The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Marital Conflicts Using Actor-Partner Interdependence Model

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A r t i c l e   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. This study utilizes a cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. The participants were 100 married couples who were recruited through convenience sampling from different regions of the Canada. The inclusion criteria for the study were that the couples had to be married for at least one year and have no history of mental illness. The participants were asked to complete the EQ-i questionnaire, which measures emotional intelligence, and the MCQ questionnaire, which measures the marital conflicts. The questionnaires were completed by both partners separately, and the responses were matched based on the couple's identification code. The data was collected through an online survey platform. The data analysis was conducted using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). The results for the APIM indicated that the husbands' emotional intelligence ($\beta= -0.289$, $P<0.001$) as well as the wives' emotional intelligence ($\beta= -0.320$, $P<0.001$) exhibited a significant actor effect on their marital conflicts. Similarly, husbands' emotional intelligence ($\beta= -0.301$, $P<0.001$) as well as the wives' emotional intelligence ($\beta= -0.342$, $P<0.001$) exhibited a significant partner effect on their spouses' marital conflicts. The present study highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in romantic relationships and provides insights for clinicians and researchers working with couples to improve their marital relationships.
Keywords: emotional intelligence, marital conflicts, actor-partner interdependence model.

1   Introduction

Marital conflicts are a common occurrence in romantic relationships, and can have negative impacts on both partners (Navabinejad, Rostami, & Parsakia, 2023). Recent studies have highlighted the crucial role of emotional intelligence in fostering positive and satisfying marital relationships. The research conducted Mostova et al. (2022) as well as Suri and Kochhar (2020) has brought to the forefront the necessity of emotional intelligence in promoting effective communication, empathy, and conflict resolution skills among couples (Mostova, Stolarski, &

Matthews, 2022; Suri & Kochhar, 2021). Zmaczyńska-Witek et al. (2019), and Hadian and Amini (2019) found that couples who scored higher in emotional intelligence were more likely to engage in effective communication and problem-solving strategies. Such couples were better equipped to handle conflicts and difficult decisions with greater empathy and understanding. The study further revealed that emotional intelligence played a significant role in promoting positive outcomes in marital relationships, particularly when it came to resolving conflicts and making decisions (Hadian & Amini, 2019; Zmaczyńska-Witek, Komborska, & Rogowska, 2019).

Many studies showed that higher levels of EI were associated with greater relationship satisfaction and lower levels of conflict among couples. Other studies have focused on the role of specific components of EI in couples' relationships (Jardine, Vannier, & Voyer, 2022). For example, Wollney et al. (2020) found that the ability to regulate one's own emotions was particularly important for couples' relationship satisfaction and stability (Wollny, Jacobs, & Pabel, 2020). Several studies indicate that the ability to perceive and understand one's partner's emotions was associated with greater intimacy and trust and lower infidelity in couples' relationships (Navabinejad, Rostami, & Parsakia, 2023; Schulsinger, 2022; Sevari & Talaeezadeh, 2015; Sidhu, Bhalla, & Ali, 2019).

Research revealed that emotional intelligence allowed couples to better regulate their emotions and manage stress levels, which led to more positive interactions and greater feelings of closeness and intimacy. These findings emphasize the critical role of emotional intelligence in promoting healthy and fulfilling marital relationships. By developing emotional intelligence skills, couples can improve their ability to communicate effectively, manage stress and conflict, and ultimately build stronger bonds of trust and understanding (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020; Parker et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to prioritize emotional intelligence skills in any relationship, as it is the foundation of a happy and healthy partnership.

Emotional intelligence allows individuals to better understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of their partners, leading to more effective communication and conflict resolution (Gottman et al., 2019; Knox et al., 2023). Gottman and colleagues (2019) state that emotional intelligence was positively associated with marital satisfaction, and negatively associated with marital conflicts. Specifically, the study found that individuals with higher emotional intelligence were better able to regulate their emotions during conflicts, leading to more positive outcomes (Gottman et al., 2019).

Taken together, these findings suggest that emotional intelligence is a crucial factor in predicting marital conflicts, and may be an important target for interventions aimed at improving the quality of romantic relationships. Clinicians working with couples can use these findings to develop targeted interventions that focus on enhancing emotional intelligence skills among both partners. In addition to emotional intelligence, other factors may also play a role in predicting marital conflicts.

Overall, the recent research suggests that emotional intelligence is an important factor in predicting marital conflicts, and can have significant impacts on the quality of romantic relationships. By understanding the role of emotional intelligence in marital conflicts, clinicians and researchers can develop targeted interventions to improve the quality of romantic relationships and reduce conflicts between partners. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts.

2   Methods and Materials

2.1   Study Design and Participants

This study utilizes a cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. A cross-sectional design involves collecting data at a single point in time, allowing for the assessment of variables of interest and their potential associations. The participants were 100 married couples who were recruited through convenience sampling from different regions of the Canada. The inclusion criteria for the study were that the couples had to be married for at least one year and have no history of mental illness. The sample size was determined based on the power analysis, which indicated that a sample size of 100 couples was sufficient to detect a medium effect size ($f2 = 0.15$) with 80% power and a significance level of 0.05. The participants were asked to complete the EQ-i questionnaire, which measures emotional intelligence, and the MCQ questionnaire, which measures the marital conflicts. The questionnaires were completed by both partners separately, and the responses were matched based on the couple's identification code. The data was collected through an online survey platform.

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2.2   Measures

2.2.1   Emotional Intelligence

The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) is a commonly used self-report questionnaire designed to measure emotional intelligence in individuals. The EQ-i assesses emotional and social skills that are important for effective communication, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relationships. The EQ-i consists of 133 items and is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The EQ-i has been found to have good reliability and validity, making it a valuable tool for clinicians and researchers alike. The EQ-i consists of five composite scores and 15 subscales, each measuring a different aspect of emotional intelligence. The five composite scores include Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Adaptability, Stress Management, and General Mood. The 15 subscales include Self-Regard, Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Independence, Empathy, Social Responsibility, Interpersonal Relationships, Stress Tolerance, Flexibility, Problem Solving, Reality Testing, Impulse Control, Optimism, Happiness, and Well-being. The scoring method for the EQ-i involves calculating scores for each of the five composite scores and 15 subscales. The scores are then compared to normative data to determine an individual's emotional intelligence level. Studies have shown that the EQ-i has good test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Bar-On, 2010). Additionally, the EQ-i has been found to have good construct validity, as it is able to differentiate between individuals with high and low emotional intelligence (Bar-On & Parker, 2000).

2.2.2   Marital Conflicts

The MCQ measures the marital conflicts and its dimensions, which are: 1) reduction of cooperation; 2) reduction of sex; 3) increasing emotional reactions; 4) increasing the support of children; 5) increasing personal relationship with relatives; 6) reduction of family relationship with spouse's relatives and friends; 7) Separate financial affairs from each other. This questionnaire contains 42 items, each of which is graded on a five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5. Therefore, the lowest score is 42, the highest score is 210, and a higher score means more conflict. In his research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.30 for reducing cooperation; for sex 0.50; for emotional reaction 0.73; for getting the support of children 0.60; for increasing strong

relationships with relatives 0.64; for separating financial affairs 0.51 and whole test 0.52. The MCQ has been validated in several studies (Darbani & Parsakia, 2022).

2.3   Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). This model is used to examine the effects of an individual's emotional intelligence on their own and their partner's marital conflicts. The model estimates the actor and partner effects separately and also examines the interaction effects between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. The data was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS software. The goodness of fit of the model was assessed using various fit indices, including chi-square, comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

3   Findings

As presented in Table 1, Husbands' EI significantly correlated with their own (r= -0.423, P<0.01) and their wives' MC (r= -0.319, P<0.01). Also, the results of Table 1 shows that wives'' EI significantly correlated with their own (r= -0.451, P<0.01) and their husbands' MC (r= -0.397, P<0.01).

Table 1

Correlations between EI and MC husbands and wives (n=100)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. EI in wives	172.52	29.52	1		
2. EI in husbands	180.13	22.02	0.014	1	
3. MC in wives	92.88	8.20	-0.451[*]	-0.319[*]	1
4. MC in husbands	98.15	9.11	-0.397[*]	-0.423[*]	0.599[*]

*Significant at the 0.01 level

As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, the results for the APIM indicated that the husbands' emotional intelligence (ß= -0.289, P<0.001) as well as the wives' emotional intelligence (ß= -0.320, P<0.001) exhibited a significant actor effect on their marital conflicts. Similarly, husbands' emotional intelligence (ß= -0.301, P<0.001) as well as the wives' emotional intelligence (ß= -0.342, P<0.001) exhibited a significant partner effect on their spouses' marital conflicts.
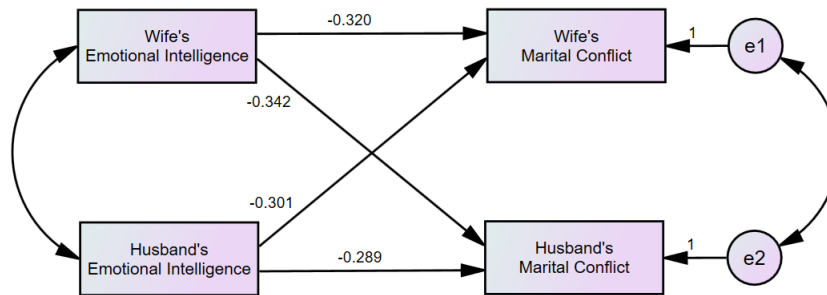
Table 2

Actor and partner effects of emotional intelligence on marital conflicts (n=100)

	Wives			Husbands		
	β (95% CI)	t	P value	β (95% CI)	t	P value
Actor's EI	-0.320 (-0.351, -0.276)	3.77	<0.001	-0.289 (-0.360, -0.205)	3.22	<0.001
Partner's EI	-0.301 (-0.388, -0.189)	3.45	<0.001	-0.342 (-0.422, 0.219)	4.17	<0.001

Figure 1

Actor-Partner Interdependence model

4   Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts using the Actor-Partner Interdependence model. The findings of the study indicate that emotional intelligence has a significant effect on marital conflicts for both men and women. Specifically, the emotional intelligence of women was found to have a significant effect on both their own and their partner's marital conflicts, while the emotional intelligence of men had a significant effect on both men's and women's marital conflicts.

These findings are consistent with previous research (Hadian & Amini, 2019; Jardine, Vannier, & Voyer, 2022; Knox et al., 2023; Mostova, Stolarski, & Matthews, 2022; Navabinejad, Rostami, & Parsakia, 2023; Parker et al., 2021; Schulsinger, 2022; Sevari & Talaeezadeh, 2015; Sidhu, Bhalla, & Ali, 2019; Suri & Kochhar, 2021; Wollny, Jacobs, & Pabel, 2020; Zmaczyńska-Witek, Komborska, & Rogowska, 2019) that has shown that emotional intelligence is an important factor in predicting marital satisfaction and relationship quality. Emotional intelligence allows individuals to better understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of their partners, leading to more effective communication and conflict resolution. In addition, emotional intelligence has been found to be associated with greater empathy, higher levels of forgiveness, and more positive interactions in romantic relationships.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. It plays a crucial role in maintaining healthy relationships, including marital relationships (Bar-On, 2010; Goleman, 1996). One way that EI can affect marital conflicts is through the ability to regulate emotions. Couples who are able to regulate their emotions are less likely to engage in destructive behaviors during conflicts, such as yelling or name-calling. Instead, they are more likely to use constructive communication strategies, such as active listening and expressing empathy. Another way that EI can impact marital conflicts is through the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions and the emotions of their partner. Couples who are able to accurately identify and express their emotions are better able to communicate their needs and desires to their partner, which can reduce misunderstandings and conflicts.

In conclusion, the present study provides further evidence that emotional intelligence is a crucial factor in predicting marital conflicts. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving emotional intelligence may be beneficial for couples experiencing marital conflicts. Clinicians working with couples can use the findings of this study to develop targeted interventions that focus on enhancing emotional intelligence skills among both partners. The

present study also extends previous research by using the Actor-Partner Interdependence model Interdependence model, which allows for the examination of the effects of emotional intelligence on both the individual and their partner. This model provides a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of marital conflicts and allows for the identification of factors that may impact both partners in the relationship.

However, it is important to note that emotional intelligence is not the only factor influencing marital conflicts. Other factors, such as personality traits, attachment styles, and communication patterns, may also play a role in predicting marital satisfaction and conflict resolution. Future research can further explore the role of these factors in the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts.

Overall, the present study highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in romantic relationships and provides insights for clinicians and researchers working with couples to improve their marital relationships.

5   Limitations

1. Sample Bias: The study may suffer from a lack of generalizability due to the specific sample used. Participants may not be representative of the broader population, which limits the external validity of the findings.

2. Self-Report Measures: The use of self-report measures for emotional intelligence and marital conflicts introduces the possibility of response biases. Participants may not accurately report their emotional intelligence or marital conflicts, leading to potential measurement error.

3. Cross-Sectional Design: The study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. It is not possible to determine whether emotional intelligence precedes or follows marital conflicts, as data is collected at a single point in time.

4. Lack of Objective Measures: The study relies solely on self-report measures for emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. Objective measures, such as behavioral observations or physiological indicators, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of these constructs.

5. Limited Control Variables: While control variables such as age, gender, and relationship duration may be included in the analysis, there may be other unmeasured variables that could influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. Failure to

account for these variables may introduce confounding effects.

6. Potential Reverse Causality: The study does not address the possibility of reverse causality, where marital conflicts may impact emotional intelligence. It is possible that individuals experiencing frequent conflicts may develop lower emotional intelligence over time.

7. Social Desirability Bias: Participants may respond in a socially desirable manner, particularly when reporting on sensitive topics such as marital conflicts. This bias could lead to underreporting or overreporting of conflicts, affecting the accuracy of the results.

8. Longitudinal Analysis: The study's reliance on cross-sectional data limits the ability to examine changes in emotional intelligence and marital conflicts over time. A longitudinal analysis would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between these variables.

9. Potential Confounding Factors: There may be other factors not accounted for in the study that could influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. For example, individual personality traits or external stressors could impact this relationship.

10. Limited Scope: The study focuses specifically on emotional intelligence and marital conflicts, neglecting other potential factors that may contribute to marital satisfaction and conflict resolution. The findings may not provide a complete picture of the complex dynamics within marriages.

6   Suggestions and Applications

Based on the findings of this study, there are several suggestions that can be made for future research and clinical practice. Firstly, future studies can explore the role of emotional intelligence in marital conflicts in more diverse samples, including couples from different cultural backgrounds and with different demographic characteristics. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts.

Secondly, clinicians working with couples can use the findings of this study to develop interventions that focus on enhancing emotional intelligence skills among both partners. This can include strategies such as mindfulness training, emotion regulation, and communication skills training. By improving emotional intelligence, couples can better understand and manage their emotions, leading to more effective conflict resolution and a healthier marital relationship.

Lastly, future studies can also consider other factors that may moderate or mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital conflicts. For example, personality traits, coping strategies, and social support may play a role in how emotional intelligence impacts marital conflicts. Understanding these factors can provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of marital conflicts and further inform clinical practice.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent.

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