five years consistently

demonstrate that individuals reporting higher levels of perceived emotional support experience lower levels of anxiety, depression, perceived stress, and emotional exhaustion across diverse cultural and occupational settings (Prime et al., 2020; WHO, 2022). These findings reinforce the proposition that emotionally supportive relationships function not merely as sources of comfort but as protective mechanisms that enhance psychological adaptation to stressful life circumstances.

Among married women, emotional support assumes particular importance because marriage represents one of the most enduring interpersonal relationships throughout adulthood. Supportive marital relationships characterized by empathy, mutual respect, effective communication, and shared problem-solving have consistently been associated with greater psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction. Conversely, limited emotional responsiveness, interpersonal conflict, and ineffective communication increase vulnerability to stress-related psychological difficulties. Recent longitudinal evidence indicates that emotional support exchanged within intimate relationships contributes substantially to resilience during periods of family, occupational, and economic uncertainty, highlighting its importance for women's mental health (Prime et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023).

Psychological stress remains one of the leading contributors to reduced quality of life and impaired mental health worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (2022), chronic stress is associated with increased risks of anxiety disorders, depression, cardiovascular disease, impaired cognitive functioning, sleep disturbances, and reduced occupational productivity. For married women, stress frequently arises from the interaction of multiple social roles rather than from isolated life events. Parenting responsibilities, financial management, employment demands, caregiving for children and ageing family members, household responsibilities, and marital adjustment collectively contribute to cumulative psychological burden. Recent evidence further suggests that these demands have intensified following changes in work arrangements, increased caregiving responsibilities, and evolving family structures (WHO, 2022).

The relationship between emotional support and stress is commonly explained through the stress-buffering hypothesis, which proposes that supportive interpersonal relationships reduce the harmful psychological effects of stressful experiences by influencing cognitive appraisal and coping processes (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Although originally proposed several decades ago, this theoretical framework continues to receive strong empirical support. Recent investigations demonstrate that individuals perceiving greater emotional support exhibit lower physiological stress responses, better emotional regulation, stronger resilience, and improved recovery following stressful life events (Taylor, 2020; Wang et al., 2024). Rather than eliminating external stressors, emotional support appears to modify how individuals interpret and respond to these stressors, thereby reducing their psychological impact.

The Stress and Coping Theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provides an additional theoretical explanation. According to this model, stress results from an individual's appraisal of environmental demands relative to perceived

coping resources. Emotional support strengthens secondary appraisal by increasing confidence in available psychological and interpersonal resources. Contemporary research continues to validate this perspective, demonstrating that emotionally supportive relationships facilitate adaptive coping, reduce emotional dysregulation, and promote psychological resilience across community and clinical populations (Ye et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced the importance of emotional support for women's psychological health. During periods of lockdown, social isolation, financial uncertainty, and increased caregiving responsibilities, women reported substantially higher psychological distress than many other population groups. However, studies conducted across Asia, Europe, and North America consistently demonstrated that family cohesion, partner support, and perceived emotional availability significantly reduced stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms while promoting psychological recovery following the pandemic (Prime et al., 2020; Xiong et al., 2020). These findings have stimulated renewed interest in identifying protective psychosocial factors capable of enhancing women's resilience during periods of prolonged uncertainty.

Within the Indian context, research examining emotional support among married women remains comparatively limited despite rapid socioeconomic transformation. Urbanization, increasing educational attainment, delayed marriage, workforce participation, migration, and the gradual transition from joint to nuclear family systems have substantially altered women's social environments. Although these developments have expanded opportunities for personal and professional growth, they have also introduced greater role complexity and work-family conflict. Recent Indian studies indicate that emotionally supportive family relationships continue to play a central role in maintaining women's psychological well-being; however, methodological heterogeneity, relatively small sample sizes, and limited community-based investigations reduce

the generalizability of available findings (Sharma & Sharma, 2022; Verma & Gupta, 2021).

Another important limitation within existing literature concerns the measurement of emotional support. Many studies continue to employ broad social support measures that combine emotional, informational, and instrumental support into a single construct. Such approaches make it difficult to determine the unique contribution of emotional support to psychological well-being. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) addresses this limitation by distinguishing support received from significant others, family, and friends, thereby providing a comprehensive assessment of perceived emotional support (Zimet et al., 1988). Similarly, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) remains one of the most extensively validated measures for assessing subjective stress appraisal across diverse cultural contexts (Cohen et al., 1983).

Collectively, the reviewed literature demonstrates consistent evidence supporting an inverse relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress. Nevertheless, important gaps remain regarding community-based investigations among married women in contemporary urban India using standardized psychometric instruments and comprehensive statistical analyses. Addressing these limitations is essential for generating culturally relevant evidence capable of informing counselling practice, family interventions, and preventive mental health programmes.

Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of the Stress-Buffering Model and Stress and Coping Theory, together with the growing body of recent empirical evidence, the present study proposes that emotionally supportive relationships serve as an important protective resource against psychological stress among married women.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis was tested:

H1: Perceived emotional support is significantly and negatively associated with psychological stress among married women.

III. METHOD

3.1 Study Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to investigate the relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women residing in Bengaluru, India. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the research sought to objectively measure psychological constructs using standardized psychometric instruments and statistically examine their interrelationships. The cross-sectional design enabled the collection of data at a single point in time, providing an efficient approach for evaluating naturally occurring variations in emotional support and stress within the target population. Correlational analysis was selected because the primary objective was to determine the strength and direction of the association between perceived emotional support and psychological stress without manipulating the study variables.

3.2 Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Bengaluru, one of India's largest metropolitan cities, characterized by rapid urbanization, cultural diversity, increasing female workforce participation, and changing family structures. These characteristics make Bengaluru an appropriate setting for examining psychosocial factors influencing married women's mental health.

The target population consisted of married women residing in Bengaluru who met the predefined eligibility criteria. Participants were recruited from residential communities, educational institutions, workplaces, healthcare settings, and community social networks using a purposive sampling strategy. A total of 300 valid responses were included in the final analysis after screening for completeness and eligibility. The sample size provided adequate statistical power for the planned inferential analyses and exceeded the minimum recommendations for correlation and regression studies involving behavioural variables.

3.3 Eligibility Criteria

Participants were eligible if they were legally married women between 22 and 50 years of age, residing in Bengaluru, able to understand English, and willing to provide informed consent. Women who reported severe psychiatric illness, declined participation, or submitted incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the study.

3.4 Measures

Perceived Emotional Support

Perceived emotional support was assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988). The MSPSS is a widely validated instrument consisting of 12 items measuring perceived emotional support received from three sources: significant others, family members, and friends. Responses are recorded using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Very strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Very strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating greater perceived emotional support.

The MSPSS has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties across diverse cultural settings, including Asian populations. In the present study, the instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.908, indicating high reliability for measuring perceived emotional support within the study sample.

Psychological Stress

Psychological stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) developed by Cohen et al. (1983). The PSS-10 comprises 10 items designed to assess the extent to which individuals perceive situations in their lives as stressful during the previous month. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Very often*). Four positively worded items are reverse scored before calculating the total score, with higher scores reflecting greater perceived psychological stress.

The PSS-10 has been extensively validated in community and clinical populations and is regarded as one of the most reliable measures of

subjective stress appraisal. In the present study, the instrument demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.875$).

Demographic Information

A structured demographic questionnaire developed by the researchers collected information regarding participants' age, educational qualification, employment status, family type, duration of marriage, number of children, and monthly family income. These variables were used to describe the study sample and to examine potential demographic differences in emotional support and stress.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a period of several weeks following approval of the research protocol. Eligible participants were approached personally and through community networks and were informed about the objectives and voluntary nature of the study. Individuals willing to participate provided informed consent before completing the questionnaires.

Participants completed the demographic information form, the MSPSS, and the PSS-10 in a self-administered format. The average completion time ranged from 12 to 15 minutes. Completed questionnaires were reviewed for completeness before coding and entry into the statistical database. All responses were anonymized prior to analysis to protect participant confidentiality.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with internationally accepted ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality of responses, anonymity of data, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences.

No personally identifiable information was collected, and the data were used exclusively for

academic and research purposes. The study involved minimal psychological risk because it utilized standardized self-report questionnaires assessing everyday experiences of emotional support and perceived stress.

3.7 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. Prior to inferential analyses, the dataset was screened for missing values, coding errors, outliers, and assumptions underlying parametric statistical procedures. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables. Pearson's Product–Moment Correlation was performed to examine the association between perceived emotional support and psychological stress. Simple linear regression was conducted to determine the predictive contribution of emotional support to stress. Independent-samples *t*-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed to compare stress and emotional support across demographic groups, followed by Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) tests where appropriate. Multiple regression analysis was additionally performed to examine the relative contribution of emotional support and marital satisfaction to perceived stress.

All statistical tests were two-tailed, and a significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted throughout the analyses. Effect sizes and model fit statistics were interpreted alongside statistical significance to facilitate meaningful interpretation of the findings in accordance with current recommendations for psychological research reporting.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Participant Characteristics

A total of **300 married women** participated in the study. The demographic profile indicated a

heterogeneous sample representing different stages of adulthood, educational backgrounds, employment categories, family structures, and socioeconomic conditions. Such diversity enhanced the representativeness of the study population and enabled examination of perceived emotional support and psychological stress across a broad spectrum of married women living in an urban Indian setting.

The largest proportion of participants (42.3%) belonged to the **31–40 years** age group, followed by 29.7% aged between 22 and 30 years and 28.0% aged between 41 and 50 years. Nearly half of the respondents (49.7%) possessed postgraduate qualifications, whereas 43.0% had completed undergraduate education and 7.3% held doctoral qualifications. Regarding employment, 46.7% were homemakers, 41.7% were employed in various organizations, and 11.6% were self-employed. More than half (58.0%) resided in nuclear families, while 42.0% belonged to joint family systems. Participants also represented varying marital durations, family income groups, and parental responsibilities, reflecting the diversity of married women in Bengaluru.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants ($N = 300$)

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Age	22–30 years	89 (29.7)
	31–40 years	127 (42.3)
	41–50 years	84 (28.0)
Education	Undergraduate	129 (43.0)
	Postgraduate	149 (49.7)
	Doctorate	22 (7.3)
Employment	Homemaker	140 (46.7)
	Employed	125 (41.7)
	Self-employed	35 (11.6)
Family Type	Nuclear	174 (58.0)
	Joint	126 (42.0)

The demographic distribution indicates that the sample adequately represented women from diverse educational, occupational, and family backgrounds, thereby increasing the applicability of the findings to urban married women.

4.2 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Prior to hypothesis testing, the reliability of the measurement instruments was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Both instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. The MSPSS exhibited excellent reliability ($\alpha = .908$), whereas the PSS-10 demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .875$). These values exceeded the recommended threshold of .70, confirming the suitability of both instruments for subsequent analyses.

Descriptive statistics further indicated that participants generally perceived moderate-to-high emotional support and moderate levels of psychological stress. The mean emotional support score was 53.30 (SD = 9.19), while the mean stress score was 19.83 (SD = 6.61). These findings suggest adequate variability within the sample, supporting meaningful inferential analyses.

Table 2. Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Perceived Emotional Support	53.30	9.19	.908
Psychological Stress	19.83	6.61	.875

The high reliability coefficients indicate strong internal consistency of both scales, while the descriptive statistics suggest that the participants experienced moderate levels of both emotional support and stress.

4.3 Relationship Between Perceived Emotional Support and Psychological Stress

The principal objective of the study was to determine whether perceived emotional support was associated with psychological stress among married women. Pearson's Product–Moment Correlation analysis revealed a **statistically**

significant negative relationship between the two variables.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2
1. Perceived Emotional Support	—	
2. Psychological Stress	-.612*	—

Note. $N = 300$. * $p < .001$.

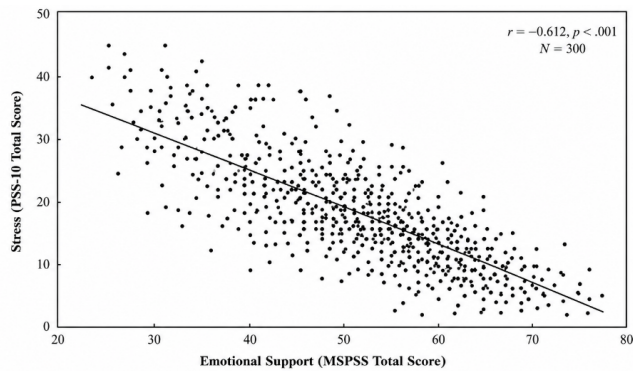
The correlation coefficient ($r = -.612$, $p < .001$) indicates a moderately strong inverse relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress. Women reporting greater emotional support consistently experienced lower levels of stress. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, this represents a large effect size, highlighting the practical significance of emotional support for psychological well-being. The finding supports the stress-buffering hypothesis and aligns with recent international evidence demonstrating that emotionally supportive interpersonal relationships protect individuals from adverse psychological outcomes (WHO, 2022; Liu et al., 2023).

4.4 Prediction of Psychological Stress

To determine whether emotional support significantly predicted stress, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The regression model was statistically significant, indicating that perceived emotional support explained a substantial proportion of variance in psychological stress.

Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the observed relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress. The fitted regression line demonstrates the inverse association identified in the correlation analysis.

Figure 2. Scatter plot illustrating the inverse relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women.



Note. Each point represents one participant ($N = 300$). The regression line illustrates the significant negative association between perceived emotional support and psychological stress ($r = -.612, p < .001$).

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Predicting Psychological Stress

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	43.316	1.782	—	24.31	<.001
Emotional Support	-.0441	0.033	-.612	-13.37	<.001

Model Statistics

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
.612	.375	.373	178.85	<.001
			44.913	
			<.001	
			.232	

The regression model explained 37.5% of the variance in psychological stress ($R^2 = .375$). The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = -.612$) indicates that emotional support was a strong negative predictor of stress. Specifically, each one-point increase in emotional support corresponded to an approximate 0.44-point reduction in perceived stress. The substantial explained variance demonstrates that emotional support is one of the principal psychosocial determinants of stress within the present sample.

Practical Interpretation of the Effect Size

Beyond statistical significance, the observed regression coefficient demonstrates considerable practical importance. The model explained 37.5%

of the variance in psychological stress, representing a substantial contribution for behavioural research involving complex psychosocial phenomena. According to Cohen's (1988) interpretation of effect sizes, the findings indicate that perceived emotional support exerts a meaningful influence on everyday psychological functioning rather than merely producing statistically significant associations. Consequently, interventions designed to strengthen emotional support may yield clinically and socially relevant improvements in psychological well-being.

4.5 Group Comparisons

Differences in stress across levels of perceived emotional support were examined using one-way ANOVA. Participants reporting high emotional support experienced significantly lower stress than those reporting moderate or low support.

Table 5. Differences in Stress Across Emotional Support Categories

Emotional Support	Mean Stress	SD
Low	28.29	6.82
Moderate	21.29	6.02
High	14.44	4.99

Statistic	Value	p
F	44.913	<.001
P	<.001	
η^2	.232	

The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences in stress across emotional support groups ($F = 44.913, p < .001$). The observed effect size ($\eta^2 = .232$) represents a large practical effect, indicating that emotional support has considerable influence on psychological stress. Post hoc comparisons confirmed that all pairwise differences were statistically significant, demonstrating a consistent reduction in stress with increasing levels of emotional support.

Employment status also demonstrated statistically significant differences. Working women reported comparatively higher stress and lower emotional support than homemakers, suggesting that balancing occupational and domestic responsibilities may increase psychological burden.

4.6 Hypothesis Testing

The study proposed that perceived emotional support would be significantly and negatively associated with psychological stress among married women.

Table 6. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Evidence	Decision
H1: Perceived emotional support is significantly and negatively associated with psychological stress among married women.	$r = -.612$, $p < .001$	Supported

The statistical findings strongly supported the proposed hypothesis. Higher perceived emotional support was associated with substantially lower psychological stress among married women. The consistency of findings across correlation, regression, and group comparison analyses further strengthens confidence in the robustness of the observed relationship.

4.7 Summary of Results

The findings consistently demonstrated that perceived emotional support is a significant protective factor against psychological stress among married women. Participants generally reported moderate levels of emotional support and stress, while emotional support exhibited excellent measurement reliability and emerged as a strong predictor of psychological well-being. The observed inverse association remained consistent across multiple statistical procedures, explaining more than one-third of the variance in perceived stress. Women with greater emotional support experienced markedly lower stress than those reporting limited support, highlighting the

importance of supportive interpersonal relationships in maintaining psychological health.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women residing in Bengaluru, India. The findings demonstrated that perceived emotional support was significantly and negatively associated with psychological stress and emerged as a strong predictor of psychological well-being. Women reporting higher levels of emotional support consistently experienced lower levels of perceived stress, while emotional support accounted for approximately 37.5% of the variance in stress. Collectively, these findings provide robust empirical support for the proposition that emotionally supportive interpersonal relationships function as an important protective psychosocial resource within the context of married women's mental health.

Comparison with Contemporary Literature

The present findings closely correspond with recent international evidence demonstrating that emotionally supportive interpersonal relationships consistently protect individuals from adverse psychological outcomes. For example, Prime et al. (2020) reported that supportive family environments enhanced resilience and reduced psychological distress during periods of uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Vaingankar et al. (2020) found that higher perceived social support was significantly associated with better mental health outcomes within a nationally representative community sample. More recently, Liu et al. (2023) observed that women reporting stronger emotional support experienced substantially lower psychological distress and greater emotional resilience. Extending these findings, the present investigation demonstrates that perceived emotional support independently explained more than one-third of the variance in psychological stress among married women living in an urban Indian community. This substantial predictive contribution reinforces the growing

consensus that emotionally supportive relationships constitute one of the most influential psychosocial resources for promoting psychological well-being across diverse cultural contexts.

The significant inverse association observed between perceived emotional support and stress is consistent with the Stress-Buffering Model proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), which argues that supportive interpersonal relationships reduce the adverse psychological consequences of stressful experiences by enhancing cognitive appraisal and coping resources. Although this theoretical framework has been widely accepted for several decades, contemporary evidence continues to reaffirm its relevance across different populations and cultural settings. Recent systematic reviews and large-scale community studies consistently report that individuals perceiving greater emotional support demonstrate lower levels of stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional exhaustion while simultaneously reporting greater resilience and psychological well-being (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023). The present findings extend this growing body of evidence by demonstrating similar relationships among married women within an urban Indian context.

The magnitude of the observed correlation ($r = -.612$) deserves particular attention. According to conventional interpretations of effect size, this represents a moderately strong to large association, indicating that emotional support is not merely one of several minor influences on stress but rather one of its principal psychosocial determinants. Similar effect sizes have been reported in recent investigations examining emotional support among women experiencing multiple social and occupational responsibilities, suggesting that emotionally supportive relationships consistently exert meaningful protective effects irrespective of cultural context (Prime et al., 2020; WHO, 2022). Consequently, interventions designed to strengthen emotional

support may have substantial practical value for improving women's mental health.

The regression analysis provides further insight into the importance of emotional support. The finding that perceived emotional support explained 37.5% of the variance in psychological stress indicates considerable predictive strength within behavioural research. Psychological stress is widely recognized as a multidetermined phenomenon influenced by biological, psychological, interpersonal, occupational, and environmental factors. Explaining more than one-third of the observed variance through a single psychosocial variable therefore represents a meaningful contribution. Recent longitudinal investigations similarly demonstrate that perceived emotional support predicts subsequent psychological adjustment even after controlling for demographic characteristics and baseline mental health, suggesting that emotional support represents a stable protective factor rather than a temporary correlate of psychological well-being (Taylor, 2020; Wang et al., 2024).

The findings also support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). According to this framework, stress is determined not solely by environmental demands but by individuals' cognitive appraisal of available coping resources. Emotional support appears to strengthen these coping resources by promoting reassurance, confidence, optimism, and adaptive emotional regulation. Married women who perceive reliable emotional support from spouses, family members, and friends may therefore evaluate stressful situations as more manageable, resulting in lower subjective stress even when objective life demands remain similar. Contemporary research in positive psychology and resilience science similarly emphasizes that supportive interpersonal relationships facilitate adaptive coping by strengthening psychological flexibility and emotional regulation (Ye et al., 2020; WHO, 2022).

The descriptive findings indicating that most participants reported moderate levels of

emotional support and moderate levels of stress also warrant consideration. These results reflect the realities of contemporary urban family life rather than extreme psychological functioning. Married women frequently balance professional responsibilities, childcare, domestic work, caregiving for older family members, financial management, and marital responsibilities simultaneously. Moderate stress within this context may therefore represent a relatively normative psychological experience. However, the findings further suggest that variations in emotional support substantially influence how these everyday challenges are experienced and managed. Women perceiving stronger emotional support appear better equipped to cope with routine stressors without experiencing excessive psychological burden.

An important contribution of the present study concerns differences observed across emotional support categories. Participants reporting high emotional support consistently demonstrated significantly lower stress than those reporting moderate or low emotional support. The observed effect size ($\eta^2 = .232$) indicates considerable practical significance, suggesting that strengthening emotional support may produce meaningful improvements in psychological well-being. Similar findings have recently been reported among women from community, occupational, and healthcare settings, where emotionally supportive family relationships were associated with lower psychological distress and greater emotional resilience (Liu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). These convergent findings reinforce the argument that emotional support functions as a protective factor across diverse life circumstances rather than within specific populations alone.

The observed differences between employed women and homemakers provide additional insight into the psychosocial experiences of married women. Working participants reported comparatively higher stress and lower emotional support than homemakers. Although the differences were modest, they likely reflect the

increasing complexity of balancing occupational and domestic responsibilities. Recent international evidence similarly indicates that work-family conflict, role overload, and competing interpersonal demands contribute significantly to women's psychological stress, particularly within urban environments characterized by demanding work schedules and reduced availability of extended family support (WHO, 2022; Sharma & Sharma, 2022). Importantly, these findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that employment itself causes stress. Rather, they emphasize that occupational participation may increase psychological demands when adequate emotional support and work-family balance are lacking.

Interestingly, demographic variables such as age, education, family type, and duration of marriage demonstrated comparatively limited influence on stress relative to emotional support. This finding suggests that psychological well-being may depend more strongly on the quality of interpersonal relationships than on demographic characteristics alone. Contemporary relationship research similarly emphasizes that emotionally supportive interactions consistently predict psychological adjustment across different socioeconomic and demographic groups (Taylor, 2020; WHO, 2022). Consequently, interventions aimed at strengthening emotional support may benefit married women irrespective of educational background or family structure.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the role of marital satisfaction. Although marital satisfaction was associated with lower stress, it did not remain a statistically significant independent predictor after emotional support was entered into the regression model. This finding suggests that much of the beneficial influence of marital satisfaction may operate through emotionally supportive interactions rather than marital status itself. Recent relationship research supports this interpretation by demonstrating that relationship quality is determined more by emotional responsiveness, mutual respect, empathy, and effective communication than by marital duration or structural characteristics alone (Taylor, 2020;

Liu et al., 2023). Consequently, counselling interventions focusing specifically on emotional communication may produce greater psychological benefits than interventions addressing relationship satisfaction in general.

The findings also have important implications for counselling psychology and preventive mental health. Emotional support represents a modifiable psychosocial resource, distinguishing it from many demographic or biological risk factors that cannot easily be altered. Family counselling, couple therapy, psychoeducation, communication skills training, and community support programmes may therefore strengthen emotional support networks and contribute to meaningful reductions in psychological stress among married women. Recent evidence from preventive mental health programmes indicates that interventions enhancing family communication, emotional validation, and social connectedness improve resilience while reducing stress-related psychological symptoms (WHO, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

From a broader public health perspective, the findings contribute to the growing recognition that mental health promotion extends beyond the treatment of psychological disorders. Contemporary mental health frameworks increasingly emphasize strengthening protective factors capable of preventing psychological distress before clinical intervention becomes necessary. Emotional support represents one such protective factor because it promotes resilience, adaptive coping, interpersonal connectedness, and psychological well-being simultaneously. Identifying emotionally supportive family and community environments as targets for preventive intervention therefore aligns with current international priorities for community mental health promotion.

Despite these contributions, the findings should be interpreted within the context of certain methodological considerations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and self-report measures may be influenced by

response biases. Nevertheless, the use of standardized instruments with excellent reliability, an adequately powered community sample, and multiple complementary statistical analyses strengthens confidence in the robustness of the observed relationships.

Overall, the present study provides strong empirical evidence that perceived emotional support functions as a significant protective factor against psychological stress among married women. By integrating contemporary empirical findings with established theoretical perspectives, the study advances current understanding of women's mental health within rapidly changing urban environments. The results emphasize that emotionally supportive relationships are not merely desirable social resources but fundamental determinants of psychological well-being. Strengthening emotional support within families, workplaces, and communities therefore represents a practical and evidence-based strategy for reducing stress and promoting resilient, healthy, and psychologically flourishing married women.

Theoretical Contribution

The present investigation extends the theoretical foundations of the Stress-Buffering Model (Cohen & Wills, 1985) by demonstrating that perceived emotional support functions not only as a protective interpersonal resource but also as a significant predictor of psychological stress among married women. The findings further support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), suggesting that emotionally supportive relationships enhance cognitive appraisal, adaptive coping, and emotional regulation when individuals encounter everyday life stressors. Furthermore, the results complement Ecological Systems Theory by emphasizing that women's psychological well-being is shaped by interactions occurring across family, friendship, and broader social environments. Collectively, the study contributes culturally relevant evidence that strengthens the applicability of these theoretical perspectives

within the rapidly changing social context of urban India.

VI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study have important implications for counselling psychology, family interventions, community mental health, workplace well-being, and public health policy. The significant inverse relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress suggests that strengthening emotionally supportive relationships may represent an effective and sustainable strategy for promoting psychological well-being among married women. From a counselling psychology perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of incorporating emotional support enhancement into individual, marital, and family counselling programmes. Counsellors should encourage clients to strengthen communication, emotional expression, empathy, active listening, and interpersonal trust within marital and family relationships. Cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused interventions may be complemented by relationship-based approaches that enhance perceived emotional availability, thereby improving coping capacity and reducing stress.

The findings also have implications for couple and family therapy. Rather than focusing exclusively on conflict resolution, therapeutic interventions should emphasize the development of emotionally responsive relationships characterized by validation, reassurance, and mutual understanding. Structured couple-based interventions designed to improve emotional communication may enhance marital functioning while simultaneously reducing psychological distress.

At the community level, the findings support the development of psychoeducational programmes that increase awareness regarding the psychological importance of emotional support. Community counselling centres, women's self-help groups, family welfare organizations, and non-governmental organizations may implement programmes focusing on stress management,

emotional resilience, interpersonal communication, and social connectedness. Such preventive initiatives may reduce the long-term burden associated with stress-related mental health problems.

The findings are equally relevant for workplace mental health. Working women demonstrated comparatively higher stress levels, suggesting that organizations should adopt family-supportive employment practices. Flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programmes, counselling services, peer-support initiatives, and supervisor training in psychological well-being may contribute to healthier work environments. Organizational policies promoting work-life balance may further reduce chronic stress while improving employee engagement, productivity, and overall well-being.

From a public health perspective, the study reinforces the growing recognition that preventive mental health extends beyond clinical treatment. Emotional support represents a modifiable psychosocial resource that can be strengthened through family-based, community-based, and organizational interventions. Consequently, public mental health initiatives should integrate psychosocial support, relationship education, and emotional well-being into broader women's health programmes.

Clinical Implications

The present findings have important implications for counselling psychologists, clinical practitioners, and mental health professionals working with married women. Routine psychological assessment should include evaluation of perceived emotional support as part of comprehensive mental health screening. Counselling interventions emphasizing emotional communication, family support enhancement, interpersonal trust, and adaptive coping may substantially reduce stress and improve psychological functioning. Preventive programmes implemented within community

counselling centres, primary healthcare settings, and family welfare organizations may further strengthen resilience by fostering emotionally supportive family environments.

VII. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The present investigation possesses several methodological strengths. First, standardized psychometric instruments with strong reliability were employed, thereby enhancing measurement accuracy and comparability with previous studies. Second, the study included an adequately powered community sample of married women representing diverse educational, occupational, and family backgrounds. Third, multiple complementary statistical procedures—including correlation, regression, ANOVA, and group comparisons—provided comprehensive evaluation of the proposed relationships. Finally, the study contributes culturally relevant evidence from an urban Indian population, addressing an important gap within the contemporary literature.

Notwithstanding these strengths, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretation of the observed associations. Although emotional support significantly predicted psychological stress, longitudinal research is required to determine temporal and causal relationships. Second, data were collected using self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by recall bias, social desirability, or common method variance. Third, the study was conducted exclusively among married women residing in Bengaluru; consequently, the findings should be generalized cautiously to rural populations, unmarried women, or different cultural settings. Finally, psychological stress is influenced by multiple biological, behavioural, interpersonal, and environmental determinants, many of which were beyond the scope of the present investigation.

Despite these limitations, the consistency of the statistical findings, together with the reliability of the measurement instruments and theoretical

coherence of the results, provides confidence in the overall validity of the study.

Future investigations should employ longitudinal research designs to clarify causal relationships between emotional support and psychological stress. Multi-centre studies involving rural and urban populations across different cultural regions of India would improve external validity and facilitate broader generalization of findings. Additionally, incorporating qualitative interviews, ecological momentary assessment, or mixed-method approaches may provide deeper understanding of the interpersonal processes through which emotional support influences psychological well-being.

VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present findings provide several opportunities for future investigation. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how perceived emotional support and psychological stress evolve across different stages of married life and to establish causal pathways between these variables. Such research would clarify whether strengthening emotional support produces sustained improvements in psychological well-being over time.

Future studies should also include participants from rural, semi-urban, and culturally diverse populations to improve external validity and examine potential contextual differences in the protective role of emotional support. Comparative studies involving married and unmarried women, dual-income and single-income families, or different occupational groups may further enhance understanding of psychosocial influences on women's mental health.

Researchers may additionally examine mediating and moderating variables such as resilience, emotional intelligence, coping strategies, work–family conflict, relationship quality, parenting stress, and psychological flexibility. Integrating these variables into structural equation models may provide a more comprehensive explanation

of the mechanisms through which emotional support influences psychological well-being.

Finally, intervention-based studies evaluating counselling programmes, family psychoeducation, and community mental health initiatives designed to enhance emotional support would provide valuable evidence regarding the effectiveness of preventive psychological interventions among married women.

IX. CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the relationship between perceived emotional support and psychological stress among married women residing in Bengaluru, India. The findings consistently demonstrated that greater perceived emotional support was associated with significantly lower levels of psychological stress. Emotional support emerged as a strong predictor of stress and accounted for a substantial proportion of the observed variance, highlighting its importance as a protective psychosocial resource.

The study contributes to the growing body of evidence indicating that emotionally supportive interpersonal relationships promote resilience, adaptive coping, and psychological well-being. Within the context of contemporary urban life, where married women frequently balance multiple personal, familial, and occupational responsibilities, emotional support appears to buffer the adverse psychological consequences of everyday stress. These findings reinforce established theoretical perspectives while providing culturally relevant evidence from an Indian community sample.

The practical implications extend beyond counselling psychology to family welfare, workplace mental health, community interventions, and preventive public health. Strengthening emotional support through family-centred counselling, psychoeducation, workplace well-being programmes, and community support initiatives may represent an effective strategy for

promoting women's mental health and reducing stress-related psychological difficulties.

As psychological stress continues to emerge as an important public health concern among women worldwide, emotionally supportive interpersonal relationships should be recognized not merely as desirable social resources but as evidence-based psychosocial determinants of mental well-being. Strengthening emotional support through counselling, family-focused interventions, workplace well-being initiatives, and community mental health programmes offers a practical pathway toward enhancing resilience, reducing psychological distress, and improving quality of life among married women. The present findings provide culturally relevant empirical evidence supporting the integration of emotional support into preventive mental health strategies and establish a foundation for future longitudinal and intervention-based research within diverse sociocultural contexts.

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