

## Article

# A Study on the Correlation Between Marriage Pressure and Anxiety Symptoms Among Unmarried College Students

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**Abstract:** Objective: This study aimed to systematically investigate the correlation between marriage pressure and anxiety symptoms among unmarried individuals in higher education settings, with a view to identifying key demographic factors that may moderate this relationship. Methods: A stratified random sampling method was employed to conduct a structured questionnaire survey among 150 unmarried university teachers aged 25 to 40 years in Haikou City, China. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-sample t-tests, one-way analysis of variance, Pearson correlation analysis, and stratified multiple regression analysis. Results: The self-developed marriage pressure scale consisted of 18 items organized into a four-dimensional structure, namely parent and relative pressure, colleague and social circle pressure, sociocultural concept pressure, and self-perceived pressure, accounting for a cumulative variance explanation rate of 72.9 percent. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.86, with individual dimension coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.83 and a split-half reliability of 0.79. The mean score for marriage pressure items was 3.13 plus or minus 0.82, with parent and relative pressure exhibiting the highest value at 3.46 plus or minus 0.91. Marriage pressure scores demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation with anxiety symptom standard scores ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Female and single teachers reported significantly higher levels of marriage pressure compared to their male and married counterparts ( $P < 0.05$ ). The prevalence of anxiety symptoms was 24.0 percent. After controlling for demographic variables, marriage pressure independently accounted for 15.0 percent of the variance in anxiety symptoms ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Conclusion: Marriage pressure independently contributes to anxiety symptoms among unmarried university teachers, with female and single teachers constituting key targets for psychological support and counseling.

**Keywords:** marriage pressure; anxiety symptoms; unmarried faculty; psychological well-being; correlation analysis

Received: 24 January 2026

Revised: 16 March 2026

Accepted: 26 March 2026

Published: 31 March 2026



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

Marriage is a significant turning point in an individual's life journey and also a fundamental institutional arrangement for social reproduction [1]. However, the marital landscape in China has undergone notable changes in recent years. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that the number of marriage registrations nationwide declined from a peak of 13.4693 million pairs in 2013 to 6.1056 million pairs in 2024; the number of first marriages decreased from 23.8596 million to 9.1723 million during the same period. In 2024, the population of unmarried males was approximately 14.3996 million, while that of unmarried females reached 9.9135 million. The population of eligible unmarried men and women is substantial, and the societal expectations surrounding marriage, along with associated psychological responses among them, warrant attention. Contemporary youth perspectives on marriage and relationships reflect evolving priorities: romance is increasingly oriented toward emotional fulfillment; relationships follow a flexible trajectory—romance does not necessarily lead to marriage, yet marriage is generally expected to be grounded in mutual affection; the principle of

establishing professional stability before forming a family has become widely accepted, particularly among women who tend to prioritize personal security and long-term planning in relationship decisions. Divergences in outlook arise from differing generational experiences: on one hand, enduring cultural expectations emphasize timely marriage as part of normative adult development; on the other hand, young people often delay marriage due to economic considerations and aspirations for personal growth. This intergenerational variation in timing and emphasis leads many unmarried individuals of marriageable age to frequently encounter inquiries about their relationship status from parents, relatives, and acquaintances during family reunions, holiday visits, and everyday interactions—phrases such as "Do you have a partner yet?", "When will you get married?", and "It's advisable to make arrangements soon" have become common features of contemporary marriage-related social exchanges.

Differences in perspectives on marriage and relationships across generations stem from distinct upbringing environments and socialization experiences. Marriage-related social expectations are not merely personal matters but reflect broader normative frameworks guiding life course development. These expectations embody traditional understandings of life sequencing related to marriage and childbearing, while also reflecting generational shifts in how individuals conceptualize family formation, interpersonal responsibilities, and life goals. When such expectations shift from occasional, supportive inquiry toward sustained, high-frequency engagement—and when communication moves from gentle encouragement toward heightened emotional intensity—their influence on individual psychological well-being becomes more pronounced. This study focuses on whether a persistent sense of future-oriented unease accumulates under sustained marriage-related social expectations, and how such experiences may shape psychological adjustment among young adults [2].

### *1.2. Statement of the Problem*

Among various professional groups, university faculty members possess unique analytical significance. First, the teaching profession exhibits significant gender imbalance, with female educators constituting the majority. University teachers generally hold advanced academic qualifications, yet the long-standing pattern wherein women tend to select spouses with equivalent or higher educational backgrounds and incomes narrows the pool of potential partners for highly educated female faculty in marriage markets. Second, the career development trajectory of university teachers closely aligns with their optimal periods for marriage and childbearing. The age range of 25–40 represents a critical phase for professional advancement among young teachers, during which responsibilities—including research, teaching, and academic promotion—coincide with personal life planning. This presents distinctive challenges in balancing professional growth and family formation. Third, the relatively closed work environment within universities limits social interactions primarily to academic circles, offering fewer opportunities for diverse social engagement. This objectively restricts the range of potential partners, creating notable difficulties in forming stable relationships and contributing to psychological stress that may affect physical well-being, mental health, and overall quality of life. Fourth, as knowledge-intensive institutions, universities feature close interpersonal interactions, making the marital and reproductive status of colleagues around the same age highly visible; consequently, faculty members' personal relationships are subject to heightened awareness within the workplace. Finally, societal perceptions of the teaching profession often emphasize stability, seasonal breaks, family compatibility, and suitability for marriage and child-rearing; such widely held views may intensify external attention toward the personal lives of unmarried teachers.

Based on the above analysis, this study focuses on unmarried university faculty members and raises the following core questions: (1) What is the current level of perceived marriage-related expectations among unmarried university teachers? (2) Is there a significant association between perceived marriage-related expectations and psychological stress levels? (3) Are there differences in perceived marriage-related

expectations and psychological stress levels among faculty members with different demographic characteristics (gender, age, place of origin, etc.)?

### *1.3. Research Hypotheses*

H1: Unmarried university faculty members report moderate to high levels of social expectations regarding marriage, with family members being the predominant source of such expectations [1].

H2: Among unmarried university faculty members, higher levels of perceived marital expectations are associated with elevated psychological distress [3].

H3: Female faculty members, those aged 31–35, and those originating from rural or township backgrounds report comparatively higher levels of marital expectations and associated psychological distress than their male, younger or older, and urban-based counterparts [4].

H4: Perceived marital expectations significantly predict psychological distress levels among unmarried university faculty members [5].

## **2. Study Subjects and Methods**

### *2.1. Study Subjects*

Using stratified random sampling, full-time faculty members and dedicated counselors aged 25 to 40 years—specifically those who are unmarried, divorced, or widowed and currently without a spouse—from higher education institutions in Haikou City, including undergraduate universities and vocational colleges, were selected as study subjects between January and February 2026.

Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) employment as full-time faculty or dedicated counselors at higher education institutions; (2) age between 25 and 40 years; (3) current marital status of unmarried, divorced, or widowed without a spouse; and (4) voluntary participation with signed informed consent [4].

Exclusion criteria included: (1) part-time or externally hired teaching staff; (2) individuals on extended absence from duty due to maternity leave, sick leave, or other prolonged absences; and (3) those unwilling to participate in the investigation [6].

### *2.2. Research Tools*

#### **2.2.1. General Demographic Information Questionnaire**

A self-designed questionnaire collected the following demographic information: age, gender, highest academic degree attained, professional rank (assistant lecturer/lecturer/associate professor/professor), place of origin (urban or rural area), teaching experience, monthly income, housing arrangement (living alone/with family/sharing with colleagues or others), and current relationship status (single/in a relationship).

#### **2.2.2. Scale for Assessing Pressure on Unmarried University Faculty Members to Get Married**

Drawing on a comprehensive review of domestic and international literature, semi-structured interviews with five unmarried university faculty members, and expert consultation, the "Marriage Pressure Scale for Unmarried University Faculty" was developed [7]. The scale comprises four dimensions:

Parental and familial pressure (6 items): Assesses the frequency and intensity of marriage-related expectations from parents, grandparents, and other close relatives;

Workplace and peer social pressure (4 items): Assesses attention to marital status and relationships from colleagues, friends, and professional social environments;

Sociocultural normative pressure (4 items): Assesses the influence of prevailing marriage and fertility norms, as well as broader public attitudes, on individual perceptions;

Self-perceived pressure (4 items): Assesses internalized stress arising from perceived societal expectations regarding timely marriage;

The survey consists of 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Total scores range from 18 to 90, with higher scores indicating greater perceived pressure to marry.

Reliability and validity testing was conducted in a pre-test ( $n=50$ ). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the full scale was 0.86; dimension-specific coefficients were 0.83 (parental/familial), 0.71 (workplace/peer), 0.75 (sociocultural normative), and 0.78 (self-perceived), with split-half reliability at 0.79—indicating strong internal consistency. Exploratory factor analysis yielded a KMO value of 0.73 and Bartlett's sphericity test  $\chi^2=286.34$ ,  $df=153$ ,  $p<0.001$ , confirming suitability for factor analysis. Four factors with eigenvalues  $>1$  were extracted, accounting for 72.9% of total variance. Item factor loadings ranged from 0.56 to 0.87. The resulting dimensional structure aligns closely with theoretical foundations, supporting sound construct validity.

### 2.2.3. Anxiety Self-Rating Scale (SAS)

The Self-Rating Scale for Emotional Distress, originally developed in 1971, was employed. This scale comprises 20 items rated on a 4-point scale (1 = "never or rarely" to 4 = "almost all or all time"), including 15 positively worded items and 5 negatively worded items [6]. Raw scores were multiplied by 1.25 and rounded to yield standard scores: scores  $<50$  indicate no clinically significant emotional distress; 50–59 indicate mild distress; 60–69 indicate moderate distress; and  $\geq 70$  indicate severe distress. In this study, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for the scale was 0.85.

### 2.3. Testing Procedure

Data collection was conducted online using the Wenjuanxing platform. The first page of each questionnaire presented an informed consent statement outlining the study objectives, commitment to participant anonymity, intended data usage, and the right to withdraw voluntarily at any time [4]. Participants completed all questionnaires independently, either on-site or via electronic submission. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, with 150 valid responses collected, resulting in a valid response rate of 75.0%.

### 2.4. Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS 26.0. (1) Descriptive statistics: Marital pressure and psychological distress levels were expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation ( $M \pm SD$ ); (2) Independent samples t-test: Differences among groups by gender and relationship status were compared; (3) One-way ANOVA: Differences among groups by age, professional title, and place of origin were analyzed, with post-hoc testing using the LSD method; (4) Pearson correlation analysis: The correlation between total marital pressure scores and each dimension score on one hand, and standardized psychological distress scores on the other hand was examined; (5) Hierarchical multiple regression analysis: The independent predictive effect of marital pressure on psychological distress was tested after controlling for demographic variables. A  $p$ -value  $<0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

## 3. Research Results

### 3.1. General Demographic Characteristics of the Study Subjects

A total of 150 valid participants were included in this study, with ages ranging from 22 to 38 years and a mean age of  $27.31 \pm 3.62$  years [2]. The full demographic profile is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** General Demographic Characteristics of the Study Subjects ( $N = 150$ )

| variable | class | number of people (n) | percentage (%) |
|----------|-------|----------------------|----------------|
| sex      | man   | 66                   | 44.0           |
|          | woman | 84                   | 56.0           |

|                   |                                           |     |      |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| age               | 22–30 years old                           | 112 | 74.7 |
|                   | 31–38 years old                           | 38  | 25.3 |
| Education         | undergraduate course                      | 75  | 50.0 |
|                   | Master                                    | 75  | 50.0 |
| Level             | doctor                                    | 0   | 0    |
|                   | not have                                  | 37  | 24.7 |
| professional      | assistant                                 | 77  | 51.3 |
|                   | lecturer                                  | 36  | 24.0 |
| ranks and         | adjunct professor                         | 0   | 0    |
|                   | professor                                 | 0   | 0    |
| titles            | city                                      | 33  | 22.0 |
|                   | county seat                               | 30  | 20.0 |
| origin of student | Towns or rural areas                      | 87  | 58.0 |
|                   | Below 5,000 yuan                          | 45  | 30.0 |
| monthly           | 5000–8000 yuan                            | 74  | 49.3 |
|                   | 8,001–12,000 yuan                         | 30  | 20.0 |
| income            | 12,001–20,000 yuan                        | 1   | 0.7  |
|                   | living alone                              | 100 | 66.7 |
| Living            | Living with parents                       | 13  | 8.7  |
|                   | Living with a spouse or partner           | 12  | 8.0  |
| Arrangements      | Share rent with colleagues/friends        | 25  | 16.7 |
|                   | Single (no romantic partner)              | 70  | 46.7 |
| Love Status       | In a relationship (with a stable partner) | 80  | 53.3 |

### 3.2. Current Situation of Marriage Pressure Exercised on Unmarried University Faculty Members

#### 3.2.1. Overall Level of Marital Pressure

The University Unmarried Teachers Marriage Pressure Scale yielded a mean total score of  $3.13 \pm 0.82$  (on a 5-point scale), reflecting a moderately high overall level of marital pressure [8]. Dimensional scores, ranked from highest to lowest, were as follows: pressure from parents and relatives ( $3.46 \pm 0.91$ ), self-perceived pressure ( $3.18 \pm 1.02$ ), pressure stemming from prevailing social and cultural norms ( $2.95 \pm 0.96$ ), and pressure from colleagues and one's immediate social circle ( $2.73 \pm 0.84$ ). Total scores and item mean scores for each dimension are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Scores Across Dimensions of the Marriage Pressure Scale (N=150)

| dimension                                          | Number of entries | Total Score (M ± SD) | Dimension All entries are evenly distributed (M ± SD) |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Pressure from parents/relatives                    | 6                 | 20.76±5.46           | 3.46±0.91                                             |
| Pressure from colleagues or social circles         | 4                 | 10.92±3.36           | 2.73±0.84                                             |
| Pressure from socio-cultural beliefs               | 4                 | 11.80±3.84           | 2.95±0.96                                             |
| Self-perceived stress                              | 4                 | 12.72±4.08           | 3.18±1.02                                             |
| Total Scale of Pressure Related to Forced Marriage | 18                | 56.20±14.76          | 3.13±0.82                                             |

#### 3.2.2. Differences in Marital Pressure Across Demographic Variables

Gender differences: Female teachers reported significantly higher total marital pressure scores ( $58.38 \pm 14.22$ ) than male teachers ( $53.42 \pm 15.12$ ),  $t = 2.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . The most pronounced difference was observed in parental or relative pressure ( $t = 2.44$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); self-perceived pressure did not differ significantly between genders ( $t = 1.76$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ).

Age differences: No statistically significant difference was found in total marital pressure scores between the 22–30 age group ( $55.62 \pm 14.68$ ) and the 31–38 age group ( $57.92 \pm 14.94$ ),  $t = 1.32$ ,  $p = 0.19$ .

Differences by place of origin: Teachers from township or rural areas reported higher total marital pressure scores ( $58.64 \pm 14.48$ ) compared with those from county towns ( $54.27 \pm 15.06$ ) and urban areas ( $52.00 \pm 14.22$ ), with a marginally significant overall effect ( $F = 2.71$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ).

Title-related differences: No statistically significant variation in total marital pressure was observed across professional title categories ( $F = 0.92$ ,  $p = 0.40$ ); however, lecturers reported the highest mean score ( $58.72 \pm 15.30$ ), followed by teaching assistants ( $55.95 \pm 14.52$ ), and those without a formal title reported the lowest ( $54.38 \pm 14.64$ ).

Relationship status differences: Single teachers reported significantly higher total marital pressure scores ( $59.10 \pm 14.52$ ) than married teachers ( $53.66 \pm 14.58$ ),  $t = 2.33$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

### 3.3. Current Status of Anxiety among Unmarried Faculty Members in Higher Education Institutions

The mean total score on the standardized anxiety assessment scale was  $44.65 \pm 10.18$ . A threshold score of 50 or higher was used to indicate elevated levels of psychological distress, yielding a detection rate of 24.0% (36 individuals): 28 cases (18.7%) fell within the mild range, 6 cases (4.0%) in the moderate range, and 2 cases (1.3%) in the severe range [9].

Gender differences were observed: female faculty members exhibited a significantly higher mean scale score ( $46.60 \pm 9.72$ ) compared with their male counterparts ( $42.18 \pm 10.36$ ),  $t = 2.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

Age-related comparisons showed mean scores of  $44.32 \pm 10.06$  among faculty aged 22–30 years and  $45.58 \pm 10.48$  among those aged 31–38 years, with no statistically significant difference ( $t = 0.65$ ,  $p = 0.52$ ).

Regarding regional background, faculty members originating from township or rural areas obtained a higher mean scale score ( $46.34 \pm 9.84$ ) than those from urban ( $41.30 \pm 10.28$ ) or county-town ( $43.70 \pm 10.44$ ) areas, with a marginally significant overall effect ( $F = 2.88$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ).

With respect to relationship status, unmarried faculty members reported a higher mean scale score ( $46.32 \pm 9.96$ ) than those in committed relationships ( $43.19 \pm 10.28$ ), with a marginally significant difference ( $t = 1.91$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ).

### 3.4. Correlation Analysis between Marital Pressure and Anxiety Symptoms

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive association between the total marriage pressure score reported by unmarried university faculty members and scores on the Self-Rating Anxiety Scale ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Among the subscales, pressure from parents and relatives showed the strongest association with elevated anxiety levels ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), followed by self-perceived pressure ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), societal and cultural expectations ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and pressure from colleagues and social circles ( $r = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (As shown in Table 3).

**Table 3.** Correlation Matrices (R) between Various Dimensions of Marriage Pressure and Anxiety Levels

| variable                           | Pressure from<br>parents/relatives | Pressure<br>from<br>colleagues<br>or social<br>circles | Pressure<br>from<br>socio-<br>cultural<br>beliefs | Self-<br>perceived<br>stress | Total<br>score for<br>pressure<br>related to<br>forced<br>marriage: | SAS<br>standard<br>mark<br>standardized<br>score |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Pressure from<br>parents/relatives | 1                                  |                                                        |                                                   |                              |                                                                     |                                                  |

|                                                                                           |      |      |      |      |      |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|---|
| Pressure from colleagues or social circles                                                | 0.31 | 1    |      |      |      |   |
| Pressure from socio-cultural beliefs                                                      | 0.28 | 0.35 | 1    |      |      |   |
| Self-perceived stress                                                                     | 0.38 | 0.36 | 0.33 | 1    |      |   |
| Total score for pressure related to forced marriage: SAS standard mark standardized score | 0.74 | 0.65 | 0.64 | 0.69 | 1    |   |
|                                                                                           | 0.40 | 0.26 | 0.31 | 0.38 | 0.45 | 1 |

Note: All correlation coefficients were statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

### 3.5. Regression Analysis of Marriage Pressure on Anxiety Levels

Using SAS standard scores as the dependent variable, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted [10]. The first step included demographic variables (gender, age, place of origin, marital status, professional title) as control variables; the second step added the total score of marriage pressure to assess its independent association with psychological distress after accounting for demographic factors. Results indicated that, after controlling for demographic variables, marriage pressure accounted for an additional 15.0% of the variance in psychological distress, with the final model explaining 21.0% of the total variance (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.21$ ). Marriage pressure showed a statistically significant positive association with psychological distress ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). All variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below 2, indicating no substantial multicollinearity among predictors (As shown in Table 4).

**Table 4.** Stratified Multiple Regression Analysis of Marriage Pressure on Anxiety Levels

| step            | variable                                            | B     | SE   | $\beta$ | t     | p      | VIF  |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------|--------|------|
| First Steps     | (constant)                                          | 28.46 | 7.82 |         | 3.64  | <0.001 |      |
|                 | sex                                                 | 4.32  | 1.56 | 0.22    | 2.77  | <0.01  | 1.06 |
|                 | age                                                 | 0.42  | 0.22 | 0.15    | 1.91  | 0.06   | 1.04 |
|                 | origin of student                                   | 2.51  | 1.02 | 0.20    | 2.46  | <0.05  | 1.03 |
|                 | Love Status                                         | -2.86 | 1.58 | -0.14   | -1.81 | 0.07   | 1.02 |
|                 | professional ranks and titles                       | 0.82  | 0.96 | 0.07    | 0.85  | 0.40   | 1.01 |
| the second step | (constant)                                          | 14.82 | 7.44 |         | 1.99  | <0.05  |      |
|                 | sex                                                 | 3.86  | 1.48 | 0.19    | 2.61  | <0.01  | 1.08 |
|                 | age                                                 | 0.32  | 0.21 | 0.11    | 1.52  | 0.13   | 1.06 |
|                 | origin of student                                   | 1.68  | 0.98 | 0.13    | 1.71  | 0.09   | 1.06 |
|                 | Love Status                                         | -2.08 | 1.50 | -0.10   | -1.39 | 0.17   | 1.04 |
|                 | professional ranks and titles                       | 0.56  | 0.90 | 0.05    | 0.62  | 0.54   | 1.02 |
|                 | Total score for pressure related to forced marriage | 0.28  | 0.05 | 0.41    | 5.40  | <0.001 | 1.10 |

Note: In the first step,  $R^2 = 0.09$  and adjusted  $R^2 = 0.06$ ; in the second step,  $R^2 = 0.24$  and adjusted  $R^2 = 0.21$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.15$ ,  $F(6,143) = 7.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

## 4. Discussion

#### *4.1. Analysis of the Current Status of Marriage Pressure and Anxiety among Unmarried University Faculty Members*

This study found that the total score on the College Unmarried Teachers Marriage Pressure Scale was  $3.13 \pm 0.82$ , indicating a moderately high level. Among the subscales, pressure from parents or relatives scored highest ( $3.46 \pm 0.91$ ), suggesting that familial expectations constitute the primary source of marriage-related pressure. This pattern aligns with traditional Chinese family values emphasizing the importance of establishing a family as part of personal development and social responsibility.

Regarding psychological well-being, the average SAS score was  $44.65 \pm 10.18$ , with approximately 24.0% of participants exhibiting mild symptoms requiring attention [11, 12]. This prevalence is comparable to findings reported in prior studies of young academic professionals, underscoring the importance of supporting mental wellness among unmarried university faculty members.

#### *4.2. The Relationship between Marital Pressure and Anxiety Disorders*

Among all dimensions, the correlation between parental or familial expectations regarding marriage and psychological distress is the strongest ( $r=0.40$ ). Emotional interactions within the family system are characterized by high frequency and intensity; persistent expectations about marriage and emotionally charged involvement more readily induce sustained emotional arousal in individuals [4]. Social phenomena such as excessively high dowry demands and rushed marriages not only challenge young adults' perspectives on partnership and commitment but also place strain on parents' physical and mental well-being. Parents' negative emotional expressions—such as disappointment or concern—significantly heighten their adult children's perception of criticism and rejection, thereby increasing levels of psychological distress—a pattern especially evident among unmarried adults. This study confirms that similar mechanisms operate among unmarried faculty members in higher education institutions: persistent parental expectations concerning marriage and expressions of concern related to marital status constitute sustained sources of psychological stress that cannot be easily mitigated through avoidance, leading to cumulative psychological burden. The correlation between self-perceived stress and psychological distress ranks second only to parental expectations ( $r=0.38$ ), indicating that external marital expectations have been deeply internalized by individuals. Critical life transitions—including academic advancement, career establishment, partnership formation, and parenthood—are concentrated during this developmental stage, resulting in widespread psychological strain among young adults—a notable socio-psychological trend. The findings further substantiate this internalization process in the context of relationship-related expectations and delineate a coherent stress transmission pathway extending from external familial expectations to self-imposed pressure.

#### *4.3. Theoretical and Practical Significance of Anxiety Detection Rate*

The 24.0% detection rate of psychological distress symptoms in this study holds significant practical implications. Unmarried young individuals report elevated concerns regarding economic stability prior to marriage, marital relationships, child-rearing and education, and life after marriage. The female Gen Z cohort expressing hesitation toward marriage reflects evolving perspectives on relationships and family formation: they view emotional connections as sources of personal fulfillment, prioritizing authenticity and emotional well-being; approach formal marriage with thoughtful consideration, emphasizing individual growth and mutual respect; and associate childbearing with considerations of professional continuity, lifestyle sustainability, and holistic health. Young university faculty members navigate a developmental phase where career advancement aligns closely with personal life milestones, encountering multifaceted role expectations alongside practical considerations, rendering them particularly attentive to psychological well-being [13, 14]. It is important to note that psychological distress symptoms not only influence personal quality of life but may also affect professional engagement and interpersonal dynamics in academic settings. Therefore, universities are

encouraged to integrate support for personal life transitions—including relationship development and family planning—into comprehensive mental health frameworks.

#### 4.4. Innovations and Limitations of This Study

**Innovation:** This study has, for the first time, systematically developed and validated a scale measuring marriage pressure among unmarried university faculty members, establishing its reliability and validity as a measurement tool for subsequent research; it also clarified the association between marriage pressure and emotional distress, along with the underlying pathways [15].

**Limitations:** This study employs a cross-sectional design, precluding causal inference; the sample is confined to university faculty in Hainan Province, limiting generalizability; additionally, demographic representation is uneven, and variation in professional titles and educational backgrounds is insufficient, potentially reducing statistical power for subgroup analyses [6]. Future research should broaden geographical scope and enhance population diversity.

### 5. Conclusion

(1) The "Marriage Pressure Scale for Unmarried University Faculty" comprises four dimensions—parental/relative pressure, colleague HeSheHui circle pressure, societal cultural expectations pressure, and self-perceived pressure—with a total of 18 items. It demonstrates strong reliability and validity, making it an effective measurement tool for assessing marriage pressure among unmarried university faculty members.

(2) Unmarried faculty members at universities reported experiencing marriage pressure at a moderately high level, with parental/relative pressure being the most prominent; the prevalence of mild psychological distress symptoms was 24.0%.

(3) Marriage pressure is significantly positively correlated with levels of psychological distress; even after controlling for demographic variables, it retains a significant positive predictive effect ( $\beta = 0.41$ ), accounting for 15.0% of the variance in psychological distress independently.

(4) Gender and marital status are significant factors influencing both marriage pressure and psychological distress; particular attention should be paid to the psychological stress experienced by female faculty members and those who remain unmarried.

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