

**PERCEIVED PARTNER RESPONSIVENESS, MARITAL CONFLICT AND
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED INDIVIDUALS: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO-FAMILY LIFE CYCLE STAGES**

*Dissertation submitted to The University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirement for
the award of the Degree of*

Master of Science in Counselling Psychology

By

HAFSA K M

(Reg No: LC24PCP09)

Under the Guidance of

Dr. Ammu Lukose

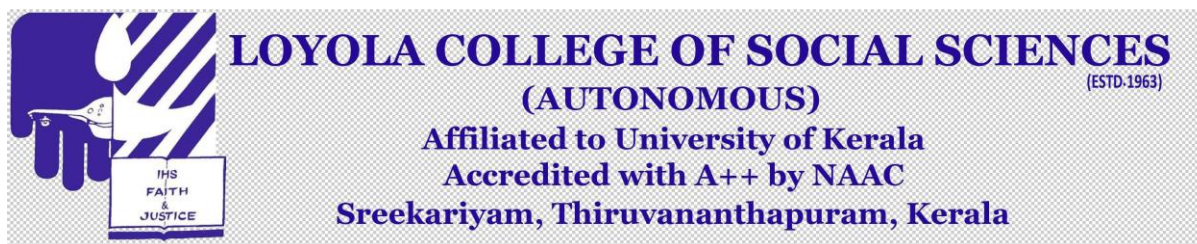
Asst. Professor & Head (In Charge) of Department of Counselling Psychology



DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

LOYOLA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (AUTONOMOUS)

2024-2026



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled “Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict and Relationship Satisfaction among Married Individuals: A Comparative Study of Two-Family Life Cycle Stages” is an authentic work carried out by Hafsa K M, under the guidance of Dr. Ammu Lukose, Asst. Professor & Head (In Charge) of Department of Counselling Psychology, during the fourth semester of M.Sc. Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year 2024-2026

Dr. Ammu Lukose

Guide & Head of the Department (In Charge)

Department of Counselling Psychology

Submitted for the examination held on: 14-07-2026

Examiner:

DECLARATION

I, Hafsa K M, do hereby declare that the dissertation titled “Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict and Relationship Satisfaction among Married Individuals: A Comparative Study of Two Family Life Cycle Stages” submitted to the Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), under the supervision of Dr. Ammu Lukose, Asst. Professor & Head (In Charge) of Department of Counselling Psychology, for the award of the Degree of Master of Science in Counselling Psychology, is a Bonafide work carried out by me and no part thereof has been submitted for the award of any other degree in any University.

Place: Sreekaryam

Date: 10-07-2026

Name: Hafsa K M

Reg No: LC24PCP09

Msc Counselling Psychology

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With a heart full of gratitude, I humbly thank Almighty God for His abundant grace, unwavering guidance, and countless blessings throughout this academic journey. His strength, wisdom, and constant presence enabled me to overcome every challenge and successfully complete this dissertation. I remain deeply thankful for His endless love and guidance in every step of this journey.

It is with immense pleasure that I present this dissertation entitled “*Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict, and Relationship Satisfaction among Married Individuals: A Comparative Study of Two-Family Life Cycle Stages.*” The successful completion of this study would not have been possible without the encouragement, guidance, and support of many individuals to whom I am sincerely grateful.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to my research guide, Dr. Ammu Lukose, Assistant Professor and Head (In-Charge), Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram, for her invaluable guidance, constant encouragement, insightful suggestions, and patient supervision throughout this research. Her expertise, constructive feedback, and unwavering support have been instrumental in shaping this study and inspiring me to strive for academic excellence.

I also extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Jesline Maria Mamen, Ms. Athmaja Panicker, and Dr. Pramod SK for their valuable suggestions, encouragement, and academic support throughout the course of this research.

I am truly fortunate to have friends who stood by me throughout this journey. My heartfelt thanks go to Ms. Minha Fathima P. S, whose unwavering support during data collection was invaluable. Her willingness to help at every stage, constant encouragement, and

dedicated efforts played a significant role in the successful completion of this study, and I will always remain grateful for her kindness and dependable support.

I also sincerely thank Ms. Athiya Sherin, Ms. Gayathri Devi G., and Ms. Vishnupriya S. P. for their valuable assistance with data analysis, which greatly contributed to the completion of this research. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to Ms. Fathima Shifana for providing the necessary academic resources and reference materials whenever required, and to Mr. Alvin Gigi for his timely assistance with the binding and final preparation of the dissertation.

A special word of thanks goes to my beloved fiancé, Mr. Samil Sudheer, for his unwavering encouragement, patience, and constant belief in me. His generous support during data collection and his reassuring presence throughout this journey gave me the confidence and strength to overcome every challenge.

Above all, I express my deepest gratitude to my beloved parents, whose unconditional love, endless sacrifices, constant prayers, and unwavering faith have been my greatest source of strength. They stood beside me through every difficult moment, offering comfort, encouragement, and confidence when I needed it the most. This achievement is as much theirs as it is mine.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to everyone who, directly or indirectly, contributed to the successful completion of this dissertation. Every word of encouragement, act of kindness, and gesture of support has been deeply appreciated and will always be remembered with gratitude.

HAFSA K M

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Appendices

Abstract

Sl No.	Chapters	Page No.
I	Introduction	10-22
II	Review of Literature	23-44
III	Method	45-58
IV	Result & Discussion	59-75
V	Summary & Conclusion	78-88

References

Appendices

Tist of tables

Table No.	Table Name	Page No.
4.1	Descriptive Statistics and Normality Test results of Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR), Marital Conflict (MC) and Relationship Satisfaction (RS)	60
4.2	Comparison of Perceived Partner Responsiveness across Two Family life cycle Stages	63
4.3	Comparison of Marital Conflict across Two Family life cycle Stages	65
4.4	Comparison of Relationship Satisfaction across Two Family life cycle Stages	68
4.5	Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Matrix for Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict, and Relationship Satisfaction (N = 142)	71
4.6	Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Marital Conflict	74

List of Appendices

Appendix	Title	Page No.
A	Informed Consent Form	102
B	Sociodemographic Data Sheet	103
C	Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS)	105
D	Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS)	107
E	Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)	110

Abstract

The present study aimed to compare perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals across two family life cycle stages, namely the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage. The study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive-comparative research design. A total of 142 married individuals from the two selected family life cycle stages were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected using a socio-demographic data sheet, the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS), the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk test, Mann–Whitney U test, Spearman's rank-order correlation, and multiple linear regression. The findings revealed that perceived partner responsiveness was significantly higher among individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage, whereas marital conflict was significantly higher among those in the Families with Young Children stage. No significant difference was observed in relationship satisfaction between the two groups. Perceived partner responsiveness was negatively associated with marital conflict and positively associated with relationship satisfaction, while marital conflict was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict significantly predicted relationship satisfaction, with perceived partner responsiveness emerging as the stronger predictor. The findings highlight the importance of emotionally responsive partner interactions and constructive conflict management in promoting relationship satisfaction and have implications for marital counselling, couple-based interventions, and family life education programmes.

Keywords: perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, relationship satisfaction, family life cycle, married individuals.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the oldest and most universal social institutions, serving as the foundation of family life and social organization across cultures and historical periods. Westermarck (1921) described marriage as a more or less durable relationship between a man and a woman that extends beyond procreation and continues through the upbringing of offspring.

From a sociological standpoint, marriage is considered a socially approved union that regulates intimate relationships, family formation, and social responsibilities, while its meaning and practices are shaped by prevailing cultural norms and values (Marriage as a Social Institution: Roles and Relevance, n.d.). Psychologically, marriage has been consistently associated with positive well-being outcomes. Research suggests that married individuals generally report higher levels of life satisfaction, emotional well-being, and psychological adjustment compared to their unmarried counterparts. Factors such as emotional responsiveness, effective communication, conflict management, and relationship satisfaction play a crucial role in determining whether marriage functions as a source of support or stress for individuals.

Indian society, characterized largely by collectivistic values, places considerable emphasis on marital stability, familial obligations, and long-term commitment (Sharma et al., 2026). Marriage continues to be regarded as a sacred and enduring relationship in many Indian communities, with strong expectations regarding commitment, family involvement, and the fulfillment of social roles (Love Diversity Project, n.d.).

The relevance of studying marriage has become increasingly important in contemporary society due to ongoing changes in family structures, gender roles, and relationship expectations. These developments have encouraged researchers to move beyond

examining marriage as a static institution and instead explore the factors that contribute to the quality and functioning of marital relationships across different stages of life.

Marriage is not a fixed or unchanging experience; rather, it is a dynamic developmental process that evolves as individuals encounter new roles, responsibilities, and life circumstances. As couples progress through different phases of family life, they face distinct developmental tasks and challenges that may influence their interpersonal experiences and relationship outcomes. The Family Life Cycle framework provides a valuable perspective for understanding these transitions and examining how relational processes change over time. Consequently, exploring relationship variables such as perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction within different family life cycle stages offers important insights into the evolving nature of marital relationships.

1.1 Family Life Cycle Stages

The family is a dynamic social system that undergoes continuous transformation as its members progress through various developmental phases. To understand these changes, scholars have proposed the Family Life Cycle framework, which conceptualizes family development as a sequence of predictable stages characterized by specific developmental tasks, role transitions, and relational adjustments. One of the most influential formulations of this perspective was developed by Carter and McGoldrick (1989), who described the family life cycle as a framework for understanding how families evolve over time while adapting to normative life events and transitions. According to this model, families progress through a series of stages, including young adulthood, the joining of families through marriage, families with young children, families with adolescents, families at midlife, and families in later life. Each stage presents unique emotional, social, and structural challenges that require adaptation from both individuals and the family system as a whole.

Among the various stages of the family life cycle, the joining of families through marriage and the families with young children stage represent two particularly significant developmental transitions. These stages are characterized by major changes in roles, responsibilities, expectations, and interpersonal relationships, making them especially relevant for understanding marital experiences and relationship functioning.

The joining of families through marriage stage marks the formation of a new family system through the establishment of a committed marital relationship. According to Carter and McGoldrick (1989), the central emotional process during this stage involves commitment to a new system. Individuals transition from functioning primarily as independent persons to becoming members of a couple unit, requiring the development of a shared identity while maintaining a balance between autonomy and togetherness. This stage involves several important developmental tasks, including the establishment of couple boundaries, negotiation of marital roles, realignment of relationships with families of origin, and decision-making regarding future family plans such as parenthood. As partners integrate their individual backgrounds, values, expectations, and lifestyles, they are required to develop effective communication patterns and strategies for managing differences. The manner in which couples negotiate these early adjustments often lays the foundation for future relationship functioning.

The families with young children stage begins with the birth or adoption of the first child and involves the incorporation of new members into the family system. Carter and McGoldrick (1989) described the central emotional process of this stage as accepting new members into the system. The transition to parenthood introduces substantial changes in family structure and requires couples to reorganize their relationship to accommodate parenting responsibilities. Developmental tasks associated with this stage include adjusting the marital relationship to make space for children, managing child-rearing responsibilities, negotiating

household and financial demands, and redefining relationships with extended family members to include parenting and grandparenting roles. The increased demands of childcare and household responsibilities may reduce opportunities for couple interaction, emotional intimacy, and shared leisure activities. Furthermore, differences in parenting expectations, division of labor, and perceptions of fairness may become sources of disagreement and tension within the relationship.

The joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage are therefore characterized by distinct developmental tasks and relational challenges. While the former focuses on establishing a couple identity and negotiating the foundations of marital life, the latter requires couples to adapt their relationship to accommodate parenting responsibilities and changing family structures. Given the substantial differences in role expectations, interpersonal demands, and family responsibilities across these stages, variations may emerge in how individuals perceive their partner's responsiveness, experience marital conflict, and evaluate the quality of their relationships. Examining these variables across two family life cycle stages can contribute to a deeper understanding of how marital relationships evolve in response to developmental transitions and changing family circumstances.

1.2 Perceived Partner Responsiveness

The concept of perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) originated from the work of Reis and Shaver (1988) in their Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy. They proposed that intimacy develops through an ongoing interpersonal process in which one partner discloses personally meaningful thoughts, feelings, or experiences and the other partner responds in a manner that communicates understanding, validation, and care. Building upon this conceptualization, Reis et al. (2004) defined perceived partner responsiveness as the process

through which individuals come to believe that their relationship partners attend to, understand, and respond supportively to central and defining aspects of the self.

Perceived partner responsiveness is commonly conceptualized as consisting of three interrelated components: understanding, validation, and caring (Reis et al., 2004). Understanding refers to the perception that one's partner accurately comprehends personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Validation involves feeling accepted, respected, and affirmed by the partner, even when differences of opinion or perspective exist. Caring refers to the belief that one's partner expresses genuine concern, affection, and support for one's well-being.

The significance of perceived partner responsiveness becomes particularly evident during major transitions within the family life cycle. During the joining of families through marriage stage, couples are engaged in establishing a shared identity, negotiating roles, and adapting to new relational expectations. Responsive interactions facilitate emotional closeness and help couples navigate the challenges associated with the early years of marriage. Similarly, during the families with young children stage, the arrival of children introduces significant changes in family roles, responsibilities, and daily routines. Although the need for emotional support often increases during this period, the demands associated with parenting may reduce couples' capacity to provide responsiveness to one another. Simpson et al. (2021) noted that perceptions of partner responsiveness may fluctuate during the transition to parenthood as couples adapt to increased caregiving responsibilities and changing family dynamics. Therefore, examining perceived partner responsiveness among married individuals in the joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage may contribute to a deeper understanding of relationship processes across different phases of family development.

1.3 Marital Conflict

Marital conflict refers to disagreements, tensions, or incompatibilities that arise between spouses regarding various aspects of their relationship and daily life. It encompasses both overt expressions of disagreement and more subtle forms of tension that emerge when partners perceive differences in needs, expectations, values, or priorities. Constructively managed conflict can facilitate communication, promote mutual understanding, and contribute to relationship growth, whereas unresolved or destructive conflict may undermine emotional intimacy, increase relational distress, and negatively affect marital functioning (Fincham, 2003).

Gottman (1994) identified four destructive communication patterns that frequently emerge during marital conflict: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, collectively known as the "Four Horsemen." Persistent reliance on these behaviors is associated with poorer relationship outcomes and reduced marital stability. Another important perspective distinguishes between constructive conflict behaviors, such as cooperation, problem-solving, compromise, and support, and destructive conflict behaviors, including hostility, withdrawal, avoidance, and verbal aggression (Cummings & Davies, 2010). A related framework is the demand-withdraw pattern described by Christensen and Heavey (1990), in which one partner seeks discussion or change while the other withdraws or avoids the issue. This interaction pattern has consistently been associated with lower relationship satisfaction, poorer communication quality, and greater marital distress.

The nature and sources of marital conflict may vary across different stages of the family life cycle. During the joining of families through marriage stage, couples are engaged in establishing a shared identity, negotiating marital roles, and adapting to new expectations associated with married life. Common sources of conflict during this period include

communication difficulties, financial management, sexual adjustment, household responsibilities, and relationships with families of origin (Storaasli & Markman, 1990). The conflict patterns established during the early years of marriage often influence future relationship functioning.

In the families with young children stage, marital conflict may emerge from additional responsibilities associated with parenting and family management. Couples may experience disagreements regarding parenting practices, childcare responsibilities, household labor, work-family balance, and perceptions of fairness within the relationship. Increased stress, reduced opportunities for couple interaction, and competing demands associated with raising children may further contribute to conflict experiences. Research suggests that many couples report increases in marital tension and dissatisfaction following the transition to parenthood as they adjust to the challenges of integrating parental and marital roles.

Examining marital conflict among individuals in the joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage, alongside perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction, may contribute to a deeper understanding of the interpersonal processes underlying healthy marital relationships.

1.4 Relationship Satisfaction

Hendrick (1988) defined relationship satisfaction as an individual's subjective evaluation of their romantic relationship, making it one of the most widely accepted conceptualizations in relationship research.

Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) Model proposed by Karney and Bradbury (1995) suggests that relationship satisfaction is shaped by the interaction of enduring vulnerabilities, stressful life events, and adaptive processes. Enduring vulnerabilities include

relatively stable individual characteristics, stressful life events refer to external pressures such as financial difficulties, work demands, parenting responsibilities, and health concerns, whereas adaptive processes include communication, problem-solving, conflict management, and mutual support. According to the model, relationship satisfaction evolves over time as couples encounter varying stressors and utilize different adaptive resources. The model is particularly relevant to the present study because the joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage differ considerably in terms of developmental tasks, stressors, and adaptive demands.

Relationship satisfaction is not constant across the marital life course and may fluctuate in response to changing developmental demands and life circumstances. The joining of families through marriage stage represents a significant transition in which individuals establish a shared identity, negotiate marital roles, and adapt to new responsibilities. Although this stage is often characterized by emotional closeness, couples may also encounter challenges related to communication, role expectations, financial management, and adjustment to married life. In contrast, the families with young children stage introduces additional demands associated with parenting, childcare responsibilities, financial pressures, and reduced opportunities for couple interaction. Recent research indicates that relationship satisfaction follows diverse trajectories, with some couples maintaining high levels of satisfaction over extended periods while others experience substantial declines (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). These variations highlight the importance of examining contextual and developmental factors that influence relationship experiences across different stages of family life.

In collectivistic societies such as India, marital relationships are embedded within broader family and social networks, and cultural expectations may shape how satisfaction is experienced and expressed.

Relationship satisfaction therefore represents a multifaceted construct influenced by personal characteristics, interpersonal processes, developmental transitions, and sociocultural contexts. As an important indicator of relational well-being, it provides valuable insight into how individuals evaluate and experience their marital relationships. Given that perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict are closely associated with relationship satisfaction, and that family life cycle stages present unique developmental demands and challenges, examining relationship satisfaction across the joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage may contribute to a deeper understanding of marital functioning. Therefore, the present study seeks to explore relationship satisfaction alongside perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict among married individuals across two significant stages of the family life cycle.

1.5 Need and Significance of the Study

Marriage is one of the most significant interpersonal relationships in adult life and plays an important role in the psychological well-being of spouses, family functioning, and overall quality of life. Understanding the factors that contribute to healthy and satisfying marital relationships has therefore become an important area of research in psychology, family studies, and counselling. Among these factors, perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction have been identified as important determinants of marital functioning.

Marital relationships are dynamic and evolve across different stages of the family life cycle. According to Family Life Cycle Theory (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989), each developmental stage presents unique tasks, responsibilities, and challenges that require couples to adapt to changing roles and expectations. The joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage are particularly significant, as both involve major developmental transitions that may influence relationship processes differently.

Although previous research has established the importance of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction, comparatively few studies have examined these variables simultaneously across different family life cycle stages. Furthermore, limited research has explored these relationships within the Indian context, particularly by comparing individuals in the joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage. Examining these developmental stages may provide a better understanding of how marital experiences vary across important transitions in family life.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals across these two family life cycle stages. Integrating a family life cycle perspective with key relationship processes may contribute to the existing literature on marital functioning and enhance understanding of developmental influences on marital relationships.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

Marriage is a dynamic relationship that undergoes continuous changes as couples progress through different stages of the family life cycle. Developmental transitions such as the establishment of a new marital relationship and the transition to parenthood introduce new roles, responsibilities, and challenges that may influence the quality of marital relationships. Factors such as perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict have been identified as important determinants of relationship satisfaction and overall marital functioning. However, the manner in which these variables differ across family life cycle stages remains insufficiently understood, particularly within the Indian context. Understanding these differences is important for gaining deeper insights into the relational experiences of married individuals and for developing interventions that promote healthy marital relationships. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship

satisfaction among married individuals and compare these variables across two family life cycle stages.

The problem undertaken for the present study is stated as:

“Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict, and Relationship Satisfaction among Married Individuals: A Comparative Study of Two Family Life Cycle Stages.”

1.7 Objectives

1. To compare perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals across the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage.
2. To examine the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.
3. To determine the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

1.8 Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in perceived partner responsiveness between the joining of families through marriage stage and families with young children stage.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in marital conflict between the joining of families through marriage stage and families with young children stage.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction between the joining of families through marriage stage and families with young children stage.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict among married individuals.

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

H₀₆: There is no significant relationship between marital conflict and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

H₀₇: Perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict do not significantly predict relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

1.9 Delimitations of the Study

The present study was delimited to married individuals belonging to two specific stages of the family life cycle, namely the joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage. The study focused exclusively on three variables: perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction.

The participants were married individuals who provided responses independently. Data were not collected from both spouses as dyads; therefore, the study examined individual perceptions rather than couple-level interactions. The study did not include individuals from other family life cycle stages such as families with adolescents, families at midlife, or families in later life.

The investigation was confined to the use of self-report measures, namely the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale, the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale, and the Relationship Assessment Scale. The findings were based solely on participants' self-reported perceptions and experiences.

The study was further delimited to the selected sample and geographical area from which the participants were recruited. Consequently, the findings may not be generalized to all married individuals across different cultural, social, or regional contexts.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the present study. It is organized into two sections: the theoretical review and the empirical review. The theoretical review discusses the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the four key variables of the study, namely family life cycle stages, perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. The empirical review summarizes previous research related to these variables. Together, the reviewed literature provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study and highlights the need for further investigation in the identified area of research.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical review presents the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the variables included in the present study. It discusses the major theories related to family life cycle stages, perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction, providing a framework for understanding their underlying concepts and interrelationships.

2.1.1 Theoretical perspectives on Family Life Cycle Stages

The family is a dynamic social system that undergoes continuous growth and change over time. As families progress through different developmental stages, they encounter transitions that require adjustments in roles, relationships, responsibilities, and expectations. Family development theories explain these developmental changes and provide a framework for understanding how family relationships evolve across the life span.

One of the earliest theoretical perspectives on family development is Duvall's Family Development Theory, proposed by Evelyn Millis Duvall in 1977. Duvall conceptualized the family as a social system that progresses through a predictable sequence of developmental stages, from marriage to later life. According to the theory, each stage is associated with specific developmental tasks arising from biological, psychological, cultural, and societal

demands. Successful completion of these tasks facilitates healthy family functioning and smooth progression to subsequent stages, whereas failure to accomplish them may result in stress, maladjustment, and difficulties in family functioning. The theory emphasizes that family development is a continuous process in which transitions affect both individual members and the family system as a whole.

Building on this developmental perspective, Carter and McGoldrick proposed the Family Life Cycle Theory in 1989. This theory views the family as an evolving system that continuously adapts to normative and non-normative life events. Carter and McGoldrick emphasize the interaction between individual development and changes within the family system. They proposed six stages of the family life cycle: young adulthood, the joining of families through marriage, families with young children, families with adolescents, families at midlife, and families in later life. Each stage requires family members to negotiate new roles, responsibilities, and relationship patterns while maintaining emotional connectedness and flexibility. Successful adaptation to these transitions promotes healthy family functioning, whereas difficulties in adaptation may contribute to relational stress and conflict.

The present study focuses on two stages of Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory: the joining of families through marriage and families with young children. The joining of families through marriage stage involves the establishment of a new family system in which couples negotiate marital roles, develop communication patterns, and establish a shared identity. The families with young children stage requires couples to adapt to parenting responsibilities, changing family roles, and increased household and financial demands while maintaining their marital relationship. These stages represent important developmental transitions that may influence marital functioning and relationship processes.

Together, Duvall's Family Development Theory (1977) and Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory (1989) provide the theoretical foundation for understanding family development across different stages of the life cycle. While Duvall explains family development through stage-specific developmental tasks, Carter and McGoldrick emphasize the systemic adaptations required during family transitions. These theories are particularly relevant to the present study as they provide a conceptual framework for comparing perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals in the joining of families through marriage stage and the families with young children stage. They support the assumption that developmental transitions and changing family roles may influence the quality of marital relationships across different family life cycle stages.

2.1.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Perceived Partner Responsiveness

Perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) is a key construct in relationship science that refers to an individual's perception that their partner understands, validates, and cares for important aspects of the self (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Reis et al., 2004). Feeling understood and supported by a partner promotes intimacy, emotional security, and healthy relationship functioning. The theoretical foundation of perceived partner responsiveness is primarily based on the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy and Attachment Theory.

The Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy, proposed by Reis and Shaver (1988), provides the primary theoretical framework for understanding perceived partner responsiveness. According to the model, intimacy develops through a reciprocal interpersonal process involving self-disclosure and partner responsiveness. While self-disclosure allows individuals to share personally meaningful thoughts and feelings, intimacy is fostered when partners respond with understanding, validation, and care. Understanding refers to accurately

comprehending a partner's thoughts and emotions, validation involves accepting and respecting those experiences, and caring reflects genuine concern for the partner's well-being. These three components constitute perceived partner responsiveness and promote emotional closeness, trust, and intimacy within romantic relationships.

Another important theoretical perspective is Attachment Theory, proposed by Bowlby (1969). The theory suggests that individuals develop internal working models based on early interactions with caregivers, which shape expectations regarding the availability, responsiveness, and reliability of significant others throughout life. Extending this perspective to adult romantic relationships, Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that romantic partners function as attachment figures who provide comfort, security, and emotional support. Individuals with secure attachment are more likely to perceive their partners as responsive and supportive, whereas those with insecure attachment may experience difficulties trusting or relying on their partners. Thus, consistent partner responsiveness contributes to emotional security, whereas unresponsiveness may lead to attachment anxiety, avoidance, and relational distress.

Together, the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy and Attachment Theory provide the conceptual foundation for understanding perceived partner responsiveness. While the Interpersonal Process Model explains how responsiveness fosters intimacy through understanding, validation, and caring, Attachment Theory highlights its role in developing emotional security within romantic relationships. These theories are directly relevant to the present study, as they provide a framework for examining perceived partner responsiveness among married individuals and understanding its association with marital conflict and relationship satisfaction across different family life cycle stages.

2.1.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Marital Conflict

Marital conflict is an inevitable aspect of intimate relationships and arises when spouses experience disagreements regarding needs, expectations, values, roles, or goals within the marriage. Although conflict is a natural part of marital relationships, its impact depends on how couples manage and resolve disagreements. The theoretical understanding of marital conflict is primarily based on Gottman's Cascade Model and Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

One of the most influential theories explaining marital conflict is Gottman's Cascade Model, also known as the Four Horsemen Model, proposed by John Gottman (1994, 1999). Based on extensive observational research with married couples, the model proposes that relationship deterioration occurs through four destructive communication patterns: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Criticism involves attacking a partner's character rather than addressing a specific behaviour, contempt reflects disrespect and hostility, defensiveness involves denying responsibility and adopting self-protective responses, and stonewalling refers to emotional withdrawal from interaction. According to Gottman, persistent engagement in these behaviours weakens trust, intimacy, and emotional connection, increasing the risk of marital dissatisfaction and relationship instability. The model further emphasizes that successful marriages are characterized not by the absence of conflict but by the use of constructive communication and conflict-resolution strategies.

Another important theoretical perspective is Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura (1977). The theory suggests that behaviour is acquired through observation, imitation, reinforcement, and social experiences. Applied to marital relationships, it proposes that spouses learn patterns of communication and conflict management from their families of origin and other significant social experiences. These behaviours are reinforced through repeated interactions and gradually become stable patterns within the marital relationship. The

theory also emphasizes reciprocal influences between partners, whereby constructive behaviours such as empathy, active listening, compromise, and emotional support encourage positive interactions, whereas criticism, hostility, and withdrawal reinforce destructive conflict patterns.

Together, Gottman's Cascade Model and Social Learning Theory provide complementary explanations of marital conflict. While Gottman's model explains the communication patterns that contribute to relationship deterioration, Social Learning Theory explains how these patterns are acquired and maintained through learning and reinforcement. These theories provide the conceptual foundation for the present study by explaining marital conflict as a dynamic interpersonal process that may vary across different family life cycle stages and influence perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

2.1.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is a central construct in relationship and family research, reflecting an individual's overall evaluation of the quality of their romantic relationship. Hendrick (1988) defined relationship satisfaction as an individual's subjective assessment of the positivity of their relationship and the extent to which it fulfills personal needs and expectations. It reflects feelings of happiness, contentment, and fulfillment within the relationship and serves as an important indicator of relationship quality and stability. The theoretical understanding of relationship satisfaction is primarily based on the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model and the Investment Model.

One of the most influential theories explaining relationship satisfaction is the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation (VSA) Model proposed by Karney and Bradbury (1995). The

model explains relationship satisfaction as the outcome of the interaction between enduring vulnerabilities, stressful life events, and adaptive processes. Enduring vulnerabilities refer to relatively stable characteristics that individuals bring into the relationship, such as personality traits, attachment styles, family background, and psychological functioning. Stressful events are external demands that place pressure on the relationship, while adaptive processes involve the ways couples communicate, solve problems, manage conflict, and support one another. According to the model, couples with fewer vulnerabilities and effective adaptive processes are better able to maintain satisfying relationships despite stressful circumstances, whereas greater vulnerabilities and ineffective coping strategies increase the likelihood of declines in relationship satisfaction. The model also emphasizes that relationship satisfaction changes over time as couples adapt to developmental transitions and life stressors.

Another important theoretical framework is Rusbult's Investment Model, proposed by Caryl Rusbult (1980). The model explains relationship commitment and satisfaction through three components: satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. Satisfaction level refers to the extent to which the relationship fulfills an individual's needs and expectations, quality of alternatives refers to the perceived attractiveness of alternative relationships or life circumstances, and investment size includes the resources devoted to the relationship, such as time, emotional commitment, shared experiences, children, and financial investments. The model proposes that individuals are more likely to remain committed to their relationships when satisfaction is high, investments are substantial, and alternatives are perceived as less desirable, highlighting the role of relationship satisfaction in promoting long-term relationship stability.

Together, the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model and the Investment Model provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding relationship satisfaction.

While the VSA Model explains how satisfaction is influenced by individual vulnerabilities, life stressors, and adaptive processes, the Investment Model emphasizes the role of satisfaction in fostering commitment and relationship stability. These theories are particularly relevant to the present study, as they provide a framework for understanding relationship satisfaction among married individuals and its association with perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict across different family life cycle stages.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical review presents an overview of previous research relevant to the variables included in the present study. It summarizes findings from national and international studies on family life cycle stages, perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction, as well as research examining the relationships among these variables. The review provides empirical evidence supporting the conceptual framework of the study and highlights the existing gaps that justify the need for the present research.

2.2.1 Studies on Family Life Cycle Stages and Marital Relationships

Dupuis et al. (2025) found that psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction increased during the transition to marriage but gradually returned to pre-marital levels after marriage. The findings suggest that sustaining marital satisfaction requires continued relational investment and effective adaptation during the early stages of married life.

Kingsbury et al. (2023) examined relationship satisfaction during the transition to parenthood and reported a decline in satisfaction following the birth of the first child, particularly during infancy. Partner understanding, parenting agreement, and lower levels of conflict emerged as significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, highlighting the importance of supportive partner interactions during this developmental stage.

Abreu-Afonso et al. (2022) investigated marital satisfaction across different family life cycle stages and found that communication, intrinsic motivation, and professional status positively predicted marital satisfaction. In contrast, the family-with-young-children stage was associated with lower marital satisfaction, indicating the increased adjustment demands experienced during this period.

Tran et al. (2022) explored family-life satisfaction during the transition to parenthood and found that although parents experienced declines in satisfaction and parenting pleasure after childbirth, many reported greater overall family satisfaction over time. The findings suggest that the transition to parenthood involves both challenges and rewarding experiences, depending on couples' adaptation.

A meta-analysis published in *Frontiers in Psychology* (2022), synthesizing findings from 49 studies, reported that marital satisfaction generally declines following the birth of a child due to increased childcare responsibilities, stress, reduced communication, and changes in couple interactions. However, the extent of decline varied according to couples' personal and relational resources.

Simpson et al. (2021) found that the transition to parenthood often reduced perceived partner responsiveness because of increased caregiving demands and stress. Lower responsiveness was associated with decreased relationship satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of mutual support during family life transitions.

These studies demonstrate that marital relationships change across family life cycle stages. While the early years of marriage and the transition to parenthood are associated with unique developmental demands, relationship quality during these stages is largely influenced by partner responsiveness, communication, conflict management, and couples' ability to adapt

to changing family roles. These findings support the importance of examining marital functioning across different family life cycle stages.

2.2.2 Studies on Perceived Partner Responsiveness

Thargay, Giri, and Behera (2026) found that perceived partner responsiveness mediated the relationship between daily affect and marital satisfaction among married couples. Positive affect enhanced marital satisfaction through greater perceived responsiveness, whereas negative affect reduced responsiveness and subsequently lowered marital satisfaction. The findings identified perceived partner responsiveness as a key mechanism linking emotional experiences with marital outcomes.

Fenech et al. (2026) reported that higher perceived partner responsiveness was associated with greater relationship satisfaction, intimacy, affectionate interactions, and better physical health outcomes, including reduced health-risk behaviours and lower levels of inflammation. The findings suggest that responsiveness contributes to both relational and individual well-being.

Kouri et al. (2025) found that individuals who perceived greater partner responsiveness during the transition to parenthood reported higher attachment security and healthier relationship functioning. However, increased parenting demands and stress often reduced responsiveness, particularly among women, highlighting the challenges associated with the family-with-young-children stage.

Thargay and Giri (2024) demonstrated that greater perceived partner responsiveness was associated with higher marital satisfaction and life satisfaction among married couples. The findings suggested that responsiveness facilitates psychological need fulfilment and promotes overall well-being within marital relationships.

In another study, Thargay and Giri (2024) found that avoidant attachment partially mediated the relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and marital satisfaction, particularly among husbands. The study emphasized that increasing partner responsiveness and reducing attachment-related avoidance may enhance marital satisfaction.

Yuan, Fan, and Leng (2022) reported that emotional reactivity negatively predicted both perceived partner responsiveness and marital quality. Perceived partner responsiveness significantly mediated this relationship, indicating that responsiveness is an important pathway through which emotional experiences influence marital functioning.

Jolink, Chang, and Algoe (2022) found that higher perceived partner responsiveness was associated with greater affectionate touch between partners, and affectionate touch further enhanced perceptions of responsiveness over time. These findings provide empirical support for the role of responsiveness in promoting intimacy within romantic relationships.

Visserman et al. (2022) found that individuals who perceived their partners as more responsive viewed relational sacrifices more positively, reporting greater satisfaction, lower perceived costs, reduced regret, and greater personal and relational benefits. The findings suggest that responsiveness facilitates constructive relationship maintenance.

Simpson et al. (2021) reported that the transition to parenthood was associated with reduced perceived partner responsiveness due to increased parenting demands and stress. Lower responsiveness was accompanied by declines in relationship satisfaction and intimacy, highlighting responsiveness as an important protective factor during family life transitions.

Rice, Kumashiro, and Arriaga (2020) found that perceived partner responsiveness strengthened partner-specific attachment security by reducing attachment anxiety and avoidance, even among individuals with generally insecure attachment orientations. The findings suggest that

responsiveness promotes healthier relationship functioning through the development of secure attachment bonds.

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that perceived partner responsiveness is a significant predictor of healthy marital relationships. Higher responsiveness is associated with greater intimacy, attachment security, relationship satisfaction, effective communication, positive relationship maintenance, and psychological well-being, whereas lower responsiveness is linked to poorer marital quality, particularly during stressful life transitions such as parenthood. These findings support the inclusion of perceived partner responsiveness as a central variable in the present study.

2.2.3 Studies on Marital Conflict

Rosen, Dubé, Bosisio, and Bergeron (2024) found that demand–withdraw communication patterns during conflict were associated with lower sexual satisfaction and poorer relationship outcomes over time. The findings highlighted the detrimental effects of avoidance and ineffective communication on relationship well-being.

Singh, Gupta, and Srivastava (2023) reported that communication breakdowns, financial disagreements, and role-related conflicts significantly predicted depression, anxiety, lower life satisfaction, and poorer physical health among Indian couples. The study emphasized the adverse consequences of persistent marital conflict on both individual and relational well-being.

Kelley et al. (2023) found that greater financial stress was associated with increased marital conflict and reduced relationship quality. The findings identified financial strain as an important contributor to conflict across different stages of marriage.

Kingsbury et al. (2023) observed that relationship satisfaction declined during the transition to parenthood, particularly among parents of infants. Increased parenting responsibilities, childcare disagreements, and elevated stress contributed to greater marital conflict and poorer relationship quality, identifying parenthood as a vulnerable period for marital adjustment.

Abreu-Afonso et al. (2022) found that communication difficulties and family life cycle transitions, particularly the family-with-young-children stage, were associated with lower marital satisfaction and increased marital conflict. The study highlighted the influence of developmental transitions on marital functioning.

Tran, Ivanova, Reitz, and Stavrova (2022) reported that the transition to parenthood was accompanied by increased stress, reduced personal freedom, and difficulties adapting to parenting roles, contributing to relationship strain and marital conflict during the early postnatal period.

A meta-analysis published in *Frontiers in Psychology* (2022), which synthesized findings from 49 studies, found that increased childcare responsibilities, reduced communication, stress, and role demands contributed to heightened marital conflict and declines in marital satisfaction following childbirth. However, the extent of these changes varied depending on couples' relationship quality and adaptive resources.

Tasew and Getahun (2021) reported that marital conflict was highly prevalent among couples, with many experiencing recurrent conflicts each month. Persistent conflict was associated with emotional detachment, withdrawal, separation, and reduced relationship quality, highlighting its implications for marital stability.

Don et al. (2021) found that couples who experienced greater positive emotions and supportive interactions during the transition to parenthood were better able to manage stress and marital

conflict. Positive relational experiences buffered the negative effects of conflict and promoted healthier relationship adjustment.

Meyer and Sledge (2020) reported that destructive conflict behaviours, including emotional detachment, control struggles, and neglect, were strongly associated with relationship deterioration and marital instability. Persistent destructive conflict increased the likelihood of separation and poorer marital outcomes.

The reviewed studies indicate that marital conflict is influenced by communication difficulties, financial stress, parenting challenges, and family life cycle transitions. Destructive conflict patterns consistently predict poorer relationship satisfaction and stability, whereas supportive interactions and effective communication promote healthier marital adjustment. These findings highlight the importance of examining marital conflict as a key factor influencing relationship functioning across different family life cycle stages.

2.2.4 Studies on Relationship Satisfaction

Dupuis et al. (2025) found that psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction increased during the transition to marriage but gradually returned to pre-marital levels after marriage. The findings suggest that maintaining long-term relationship satisfaction requires continuous relational investment and effective adaptation.

Gander et al. (2025) reported that individuals who endorsed growth beliefs, the belief that relationships improve through effort, experienced higher relationship satisfaction and less decline over time. In contrast, destiny beliefs showed weaker associations with relationship satisfaction, highlighting the importance of adaptive relationship beliefs.

Bodenmann et al. (2025) identified distinct trajectories of relationship satisfaction over a ten-year period. Couples who maintained high and stable satisfaction demonstrated better communication and dyadic coping skills, whereas negative communication emerged as a strong predictor of declining relationship satisfaction.

Ghosh and Chaurasiya (2025) found that perceived partner responsiveness, effective communication, and constructive conflict management significantly predicted couple flourishing and relationship satisfaction among Indian married couples. The findings emphasized the importance of positive interpersonal processes in promoting healthy marital relationships.

Michael and Ben-Zur (2024) reported that marital support mediated the relationship between personal psychological resources and marital satisfaction. Individuals who perceived greater support from their spouses experienced higher levels of relationship satisfaction, highlighting the role of supportive interactions in marital well-being.

Barman (2024) found that sustainable marriages were characterized by higher perceived partner responsiveness, constructive conflict resolution, and effective communication. Couples reporting these qualities also experienced greater relationship satisfaction, demonstrating the interconnected nature of these relationship processes.

Alghraibeh (2024) found that emotional, intellectual, and recreational intimacy were significant predictors of marital satisfaction among both men and women. The study further indicated that factors influencing satisfaction varied across different stages of marriage, suggesting that relationship satisfaction evolves throughout the family life cycle.

Kingsbury et al. (2023) reported that relationship satisfaction during the transition to parenthood was positively influenced by pre-birth satisfaction, perceived partner

understanding, parenting agreement, and lower levels of conflict. Mothers who felt understood and supported by their partners reported particularly high levels of satisfaction.

Abreu-Afonso et al. (2022) found that communication, intrinsic motivation, occupational status, and family life cycle stage significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Couples in the family-with-young-children stage reported lower satisfaction than those in other stages, indicating the challenges associated with this developmental transition.

A study published in *PNAS* (2022) found that greater neural synchronization between partners while viewing relationship-related stimuli was associated with higher marital satisfaction. Shared emotional and cognitive experiences predicted satisfaction beyond many demographic and personality factors.

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that relationship satisfaction is influenced by communication, perceived partner responsiveness, intimacy, supportive interactions, adaptive beliefs, and effective conflict management. Satisfaction also varies across family life cycle stages, particularly during the transition to parenthood, emphasizing the importance of developmental and interpersonal factors in understanding marital relationships.

2.2.5 Studies Examining the Relationship Among Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict, and Relationship Satisfaction

Thargay, Giri, and Behera (2026) found that perceived partner responsiveness mediated the relationship between daily affect and marital satisfaction. Positive affect enhanced marital satisfaction through greater perceived partner responsiveness, whereas negative affect reduced responsiveness and subsequently lowered marital satisfaction. The findings identified

perceived partner responsiveness as an important mechanism linking emotional experiences with marital outcomes.

Yuan, Fan, and Leng (2022) reported that emotional reactivity negatively predicted both perceived partner responsiveness and marital quality. Perceived partner responsiveness significantly mediated this relationship, demonstrating that responsiveness plays a crucial role in explaining how emotional experiences influence marital functioning.

Visserman et al. (2022) found that individuals who perceived their partners as more responsive viewed relational sacrifices more positively, reported lower perceived costs, and experienced higher relationship satisfaction. The findings suggest that responsiveness promotes constructive relationship maintenance and may reduce conflict arising from everyday relational sacrifices.

Simpson et al. (2021) reported that increased parenting demands during the transition to parenthood were associated with reduced perceived partner responsiveness and lower relationship satisfaction. Couples who maintained higher responsiveness experienced better relational adjustment, indicating that responsiveness can buffer the negative effects of stress and conflict during major family life transitions.

Rice, Kumashiro, and Arriaga (2020) found that perceived partner responsiveness strengthened attachment security by reducing attachment anxiety and avoidance, leading to healthier relationship functioning. The findings suggest that responsiveness promotes secure relationships and may indirectly reduce conflict through improved emotional security.

Thargay and Giri (2024) found that higher perceived partner responsiveness was associated with greater marital satisfaction, with avoidant attachment partially mediating this relationship.

The study emphasized the importance of responsiveness in fostering secure attachment and positive marital experiences.

Barman (2024) reported that sustainable marriages were characterized by high perceived partner responsiveness, constructive conflict resolution, and effective communication. Couples demonstrating these characteristics experienced greater relationship satisfaction, highlighting the interconnected influence of responsiveness and conflict management on marital well-being.

Ghosh and Chaurasiya (2025) found that perceived partner responsiveness, communication quality, and effective conflict management were significant predictors of couple flourishing and relationship satisfaction among Indian married couples. The findings further support the close relationship among responsiveness, conflict regulation, and satisfaction.

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction are closely interconnected. Greater perceived partner responsiveness is associated with healthier communication, secure attachment, effective conflict management, and higher relationship satisfaction, whereas lower responsiveness contributes to increased conflict and poorer marital outcomes. These findings support the need to examine these variables together within the context of different family life cycle stages.

2.3 Research Gap

The existing literature demonstrates significant associations among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction in explaining marital functioning. Previous studies have consistently shown that perceived partner responsiveness is positively associated with intimacy, attachment security, marital quality, and relationship satisfaction (Rice et al., 2020; Simpson et al., 2021; Thargay & Giri, 2024). Likewise, marital conflict has

been associated with poorer psychological well-being, lower relationship satisfaction, and greater relationship distress (Singh et al., 2023; Rosen et al., 2024), while effective communication, partner support, intimacy, and dyadic coping have been identified as important predictors of relationship satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2025; Ghosh & Chaurasiya, 2025).

Although previous research has established important associations among these variables, relatively few studies have examined perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction simultaneously within the framework of the family life cycle. While research has explored marital functioning during early marriage or the transition to parenthood, direct comparisons of these relationship processes across distinct family life cycle stages remain limited. Furthermore, although studies on marital relationships have increased in the Indian context, research integrating these three variables across different family life cycle stages is scarce.

The Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage represent two critical developmental phases characterised by distinct relational demands, role transitions, and adjustment challenges. Couples in the early years of marriage are primarily engaged in establishing marital roles, negotiating expectations, and developing patterns of interaction, whereas couples with young children must additionally adapt to parenting responsibilities, increased role demands, and changes in couple dynamics. Despite these developmental differences, limited empirical evidence has compared perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction across these two family life cycle stages.

Therefore, there is a need to examine perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction simultaneously while comparing married individuals across the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage. By

adopting a family life cycle perspective, the present study seeks to address this gap and contribute to a better understanding of how developmental transitions influence marital functioning within the Indian socio-cultural context.

2.4 Relevance of the Study

The present study holds considerable theoretical and practical relevance by examining perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction across two important family life cycle stages, namely the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage. Marriage involves continuous developmental transitions that require couples to adapt to changing roles, responsibilities, and relational demands across the family life cycle. Understanding how key relational variables function across these stages is therefore important for advancing knowledge of marital relationships.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the existing literature by integrating perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction within a family life cycle framework. While previous research has established the importance of these variables individually, comparatively fewer studies have examined them together across different stages of marital development. By focusing on two distinct family life cycle stages, the study provides a better understanding of how developmental transitions influence marital processes. The study also extends the application of major theoretical perspectives, including the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy, Attachment Theory, Gottman's Cascade Model, the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model, the Investment Model, and Family Life Cycle Theory within the Indian socio-cultural context. Furthermore, as much of the existing literature has been conducted in Western populations, the study contributes to the relatively limited body of research on marital relationships among Indian married individuals.

From a practical perspective, the findings of the study may be useful for counsellors, psychologists, marriage and family therapists, and other mental health professionals working with married individuals and couples. Understanding differences in perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction across family life cycle stages may assist professionals in designing stage-specific counselling interventions, premarital counselling programmes, marital enrichment workshops, and family welfare initiatives aimed at strengthening partner responsiveness, improving communication, reducing destructive conflict, and enhancing relationship satisfaction. The findings may also contribute to preventive mental health efforts by helping couples navigate important developmental transitions, particularly the transition to parenthood, more effectively. Consequently, the study may contribute to promoting marital well-being, healthy family functioning, and the psychological well-being of married individuals.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This chapter describes the methodology adopted for the present study. It includes the aim and objectives of the study, variables and their operational definitions, hypotheses, research design, participant characteristics, sampling procedure, instruments used for data collection, data collection procedure, and statistical techniques employed for data analysis.

3.1 Aim of the Study

The present study aims to examine perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals across two family life cycle stages, namely the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Family with Young Children stage. The study further aims to compare these variables across the two stages and to explore the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction, as well as the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction.

3.2 Objectives

1. To compare perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals across the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage.
2. To examine the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.
3. To determine the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

3.3 Variables of the Study

The study variables in the present research are perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. These variables are examined among married individuals and constitute the primary constructs of interest in the study.

The grouping variable is family life cycle stage, which classifies participants into two groups: the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Family with Young Children stage. The study compares perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction across these two family life cycle stages.

In addition, the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction are examined. The study also investigates the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict in explaining relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

3.4 Operational Definitions of Variables

Perceived Partner Responsiveness

Perceived Partner Responsiveness refers to an individual's perception that their spouse understands, validates, and cares for their thoughts, feelings, and needs. In the present study, perceived partner responsiveness is operationally defined as the score obtained by a participant on the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale. The scale assesses the extent to which individuals perceive their spouse as responsive, supportive, understanding, and accepting. Higher scores indicate a greater perception of partner responsiveness characterized by understanding, validation, and care.

Marital Conflict

Marital Conflict refers to the disagreements, tensions, and conflict-related interactions that occur between spouses within the marital relationship. In the present study, marital conflict is operationally defined as the score obtained by a participant on the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) developed by Tammy L. Zacchilli, Clyde Hendrick, and Susan S. Hendrick. The scale assesses the nature of conflict experiences and conflict-management patterns within romantic relationships. Higher scores indicate greater levels of marital conflict experienced by the spouses.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship Satisfaction refers to an individual's overall evaluation of the quality, fulfillment, and satisfaction experienced in their marital relationship. In the present study, relationship satisfaction is operationally defined as the score obtained by a participant on the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with the marital relationship.

Joining of Families Through Marriage

Joining of Families Through Marriage refers to the family life cycle stage in which married partners are in the early phase of establishing their marital relationship and integrating their lives as a couple. In the present study, this stage includes married individuals who have been married for one to five years, are living together with their spouse, are not in a long-distance marital relationship, and do not have children.

Families with Young Children

Families with Young Children refers to the family life cycle stage in which spouses have entered parenthood and are actively involved in raising young children. In the present study, this stage includes married individuals who are living together with their spouse, are not in a long-distance marital relationship, and have at least one child, with the oldest child being six years of age or younger.

3.5 Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in perceived partner responsiveness between the joining of families through marriage stage and families with young children stage.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in marital conflict between the joining of families through marriage stage and families with young children stage.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction between the joining of families through marriage stage and families with young children stage.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict among married individuals.

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

H₀₆: There is no significant relationship between marital conflict and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

H₀₇: Perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict do not significantly predict relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

3.6 Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive-comparative research design. The study sought to examine perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals and compare these variables across two family life cycle stages: joining of families through marriage and families with young children.

A descriptive design was employed to systematically assess and describe the levels of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among the participants. The comparative component of the design enabled the examination of differences in these variables between the two family life cycle stages. In addition, a correlational approach was incorporated to investigate the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, predictive analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict predict relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

The study utilized standardized self-report measures to collect quantitative data from participants. Since the variables were observed and measured as they naturally occurred without any manipulation or intervention by the researcher, the study was non-experimental in nature.

3.7 Participants

Population

The population of the present study comprised married individuals residing in Kerala, India. The study focused on individuals belonging to two family life cycle stages: joining of families through marriage and families with young children.

Sample

The sample consisted of 142 married individuals, with 72 participants belonging to the joining of families through marriage stage and 70 participants belonging to the families with young children stage. Participants were selected based on the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Sampling Technique

The present study employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling technique, both of which are non-probability sampling methods. Initially, participants who met the predetermined inclusion criteria were identified and selected purposively by the researcher. Subsequently, these participants were requested to share the survey link with other married individuals who satisfied the study criteria. This process facilitated the recruitment of additional eligible participants through participant referrals. The technique was considered appropriate as it enabled access to married individuals belonging to the two selected family life cycle stages and ensured adequate representation of the target population.

Inclusion Criteria

- a) Individuals who were currently living with their spouse.
- b) Individuals who were able to read and understand English.
- c) Individuals belonging to either of the following family life cycle stages:
 - a. Joining of Families Through Marriage: Married for one to five years and having no children.
 - b. Families with Young Children: Having at least one child, with the oldest child being six years of age or younger.
- d) Individuals who provided informed consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

- a) Individuals who were seeking mental health support, separated, divorced, or widowed.
- b) Individuals who were in long-distance marital relationships and not residing with their spouse.
- c) Individuals whose oldest child was above six years of age.
- d) Individuals who have been married for more than 5 years and not having children.

3.8 Instruments

The present study employed a socio-demographic data sheet and three standardized self-report instruments to collect data on the study variables. The instruments included the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS), the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). These instruments were selected based on their relevance to the objectives of the study and their established psychometric properties.

3.8.1 Sociodemographic Data Sheet

A socio-demographic data sheet was developed to obtain relevant personal and family-related information from the participants. The data sheet consisted of items pertaining to initials, age, gender, place of residence, stage of family life cycle, duration of marriage, number of children, and age of the oldest child. The information obtained through the socio-demographic data sheet was used to describe the characteristics of the sample and to determine participants' eligibility based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study.

3.8.2 Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS)

The Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS) developed by Reis et al. (2018) was used to assess participants' perceptions of their spouse's responsiveness. The scale

measures the extent to which individuals perceive that their romantic partner understands, validates, and cares for them, thereby reflecting the partner's responsiveness within the relationship.

The instrument consists of 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from 1 (Not at all true) to 9 (Completely true). Participants indicate the extent to which each statement describes their partner's behaviour and responsiveness. The total score is obtained by summing the responses to all items, with higher scores indicating greater perceived partner responsiveness.

The scale has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties across different populations. The original authors reported high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding .90, indicating excellent reliability. Evidence for construct validity has also been established through significant associations with related constructs such as intimacy, attachment security, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction, supporting the validity of the instrument as a measure of perceived partner responsiveness.

3.8.3 Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS)

The Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) developed by Zacchilli, Hendrick, and Hendrick (2009) was used to assess marital conflict among the participants. The scale was developed to evaluate the ways in which individuals respond to and manage conflict within romantic relationships. It measures constructive as well as destructive patterns of conflict resolution and provides a comprehensive assessment of conflict behaviours exhibited during disagreements with a romantic partner.

The scale consists of 42 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all true of me) to 5 (Very true of me). Participants are required to indicate the extent to which each statement describes their typical behaviour during disagreements with their spouse.

The responses are summed to obtain the total score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of romantic partner conflict. The scale has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. The original authors reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .84 to .96 across the six subscales, indicating good to excellent internal consistency. Construct validity was established through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, while criterion-related validity was supported by significant associations with relationship functioning, communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction.

3.8.4 Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) developed by Hendrick (1988) was used to assess the overall level of relationship satisfaction among the participants. The scale is a brief self-report measure designed to evaluate an individual's global satisfaction with their romantic relationship.

The scale consists of seven items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The response options range from 1 (Low Satisfaction) to 5 (High Satisfaction). The items assess various aspects of relationship satisfaction, including the extent to which the relationship meets an individual's needs and expectations, overall satisfaction with the relationship, feelings of love towards the partner, and perceived relationship problems.

Items 4 and 7 are reverse scored before computing the total score. The total score is obtained by summing the responses to all seven items, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. The scale has demonstrated good psychometric properties across

diverse populations. Hendrick (1988) reported satisfactory internal consistency and evidence of construct validity, and subsequent studies have consistently supported its reliability and validity as a measure of global relationship satisfaction.

3.9 Procedure of Data Collection

Following the finalization of the research topic and selection of the instruments, data collection was initiated. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation.

Participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Initially, married individuals who met the predetermined inclusion criteria were identified and invited to participate in the study. Subsequently, they were requested to share the questionnaire with other eligible married individuals who fulfilled the inclusion criteria, thereby facilitating participant recruitment through snowball sampling.

Data were collected through both online and offline modes. The online questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms and circulated among eligible participants through various social media platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. Offline data were collected by personally administering printed questionnaires to eligible participants. The questionnaire consisted of the socio-demographic data sheet, the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale, the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale, and the Relationship Assessment Scale.

Participants were requested to respond to all the items honestly based on their personal experiences. They were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that all responses would be kept confidential and used solely for academic and research purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected, thereby ensuring the anonymity of the

participants. Upon completion of data collection, the responses were coded in Excel sheets and then entered into the Jamovi (version 2.7.31) for analysis.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before administering the questionnaires.

Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for academic and research purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected, thereby ensuring the anonymity of the participants. Participants were also informed that they had the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Care was taken to ensure that participation in the study did not cause any physical, psychological, or social harm to the participants. The collected data were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher for the purpose of analysis.

3.11 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the systematic process of organizing, summarizing, interpreting, and evaluating collected data using appropriate statistical techniques. Quantitative data analysis involves the use of descriptive and inferential statistics to summarize data, examine relationships and differences among variables, and test the hypotheses of a study. Descriptive statistics provide a summary of the characteristics and distribution of the data, whereas inferential statistics are employed to examine relationships, compare groups, and determine the statistical significance of the findings (Kotronoulas et al., 2023).

The data collected for the present study were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques in accordance with the objectives and hypotheses of the study. All statistical analyses were performed using Jamovi (Version 2.7.31). The following statistical procedures were employed to analyse the data:

(a) Descriptive Statistics:

Frequencies and percentages were computed to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. Measures of central tendency and dispersion, including the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, were calculated to describe the distribution of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction.

(b) Test of Normality:

The Shapiro–Wilk test was employed to examine the normality of the distribution of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. Based on the results of the normality test, appropriate statistical procedures were selected for subsequent analyses.

(c) Group Comparisons:

The Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction between married individuals belonging to the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage of the family life cycle, addressing H_{01} , H_{02} and H_{03} .

(d) Correlation Analysis:

Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction, thereby addressing the H_{04} , H_{05} and H_{06} .

(e) Multiple Linear Regression:

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction, addressing H_{07} .

The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all inferential analyses.

CHAPTER IV

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the statistical analyses conducted to achieve the objectives of the study and test the proposed hypotheses. The data were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The findings are presented systematically through tables and interpreted in relation to the hypothesis of the study. Further, the results are discussed in the light of relevant theoretical perspectives and empirical literature to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction across the two selected family life cycle stages.

4.1 Assessment of Data Distribution

Prior to testing the study hypotheses, the data were examined to determine the distributional characteristics of the study variables. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the central tendency and variability of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. Subsequently, the Shapiro–Wilk test of normality was performed to assess whether the distribution of the variables deviated significantly from normality.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics and Normality Test results of Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR), Marital Conflict (MC) and Relationship Satisfaction (RS)

	PPR	MC	RS
N	142	142	142
Mean	117	102	28.2
Median	128	99.0	30.0

Standard deviation	37.6	23.3	5.94
Skewness	-0.937	0.176	-1.02
Std. error skewness	0.203	0.203	0.203
Kurtosis	-0.158	-0.105	0.0676
Std. error kurtosis	0.404	0.404	0.404
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.887	0.981	0.872
Shapiro-Wilk p	<.001	.048	<.001

Table 4.1 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of the Shapiro–Wilk test for perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. The mean scores obtained were 117 (SD = 37.60) for perceived partner responsiveness, 102 (SD = 23.30) for marital conflict, and 28.20 (SD = 5.94) for relationship satisfaction. The median scores were 128.00, 99.00, and 30.00, respectively.

The skewness values ranged from -1.02 to 0.18 , indicating that perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction exhibited moderate negative skewness, whereas marital conflict demonstrated a distribution that was approximately symmetric. The kurtosis values for all three variables were close to zero, suggesting that the distributions did not exhibit substantial deviations in peakiness.

The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that the distributions of perceived partner responsiveness ($W = .887, p < .001$), marital conflict ($W = .981, p = .048$), and relationship satisfaction ($W = .872, p < .001$) deviated significantly from normality. As the assumption of normality was not

satisfied for the study variables, appropriate non-parametric statistical procedures were employed for the subsequent group comparison and correlation analyses.

Assessment of the normality of data is an important preliminary step in quantitative research, as it informs the selection of appropriate statistical techniques. The findings of the Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that the distributions of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction differed significantly from a normal distribution. Although the deviation from normality for marital conflict was marginal ($p = .048$), all three variables yielded statistically significant Shapiro–Wilk test results at the .05 level.

Considering these findings, non-parametric statistical procedures were considered more appropriate for analysing differences between the two family life cycle stages and for examining the associations among the study variables. Accordingly, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed for group comparisons, and Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. Multiple linear regression analysis was subsequently conducted to examine the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction, with the relevant regression assumptions evaluated separately.

4.2 Comparison of Study Variables across Two Family Life Cycle Stages

Following the assessment of normality, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed to examine differences in perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction between married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage. The Mann–Whitney U test is a non-parametric alternative to the independent samples *t*-test and is appropriate for comparing two independent groups when the assumption of normality is not satisfied. The test was used to examine the first three null

hypotheses of the study, which proposed that there would be no significant differences in perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction between the two selected family life cycle stages.

Table 4.2

Comparison of Perceived Partner Responsiveness across Two Family life cycle Stages

Variable	Family Life Cycle Stage	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mann– Whitney <i>U</i>	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>
Perceived Partner Responsiveness	Stage 1	131	25.2	1662	20.0	< .001
	Stage 2	104	43.4			

Note: Stage 1- Joining of families through Marriage, Stage 2- Families with Young Children

Table 4.2 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney *U* test comparing perceived partner responsiveness between married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and those in the Families with Young Children stage. The findings revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived partner responsiveness between the two groups ($U = 1662$, $p < .001$). Married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage obtained a higher mean score ($M = 131.00$, $SD = 25.20$) than those in the Families with Young Children stage ($M = 104.00$, $SD = 43.40$), with a mean difference of 20.00.

The findings indicate that individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage perceive their partners as significantly more responsive than individuals in the Families with Young Children stage. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) stating that there is no significant

difference in perceived partner responsiveness between the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage was rejected.

These results suggested that perceived partner responsiveness differs significantly across the two selected family life cycle stages, with individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage reporting higher levels of perceived partner responsiveness than those in the Families with Young Children stage. This difference may be attributed to the developmental changes and increasing responsibilities associated with the family life cycle.

The present findings supports Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory, which proposes that each stage of family development presents unique developmental tasks and transitions that influence family relationships. During the Joining of Families through Marriage stage, the primary developmental tasks include establishing a new marital system, negotiating roles and expectations, developing emotional intimacy, and redefining relationships with the families of origin. As couples are primarily focused on strengthening their marital bond, they tend to devote greater time and emotional resources to understanding, validating, and supporting one another. Consequently, partners are more likely to perceive each other as emotionally available, caring, and responsive.

In contrast, the Families with Young Children stage requires couples to reorganize the family system to accommodate children, assume parenting responsibilities, redistribute household roles, and balance the competing demands of work and family life. Carter and McGoldrick suggest that these developmental transitions require considerable emotional, physical, and practical adjustment. The increased responsibilities associated with childcare and family management may reduce opportunities for partners to engage in emotionally responsive interactions, thereby contributing to lower perceptions of partner responsiveness.

The findings are consistent with the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy proposed by Reis and Shaver, which suggests that intimacy develops when individuals perceive their partners as understanding, validating, and caring. Similarly, Attachment Theory emphasizes that responsive partner interactions foster emotional security, trust, and relationship quality.

The present findings are also supported by previous empirical research. Rice et al. (2020) and Simpson et al. (2021) reported that perceived partner responsiveness is positively associated with intimacy, relationship quality, and emotional well-being. Likewise, Thargay and Giri (2024) found that higher levels of perceived partner responsiveness contribute to greater relationship satisfaction and healthier marital functioning. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that perceived partner responsiveness also varies across family life cycle stages, highlighting the influence of developmental transitions on marital relationships.

These pattern indicates that although perceived partner responsiveness remains a key component of healthy marital relationships, it may be influenced by the changing demands and responsibilities encountered across different stages of family life.

Table 4.3

Comparison of Marital Conflict across Two Family life cycle Stages

Variable	Family Life Cycle Stage	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mann–Whitney <i>U</i>	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>
Marital Conflict	Stage 1	96.70	20.70	2010	–10.00	.037
	Stage 2	108.00	24.70			

Note: Stage 1- Joining of families through Marriage, Stage 2- Families with Young Children

Table 4.3 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test comparing marital conflict between married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and those in the Families with Young Children stage. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in marital conflict between the two groups ($U = 2010$, $p = .037$). Married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage reported lower levels of marital conflict ($M = 96.70$, $SD = 20.70$) than those in the Families with Young Children stage ($M = 108.00$, $SD = 24.70$), with a mean difference of -10.00 .

The findings indicate that married individuals in the Families with Young Children stage experience significantly higher levels of marital conflict than those in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) stating that there is no significant difference in marital conflict between the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage was rejected.

The present study found a statistically significant difference in marital conflict between married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and those in the Families with Young Children stage. Participants in the Families with Young Children stage reported significantly higher levels of marital conflict, suggesting that the transition to parenthood and the associated changes in family roles may increase the likelihood of marital disagreements.

This finding is consistent with Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory, which emphasizes that each transition within the family life cycle introduces new developmental demands that require families to reorganize their relationships and roles. During the Joining of Families through Marriage stage, couples focus primarily on establishing a stable marital relationship, negotiating mutual expectations, and developing effective communication

patterns. Although adjustment challenges may arise during this stage, couples generally have greater flexibility to invest in their relationship before assuming additional family responsibilities.

In contrast, the Families with Young Children stage represents one of the most demanding developmental transitions in the family life cycle. Couples are expected to integrate children into the family system, redefine marital and parental roles, share childcare responsibilities, manage financial demands, and maintain relationships with both their partner and extended family. According to Carter and McGoldrick, these simultaneous developmental tasks increase stress and require substantial adaptation, thereby creating greater potential for misunderstandings, disagreements, and marital conflict if couples are unable to adjust effectively.

The results also supports previous empirical research indicating that the transition to parenthood is often accompanied by increased marital stress and conflict. Gottman and Levenson (2000) reported that unresolved conflicts and ineffective communication contribute to declining marital quality over time. Similarly, Williamson et al. (2013) found that parenting demands, financial pressures, and other external stressors were associated with more frequent marital disagreements and poorer relationship functioning. Overall et al. (2022) also observed that although couples continue to support one another during the transition to parenthood, increased caregiving responsibilities and reduced opportunities for couple interaction may contribute to interpersonal tensions and conflict.

The findings may be explained by the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model, which suggests that increased external stressors, such as parenting responsibilities and role adjustments, can influence relationship functioning by placing greater demands on couples'

adaptive processes. As couples navigate the challenges associated with raising young children, these stressors may increase the potential for marital conflict.

The findings indicate that marital conflict is higher among couples in the Families with Young Children stage than among those in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage, highlighting the importance of promoting effective communication and adaptive coping strategies during this developmental transition.

Table 4.4

Comparison of Relationship Satisfaction across Two Family life cycle Stages

Variable	Family Life Cycle Stage	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mann–Whitney <i>U</i>	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>
Relationship Satisfaction	Stage 1	29.60	4.10	2054	2.00	.056
	Stage 2	26.70	7.10			

Note: Stage 1- Joining of families through Marriage, Stage 2- Families with Young Children

Table 4.4 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney *U* test comparing relationship satisfaction between married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and those in the Families with Young Children stage. The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in relationship satisfaction between the two groups ($U = 2054$, $p = .056$). Although married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage obtained a slightly higher mean score ($M = 29.60$, $SD = 4.10$) than those in the Families with Young Children stage ($M = 26.70$, $SD = 7.10$), the observed difference was not statistically significant.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) stating that there is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction between the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage was accepted.

The present study found no statistically significant difference in relationship satisfaction between married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and those in the Families with Young Children stage. Although participants in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage reported slightly higher relationship satisfaction, the difference was not statistically significant. This finding suggests that relationship satisfaction may remain relatively stable across these two family life cycle stages despite the increased responsibilities associated with the transition to parenthood.

This finding can be interpreted through Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory, which suggests that successful progression through each family life cycle stage depends on the family's ability to accomplish stage-specific developmental tasks. While the transition to the Families with Young Children stage introduces additional parenting responsibilities, role changes, and family demands, it also provides opportunities for couples to develop new patterns of cooperation, mutual support, and family cohesion. Couples who successfully adapt to these developmental tasks may maintain satisfying marital relationships despite experiencing greater stress and increased responsibilities.

The absence of a significant difference suggests that progression from one family life cycle stage to another does not inevitably reduce relationship satisfaction. Rather, relationship satisfaction may remain relatively stable when couples effectively adjust to changing family roles and continue to invest in their marital relationship. This interpretation supports Carter and McGoldrick's view that successful adaptation, rather than the developmental transition itself, determines family functioning and relationship quality.

The present findings supports previous research indicating that relationship satisfaction is influenced more by the quality of interpersonal processes than by family life cycle stage alone. Rice et al. (2020) and Simpson et al. (2021) reported that perceived partner responsiveness, emotional support, and intimacy are significant contributors to relationship satisfaction. Similarly, Thargay and Giri (2024) found that greater perceived partner responsiveness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of supportive partner interactions in maintaining marital well-being.

Although some studies have reported a decline in relationship satisfaction following the transition to parenthood due to increased parenting responsibilities and reduced opportunities for couple interaction, the present findings suggest that many couples are able to adapt successfully to these developmental changes. Effective communication, emotional responsiveness, mutual support, and shared responsibilities may help couples maintain satisfying relationships despite increased family demands.

The pattern can also be understood in light of the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model, which proposes that relationship satisfaction is shaped by the interaction between external stressors and couples' adaptive processes. While couples with young children experience greater parenting and family-related demands, adaptive processes such as constructive communication and emotional responsiveness may buffer the impact of these stressors and help sustain relationship satisfaction.

The results suggested indicates that progression from the Joining of Families through Marriage stage to the Families with Young Children stage does not necessarily result in reduced relationship satisfaction. Rather, the quality of partners' interactions and their ability to adapt to changing family roles appear to play a more important role in maintaining relationship satisfaction than the family life cycle stage itself.

4.3 Relationship Between Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict, and Relationship Satisfaction

Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. Spearman's rank-order correlation is a non-parametric measure of association that is appropriate when the assumption of normality is not satisfied. The analysis was conducted to test the fourth, fifth, and sixth null hypotheses of the study concerning the relationships among the study variables.

Table 4.5

Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Matrix for Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR), Marital Conflict (MC), and Relationship Satisfaction (RS)(N = 142)

		PPR	MC	RS
PPR	Spearman's rho	—		
	df	—		
	p-value	—		
MC	Spearman's rho	-0.534***	—	
	df	140	—	
	p-value	<.001	—	
RS	Spearman's rho	0.639***	-0.587***	—
	df	140	140	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—

Note. *p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.001

Table 4.5 presents the results of the Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis examining the relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. The analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate negative correlation between perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict ($r_s = -.534, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of perceived partner responsiveness were associated with lower levels of marital conflict. A statistically significant strong positive correlation was also observed between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction ($r_s = .639, p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who perceived their partners as more responsive reported greater relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, marital conflict demonstrated a statistically significant moderate negative correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r_s = -.587, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of marital conflict were associated with lower relationship satisfaction.

These findings indicate that perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction are significantly interrelated among married individuals. Therefore, the null hypotheses stating that there is no significant relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict (H_{04}), perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction (H_{05}), and marital conflict and relationship satisfaction (H_{06}) were rejected.

The present study found significant relationships among all three study variables. Higher perceived partner responsiveness was associated with lower marital conflict and greater relationship satisfaction, while higher marital conflict was associated with lower relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest that emotionally responsive partner interactions play an important role in fostering healthy marital relationships, whereas increased marital conflict is associated with poorer relationship outcomes.

Although these relationships were examined across the entire sample, they may also be understood within Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory. Regardless of the

family life cycle stage, couples who successfully adapt to stage-specific developmental tasks through emotional responsiveness and effective conflict management are more likely to experience healthier and more satisfying marital relationships.

The findings are consistent with previous empirical research. Rice et al. (2020) and Simpson et al. (2021) reported that perceived partner responsiveness is positively associated with intimacy, emotional security, and relationship satisfaction. Similarly, Thargay and Giri (2024) found that individuals who perceived greater responsiveness from their partners experienced higher levels of marital satisfaction and healthier relationship functioning. In addition, Overall et al. (2022) observed that responsive partner behaviours promote constructive conflict management and reduce interpersonal tensions within romantic relationships. Conversely, Gottman and Levenson (2000) and Lavner and Bradbury (2010) reported that persistent marital conflict is associated with declining relationship quality and reduced marital satisfaction.

The results can be reflected through the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy proposed by Reis and Shaver (1988), which suggests that perceptions of partner responsiveness promote intimacy by fostering feelings of understanding, validation, and care. These positive interpersonal experiences strengthen emotional closeness and relationship satisfaction while facilitating constructive conflict resolution. Similarly, the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) proposes that adaptive relationship processes, including effective communication and emotional responsiveness, can buffer the impact of external stressors on relationship functioning. Consequently, couples who perceive greater responsiveness from their partners may experience lower levels of marital conflict and higher relationship satisfaction.

The findings highlight the interconnected nature of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. The results suggest that fostering emotionally responsive interactions and promoting constructive conflict resolution may play a vital role in enhancing relationship satisfaction and strengthening marital relationships.

4.4 Predictive Role of Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Marital Conflict on Relationship Satisfaction

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict significantly predicted relationship satisfaction among married individuals. Multiple linear regression estimates the combined and individual contribution of two or more predictor variables in explaining variation in a dependent variable. The analysis was conducted to test the seventh null hypothesis of the study.

Table 4.6

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Marital Conflict

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	29.42	2.729	—	10.78	< .001
	3				
Perceived Partner Responsiveness	0.073	0.011	.462	6.73	< .001
Marital Conflict	-	0.018	-.378	-5.51	< .001
	0.096				

Model Summary: $R = .742$, $R^2 = .551$, $F(2, 139) = 85.20$, $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable = Relationship Satisfaction. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient.

Table 4.6 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction among married individuals. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 139) = 85.20$, $p < .001$, indicating that the model significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. The model yielded a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .742$ and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .551, suggesting that perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict together accounted for 55.1% of the variance in relationship satisfaction.

The regression coefficients revealed that perceived partner responsiveness was a significant positive predictor of relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.073$, $\beta = .462$, $t = 6.73$, $p < .001$). This indicates that an increase in perceived partner responsiveness was associated with an increase in relationship satisfaction. Conversely, marital conflict emerged as a significant negative predictor of relationship satisfaction ($B = -0.096$, $\beta = -.378$, $t = -5.51$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of marital conflict were associated with lower relationship satisfaction.

Among the two predictors, perceived partner responsiveness demonstrated a relatively stronger predictive influence on relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .462$) than marital conflict ($\beta = -.378$). Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict do not significantly predict relationship satisfaction among married individuals was rejected.

The present study examined whether perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict jointly predict relationship satisfaction among married individuals. The findings revealed that the regression model was statistically significant, with the two predictors

accounting for 55.1% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. Perceived partner responsiveness positively predicted relationship satisfaction, whereas marital conflict negatively predicted it. Moreover, perceived partner responsiveness emerged as the stronger predictor, highlighting its greater contribution to relationship satisfaction.

From the perspective of Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory, developmental transitions create the context in which couples experience changing roles and responsibilities; however, the present findings suggest that relationship satisfaction is more directly influenced by how couples respond to these developmental challenges. In particular, maintaining emotional responsiveness and effectively managing marital conflict appear to be essential adaptive processes that promote relationship satisfaction across family life cycle stages.

These findings are consistent with previous empirical research. Rice et al. (2020), Simpson et al. (2021), and Thargay and Giri (2024) reported that individuals who perceive their partners as understanding, caring, and emotionally responsive experience greater intimacy, emotional security, and relationship satisfaction. Likewise, Gottman and Levenson (2000) and Lavner and Bradbury (2010) found that frequent marital conflict and ineffective communication are associated with reduced relationship quality and lower marital satisfaction. Together, these findings suggest that supportive partner interactions enhance relationship satisfaction, whereas persistent conflict undermines it.

The findings may be understood through the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy, which proposes that feeling understood, validated, and cared for by one's partner strengthens intimacy and promotes relationship satisfaction. Similarly, the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model suggests that adaptive relationship processes, such as emotional responsiveness and constructive conflict management, help couples maintain satisfying

relationships despite external stressors. The stronger predictive influence of perceived partner responsiveness observed in the present study further suggests that positive interpersonal interactions may play a more influential role in determining relationship satisfaction than the negative effects of marital conflict alone.

The results highlight that relationship satisfaction is shaped by both the presence of emotionally responsive partner behaviours and the absence of destructive marital conflict. From a counselling perspective, interventions that strengthen emotional responsiveness, improve communication, and promote constructive conflict-resolution strategies may contribute to enhancing relationship satisfaction and overall marital well-being.

This chapter presented the results and discussion of the statistical analyses conducted to address the objectives of the study and test the proposed hypotheses. The findings revealed significant differences in perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict across the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage, while no significant difference was observed in relationship satisfaction. The results further demonstrated significant relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction, with perceived partner responsiveness emerging as the stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction. Overall, the findings are consistent with Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory, highlighting that developmental transitions and stage-specific family tasks influence marital processes. The results also support previous empirical research (e.g., Rice et al., 2020; Simpson et al., 2021; Thargay & Giri, 2024; Gottman & Levenson, 2000), reinforcing the importance of partner responsiveness and constructive conflict management in maintaining healthy and satisfying marital relationships.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the Study

Marriage is one of the most significant interpersonal relationships in adult life and plays an important role in promoting psychological well-being, family functioning, and overall quality of life. As a dynamic relationship, marriage evolves across different stages of the family life cycle, with each stage presenting unique developmental tasks, role transitions, and relational challenges. Among the various factors influencing marital functioning, perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction have consistently been identified as important determinants of healthy and satisfying marital relationships. Perceived partner responsiveness reflects the extent to which individuals perceive their spouses as understanding, validating, and caring, marital conflict encompasses the disagreements and tensions experienced within the marital relationship, and relationship satisfaction represents individuals' overall evaluation of the quality and fulfilment of their marital relationship.

Although previous studies have established significant associations among these variables, comparatively few have examined them simultaneously across different family life cycle stages, particularly within the Indian context. This gap provided the basis for the present study, which aimed to examine perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals and compare these variables across the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage of the family life cycle. The study was theoretically guided by Carter and McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle Theory (1989), the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), Gottman's Cascade Model (1994), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980).

To achieve these objectives, the study adopted a quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive-comparative research design with correlational and predictive components. The sample comprised 142 married individuals residing in Kerala, including 72 individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and 70 individuals in the Families with Young Children stage. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data were collected through both online and offline modes after obtaining informed consent and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. A socio-demographic data sheet was used to collect participant characteristics, while perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction were assessed using the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS; Reis et al., 2018), the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS; Zacchilli et al., 2009), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988), respectively. The collected data were analysed using Jamovi (Version 2.7.31).

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participant characteristics and study variables, and the Shapiro–Wilk test was employed to examine normality. As the variables significantly deviated from normality, non-parametric statistical procedures were adopted. The Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction across the two family life cycle stages, while Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the relationships among the study variables. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive role of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

The findings revealed significant differences in perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict across the two family life cycle stages. Married individuals in the Joining of

Families through Marriage stage reported significantly higher perceived partner responsiveness, whereas individuals in the Families with Young Children stage experienced significantly higher marital conflict. However, no statistically significant difference was observed in relationship satisfaction between the two groups, suggesting that couples may maintain comparable levels of relationship satisfaction despite increased developmental responsibilities associated with parenthood.

Correlation analysis demonstrated that perceived partner responsiveness was significantly and positively associated with relationship satisfaction, while marital conflict was significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, perceived partner responsiveness showed a significant negative relationship with marital conflict, indicating that greater perceptions of partner responsiveness were associated with lower levels of marital conflict. Multiple regression analysis further demonstrated that perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict together significantly predicted relationship satisfaction, with perceived partner responsiveness emerging as a positive predictor and marital conflict emerging as a negative predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of responsive partner interactions and constructive conflict management in promoting satisfying marital relationships while demonstrating that developmental transitions across the family life cycle influence specific aspects of marital functioning. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on marital relationships by providing empirical evidence from the Indian context and underscores the relevance of adopting a family life cycle perspective in understanding perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

5.2 Major Findings

The results of the hypothesis testing conducted in the present study are summarised below.

1. **H₀₁:** There is no significant difference in perceived partner responsiveness between the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage.

Rejected. A statistically significant difference was found in perceived partner responsiveness between the two family life cycle stages (Mann–Whitney $U = 1662$, $p < .001$). Married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage reported significantly higher perceived partner responsiveness than those in the Families with Young Children stage.

2. **H₀₂:** There is no significant difference in marital conflict between the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage.

Rejected. A statistically significant difference was found in marital conflict between the two family life cycle stages (Mann–Whitney $U = 2010$, $p = .037$). Married individuals in the Families with Young Children stage reported significantly higher marital conflict than those in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage.

3. **H₀₃:** There is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction between the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage.

Retained (Accepted). No statistically significant difference was found in relationship satisfaction between the two family life cycle stages (Mann–Whitney U , $p > .05$), indicating that married individuals in both stages reported comparable levels of relationship satisfaction.

4. **H₀₄:** There is no significant relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict among married individuals.

Rejected. A statistically significant negative relationship was found between perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict ($\rho = -0.534$, $p < .001$), indicating that married individuals who perceived their partners as more understanding, validating, and caring experienced lower levels of marital conflict.

5. **H₀₅:** There is no significant relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

Rejected. A statistically significant positive relationship was found between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction ($\rho = 0.639$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived partner responsiveness was associated with greater relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

6. **H₀₆:** There is no significant relationship between marital conflict and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

Rejected. A statistically significant negative relationship was found between marital conflict and relationship satisfaction ($\rho = -0.587$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of marital conflict were associated with lower relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

7. **H₀₇:** Perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict do not significantly predict relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

Rejected. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that the overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 139) = 85.20$, $p < .001$, explaining 55.1% of the

variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .551$). Perceived partner responsiveness emerged as a significant positive predictor of relationship satisfaction ($B = 0.0729$, $\beta = .462$, $t = 6.73$, $p < .001$), whereas marital conflict emerged as a significant negative predictor ($B = -0.0962$, $\beta = -.378$, $t = -5.51$, $p < .001$). Together, these findings indicate that greater perceived partner responsiveness enhances relationship satisfaction, whereas increased marital conflict reduces relationship satisfaction.

5.3 Conclusion

This study examined perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage of the family life cycle. The findings demonstrated that couples in the Joining of Families through Marriage stage perceived greater partner responsiveness, whereas couples in the Families with Young Children stage experienced higher levels of marital conflict. However, relationship satisfaction did not differ significantly between the two groups, suggesting that couples may sustain comparable levels of satisfaction despite the increased responsibilities and challenges associated with parenthood.

The study further established that perceived partner responsiveness was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and negatively associated with marital conflict, while marital conflict was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Moreover, perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict emerged as significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, highlighting their important role in shaping marital well-being. These findings underscore the significance of fostering responsive partner interactions and promoting healthy conflict resolution strategies to strengthen marital relationships across different stages of the family life cycle.

Overall, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the interplay of perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals within the Indian context. The findings have important implications for psychologists, counsellors, marriage and family therapists, and other mental health professionals in designing preventive and therapeutic interventions that enhance communication, emotional responsiveness, and constructive conflict management. It is hoped that this study will encourage further research across diverse family life cycle stages and contribute to the promotion of healthier, more satisfying, and resilient marital relationships.

5.4 Implications of the Study

The findings of the present study have important theoretical, practical, and counselling implications. The study contributes to the existing body of literature by examining perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction within the framework of the family life cycle. By comparing the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage, the study highlights how developmental transitions influence specific aspects of marital functioning. The findings also provide empirical support for theoretical perspectives such as the Family Life Cycle Theory, the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy, Attachment Theory, Gottman's Cascade Model, the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation Model, and the Investment Model, reinforcing the importance of partner responsiveness and conflict management in understanding relationship satisfaction.

The findings have significant implications for counselling psychology and marital therapy. The positive association between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction, along with its negative association with marital conflict, suggests that counselling interventions should emphasize improving emotional responsiveness, empathy, validation, and supportive communication between spouses. Similarly, the negative relationship between

marital conflict and relationship satisfaction highlights the importance of equipping couples with constructive conflict resolution and effective communication skills to enhance marital well-being.

The study also has implications for preventive mental health services and family life education. The higher levels of marital conflict observed among couples in the Families with Young Children stage indicate that the transition to parenthood is a period that may require additional psychological support. Family life education programmes, premarital counselling, and couple enrichment interventions can incorporate training in emotional responsiveness, collaborative problem-solving, parenting adjustment, and stress management to help couples navigate developmental transitions more effectively and maintain healthy marital relationships.

The findings may further assist psychologists, marriage and family therapists, social workers, and other mental health professionals in identifying relational strengths and vulnerabilities during different stages of married life. Understanding the influence of perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict on relationship satisfaction can facilitate more comprehensive assessment and individualized intervention planning. In addition, the study contributes to the limited Indian literature on marital relationships across family life cycle stages and provides a foundation for future research exploring additional relational, psychological, and socio-cultural factors influencing marital well-being.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The findings of the present study should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. First, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. As a result, the findings demonstrate associations among the variables rather than

causal effects. The study also utilized non-probability sampling techniques, specifically purposive and snowball sampling, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of married individuals. Furthermore, the sample comprised 142 married individuals from Kerala belonging to only two family life cycle stages, namely the Joining of Families through Marriage stage and the Families with Young Children stage. Consequently, the findings may not be representative of married individuals from other geographical regions, cultural contexts, or family life cycle stages.

Another limitation is that the study relied exclusively on self-report questionnaires, making the responses susceptible to social desirability bias, response bias, and participants' subjective perceptions. In addition, the study focused only on two family life cycle stages, while other important stages, such as families with adolescents, launching children, empty-nest families, and later-life marriages, were not included. Although the study examined perceived partner responsiveness and marital conflict as predictors of relationship satisfaction, several other variables that may influence relationship satisfaction, including personality traits, attachment style, communication patterns, parenting stress, financial stress, mental health, and social support, were not investigated. Finally, the exclusive use of a quantitative research approach limited the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, personal meanings, and contextual factors that may influence marital relationships.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations of the present study, several directions for future research are recommended. Future studies may employ longitudinal research designs to examine how perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction evolve across different stages of the family life cycle and to better establish causal relationships

among these variables. Researchers may also consider using larger and more diverse samples drawn from different states and cultural backgrounds through probability sampling techniques to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Expanding future research to include additional family life cycle stages, such as families with adolescents, launching children, empty-nest families, and families in later adulthood, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital relationships across the lifespan.

Further research may adopt qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to explore couples' lived experiences, interpersonal dynamics, and contextual factors influencing perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction. Future studies may also examine the influence of additional psychological and relational variables, including attachment style, communication patterns, emotional intelligence, personality traits, parenting stress, resilience, coping strategies, social support, and financial stress, to develop a broader understanding of the factors contributing to relationship satisfaction.

Comparative studies involving different demographic groups, such as urban and rural populations, working and non-working couples, dual-career couples, love and arranged marriages, and different socioeconomic groups, may further enrich the existing literature by identifying variations in marital functioning. Finally, intervention-based research evaluating the effectiveness of couple counselling, marital enrichment programmes, and relationship education initiatives aimed at enhancing perceived partner responsiveness, reducing marital conflict, and improving relationship satisfaction is recommended.

Cross-cultural and cross-national studies may also be undertaken to examine how cultural values, family structures, and societal expectations influence perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of marital relationships across diverse cultural contexts.

References

- Abreu-Afonso, J., Ramos, M. M., Queiroz-Garcia, I., & Leal, I. (2022). How couple's relationship lasts over time? A model for marital satisfaction. *Psychological Reports*, 125(6), 3071–3092. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941211000630>
- Alghraibeh, A. M. (2025). Associations between intimacy in relationships and marital satisfaction across gender and relationship durations. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2545657>
- Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2014). *Marriage, cohabitation and mental health*. <https://aifs.gov.au/research/family-matters/no-96/marriage-cohabitation-and-mental-health>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Barman, S. (2024). Relationship sustainability: Exploring the idea of sustainable marriages among Indian married couples. *Personal Relationships*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12569>
- Birditt, K. S., Brown, E., Orbuch, T. L., & McIlvane, J. M. (2010). Marital conflict behaviors and implications for divorce over 16 years. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(5), 1188–1204. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00758.x>
- Bodenmann, G., et al. (2025). Dyadic coping and communication as predictors of 10-year relationship satisfaction subgroup trajectories in stable romantic couples. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(10), 1361. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15101361>
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.

Bradbury, T. N., & Fincham, F. D. (1990). Attributions in marriage: Review and critique.

Psychological Bulletin, 107(1), 3–33.

Bradbury, T. N., Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2000). Research on the nature and

determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and the*

Family, 62(4), 964–980. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00964.x>

Bradbury, T. N., Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2000). Research on the nature and

determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and*

Family, 62(4), 964–980. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00964.x>

Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (1989). *The changing family life cycle: A framework for family*

therapy (2nd ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

Carter, E. A., & McGoldrick, M. (1989). *The changing family life cycle: A framework for*

family therapy (2nd ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

Christensen, A., & Heavey, C. L. (1990). Gender and social structure in the

demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social*

Psychology, 59(1), 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.1.73>

Coolican, H. (2014). *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology* (6th ed.). Psychology

Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (2010). *Marital conflict and children: An emotional*

security perspective. Guilford Press.

Don, B. P., Eller, J., Simpson, J. A., et al. (2021). New parental positivity: The role of

positive emotions in promoting relational adjustment during the transition to

parenthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 123(1), 84–106.

- Doss, B. D., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). The effect of the transition to parenthood on relationship quality: An 8-year prospective study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(3), 601–619.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013969>
- Dupuis, H. E., Girme, Y. U., Overall, N. C., Cross, E. J., & Sibley, C. G. (2025). Changes in well-being and relationship satisfaction in the years before and after marriage. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075251315199>
- Duvall, E. M. (1977). *Marriage and family development* (5th ed.). J. B. Lippincott.
- Fenech, M., et al. (2026). Perceived partner responsiveness is associated with longitudinal changes in circulating inflammatory biomarkers among caregiving mothers in midlife. *Acta Psychologica*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.105169>
- Fincham, F. D. (2003). Marital conflict: Correlates, structure, and context. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12(1), 23–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.01215>
- Fincham, F. D. (2003). Marital conflict: Correlates, structure, and context. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12(1), 23–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.01215>
- Frontiers in Psychology. (2022). *Transition to parenthood and marital satisfaction: A meta-analysis*.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.901362/full>

- Gander, F., Uhlich, M., Traut, A. C., et al. (2025). The role of relationship beliefs in predicting levels and changes of relationship satisfaction. *European Journal of Personality*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08902070241240029>
- Ghosh, R., & Chaurasiya, A. (2025). Correlates of couple flourishing among married individuals in India. *Journal of Positive Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807241312205>
- Gottman, J. M. (1994). *Why marriages succeed or fail: And how you can make yours last*. Simon & Schuster.
- Gottman, J. M. (1994). *Why marriages succeed or fail: And how you can make yours last*. Simon & Schuster.
- Gottman, J. M. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically based marital therapy*. W. W. Norton.
- Gottman, J. M., & Levenson, R. W. (2000). The timing of divorce: Predicting when a couple will divorce over a 14-year period. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(3), 737–745.
- Gravetter, F. J., & Forzana, L. A. (2012). *Research methods for behavioral sciences* (4th ed.).
- Gunaydin, G., Selcuk, E., & Ong, A. D. (2020). Perceived partner responsiveness as a bridge between general and partner-specific attachment security. *Current Psychology*, 39(5), 1704–1715.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(3), 511–524.

- Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50(1), 93–98. <https://doi.org/10.2307/352430>
- Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50(1), 93–98. <https://doi.org/10.2307/352430>
- Jacobson, N. S., & Margolin, G. (1979). *Marital therapy: Strategies based on social learning and behavior exchange principles*. Brunner/Mazel.
- Jolink, T. A., Chang, Y. P., & Algoe, S. B. (2022). Perceived partner responsiveness forecasts behavioral intimacy as measured by affectionate touch. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 48(12), 1743–1758.
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, methods, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(1), 3–34. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.118.1.3>
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(1), 3–34. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.118.1.3>
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2020). Research on marital satisfaction and stability in the 2010s: Challenging conventional wisdom. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 100–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12635>
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2020). Research on marital satisfaction and stability in the 2010s: Challenging conventional wisdom. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 100–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12635>

- Kelley, H. H., et al. (2023). Financial stress, conflict, and relationship quality: A daily diary study. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.
- Kingsbury, M., Clayborne, Z., Nilsen, W., Torvik, F. A., Gustavson, K., & Colman, I. (2023). Predictors of relationship satisfaction across the transition to parenthood: Results from the Norwegian Mother, Father, and Child Cohort Study (MoBa). *Journal of Family Issues*, 44(3), 615–640. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X221113850>
- Kouri, G., Messerli-Bürgy, N., Meuwly, N., Richter, M., & Schoebi, D. (2025). Perceived partner responsiveness across the transition to parenthood: The role of attachment insecurity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075251332725>
- Laurenceau, J. P., Barrett, L. F., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(5), 1238–1251. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1238>
- Laurenceau, J. P., Barrett, L. F., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(5), 1238–1251.
- Liu, X., et al. (2022). Emotional reactivity, perceived partner responsiveness, and marital quality in couples. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 787899.
- Love Diversity. (n.d.). *Arranged marriages in India*. <https://love-diversity.org/arranged-marriages-in-india/>

- Meyer, A., & Sledge, R. (2022). Marital disruptions and adverse relational outcomes: Emotional detachment and conflict escalation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*.
- Michael, K., & Ben-Zur, H. (2024). Couples' psychological resources and marital satisfaction: The mediating role of marital support. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 20(4), 303–316.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2016). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Myers, J. E., Madathil, J., & Tingle, L. R. (2005). Marriage satisfaction and wellness in India and the United States: A preliminary comparison of arranged marriages and marriages of choice. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 83(2), 183–190.
- Myers, J. E., Madathil, J., & Tingle, L. R. (2005). Marriage satisfaction and wellness in India and the United States: A preliminary comparison of arranged marriages and marriages of choice. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 83(2), 183–190.
- Nock, S. L. (2005). *Marriage as a social institution*. (Use the original publication details if available through your library/source.)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024). *Society at a glance 2024*. <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/society-at-a-glance-2024>
- Oswald, A. J., & Gardner, J. (2005). *How does marriage affect physical and psychological health? A survey of the longitudinal evidence* (IZA Discussion Paper No. 1619). Institute for the Study of Labor. <https://docs.iza.org/dp1619.pdf>
- Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 367–389). Wiley.

- Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 367–389). Wiley.
- Reis, H. T., Clark, M. S., & Holmes, J. G. (2004). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing construct in the study of intimacy and closeness. In D. J. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 201–225). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Reis, H. T., Clark, M. S., & Holmes, J. G. (2004). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing construct in the study of intimacy and closeness. In D. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 201–225). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Rice, T. M., Kumashiro, M., & Arriaga, X. B. (2020). Mind the gap: Perceived partner responsiveness as a bridge between general and partner-specific attachment security. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(21), 7843. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17217843>
- Rosen, N. O., Dubé, J. P., Bosisio, M., & Bergeron, S. (2024). Do demand-withdrawal communication patterns during sexual conflict predict couples' sexual and relationship well-being? An observational and longitudinal study. *Journal of Sex Research*. Advance online publication.
- Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 16(2), 172–186. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031\(80\)90007-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(80)90007-4)

- Rusbult, C. E. (1983). A longitudinal test of the investment model: The development and deterioration of satisfaction and commitment in heterosexual involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(1), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.1.101>
- Sandhya, S. (2009). The social context of marital happiness in urban Indian couples: Interplay of intimacy and conflict. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 35(1), 74–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2008.00092.x>
- Sandhya, S. (2009). The social context of marital happiness in urban Indian couples: Interplay of intimacy and conflict. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 35(1), 74–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2008.00103.x>
- Sharma, H., Patel, N., & Prajapati, R. (2026). The transformation of the institution of marriage in India. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26318318251348808>
- Simpson, J. A., et al. (2021). Perceptions of partner responsiveness across the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 36(4), 618–629.
- Simpson, J. A., Rholes, W. S., Bui, N. H., et al. (2021). Perceptions of partner responsiveness across the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 36(4), 618–629.
- Singh, A.K. (2019). Tests, measurements and research methods in behavioral sciences (6th ed.). Bharati Bhawan Publishers.
- Singh, Y., Gupta, V., & Srivastava, A. K. (2023). Marital conflict, health, and well-being among couples. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(1), 1098–1110. <https://doi.org/10.25215/1101.112>

- Social Work Institute. (n.d.). *Marriage as a social institution: Roles and relevance*.
<https://socialwork.institute/social-science-concepts/marriage-social-institution-roles-relevance/>
- Storaasli, R. D., & Markman, H. J. (1990). Relationship problems in the early stages of marriage: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 4(1), 80–98.
- Study.com. (n.d.). *Marriage in sociology: Definition, types & challenges*. <https://study.com>
- Tasew, A. S., & Getahun, K. K. (2021). Marital conflict among couples: The case of Durbete town, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. *Cogent Psychology*, 8(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2021.1911397>
- Thargay, T., & Giri, V. N. (2024). Examining the mediating role of attachment styles between perceived partner responsiveness and marital satisfaction: Evidence from Sikkimese couples. *Marriage & Family Review*, 60(8), 573–596.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2024.2411516>
- Thargay, T., & Giri, V. N. (2024). Marital and life satisfaction in Eastern Himalayan foothills: Role of partner responsiveness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075241268996>
- Thargay, T., Giri, V. N., & Behera, R. R. (2026). Feeling good to feeling satisfied: The mediating role of perceived partner responsiveness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075261429290>

- The BRPI. (2016). *An analytical study of definitions of the term marriage*. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6(1).
https://ijhss.thebrpi.org/journals/Vol_6_No_1_January_2016/21.pdf
- Tran, C., Ivanova, K., Reitz, A. K., & Stavrova, O. (2024). Transition to parenthood: The association between expectations and family-life satisfaction. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241260570>
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, W. K., & Foster, C. A. (2003). Parenthood and marital satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(3), 574–583.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00574.x>
- Visserman, M. L., Muise, A., Righetti, F., et al. (2022). Lightening the load: Perceived partner responsiveness fosters more positive appraisals of relational sacrifices. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 123(4), 788–810.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000384>
- Wadsworth cengage learning.
- Westermarck, E. (1921). *The history of human marriage* (5th ed.). Macmillan.
- Yuan, Q., Fan, Z., & Leng, J. (2022). The effect of emotional reactivity on marital quality in Chinese couples: The mediating role of perceived partner responsiveness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 787899. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.787899>
- Zhang, Y., et al. (2022). Neural synchronization predicts marital satisfaction. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(34), e2202515119.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2202515119>

Press.

Kothari, C. R. & Garg, G. (2018). Research Methodology: Methods and techniques (4th ed.).

New Age International Publishers.

APPENDICES

Appendix A:**Informed Consent Form**

Title of the Study:

Perceived Partner Responsiveness, Marital Conflict, and Relationship Satisfaction among Married Individuals: A Comparative Study of Two-Family Life Cycle Stages

Dear Participant,

I am Hafsa K M, a postgraduate student pursuing an M.Sc. in Counselling Psychology at Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), Sreekaryam. As part of the requirements for my postgraduate degree, I am conducting this research study under the guidance of Dr. Ammu Lukose, Asst. Professor & Head (In Charge) of Department of Counselling Psychology.

You are invited to participate in this study if you are legally married and do not have children above six years of age. The purpose of this study is to understand perceived partner responsiveness, marital conflict, and relationship satisfaction among married individuals across two family life cycle stages.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Completing the questionnaire will take approximately 10–15 minutes. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason or facing any negative consequences.

All information provided by you will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. No personally identifiable information will be collected, and your responses will be used solely for academic and research purposes. The findings of the study will be reported only in an aggregated form, ensuring that individual participants cannot be identified.

If you have read and understood the information provided above and voluntarily agree to participate in this study, please indicate your consent by selecting the option below.

Consent

☐ I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Appendix B:**Sociodemographic Data Sheet**

The following questions are asked for descriptive purposes and to understand the background characteristics of the sample. All responses will remain confidential and will be used only for research analysis.

1. Initials/Name
2. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Age
4. Place of Residence
 - a. Urban
 - b. Semi Urban
 - c. Rural
5. Do you currently live together with your partner?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (living separately / long distance)
6. Which stage of family life cycle are you currently in?
 - a. Recently married (no children yet)
 - b. Married with young children (below 6 years)
 - c. Other
7. How long have you been married?
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. 1-5 years

- c. 6-10 years
- d. 11-15 years
- e. More than 15 years

8. Number of children

- a. None
- b. 1
- c. 2
- d. 3
- e. More than 3

9. Age of First Child

- a. Below 6 years
- b. Above 6 years

Appendix C:**Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS)**

Instructions: Please answer the following questions about your current partner.

Response categories:

- 1 — Not at all true
- 2 — Somewhat True
- 3 — Moderately True
- 4 — Very true
- 5 — Completely true

1. My partner usually really listens to me.
2. My partner usually is responsive to my needs.
3. My partner usually is an excellent judge of my character.
4. My partner usually sees the "real" me.
5. My partner usually sees the same virtues and faults in me as I see in myself.
6. My partner usually "gets the facts right" about me.
7. My partner usually is aware of what I am thinking and feeling.
8. My partner usually understands me.
9. My partner usually is on "the same wavelength" with me.
10. My partner usually knows me well.
11. My partner usually esteems me, shortcomings and all.
12. My partner usually values and respects the whole package that is the "real" me.
13. My partner usually seems to focus on the "best side" of me.
14. My partner usually expresses liking and encouragement for me.

15. My partner usually seems interested in what I am thinking and feeling.
16. My partner usually seems interested in doing things with me.
17. My partner usually values my abilities and opinions.
18. My partner usually respects me.

Appendix D:

Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS)

Think about how you handle conflict with your romantic partner. Specifically, think about a significant conflict issue that you and your partner have disagreed about recently. Using the scale below, fill in which response is most like how you handled conflict. If you do not have a romantic partner, respond with your most current partner in mind. If you have never been in a romantic relationship, answer in terms of what you think your responses would most likely be.

For each item, answer as follows:

- A = Strongly agree with statement
- B = Moderately agree with statement
- C = Neutral, neither agree nor disagree
- D = Moderately disagree with statement
- E = Strongly disagree with statement

1. We try to find solutions that are acceptable to both of us.
2. We often resolve conflict by talking about the problem.
3. Our conflicts usually end when we reach a compromise.
4. When my partner and I disagree, we consider both sides of the argument.
5. In order to resolve conflicts, we try to reach a compromise.
6. Compromise is the best way to resolve conflict between my partner and me.
7. My partner and I negotiate to resolve our disagreements.
8. I try to meet my partner halfway to resolve a disagreement.
9. The best way to resolve conflict between me and my partner is to find a middle ground.
10. When we disagree, we try to find a solution that satisfies both of us.

11. When my partner and I have conflict, we collaborate so that we are both happy with our decision.
12. My partner and I collaborate to find a common ground to solve problems between us.
13. We collaborate to come up with the best solution for both of us when we have a problem.
14. We try to collaborate so that we can reach a joint solution to a conflict.
15. My partner and I try to avoid arguments.
16. I avoid disagreements with partner.
17. I avoid conflict with my partner.
18. When my partner and I disagree, we argue loudly.
19. Our conflicts usually last quite a while.
20. My partner and I have frequent conflicts.
21. I suffer a lot from conflict with my partner.
22. I become verbally abusive to my partner when we have conflict.
23. My partner and I often argue because I do not trust him/her.
24. When we argue, I am easily frustrated.
25. When we have conflict, I usually feel hurt.
26. Conflict with my partner often causes strong emotions.
27. When we have conflict, we withdraw from each other for a while for a "cooling off" period.
28. When we disagree, we try to separate for a while so we can consider both sides of the argument.
29. When we experience conflict, we let each other cool off before discussing it further.
30. When we have conflict, we separate but expect to deal with it later.
31. Separation for a period of time can work well to let our conflicts cool down.
32. When we argue or fight, I try to win.
33. I try to take control when we argue.

- 34. I rarely let my partner win an argument.
- 35. When we disagree, my goal is to convince to my partner that I am right.
- 36. When we argue, I let my partner know I am in charge.
- 37. When we have conflict, I try to push my partner into choosing the solution that I think is best.
- 38. When we have conflict, I usually give in to my partner.
- 39. I give in to my partner's wishes to settle arguments on my partner's terms.
- 40. Sometimes I agree with my partner so the conflict will end.
- 41. When we argue, I usually try to satisfy my partner's needs rather than my own.
- 42. I surrender to my partner when we disagree on an issue.

Appendix E:**Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)**

For each of the following statements, please rate your response on a scale of 1 to 5.

- 1 — Low
- 5 — High

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?
2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
3. How good is your relationship compared to most?
4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?
5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
6. How much do you love your partner?
7. How many problems are there in your relationship?