

Marital Quality Among Married Individuals: Role of Conflict Resolution Styles and Emotional Intelligence

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Marital quality has been explored from many different perspectives both in eastern and western studies. A few indigenous studies have considered impact of communication skills and communication patterns on marital quality but hardly there is any study which has discussed specifically conflict resolution styles that married individuals employ in their marital conflicts and how these styles affect their marital quality. This study was an attempt to analyze the relationship between conflict resolution styles and marital quality and to explore whether emotional intelligence strengthens or weakens this relationship. Moreover, effect of different demographic variables, like age, number of children, etc. on marital quality was also explored. Sample consisted of 201 married individuals residing in Rawalpindi and Islamabad and data were collected through ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993), Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (Davies et al., 2010), and Conflict Resolutions Styles Inventory (Kurdek, 1994). Results showed that among conflict resolution styles, only positive problem solving had a positive association with marital quality while all other styles showed either a negative or insignificant relationship.

Keywords. Conflict resolution styles, marital quality, emotional intelligence, moderation, Pakistan

Creating and maintaining a meaningful and positive relationship with a loved one through marriage is one of the central components of human experience. Regardless of cultural differences, people in different parts of the world enter into different forms of committed relationships and in many traditional societies entering a marital bond is

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considered as opening of a new chapter in one's life ([Dobrowolska et al., 2020](#)). An ideal marriage not only fulfils one's basic need of bonding but also creates a deep sense of connection and belonging through partners' care and love for each other ([Plooy & Beer, 2018](#)).

Despite of the many advancements brought in the twenty first century still marriages in Pakistan are usually brokered by the elders of the two families, however, exceptions of love marriages are there too. Usually, consent is taken from both bride and groom before tying the knot and mostly it is girl which leaves her parents' house and settles with her husband and his family Elders do not leave the couple on their own, but intervene whenever this marital relationship gets too strained, and things reach to the verge of divorce ([Ahmed, 2022](#)). Though media has spread some awareness about the problems associated with consanguineous marriages, still cousin marriages are prevalent in most parts of the country. In such marriages, usually the husband has a higher level of education than the wife but in nonconsanguineous marriages usually reverse is the case ([Bashir & Nazir, 2022](#)). Premarital relationships are considered taboo in most Parts of the country; however, few girls and boys do try to develop a level of understanding before entering the marital relationship. Further many girls prefer to live in a joint family because of the high expenses and responsibilities associated with the nuclear family ([Maqsood, 2021](#)).

Conflict is an inevitable part of a marriage as couples usually come from different backgrounds, have different beliefs, possess different communication styles and have different levels of education. So, what makes the difference is how intelligently couples resolve their conflicts, what strategies they employ and what conflict resolution styles they use to reach a healthy conclusion ([Tasew & Getahun, 2021](#)).

A study conducted in Brazil, a developing country like Pakistan, on 152 marital separation proceedings from 1992 to 2006 showed that the main reasons for separation between couples were frequent arguments and fights. A significant body of empirical research shows that in the long-term conflict resolution strategies used by couples to resolve their problems and differences have a greater impact than the reasons responsible for these conflicts ([Costa & Mosmann, 2021](#)).

It is not the presence of a conflict per se, but how individuals involved in the relationship resolve it that matters more. So, a skillset which involves one's social and emotional insight becomes crucial in helping married individuals to resolve their conflicts in a healthier way. So in our study we also analyzed how emotional intelligence EI affects marital quality directly and in connection with conflict resolution styles.

Regarding concept of EI, two schools of thought exist in the literature. Though the two schools of thought differ in how they frame EI, however both share the basic elements of identifying and comprehending self and others' emotions, handling difficult emotional reactions and regulating emotions to better adjust with the environment. These core characteristics propose that EI may have a positive association with healthy adjustment and functioning in broad range of social and interpersonal settings including romantic relationships (Zysberg et al., 2019).

Conflict Resolution Styles and Marital Quality

Conflict resolution styles are the strategies or responses that reflect an individual's coping style to deal with marital problems. The possible different strategies are classified either as constructive or positive and destructive or negative (Bretaña et al., 2019). Constructive conflict resolution styles are positive problem solving such as solving the problem at hand and negotiating the way out; compliance such as giving up and not holding up for yourself; and destructive conflict resolution styles are conflict engagement such as attacking other person or losing control during conversation; and withdrawal such as refusing to discuss problem further (Kurdek 1994, as cited by Adriani & Ratnasari, 2021).

A person's choice of constructive and destructive conflict resolution styles in an intimate relationship is governed by the interdependence theory. The theory proposes that a person's perceived rewards and costs to a relationship determine a person's choice of different conflict resolution styles in an intimate relationship (Kurdek, 1995). Studies such as Wagner et al. (2019) and Perrone-McGovern et al. (2004) showed that constructive conflict resolution styles were positively related to the couples' marital quality (Costa & Mosmann, 2021).

Emotional Intelligence and Marital Quality

Understanding one's own emotions and emotions of the partner could play an important role in maintaining intimacy and a positive emotional atmosphere. Handling emotions efficiently is in fact central to successfully dealing with conflicts and heated situations. Happy couples, in contrast to unhappy couples, try to neutralize rather retaliate during a conflict situation (Zmaczyńska-Witek et al., 2019).

Milani et al. (2020) undertook an experimental study in Iran with a pre/posttest design to analyze the effect of EI training program on

reproductive women's psychological health and marital satisfaction. Results of their study show that the EI training program was very effective in enhancing women's quality of sexual life, marital satisfaction, and psychological wellbeing.

[Hajihassani and Sim \(2019\)](#) also brought to light somewhat similar findings regarding role of EI for married women. Respondents, who were 194 young Iranian girls, shared their responses on ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale regarding marital quality and attempted Emotional Quotient Inventory in reference to EI. Study revealed a significant and positive impact of EI on marital quality.

[Valentina et al. \(2021\)](#) also undertook a study to evaluate the correlation between EI and marital satisfaction among teachers in Anmbara (Nigeria) and the results showed a positive weak relationship between the two variables. Similarly the results of [Zysberg et al. \(2019\)](#) did not show a direct relation between EI and satisfaction among 175 Israeli couples involved in romantic relationships until they introduced the attachment styles.

Emotional Intelligence EI and Conflict Resolution Styles

Strong emotions and reactions are frequently manifested in interpersonal confrontations, and these can be extremely intense events. As EI reflects one's ability to be emotionally and cognitively mindful of one's own and other person's emotions, thus it can play an important role in influencing individual's choice of conflict response with their romantic partner. This predictive ability of EI is supported by few past studies as well. For example, using EI performance-based ability model, [Stolarski et al. \(2011\)](#) found that higher levels of EI ability would result in using active and constructive conflict resolution styles among heterosexual couples ([Expósito et al., 2019](#)). Further [Stolarski et al. \(2011\)](#) also found that EI significantly moderated the process of conflict resolution style selection by both men and women.

A study by [Batoool and Khalid \(2012\)](#) examined the role of EI and conflict resolution styles in predicting marital quality among married couples in Pakistan. A sample of 85 married couples was recruited for the study from four major cities of Punjab province. Results of their study show that dimensions of EI like optimism, empathy, interpersonal skills, and impulse control appear to be major predictors of marital quality. Further their results show that couples with high EI see conflict as a natural growth of healthy relationship, and it enables couples to separate person from the problem and indulge in healthy resolution styles to enhance their marital quality.

Studies like Watson and Watson (2016) analyzed how EI affects the coping self-efficacy and academic stress of Hispanic students in USA. Using two stage hierarchical regression analyses, they found that EI significantly moderated the relationship between given variables for all participants.

A few indigenous studies like Kundi and Badar (2021) also analyzed the moderating effect of EI on interpersonal conflicts in organizational setting. Taking a sample of employees from different public and private organizations in Pakistan, they found that high levels of EI played a significant role in lowering the positive relationship between interpersonal conflicts and counterproductive work behavior both for individuals and organization. Hafsa et al. (2021), also conducted a study and showed that the high levels of EI weaken the relationship between parental conflicts and loneliness among adolescents.

Finally literature shows that studies (Milani et al., 2020; Hajihassani & Sim, 2019; Siddiqua & Majeed, 2021) have shown a significant and direct effect, and few studies (Expósito et al., 2019; Zysberg et al., 2019; Zeidner & Kloda, 2013) showed indirect effect and some studies (Valentina et al., 2021) depicted low impact of EI on the marital quality, however, none of the studies has taken this important variable as a moderator. So this somewhat mixed impact of EI on marital quality provided us the impetus to take this important variable as a moderator in our study and to see its effect on marital quality by analyzing its interaction with conflict resolution styles. So our specific objectives and hypotheses for this study are on following.

Objectives

1. To study the relationship between conflict resolution styles, emotional intelligence and marital quality among married individuals.
2. To study how emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between conflict resolution styles and marital quality among married individuals.

Hypotheses

1. Positive problem solving and compliance will be positively related to marital quality among married individuals.
2. Withdrawal and conflict engagement will be negatively related to marital quality among married individuals.

3. Emotional intelligence will strengthen the relationship between positive conflict resolution styles (i.e., compliance and positive problem solving) and marital quality among married individuals.
4. Emotional intelligence will weaken the relationship between negative conflict resolution styles (i.e., conflict engagement and withdrawal) and marital quality among married individuals.

Method

Research Design and Procedure

The current study used a cross-sectional research design and was quantitative in nature. Data were gathered using the purposive sampling method. Participants were approached in person and through social media via Google forms using WhatsApp and email service. Self-reported measures were used to collect data which included informed consent as well. Only those married individuals were included in the study that have been in marital relationship for at least two years and had at least one child as well. Study was dully approved by institutional review board of the university.

Sample

The sample for this study was married individuals ($N = 201$) living in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The demographic characteristics of the participants as shown in Table 1 reflect that the percentage of men was higher than women. Regarding age distribution, equal number of the participants lie between 24-35 and 36-45 years of age. Almost equal but less number of participants lie in the categories above 46-55 years and more than 56 years of age. Most of the participants possessed education below master level followed by master level of education (18 years of education), which was followed by education above the master level.

Most of the participants have marriage duration in the range of 2 to 10, then 11-20 years, followed by 21 and more years of marriage duration. Most of the participants had 1 to 2 children and around 35% had children between 3-4. Regarding family system, individuals living

either in joint or nuclear family systems had almost same ratios (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Demographic Distribution of the Sample (N = 201)*

Demographic Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	103	51.2
Female	98	48.8
Age		
24-35	90	44.8
36-45	90	44.8
46-55	11	5.5
56 and Above	10	5
Education		
Below Masters	119	59.2
Masters	50	24.9
Above Masters	32	15.9
Marriage Duration		
2-10	118	58.7
11-20	69	34.3
21 and Above	14	7
Children		
1-2	130	65.0
3-6	71	35.0
Family system		
Joint	100	49.8
Nuclear	101	50.2

Measures

Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI)

The 16-item respondent version of the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (Kurdek, 1994) was used as the study was based on married individuals and not dyads. This 16 itemed inventory assesses the intensity with which participants employ four conflict-resolutions styles which are; Positive Problem Solving (e.g., trying to resolve the problem), Conflict Engagement (e.g., using abusive language),

Compliance (e.g., not striving to present your side of the story), and Withdrawal (e.g., keeping quiet and not discussing issue any more). Each style is composed of 4 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). High score on each scale shows that individual uses that style more and low score shows that individual indulges less in that conflict resolution style (Kurdek, 1994).

Wagner et al. (2019) used the Scale on a sample of Brazilian population to analyze the conflict resolution styles used by these individuals and to see its impact on their marital quality. They reported Cronbach's alpha value of .77 for Conflict Engagement, a value of .75 for Positive Problem Solving. Alpha values for the withdrawal and compliance domains were .61 and .53, respectively.

Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS)

The Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (Davies et al., 2010) consists of 10 items which specifically measure a person's ability to assess and express emotions, to adjust emotions, and to utilize this emotional information for interpersonal problem solving as it is based on Salovey and Mayer's model of EI. The BEIS-10 outperforms the 33-item EI construct created by Schutte et al. (1998) in terms of test-retest reliability, factorial validity, and content validity. Respondents share their responses on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (Davies et al., 2010).

Durosini et al. (2021) tested the validity of BEIS-10 for Italian population. Using Cronbach's alpha and item-total correlation analysis, they examined the BEIS-10 Scale's internal consistency and found that its reliability was adequate at .74.

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS)

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993) is a research and clinical tool which offers a valid and reliable measure of marital quality for researchers who require a brief tool for the purpose. It provides a way to obtain both individual and dyadic marital Satisfaction scores. Scale consists of 15 items (10 items for Marital Satisfaction and 5 items for Idealistic Distortion) and respondents share their responses on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An individual EMS score is the sum of both Marital Satisfaction Scale and Idealistic Distortion Scale, however, while applying scale to couples in therapy or to dyads in

research this total score is calculated after making corrections in Idealistic Distortion Scale by comparing score of both partners against each other (Fowers & Olson, 1993).

Coyle (2018) used ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale to measure marital satisfaction among a sample of 268 married individuals in USA. The scale demonstrated a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's value of .92.

Results

Before going to test the hypotheses, it was important to assess psychometric properties of the scales being used for this study. Therefore, a reliability analysis was done using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha to verify internal consistency of the scales. Table 2 depicts a summary of psychometric properties of each scale.

Cronbach's Alpha for the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (Davies et al., 2010), ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993), Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory by Kurdek (1994), were satisfactory. Our reliability values for Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory subscales were somewhat same as reported by Wagner et al. (2019), who obtained reliability values of .77 for subscale Conflict Engagement, .75 for Positive Problem Solving, and values of .61 and .53 for dimensions Withdrawal and Compliance, respectively.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis of Study Variables (N = 201)*

Scales	<i>k</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
					Potential	Actual		
BEIS	10	.80	38.50	5.23	10-50	16-50	-1.21	3.46
EMS	15	.86	57.43	11.1	15-75	30-75	-.52	-.45
CE	4	.74	7.83	2.91	4-20	4-17	.84	.72
PPS	4	.66	14.98	2.81	4-20	7-20	-.39	-.20
WD	4	.72	9.19	3.28	4-20	4-19	.56	-.13
COMP	4	.50	1.37	2.59	4-20	4-18	-.07	-.14

Note. *k* = No. of items; BEIS = Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale; EMS = ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale; Conflict Resolution Style Inventory; CE = Conflict Engagement; PPS = Positive Problem Solving; WD = Withdrawal; COMP = Compliance.

Table 3 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation among study variables. Results show that out of four only one conflict resolution style, positive problem solving, has a positive association

with marital quality. Rest all conflict resolution styles were negatively related to marital quality with conflict style withdrawal having the strongest negative relationship followed by conflict engagement and finally compliance having a nonsignificant negative correlation. Table 3 also shows that EI had a moderate positive relationship with marital quality.

Table 3: *Correlation Among Study Variables (N = 201)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 MQ	-	.41**	-.32**	-.47**	.52**	-.54**	-.11
2 EI		-	-.12	-.39**	.41**	-.25**	.14*
3 CRS			-				
4 CE				-	-.39**	.59**	.03
5 PPS					-	-.40**	.10
6 WD						-	.28**
7 COMP							-

Note. MQ = Marital Quality; EI = Emotional Intelligence; CRS = Conflict Resolution Style; CE = Conflict Engagement; PPS = Positive Problem Solving; WD = Withdrawal; COMP = Compliance.

Finally, EI taken as moderator between conflict resolution styles and marital quality do not moderate the relationship for any conflict resolution style. Moderation results for conflict resolutions style withdrawal shows EI as a significant predictor of marital quality ($\beta = .60, p < .001$), however, the interaction effect is nonsignificant ($\beta = .01, p = .63$) which shows that EI does not moderate the relationship. Regarding conflict resolution style positive problem-solving again EI is a significant predictor of marital quality ($\beta = .47, p < .001$), but interaction effect is negative nonsignificant ($\beta = -.38, p = .36$). This means emotional intelligence does not significantly moderate the link between positive problem solving and marital quality either. For the conflict resolution styles conflict engagement and compliance again EI is a strong predictor of marital quality, but interaction effect is not significant with values ($\beta = -.01, p = .89$) and ($\beta = .15, p = .74$) for conflict engagement and compliance, respectively.

Discussion

There is a shortage of studies in Pakistan who have specifically targeted the conflict resolution styles used by married individuals (Dildar & Amjad, 2017) and a few studies (Dildar et al., 2021; Rahman, 2019; Siddiqa & Majeed 2021) which have been done have used either

Organization Conflict Inventory proposed by Rahim (1983) or have researched conflict resolution through open ended questions and qualitative approach. Our study addressed this gap by quantitatively measuring conflict resolution styles through a reliable and valid scale developed by Kurdek (1994).

Results of correlation analysis showed that conflict resolution style positive problem solving had a significant positive correlation with marital quality with a strong correlation coefficient of .53 while conflict resolution style compliance had a nonsignificant negative correlation value of -.11. Regarding negative correlation between marital quality and compliance, against our proposed hypothesis, there are many studies which ascertain compliance as a negative conflict resolution style (e.g. see Coyle, 2018; Wagner et al., 2019), as not defending one's position and surrendering to the partner's unhealthy behavior may neutralize the situation temporarily, but in the long run it may result in deterioration of the marital quality (Coyle, 2018).

Above results are in line with the study of Adriani and Ratnasari (2021) who obtained almost same results for a sample of 625 married individuals in Indonesia. Adriani and Ratnasari (2021) also showed that conflict resolution style positive problem solving had the highest positive predictive ability of good marital quality and conflict resolution styles conflict engagement and withdrawal had a negative impact on marital quality. Further their results also showed the nonsignificant predictive ability of conflict resolution style compliance. Adriani and Ratnasari (2021) argue that the non-predictive ability of conflict resolution style compliance is in line with the past studies which maintain that marital satisfaction is the result of effective resolution of marital conflicts which cannot be achieved by using compliance by any of the partners.

Though compliance may be considered an inadequate conflict resolutions strategy, however, at times it can serve as a restraint in further escalation of the conflict and may also serve as a shield against partner's violent behavior. So in this way compliance may be a preferred choice of problem solving for some couples in comparison to other resolution styles (Wagner et al., 2019). Avoiding a conflict to suppress hostile feelings or withdrawing from it in milieu of affection and care for the partner can also have different meanings and outcomes for a relationship (Delatorre & Wagner, 2019).

Regarding EI, results showed that it had a significant positive relationship with marital quality that is married individuals having high levels of EI also had a high level of marital quality. These results are in

line with some previous studies like Kamomoe et al. (2021) and [Hajjhasani and Sim \(2019\)](#).

Regarding our third and fourth hypothesis, EI did not moderate the relationship for any conflict resolution styles. Our study did have some literature support regarding moderating effect of EI but most of these studies were done in organizational context apart from [Stolarski et al., \(2011\)](#). Again, [Stolarski et al. \(2011\)](#) observed the moderating role EI plays on person's choice of conflict resolution styles, but the scales used to measure emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles were different from those used in our research. And, this study was done on Polish heterosexual couples so the cultural context may have played its role too in variation of results. A Study done by [Kundi and Badar \(2021\)](#) did recruit a sample from Pakistani population and showed that emotional intelligence significantly moderated the relationship between interpersonal conflicts and counterproductive behavior of the employees, but again this was an attempt to analyze interpersonal conflicts in an organizational setting and not a in a marital relationship.

Further research done by [Salami \(2010\)](#) also found out that EI did not moderate the relationship between all types of conflict resolution strategies and organizational citizenship behavior. He found that emotional intelligence did moderate the relationship for conflict resolution strategies withdrawing and forcing and not for other three conflict resolution strategies namely compromising, confronting, and smoothing, all of which were measured through Conflict Resolution Strategies Scale.

So, from above discussion we can say that role of EI with reference to conflict resolution styles and marital quality may be a complex phenomenon involving interplay of many other variables. Further we did not analyze the moderating role of EI separately for men and women so this could also be another dimension to explore in future studies.

Conclusion

Results of our study showed that positive conflict resolution styles and higher levels of emotional intelligence had a strong association with marital quality while negative or destructive conflict resolution styles were linked to low levels of marital quality. However, emotional intelligence did not moderate the relationship between conflict resolution styles and marital quality.

Implications of the Study

This study will help married individuals in Pakistan to understand how usage of different conflict resolution styles can affect their marital quality. Further study could be also useful in educating the individuals before marriage about the importance of conflict resolution styles as pre-marital counseling has shown a significant impact in reducing conflicts in a marriage and in fostering cooperation and empathy (Coyle, 2018). Further study will help marriage counselors and psychotherapists to better understand conflict resolution tendencies being used by the people in Pakistan and the importance of teaching their clients the usage of positive conflict resolution styles.

Finally, it is noteworthy that, although findings of this research may corroborate with some international studies on marital quality, however, as they were obtained from a sample selected from two cities of Pakistan, so these should be interpreted keeping in consideration the cultural and socioeconomic context of the country.

Limitations of the Study

This study targeted married individuals and not dyads so future indigenous studies may target both married partners together. Study did provide information that individuals who make use of positive or constructive resolution styles show a higher level of marital quality and individuals who indulge in negative or destructive conflict resolution styles report lower levels of marital quality however it remains unclear that what were the factors that lead couples to engage in these conflicts so future studies may also explore these factors as well.

One of the other limitations of this study is that it targeted relatively a homogenous sample. Most of the participants were of similar regional backgrounds, were of about similar age, and had about the same level of education. These similarities in the sample may render somewhat homogenous responses. Most of the participants in our study reported a higher level of marital quality and emotional intelligence and also most of these used constructive resolution styles.

Participants in our sample had a mean education of 17 years which shows most of them were highly educated so future studies need to target participants with low levels of education and illiterate individuals to have more representative sample of the population for better generalizability. Finally, the correlational and cross-sectional nature of our study is unable to establish a causal relationship between variables. Hence, future studies could make use of longitudinal data as well as

experimental designs to address this limitation and to better highlight the practical implications of our study. Moreover, textual analysis parameters mentioned in the previous studies like Uludag (2024) can also be adopted to investigate the association between marital quality and relationships.

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