

The Role of Demographics Variables, Empathy and Communication Patterns in Conflict Resolution Among Married Individuals

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ABSTRACT: Marital relationships thrive on effective communication patterns and empathy, which play a crucial role in resolving interpersonal conflicts between couples. The present study aimed to examine the role of socio-demographic variables, empathy, and communication patterns in predicting conflict resolution among married individuals. A sample of 150 married individuals including 69 men and 81 women living in Punjab province was recruited through purposive convenient sampling technique. Along with the demographic sheet, Participants completed the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples* (Katherine & Lafontaine, 2010), *Communication Pattern Questionnaire–Short Form* (Christensen & Heavey, 1993), and *Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory* (Kurdek, 1994). Correlational analysis revealed that problem-solving conflict resolution was positively correlated with empathy and positive interaction while negatively correlated with demand/withdrawal communication. Conversely, conflict engagement conflict resolution showed positive correlations with demand/withdrawal but negative correlations with empathy and positive interaction. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that socio-demographic variables initially explained 33% of the variance in problem solving,

12% in conflict engagement, 23% in withdrawal, and 1% in compliance; with the inclusion of empathy and communication patterns, the explained variance increased substantially to $R^2 = .78, .82, .52, \text{ and } .11$. These findings underscore the importance of empathy and positive communication patterns in enhancing marital conflict resolution and overall relational harmony.

Keywords: *Empathy, Communication Pattern, Conflict resolution, Married Individuals*

Introduction

Marriage is a stage of transition in one's life. Married individuals enter into this institution with a thought to start a family which demands excessive responsibility on part of both husband and wife (Ogunsanmi, 2014). Currently, marriage instead of being pleasant and enduring has become disappointing and fragile to a great number of people (Olson & Defrain, 2000). As in all human relations, couples may experience conflicts in some periods in marriages (Cherlin, 2004). The important thing in human relations is not to experience conflict, but to be able to resolve the conflicts in a healthy way. In the conflict resolution process, ending the conflict between people, the reaction patterns that individuals put forward and give to the conflict situation can be called conflict resolution style (Tasdemir & Karaman, 2023).

Conflict resolution strategies that incorporate empathy help couples to reduce emotional distress, enhance relational satisfaction, and promote intimacy. Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of one's partner, plays a vital role in how couples navigate conflicts and communicate effectively (Adekeye & Sogbesan, 2025). The empathic response that individuals give in their relationships reflects their empathic tendencies (Yazgan & Ozgen, 2017). Understanding and fostering empathy in marital conflict contexts is indispensable for promoting long-term relational health and satisfaction (Brown et al., 2023). As couples face diverse stressors and challenges, empathy acts as a buffer that allows partners to maintain connection and collaborative problem-solving during marital disputes (Park, & Kim, 2013). Ability to be empathetic in interpersonal relationships may contribute to producing solutions to the problems experienced during the marriage (Taşdemir & Karaman, 2023).

Communication is very vital in all areas of human life especially the marriage relationship (Esere et al., 2011). Communicating effectively enables couple to develop the required

competence to manage their emotions, negotiate their relationship, understand their spouse's point of view, express empathy, and cope constructively with marital challenges and irrational dispositions (Esere & Oladun, 2014). Munroe (2003) posited that the ability of couples to say sorry, show unconditional positive regard, be appreciative of others and express forgiveness needs certain effective communication skills like empathy, self-control and a highly serviceable understanding of human needs and feelings (Nwadinigwe & Anyama, 2010).

Despite being a foundation of affection and partnership, marital relationships inevitably encounter conflict due to the complexity and imperfection inherent in any intimate relationship (Ha et al., 2019). Communication enables couples to resolve conflict amicably. It is a pillar which maintains the influence of spousal communication on marital stability and is a structure of peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding (Esere, 2007). Constructive communication patterns remain a central determinant for resolving conflicts in marital relationships, emphasizing how constructive dialogue, characterized by openness, empathy, and active listening, supports relationship satisfaction, while hostile interactions undermine it (Klimecki, 2019; Mandal & Lip, 2022).

The present study investigates several socio-demographic factors, empathy and communication patterns are explored for their predictive role in conflict resolution styles. Understanding these factors provides insight into fostering healthier marital relationships and guiding interventions aimed at improving relational harmony. This study contributes to existing literature by simultaneously examining these predictors within a sample of married individuals in Punjab.

Literature Review

Conflict resolution styles have been investigated in relation to marital adjustment in a sample of 50 couples. Their marriage duration was 10 to 15 years. Results revealed significant relationship between the use of conflict resolution strategies and perceived marital adjustment. The gender differences were also found (Fincham & Beach, 2010). In another study on conflict in adult close relationships had been examined and concluded that the way of handling marital conflict may increase intimacy and satisfaction (Brassard et al., 2007). It has been observed that both positive and negative communication

interactions influence marriage. Married couples who display frequent negative interactions are more likely to experience strained relationships (Dilillo, 2001).

A research by Driver and Gottman (2004) found that interaction between couples determine marital outcomes. The way partners communicate with one another is of particular interest, particularly how they reflect on their conflict resolution and affective communication skills. The way in which couples argue have been shown to be important, and the expression of affection they have for one another has proved to be significant in determining marital outcomes. Another study by Karney & Bradbury (2005) found that interpersonal factors include couple's behavior towards one another. Communication has also been the focus for marital researchers and it has been found an association between communication and relationship satisfaction.

Different researchers like Gottman & Levenson (1999), Jacobson and Addis (1993), Kurdek, (1995) found that couples' conflict interactional patterns have been linked with relationship satisfaction. The demand-withdrawal pattern of interaction linked negatively to relationship satisfaction Caughlin (2002). In this pattern of response, one spouse demands that the issue be resolved while the partner tries to withdraw from the conflict. Eldridge and Christensen (2002) suggested that demand-withdraw interactional style is not helpful for couples. A study also revealed that the essential to success in marriage is how couples handle their conflicts and differences in marital relationships. Hostile or demanding communication behavior leads towards conflict and then to relationship dissatisfaction (Gottman & Notarius, 2002).

It has also been found that each spouse marital satisfaction is positively associated with the frequency with which each spouse uses constructive strategies to resolve conflicts, such as agreement, compromise, and humor (Heavey et al.,1995; Kurdek, 1995; Lafontaine et al., 2010). The empathic tendency levels and conflict resolution styles of individuals in the divorce process were also examined by (Taşdemir & Karaman, 2023). The study sample consisted of 114 participants whose divorce cases were ongoing. It was revealed a significant correlation between the empathic tendency levels and conflict resolution styles of the participants. When the literature was examined, there have been studies in which the concepts of empathic tendency and conflict resolution styles were examined together and

emphasized the role of empathy and conflict resolution as factors in romantic relationship satisfaction (Gulsoy, 2025; Ronaghan et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The Integrative Conflict Model (ICM) posits that conflict resolution in intimate relationships is a multidimensional process influenced by personal attributes, communication behaviors, and relationship context. It emphasizes a dynamic interplay where personal tendencies modulate interpersonal interactions that ultimately impact conflict outcomes (Christensen et al., 1995; Brown et al., 2023). This model highlights empathy (both cognitive and affective) and communication patterns as central mechanisms influencing how couples manage conflicts. Empathy enhances partners' ability to take each other's perspectives and resonate emotionally, thereby promoting constructive conflict resolution strategies like problem-solving (Brown et al., 2023; Adekeye & Sogbesan, 2025), while buffers negative communication patterns, reducing hostility and demand/withdraw behaviors (Park & Kim, 2013; Gulsoy, 2025). Positive communication patterns further enable collaborative conflict management and relationship satisfaction (Klimecki, 2019; Mandal & Lip, 2022). Conversely, demand/withdraw patterns are associated with heightened conflict and dissatisfaction (Ha et al., 2019; Mandal & Lip, 2022). Interventions targeting empathy enhancement and communication skills yield longitudinal improvements in conflict management and relationship satisfaction (Gulsoy, 2025; Ronaghan et al., 2024).

Objectives

1. To determine the level of empathy, communication pattern and conflict resolution in sample of married individuals.
2. To observe the relationship between socio-demographic variables, empathy and communication pattern with conflict resolution among married individuals.
3. To observe the predictive effect of demographic variables, empathy and communication pattern on conflict resolution among married individuals.

Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be a significant relationship of demographic variables, empathy and communication pattern with conflict resolution among married individuals.

2. There is likely to be a significant prediction of demographic variables, empathy and communication pattern on conflict resolution among married individuals.

Method

Sample

The target population for this study was all married individuals, legally bound by the relation of marriage as husband and wife and who were living in Punjab province of Pakistan. The sample were collected from the different cities of Punjab including Gujranwala, Lahore and Wazirabad. Purposive convenient sampling technique was used to draw the sample. The researcher has collected data from one of the spouses rather than from both of them.

Sample Characteristics

The participant characteristics of the study sample consisted of 150 married individuals including 69 men (46%) and 81 women (54%), showing a slightly higher representation of women. The average age of participants was 31.32 years, with a standard deviation of about 9.35 years, indicating a relatively young to middle-aged adult sample with some age variability. Employed participants were 69%, while the remaining 31% were unemployed, reflecting a majority working population. In terms of marriage type, arrange marriages accounted for a larger share at about 69%, compared to 31% who reported love marriages. The distribution of the number of children indicated that nearly 59% of participants had between 1 to 3 children, while the remaining 41% had 4 to 6 children. Marriage duration varied, but most participants (about 57%) were married between 7 to 10 years, with smaller groups married for 1 to 3 years (18%) and 4 to 6 years (25%).

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The married individuals were in marriage relationships for at least six months and maximum of within 10 years of marriage. The data were collected from those married individuals whose spouse were alive. 2nd marriage individuals and divorced participants were excluded from the sample.

Measures

Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (IRIC). The 13 items Interpersonal Reactivity Index for couples IRIC by (Peloquin & Lafontaine, 2010) assess cognitive and

emotional empathic tendencies within the context of intimate relationships. Items are evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = does not describe me well to 5 = describe me very well and each subscale score is obtained by summing its respective items. The 6 items comprising the Perspective Taking scale measures the ability to understand and take the perspective of the partner, imagining the partner's thoughts and feelings from their point of view. The 7 items comprising the Empathic concern scale assesses the capacity to emotionally resonate and show care, concern, and compassion for the partner's feelings and experiences. Alpha coefficients for dyadic perspective taking and dyadic empathic concern were as follows: 0.84 and 0.74, respectively. The overall alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.83.

Communication Pattern Questionnaire Short form (CPQ-SF). The CPQ-SF is a condensed version of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire consisting of 11 items is a self-assessment of spouses' perceptions of marital interaction was developed by (Futris et al., 2010). It is a 9-point Likert scale from 1 = very unlikely to 9 = very likely. The 6 items comprising the demand/withdrawal subscale measures a communication pattern where one partner demands the other partner to change or discuss an issue, while the other partner avoids or withdraws from the interaction. The 5 items positive interaction subscale measures constructive and positive communication behaviors between partners. Alpha coefficients for these subscales were $\alpha = .71$ and $\alpha = 0.66$ respectively. The overall alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.86.

Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI). The CRSI is a self-report questionnaire that provides insight into how an individual typically responds to interpersonal conflict. The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory was developed by (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994) consists of 16 items, which were initially grouped into four styles: The four items positive problem-solving measures constructive conflict resolution characterized by addressing issues collaboratively, seeking solutions and engaging in open communication. The 4 items conflict engagement subscale assesses confrontational style conflict, sometimes with heightened emotions or persistent argumentations. The 4 items withdrawal subscale assesses the tendency to avoid or withdraw from conflict discussions, either by physically or emotionally distancing oneself. The 4 items compliance subscale measures the tendency to give in to the other person in a conflict to maintain peace or avoid disagreement, even at

one's own expense. Ha et al. (2019) reported cronbach's alphas ranged from .77 to .84 of this scale.

Ethical Considerations

Making ethical considerations is imperative due to the sensitive and personal nature of the study. Written permission was obtained from the married individuals. The participants were made fully aware of the content and purpose of the research and only willing participants were included in the study. Participants were informed that the information they offer would be confidential and would not be used other than academic purposes.

Results

Data Processing and Analysis

Data were screened before performing any statistical analysis; the collected data were sorted, validated, and organized for analyzing using (SPSS) widow version 26. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. To determine the predictors of conflict resolution styles, a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Before analyzing to test the hypotheses, the data were examined for its linearity, normality, and outliers and other assumptions.

Table 1: Psychometrics properties of study variables in the sample (N = 150)

Variables	<i>K</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α	Skw	Kurt
Empathy	13	34.03	10.65	7-48	.83	-1.31	.65
Perspective Taking	6	15.81	6.76	1-23	.87	-.98	.01
Empathic Concern	7	18.21	5.30	6-28	.60	-1.01	.35
Communication Pattern							
Demand/Withdrawal	6	32.57	12.37	7-52	.72	-.25	-.78
Positive Interaction	5	35.80	7.90	16-45	.63	-1.03	-.29
Conflict Resolution Styles							
Problem Solving	4	14.77	3.31	8-19	.72	-.54	-.83
Conflict Engagement	4	9.27	3.46	4-18	.78	.94	.47
Withdrawal	4	10.21	3.20	5-15	.67	.11	-1.33
Compliance	4	10.76	2.75	5-18	.65	.51	-.07

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis of the main continuous variables for the total sample of married individuals. All of the absolute values of skewness were lower than one and those of the kurtosis were all lower than three (i.e., ranged from -1.31 to .94) which showed that all the continuous main variables were almost univariately normally distributed. Cronbach alpha values for all the subscales can also be seen in the table which indicates satisfactory to high internal consistency.

Table 2: Correlation between Age, Empathy, Communication Pattern and Conflict Resolution Styles Among Married Individuals

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	-	-.24**	-.13	-.31**	.09	-.25**	-.44**	.32**	-.11	-.05
2. Empathy	-	-	.91**	.85**	-.29**	.61**	.82**	-.79**	-.01	.21*
3. Perspective			-	.55**	-.13	.41**	.76**	-.77**	.09	.37**
4. Empathic				-	-.44**	.72**	.68**	-.59**	-.15	-.06
5. Demand/Withdraw					-	-.22**	-.22**	.32**	.06	.11
6. Positive Interaction						-	.47**	-.51**	-.12	-.37**
Conflict Resolution Strategies										
7. Problem Solving							-	-.74**	.05	.40**
8. Conflict engagement								-	-.13	-.25**
9. Withdrawal									-	.18*
10. Compliance										

Table 4 shows that conflict resolution strategy e.g., problem solving has significant negative relationship with age and demand/withdraw and significant positive relationship with empathy, perspective taking, empathic orientation and positive interaction. Conflict resolution strategy e.g., conflict engagement has significant negative relationship with empathy, perspective taking, empathic orientation and positive interaction and significant positive relationship with age and demand/withdrawal. Conflict resolution strategy e.g., withdrawal has non-significant relationship with age, empathy, perspective taking, empathic orientation, demand/withdrawal and positive interaction. Conflict resolution strategy e.g., compliance has significant positive relationship with empathy and perspective taking while it has significant negative correlation with positive interaction while non-significant relationship with age, empathic orientation and demand/withdraw.

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Linear Regression Analyses for Socio-demographic Variables, Empathy and Communication Pattern Predicting Conflict Resolution Styles (Problem Solving)

Predictors	<u>Stage 1</u>		<u>Stage 2</u>		<u>Stage 3</u>	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	17.54(.98)		10.24(.81)		11.68(1.11)	
Age	-.13(.03)	-.37**	-.11(.02)	-.31**	-.13(.02)	-.35**
Gender (Male)	1.28(.49)	.19*	1.06(.29)	.16**	1.32(.31)	.20**
Love Marriage	2.35(.55)	.33**	.62(.34)	.09	.27(.39)	.04
Perspective			.25(.02)	.52*	.26(.02)	.54**
Empathic			.18(.03)	.28*	.24(.05)	.38**
Demand/Withdrawal					-.01(.01)	-.02
Positive Interaction					-.06(.03)	-.14*
R^2	.33		.77		.78	
ΔR^2			.44		.01	
F	24.37**		101.00**		74.37**	
ΔF	24.37**		144.22**		2.51	

Categorical variables were entered into the analyses as dummy variables. Participant's gender was recorded as female = 0 (reference category) and male = 1. Type of marriage was recorded as love marriage = 0 (reference category) and arranged marriage = 1. At stage one, socio-demographic variables were entered simultaneously. They contributed significantly to the regression model by explaining 33% of the variance in problem solving among married individuals. While introducing perspective taking and empathic orientation in the 2nd stage of the regression model made a significant contribution by adding 44% of explained variance in problem solving. Controlling for socio-demographic predictors, perspective and empathic significantly predicted problem solving. Finally in stage 3, adding demand/withdrawal and positive interaction to the model accounted for only 1% of the variance in problem solving. From the socio-demographic variables only age and gender predicted significantly problem solving of married individuals. This means that for every one-unit increase in age, predicted problem solving scores decrease by .35, with other variables held constant. Similarly, on average, predicted problem solving scores for males were 1.32 points higher than for females (i.e., reference category), with other variables held constant. Controlling for socio-demographic factors, other variables

significantly predicted problem solving. Together all the significant independent variables in this final stage accounted for 78% of the variance in married individuals' problem solving.

Table 4: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Socio-demographic Variables, Empathy and Communication Pattern Predicting Conflict Resolution Styles (Conflict Engagement)

Predictors	<u>Stage 1</u>		<u>Stage 2</u>		<u>Stage 3</u>	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	4.35(1.18)		12.27(.78)		10.51(1.07)	
Age	.15(.04)	.41**	.14(.02)	.39**	.15(.02)	.41**
Gender (Male)	-.48(.60)	-.06	-.26(.28)	-.04	-.38(.30)	-.06
Love Marriage	1.04(.66)	.14	3.41(.33)	.45**	3.45(.37)	.46**
Perspective			-.40(.02)	-.79**	-.41(.02)	-.80**
Empathic			-.12(.03)	-.17**	-.11(.05)	-.18*
Demand/Withdrawal					.02(.01)	.08
Positive Interaction					.03(.03)	.06
R^2	.12		.81		.82	
ΔR^2			.69		.01	
F	6.63**		123.66**		91.68**	
ΔF	6.63**		263.47**		3.03	

At stage one, socio-demographic variables contributed significantly to the regression model by explaining 12% of the variance in conflict engagement among married individuals. While introducing perspective taking and empathic orientation in the 2nd stage of the regression model made a significant contribution by adding 69% of explained variance in conflict engagement. Controlling for socio-demographic predictors, perspective taking and empathic concern significantly predicted conflict engagement. In this model except for male, remaining socio-demographic variables were found to be significant.

Finally in stage 3, adding demand/withdrawal and positive interaction to the model accounted for only 1% of the variance and it found non-significant. From the socio-demographic variables only age and love marriage predicted significantly conflict engagement of married individuals. On average, predicted conflict engagement scores for love marriages were 3.45 points higher than for arranged marriages (i.e., reference

category), with other variables held constant. Together all the significant independent variables in this final stage accounted for 82% of the variance in married individuals' conflict engagement.

Table 5: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Socio-demographic Variables, Empathy and Communication Pattern Predicting Conflict Resolution Style (Withdrawal)

Predictors	<u>Stage 1</u>		<u>Stage 2</u>		<u>Stage 3</u>	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	6.63(1.02)		8.95(1.29)		14.04(1.61)	
Age	.09(.03)	.28**	.06(.03)	.17*	-.01(.03)	-.01
Gender (Male)	-1.42(.52)	-.22**	-1.28(.46)	-.20**	-.21(.45)	-.03
Love Marriage	3.70(.57)	.54**	3.01(.54)	.44**	1.48(.56)	.22*
Perspective			.22(.04)	.47**	.25(.04)	.54**
Empathic			-.24(.05)	-.40**	.02(.06)	.03
Demand/Withdrawal					.01(.02)	.05
Positive Interaction					-.24(.04)	-.60**
R^2	.23		.39		.52	
ΔR^2			.16		.13	
F	14.66**		18.71**		21.84**	
ΔF	14.66**		19.28**		18.37**	

At stage one, socio-demographic variables contributed significantly to the regression model by explaining 23% of the variance in withdrawal among married individuals. While introducing perspective taking and empathic orientation in the 2nd stage of the regression model it made a significant contribution by adding 16% of explained variance in withdrawal. Controlling for socio-demographic predictors, perspective and empathic significantly predicted withdrawal. In this model all socio-demographic variables were found to be significant.

Finally in stage 3, adding demand/withdrawal and positive interaction to the model accounted for only 13% of the variance. From the socio-demographic variables, only love marriage significantly predicted withdrawal which indicates withdrawal scores for love marriages were 1.48 points higher than for arranged marriages (i.e., reference category),

with other variables held constant. Controlling for socio-demographic predictors, only perspective and positive interaction significantly predicted withdrawal.

Table 6: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Socio-demographic Variables, Empathy and Communication Pattern Predicting Conflict Resolution Style (Compliance)

Predictors	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	11.82(.99)		14.25(1.35)		15.24(1.88)	
Age	-.03(.03)	-.10	-.06(.03)	-.20	-.06(.03)	-.23*
Gender (Male)	-.16(.50)	-.03	-.04(.49)	-.01	.08(.53)	.02
Love Marriage	-.12(.56)	-.02	-.37(.56)	-.06	-.50(.66)	-.09
Perspective			.12(.04)	.29**	.12(.04)	.30**
Empathic			-.18(.05)	-.36**	-.16(.08)	-.32*
Demand/Withdrawal					-.01(.02)	-.03
Positive Interaction					-.03(.05)	-.08
R^2	.01		.10		.11	
ΔR^2			.09		.01	
F	.62		3.28**		2.41*	
ΔF	.62		7.20**		.30	

At stage one, socio-demographic variables were entered simultaneously. They contributed 1% of the variance in compliance, but it was non-significant. While introducing perspective taking and empathic orientation in the 2nd stage of the regression model it made a significant contribution by adding 9 of explained variance in compliance. Controlling for socio-demographic predictors, perspective and empathic significantly predicted compliance. In this model all socio-demographic variables were found to be non-significant.

Finally in stage 3, adding demand/withdrawal and positive interaction to the model accounted for only 1% of the variance and it was non-significant. From the socio-demographic variables, only age significantly predicted compliance, with other variables held constant. Controlling for socio-demographic predictors, only perspective and empathic significantly predicted compliance. Together all the significant independent

variables in this final stage accounted for 11% of the variance in married individuals' compliance.

Discussion

This study examined the role of socio-demographic factors, empathy, and communication patterns in predicting conflict resolution styles among married individuals in Punjab, Pakistan. Marital conflict is a dynamic process shaped by psychological, interpersonal, and socio-cultural factors (Olson & Defrain, 2000; Cherlin, 2004). The findings of the present study reinforce the conceptualization of conflict resolution as a multifaceted relational competence influenced by empathy and communication behaviors (Christensen et al., 1995; Brown et al., 2023). By situating these variables within a collectivistic context, the study highlights how evolving intimacy norms and traditional expectations jointly shape marital interactions, addressing a key gap in understanding conflict resolution in non-Western relationships.

The findings of the present study demonstrated that empathy and positive communication patterns are strong predictors of constructive conflict resolution, particularly problem-solving strategies. Both perspective taking and empathic concern had a connection to increased use of constructive problem-oriented strategies and reduced empathy connected to engagement in conflicts, withdrawal and compliance. These results are consistent with previous research indicating that empathy enhances understanding and emotional connection between partners, thereby facilitating cooperative conflict management (Brown et al., 2023; Adekeye & Sogbesan, 2025). Similarly, positive interaction was found to be associated with healthier conflict outcomes, supporting earlier studies which emphasize that open and respectful communication promotes relationship satisfaction and stability (Klimecki, 2019; Mandal & Lip, 2022). In contrast, demand/withdrawal communication patterns were linked with maladaptive conflict styles such as conflict engagement, aligning with findings that such negative interaction patterns increase relational distress and dissatisfaction (Caughlin, 2002; Gottman & Notarius, 2002). The regression analysis further highlighted that demographic factors initially explained a moderate proportion of variance, the inclusion of empathy and communication variables substantially increased the predictive power of the models. This finding reinforces the notion that interpersonal

and psychological factors play a more central role in marital conflict resolution than static demographic characteristics (Christensen et al., 1995).

Among the socio-demographic variables, the negative relationship between age and problem-solving suggests that younger couples may be more open to constructive conflict resolution strategies, whereas older individuals may rely on more rigid interaction patterns. Additionally, higher conflict engagement observed in love marriages may reflect greater emotional intensity and expectations within such relationships. These findings are partially supported by previous research highlighting that relationship dynamics vary based on life stage and relational context (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). However, the relatively weaker predictive role of demographic factors compared to empathy and communication indicates that relational processes are more influential in shaping conflict outcomes.

Importantly, the findings of this study should be understood within the collectivistic cultural context of Pakistan, where marital relationships are influenced by family systems, social expectations, and traditional norms. In such settings, communication patterns and emotional expression may differ from Western contexts, often emphasizing harmony and avoidance of direct confrontation. The significant role of empathy and positive interaction observed in this study suggests that even within traditional frameworks, evolving expectations of intimacy and mutual understanding are shaping how couples manage conflicts.

Conclusion

The study found that married individuals who show higher empathy tend to handle conflicts in a more positive way. Couples who communicate with kindness and openness are more likely to resolve their issues constructively, while those who use negative communication patterns tend to have more conflicts in their marriage. Additionally, certain personal and demographic factors, like age and gender, also play a role in how couples manage their conflicts. These factors, empathy and communication patterns together help predict how well couples resolve their disagreements. Overall, the findings suggest that being empathetic and communicating positively can greatly improve how couples manage conflicts and maintain happier relationships.

Limitations and Suggestions

The study's reliance from specific cities in Punjab, Pakistan and cross-sectional design limit the generalizability of the findings to broader cultural contexts and prevent strong conclusions about causality. Future research should use culturally diverse samples to enhance external validity and adopt longitudinal designs to examine how empathy, communication, and conflict resolution evolve in marriages over time. Also culturally derived or adapted tools might be required because Western scales might not capture completely relational subtlety in collectivistic systems of marriage. Finally, the study examined specific socio-demographic variables alongside empathy and communication. The lack of dyadic data limits the learning about mutual influence processes between spouses, and unmeasured factors such as personality characteristics and attachment styles, future research should consider including such variables for a more comprehensive understanding.

Implications

The findings of this study have important practical implications for settings focused on enhancing marital relationships and conflict management, such as couple counseling, family therapy, and marital education programs. By emphasizing the critical roles of empathy and positive communication patterns in resolving conflicts, these results suggest that interventions designed to improve couples' empathic understanding and communication skills can substantially increase conflict resolution effectiveness and marital satisfaction. Additionally, the study's insights can be utilized by marriage counselors and therapists to tailor their approaches toward promoting perspective taking and positive interaction patterns while mitigating demand/withdraw behaviors. Finally, community-based programs aiming to strengthen family relationships could also integrate empathy and communication skill-building activities based on these findings to reduce marital conflict and improve relational stability.

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