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Negotiating Work and Marriage: Communication Dynamics and Their Influence on Marital Satisfaction Among Working Couples in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Background: Communication is widely known to be one of the key determinants of marital satisfaction. In dual-earner families, the augmented work requirements and the ongoing cultural pressures could affect the functioning of communication in marriage. Nevertheless, little studies have been done to observe such dynamics in working couples in Punjab, Pakistan.

Methods: The cross-sectional research involved 343 working population in Punjab, Pakistan. The collected data were in form of a structured self-administered survey questionnaire which measured communication, marital satisfaction, work family conflict, and cultural norms and conflict management. The two open ended questions were used to get qualitative information. The Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression in SPSS were used to analyze the quantitative data, and thematic analysis helped to analyze the qualitative responses.

Results: Marital satisfaction was positively correlated with communication ($r = .682$, $p < .01$). This relationship was substantially undermined by work-family conflict ($\Delta R^2 = .022$, $p = .014$). Cultural norms ($\Delta R^2 = .023$, $p = .016$) and conflict management ($\Delta R^2 = .037$, $p = .002$) also played a significant role in mediating the relationship, either curbing or expanding the benefits of communication. Thematic analysis indicated that there were five broad themes namely: emotional sharing, time investment, empathetic listening, conflict avoidance and contextual stressors such

as family interference and workplace pressure.

Conclusion: Nevertheless, communication has stayed a strong indicator of marital satisfaction but the efficacy is defined by cultural and professional environments. It is suggested that culturally sensitive counseling interventions and family-supportive workplace policies can be used to promote the marital well-being of working couples in collectivist cultures.

Keywords: Communication, Marital Satisfaction, Work–Family Conflict, Cultural Norms, Conflict Management

INTRODUCTION

Effective Communication is a well-known determinant of marital satisfaction since it influences how couples relate, solve disputes, and remain emotionally in balance. According to the research, the stability of marriage is not only based on the existence of disagreements but also the manner in which the partners communicate in a conflict. Cooperation, appreciation, and constructive dialogue in the form of positive communication behavior are linked with increased marital satisfaction and negative behavior, including criticism, hostility, and withdrawal, are likely to aggravate the conflicts in a relationship and lower the quality of relationships (John Gottman and Robert W. Levenson, 2002). Communication is another significant process that helps the couples cope with stress and maintain emotional intimacy. Effective communication tends to enable couples to handle life problems more adroitly whereas ineffective patterns of communication tend to mount the marital stress (Fincham and Beach, 2010). Also, it has been demonstrated that communication-based interventions and relationship education programs could be effective in improving the level of marital satisfaction through the development of better interaction skills and conflict management strategies by the partners (Lavner et al., 2019).

Communication especially in working couples is a major challenge because of the two-way mandate of professional and family life. Often, due to the demands at the workplace, excessive hours in the workplace and time, there is limited time to meaningfully interact with the spouse and this can adversely affect the satisfaction in the marriage (Frisco & Williams, 2003). Moreover, work-family conflict might also make the communication patterns more complicated as couples strive to fulfill their professional duties and responsibilities at home (Fan et al., 2024). The empirical data indicates that the positive links between the effective communication between partners at work and the effective coping with stress and the well-being of the marriage, in general, are present (Li et al., 2024). Traditional gender roles can only make these challenges more severe in collectivistic societies like Pakistan. Females who engage in the work-force with other duties keeping the home environment are frequently prone to role strain leading to stress and communication challenges in the marital relationships (Islahi, 2017).

The Pakistani culture and society also provide some insight on marital communication, especially concerning whether the decision making power and freedom of expression in marriage. Conventionally, men are seen as the decision

makers in both financial and family affairs and women are seen as the ones doing chores. These hierarchical structures can inhibit the inclusion of women in the decision-making process and the free flow of communication between the spouses, which eventually impacts on the level of satisfaction with the other spouse. Nonetheless, these traditional dynamics are slowly changing due to the constant social changes such as urbanization, the increasing number of women joining the labor market, etc. (Fazal et al., 2019). Working couples living in an urban area tend to be more adaptive to comparatively egalitarian patterns of communication, with each other respect and decision-making (Rumondor, 2019).

Although the number of dual-earner families in the recent past has risen, there is a dearth of empirical studies that explore the particular issues of communication that working couples encounter in Punjab, Pakistan. The shifting economic landscape has transformed the conventional role of marriage but there is still no study that addresses the issue of the patterns of communication that determine marital satisfaction in the working couples in this area. Thus, the proposed study will focus on analyzing the patterns of communication between working couples in Punjab and how the cultural and structural factors interact to affect marital satisfaction. The results of the present research can be added to the current body of knowledge and bring valuable information to counselors, therapists, and policy makers who might want to establish healthier spousal relationships and better work-family balance.

Objectives

The main objective of the current research is to explore the communication patterns and marital adjustment of working couples living in Punjab, Pakistan.

Whereas, the specific objectives are:

1. To study the communication pattern that is most common in working couples
2. To analyze the correlation between communication behaviors and marital satisfaction.
3. To examine moderator effects of work-family conflict in communication and marital satisfaction.
4. To examine moderator effects of cultural norms in communication and marital satisfaction.
5. To examine moderator effects of conflict management in communication and marital satisfaction.
6. To provide suggestions to increasing marital satisfaction related to communication improvement.

Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between communication and marital satisfaction among working couples.

H2: Work-family conflict moderates the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction, such that higher levels of work-family conflict weaken the positive effect of communication on marital satisfaction.

H3: Cultural Norms moderates the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction, such that effective conflict management strengthens the positive impact

of communication on marital satisfaction.

H4: Conflict management moderates the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction, such that effective conflict management strengthens the positive impact of communication on marital satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

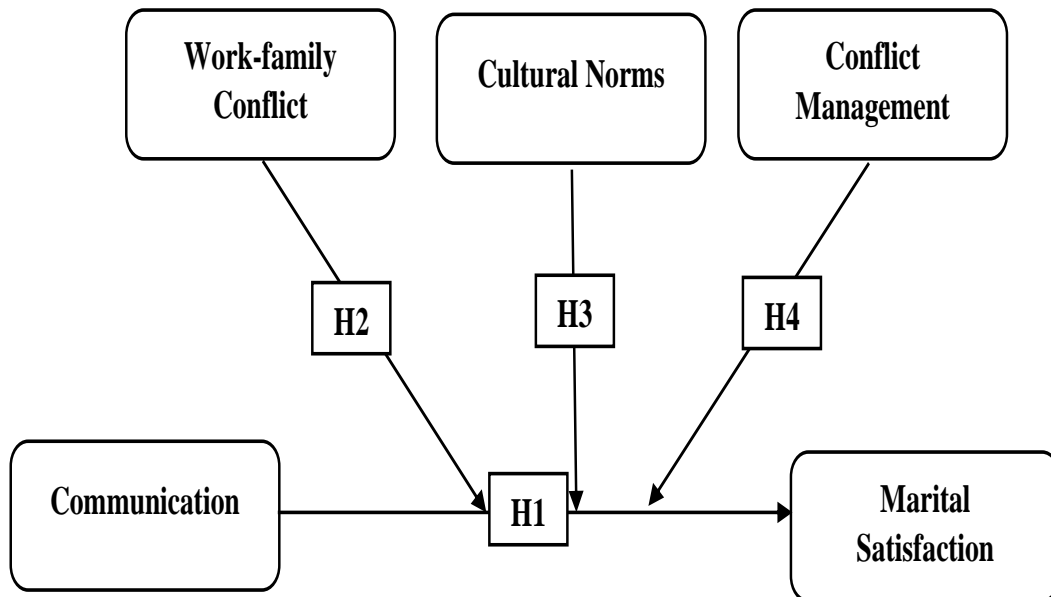


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marital satisfaction and Adjustment are the two key predictors of relationship quality and permanence in relationships. Marital satisfaction is subjective assessment of the happiness and fulfillment in marriage, whereas, marital adjustment is the level of harmonization, collaboration and adaptive coping of shared roles and interpersonal disparities (Fincham and Beach, 2010). In spite of a conceptual distinction between them, these constructs are connected to each other and are subjected to the influence of relational, individual, and contextual factors, which, in turn, shape the outcomes of marriage.

Communication and Marital Satisfaction.

It is a well-known fact that communication is a main aspect in marital relations and it extensively influences emotional intimacy, conflict management and job satisfaction in the long run. The level of marital satisfaction has been shown to be higher when couples have positive communication patterns such as active listening, validation, and supportive feedback, and negative ones such as criticism, defensiveness, contempt and withdrawal (Rehman and Holtzworth Munroe, 2011). Rehman was able to observe couples that were in American and Pakistani cultural contexts in a cross-cultural study and realized that positive marital communication was always linked to increased marital satisfaction, even though the effects were more intense in individualistic settings (Rehman and Holtzworth Munroe 2007). To this end, Lavner demonstrated that overtime, couples in which communication and

satisfaction were more positive and less negative displayed greater concurrent marital satisfaction, but the directional relationship between communication and satisfaction seems subtle (Lavner et al. (2016).

Another essential part of communication that brings about trust and intimacy is self-disclosure expression of personal thoughts and feelings (Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco, 1998). Nevertheless, culture can determine the extent to which partners can open self-disclose especially in collectivist and patriarchal cultures where the need to express feelings may be controlled by societal norms and family structures. Giving more flavor to these processes of relationship, Sadia et al. (2025) studied couples in long distance romantic relationships and concluded that trust plays a significant role by moderating the effect of relationship stressors on marital satisfaction, but resilience mediates this interaction, shielding couples against its negative consequences. This highlights the point that communication in itself is not the only factor that promotes the entire complexity of marital quality, individual resources like trust and resilience functioning in concert with communication behaviors influence the outcome of satisfaction.

Marital Adjustment and Influencing Factors.

The process of marital adjustment includes the constant adjustment to life roles, joint responsibilities and relationship stressors. Increasing degrees of adjustment are associated with an increase in psychological well-being and family stability, and the opposite is also true, as the unresolved conflict and emotional withdrawal are linked to chronic maladjustment (Okojide, 2023). Emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality traits have a positive relationship with marital satisfaction and adjustment, whereas neuroticism is a predictor of higher conflict and dissatisfaction (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Emotional intimacy a feeling of closeness, trust and support is another factor that helps in the buffering of couples against relational stress as well as helps in adaptive adjustment. Transitions like having children, switching jobs or taking up responsibility of caring about someone may be a challenge that may cause pressure on the marital roles. Dual earner couples, specifically, have a greater difficulty to strike a balance between professional and family needs, and it will affect the communication balance and, consequently, marital satisfaction.

Work-family conflict

Work-family conflict (WFC) is a situation in which occupational demands jeopardize family roles making them less attached in their time and emotional availability to interact with their partners (Michel et al., 2011). There is extensive evidence that the high level of WFC is linked to less marital satisfaction and an increased level of relational strain, such as psychological stress and burnout (Allen et al., 2012; Delanoeije and Verbruggen, 2019). The spillover effect is used to explain the process of how the workplace stress can spill over to the marital aspects in the form of irritability, withdrawal, or lack of responsiveness in marital communication. These impacts are especially relevant in collectivist cultures like Pakistan where gendered expectations tend to place the main role of caregiving and domestic work on women alongside the jobs and thereby increase role overload and emotional

burnout (Nauman et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the adverse effect of WFC can be alleviated through supportive communication and compatible role negotiation, which points to the dual role of communication as a result and moderating factor of relationship.

Gender Expectations and Cultural Norms.

Gender expectations and cultural norms have a very important role to play in determining marital communication and adaptation. The traditional gender roles in collectivist and patriarchal cultures tend to make the man the financial provider and the mom the major caregiver, which shapes the power inequality, emotional displays, and decision-making in the marriage (Shah, 2023). Such standards can support family status or societal harmony above open emotional conversation, which can influence communication performance and meaning (Younas and Frazier, 2020). The involvement of extended family present in joint family systems may provide the practical support but it may also prove to be a source of tension when the expectations of the family members compete with the autonomy of the spouses. The more socioeconomic change, urbanization, and the education level, the younger couples are giving more value to companionship and equality as well as shared decision making, which implies that the cultural norms may restrict and enhance effective communication and marital satisfaction.

Conflict Management Styles

Conflict is inevitable in intimate relationships; however, the style of conflict management determines its impact on relational health. Conflict management frameworks, such as the Thomas–Kilmann model, categorize styles into competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Collaborative and problem-solving approaches are consistently linked to higher marital satisfaction, whereas avoidance and non-constructive styles predict dissatisfaction and relational instability (Rahim, 2002). Constructive approaches support emotional regulation, mutual respect, and the resolution of underlying concerns, providing pathways to greater intimacy and marital adjustment. Cultural context further influences conflict management styles, with collectivist environments sometimes promoting avoidance or accommodation to preserve familial harmony, although prolonged suppression of conflict can erode intimacy and satisfaction over time.

Even though there is a good amount of literature related to the study of communication and marital satisfaction, most of the empirical research is based on the Western context, and thus, there is limited insight on how these processes can work in South Asian, collectivist environments. In addition, there is the scarcity of studies that have jointly looked at work-family conflict, culture and norms and conflict management as moderating variables in communication-satisfaction relationship. With the accelerated social change, the higher involvement of female workforce, as well as the inertial traditional expectations, there is need to explore these dynamics within the context of culture.

This gap is filled by the current research which examines the role of communication in the marital satisfaction of working couples in Punjab, Pakistan and evaluating the moderating influence of work-family conflict, cultural norms,

and the styles of conflict management which present a more detailed and culture-aware perspective on the marital wellbeing of transitional societies.

Theoretical framework

Marital satisfaction is an indicator of the stability and wellbeing of relationships with communication being one of the major determinants (Givertz et al., 2009). The study is based on the idea of Social Exchange Theory (SET), according to which, the relationships are based on rational analysis of rewards and costs and people are interested in the interactions, which will bring as much benefits as costs (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Homans, 1961). During marriage, communication is a reward that increases intimacy, trust, and understanding as well as a potential cost in case of misunderstanding, conflict, or emotional distance (Cook et al., 2013). Several moderators are both contextual and interpersonal, which affect the quality of marital communication and its effects on marital satisfaction. Work family conflict has the potential to diminish the quality of communication and emotional availability; however, supportive conversation and coping coping mechanisms can moderate its adverse outcomes (Allen et al., 2000; Matthews et al., 2014; Obrenovic et al., 2020). The expectations of communication and emotional expression are influenced by the cultural norms of a certain society, especially the collectivist and patriarchal world, which may limit or promote marital satisfaction (Hope et al., 2021; Davaei et al., 2022). This relationship is further moderated by conflict management strategies whereby constructive conflict management approaches such as compromise and active listening lead to satisfaction whereas avoidance or hostility leads to lower relationship well-being (Fincham et al., 2010; Markman et al., 2010; Vogel et al., 2009). All these factors explain why the effects of communication on marital satisfaction are not only dependent on the behavior of individuals but also on a wider context of relationships, culture, and situational conditions, meaning adaptive communication, cultural awareness, and effective conflict management can be used to maintain the quality of marriage among working couples.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes a quantitative research approach to examine the communication style and marital adaptation in the working couples of Punjab, Pakistan. It was based on a cross-sectional survey design that is efficient in terms of identifying relationships among the variables at a particular time and does not involve longitudinal follow-up (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The sample population consisted of legally married working couples living in Punjab and had lived together at least three years. Multi-stage random sampling approach was adopted to make it representativeness and relevant to the study objectives. Four large districts, Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, and Rawalpindi were chosen randomly in the Stage 1 to represent different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. In Stage 2, stratified sampling of each of the districts was done to determine the major sectors of employment which were university/academic, banking sector and police. Stage 3 involved taking random sampling of institutions in each sector to ensure representativeness of the organization whereas Stage 4 incorporated purposive

sampling of the participants to fit in the set inclusion criteria. The inclusion of all the aforementioned sampling methods improved internal and external validity so that the sample was able to capture communication and marital processes among the working couples in Punjab (Bryman, 2016).

Data collection was done by use of structured questionnaires which were conducted online and offline. The device was divided into four parts: demographics, communication behaviors, cultural norms, work-family conflict, conflict management, and marital satisfaction and also two open-ended questions were used to obtain qualitative data about the communication improvement strategies. Before the actual administration, a pilot study that included 30 respondents was carried out to determine reliability and clarity of the questionnaire and the suitability to the final study was established (Mugenda, 2009). Face validation was employed to guarantee the instrument validity since psychology experts established that the instrument measured the relevant constructs including communication patterns, cultural norms, work-family conflict, conflict management, and marital satisfaction. The reliability test based on Cronbachs Alpha indicated that the scale showed acceptable internal consistency among all variables (.687- range of alpha up to.763), and the scale could be used in the further analysis (Wadkar et al., 2016; Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).

The SPSS Version 26 was used to analyze quantitative data. To describe the characteristics of the participants and patterns of their responses, descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed (Gravetter and Wallnau, 2020). The correlation between communication and marital satisfaction was analyzed using Pearson correlation (Field, 2018), whereas the moderating role of the work-family conflict, cultural norms, and conflict management on the correlation was tested in hierarchical multiple regression (Aiken and West, 1991). The thematic analysis of qualitative responses of the open-ended questions consisted of transcription, coding, and recognition of the most common themes, including communication openness, emotional support, conflict patterns, and cultural expectations (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The issues of ethics were strictly followed in the course of the research. The Institutional Review Board of the university where the study took place approved and informed consent was taken with all the subjects. The process was voluntary and there was no penalty associated with dropping out at any given time according to the APA ethical principles (2017). Confidentiality and privacy were implemented by anonymizing the responses, encrypting the data in safe files, and upholding the principles of beneficence, respect to the person, and justice. In general, the applied methodological approach was credited with scientific rigor, ethical standards, and gathering of credible and valid data to conduct the study on the communication and marital adjustment dynamics among working couples in Pakistan, Punjab.

RESULT AND DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis

Table 4.1.1: Frequency and percentage distribution of demographic profiles

Variable	Values	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	83	24.2
	Female	260	75.8
Age	25–30	158	46.1
	30–35	106	30.9
	35–40	44	12.8
	40–45	31	9.0
	45–50	4	1.2
District	Lahore	140	40.8
	Faisalabad	74	21.6
	Multan	51	14.9
	Rawalpindi	69	20.1
Professional Sector	University Sector	115	33.5
	Police	114	33.2
	Department		
Occupation of Spouse	Banking Sector	105	30.6
	Public Sector Job	267	77.8
Duration of Marriage (Years)	Self-Employed	76	22.2
	1–5	186	54.2
	6–10	85	24.8
	11–15	42	12.2
	16–20	7	2.0
Age Difference Between Spouses	21–25	23	6.7
	More than Yours	138	40.2
	Less than Yours	85	24.8
Number of Children	Same	120	35.0
	1–2	255	74.3
	3–4	21	6.1
	5 or more	67	19.5

Demographic analysis indicates that most of the respondents were female (75.8%), with the males making up 24.2% of the sample. The majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 30 years (46.1), then there were those aged between 30 and 35 years (30.9). Geographically speaking, the highest percentage of respondents was Lahore (40.8), Faisalabad (21.6), Rawalpindi (20.1) and Multan (14.9). In terms of professional sector, the respondents were nearly balanced in the university sector (33.5%), the police department (33.2%), and the banking sector (30.6%). Somewhere close to 77.8 percent of the spouses worked in the public sector with 22.2 percent being self-employed. The majority of participants were married between 1-5 years (54.2%), which means that the sample consisted of rather recent marriage. Moreover, 40.2% of the respondents stated that their spouse was older than they whereas 24.8% stated that their spouses were younger than them and 35% states that spouses were of the same age. Regarding family size, most of the respondents had 1 2 children (74.3%), and others had 3 4 children (6.1%), and five

or more children

Inferential Statistic

Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 4.2.1.1. Pearson's Correlation Between Communication and Marital Satisfaction Among Working Couples

Correlations	Communication	Marital Satisfaction
Communication	1	.508**
Marital Satisfaction	.508**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis indicates a significant positive relationship between communication and marital satisfaction ($r = 0.508$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that higher levels of effective communication among couples are associated with greater marital satisfaction. The strength of the correlation is moderate, highlighting that while communication plays an important role in marital happiness, other factors may also contribute to overall satisfaction.

Moderation Analysis via Multiple Regression

Table 4.2.2.1. Model Summary for Moderation Analysis Work-Family Conflict as Moderator

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.721	.520	.513	1.280	.520	104.276	2	97	.000
2	.736	.542	.530	1.240	.022	6.238	1	96	.014
Predictors: (Constant), Centered_M_Communication, Centered_M_WorkFamilyConflict					Centered_M_Communication,				
Predictors: (Constant), Centered_M_Communication, Centered_M_WorkFamilyConflict. INT					Centered_M_Communication,				

A hierarchical regression showed that communication and work-family conflict significantly predicted marital satisfaction, explaining 52% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.520$, $p < 0.001$). Adding the interaction between communication and work-family conflict increased the explained variance to 54.2% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.022$, $p = 0.014$), indicating that effective communication can moderate the negative effects of work-family conflict on marital satisfaction.

Table 4.2.2.1.1 ANOVA for Moderation Analysis Work-Family Conflict as Moderator

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	289.400	2	144.700	104.276	.000
2	301.100	3	100.367	65.317	.000

Dependent Variable: Marital Satisfaction

Predictors: (Constant), Centered Communication, Centered_WorkFamilyConflict

Predictors: (Constant), Centered_Communication, Centered_WorkFamilyConflict, INT

The ANOVA results indicate that both regression models significantly predict marital satisfaction. Model 1, including communication and work–family conflict, was significant ($F(2, 97) = 104.276, p < 0.001$). Model 2, which added the interaction term, also significantly predicted marital satisfaction ($F(3, 96) = 65.317, p < 0.001$). These results confirm that communication, work–family conflict, and their interaction reliably influence marital satisfaction.

Table 4.2.2.2. Model Summary for Moderation Analysis Cultural Norms as Moderator

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.698	.488	.481	1.310	.488	92.486	2	97	.000
2	.715	.511	.499	1.278	.023	6.017	1	96	.016

Predictors: (Constant). Centered_M_Communication, Centered_M_CulturalNorms

Predictors: (Constant). Centered_M_Communication, Centered_M_CulturalNorms.

INT

A hierarchical regression was conducted to examine the effects of communication and cultural norms on marital satisfaction. In Model 1, communication and cultural norms together significantly predicted marital satisfaction, explaining 48.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.488, F(2, 97) = 92.486, p < 0.001$). Adding the interaction between communication and cultural norms in Model 2 explained an additional 2.3% of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.023, F(1, 96) = 6.017, p = 0.016$), indicating that the influence of communication on marital satisfaction varies depending on cultural norms.

Table 4.2.2.2.1 ANOVA for Moderation Analysis Cultural Norms as Moderator

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	265.560	2	132.780	92.486	.000
2	277.020	3	92.340	56.545	.000

Dependent Variable: Marital_Satisfaction

Predictors: (Constant), Centered_Communication, Centered_CulturalNorms

Predictors: (Constant), Centered_Communication, Centered_CulturalNorms, INT

The ANOVA results show that both regression models significantly predict marital satisfaction. Model 1, including communication and cultural norms, was significant ($F(2, 97) = 92.486, p < 0.001$). Model 2, which added the interaction term, also significantly predicted marital satisfaction ($F(3, 96) = 56.545, p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that communication, cultural norms, and their interaction are significant determinants of marital satisfaction.

Table 4.2.2.3. Model Summary for Moderation Analysis Conflict Management as Moderator

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change

	Square	R Square	Error of the Estimate	of R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.740	.547	.541	1.190	.547	117.168	2	97	.000
2	.764	.584	.573	1.145	.037	10.002	1	96	.002
Predictors:		(Constant).			Centered_M_Communication, Centered_M_ConflictManagement				
Predictors:		(Constant).			Centered_M_Communication, Centered_M_ConflictManagement. INT				

A hierarchical regression examined the effects of communication and conflict management on marital satisfaction. Model 1, including communication and conflict management, significantly predicted marital satisfaction, explaining 54.7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.547$, $F(2, 97) = 117.168$, $p < 0.001$). Adding the interaction between communication and conflict management in Model 2 explained an additional 3.7% of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.037$, $F(1, 96) = 10.002$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that the effect of communication on marital satisfaction depends on the level of conflict management.

Table 4.2.2.3.1. ANOVA for Moderation Analysis Conflict Management as Moderator

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	313.500	2	156.750	117.168	.000
2	334.800	3	111.600	85.065	.000

Dependent Variable: Marital_Satisfaction

Predictors: (Constant), Centered_Communication, Centered_ConflictManagement

Predictors: (Constant), Centered_Communication, Centered_ConflictManagement, INT

The ANOVA results show that both regression models significantly predict marital satisfaction. Model 1, including communication and conflict management, was significant ($F(2, 97) = 117.168$, $p < 0.001$). Model 2, which added the interaction term, also significantly predicted marital satisfaction ($F(3, 96) = 85.065$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that communication, conflict management, and their interaction are significant contributors to marital satisfaction.

Qualitative Analysis

Part of the semi-structured questionnaire included two open-ended questions aimed at investigating what participants do and what they can do to improve communication in their relation: “What do you or what are your suggestions to do to improve communication in your relationship? The qualitative responses were analyzed by use of thematic analysis which led to the identification of five general themes. The responses of the participants can be viewed as an ample mixture of emotional awareness, experience of relationships, the cultural impact, and the aspiration to the communication process. These themes offer a holistic view in the

way working people conceptualize and approach the idea of communication in marriage.

Mutual Respect and Emotional Attunement

The necessity of emotional awareness, empathy, and respect among many participants was stressed. Repeated mentions of “understanding emotional needs,” “sharing feelings,” “respect and soft-spoken tone,” and “valuing opinions” demonstrate a strong recognition that communication is deeply emotional. The couples which comprehend the moods, struggles, and needs of each other also appear to be in better positions to cope with the daily conversations and the long-term relationship interactions.

This is what Gottman (Attunement and Relationship Quality in Couple Relationships - ProQuest, 2023) referred to as emotional attunement, which is a source of long-term relationship satisfaction. Many respondents seem to have emotional validation, as opposed to problem-solving, as an end in itself.

Active Listening and Verbal Expression

Many of the respondents mentioned the necessity to communicate openly, use the appropriate words, address problems and be an active listener. Responses like “speak politely,” “feel free to talk,” “listen carefully,” and “discuss solutions” show an understanding that communication is both expressive and receptive.

Others also focused on timing and tone speaking in accordance with the situation or making a friendly bedroom atmosphere that will allow conversations. These reactions are consistent with the findings of research stating that a two-way, respectful communication leads to emotional safety and trust (Weger et al., 2010).

Time Investment and Shared Presence

One of the strategies and suggestions that were mentioned on several occasions was quality time. Responses included “spend more time with family,” “plan trips,” “time is precious,” and “engage in joint activities.” This theme implies that closeness, accessibility and experiences are the foundation of natural and meaningful communication.

The participants appeared to realize that communication does not simply occur in the course of critical conversations but is frequently nurtured by simple presence and the micro-processes, what Stafford (2011) describes as relational maintenance behaviors.

Conflict Sensitivity, patience and Coping Styles

Patience, emotional control, and de-escalating conflicts were advanced or applied by many respondents in the enhancement of communication. Advice such as “avoid negativity,” “don’t be biased,” “handle things logically,” “stay curious, not critical,” and “give time and space” highlights an intention to approach conflict with mindfulness rather than confrontation.

Conversely, there were also some responses of silence or avoidance as a coping behavior, that is, the concept of keeping quiet or staying silent, or even sarcastic tones. Although it is possible to interpret this as emotional exhaustion or cultural norms of non-direct communication, it also highlights how difficult it can be to be emotionally engaged during stress (Caughlin and Scott, 2010).

Cultural Realities, Personal Growth and External Challenges

Many respondents acknowledged external forces and institutional aspects that impacted communication. Some examples are work stress, interference with in-laws, inability to have a separate home and distracting on social media. These imply that it is not only skill but also context and environment that is relevant when it comes to communication.

In retaliation, some of them promoted self-development by introduction of counseling, reading, learning, interactive lessons and studying to talk with confidence. This is a pointer to a gradual shift of culture in which individuals are gradually beginning to experience personal responsibility in emotional and relationship enhancement that is proportionate to the present-day in relationship training (Markman and Rhoades, 2012).

The responses that have been lumped in the Conclusion serve to create a combined perspective of communication in marriage- the truth of practicalities and idealism of aspirations. These feelings were emotional empathy, verbal engagement with esteem, time spent together with partner, responsiveness to conflicts, and responsiveness to external and internal circumstances all of which were key in marriage communication to a healthy level. Though many of the participants are actively engaged in the beneficial practices, others of them refer to the complexity of real-life issues, such as the emotional exhaustion, cultural needs or resource shortage. Even when one is vexed or quits, there is something more of closeness and comprehension which resound in nearly all the replies. The above observations imply that any intervention- be it therapeutic, educational, or social- should be culturally alert, emotionally attentive and responsive to a shifting relational need of the modern couple that is likely to be confronted by both the traditional and modern demands.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed how communication dynamics influence marital satisfaction among working couples in Punjab, Pakistan, considering three key moderators: work-family conflict (WFC), cultural norms, and conflict management strategies. The findings indicate: (1) a strong positive relationship between communication and marital satisfaction, (2) a moderating effect of WFC that dampens this relationship, (3) a significant influence of cultural norms on marital outcomes, and (4) a substantive role of conflict management in enhancing marital satisfaction. These findings are discussed in relation to prior research and theoretical frameworks below.

The analysis showed that there exists a strong positive relationship between effective communication and marital satisfaction ($r = 0.682$; $p < 0.01$), which proves the key role of communication in marital well-being. Optimistic and open communication systems enable partners to express their needs, overcome conflicts, and deepen emotional attachment, which is in line with Gottman and Levenson (1992) and Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998). These findings also support the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) model that the adaptive communication cushions the effect of the stressors on marital quality (Karney and

Bradbury, 1995).

These findings are supported by previous research in a Pakistani and dual-earner setting. Rahman and Khan (2018) and Khalil et al. (2023) discovered that open-ended and frequent communication would improve the health of marriages especially in the face of contemporary professional demands. These relationships are further mediated and moderated by trust and resilience respectively, in accordance with Sadia et al. (2025), which emphasizes that effective communication is not always enough in the absence of supportive relational resources.

The results of the moderation analysis showed that an increased WFC undermines the positive relationship between communication and marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.022$, $p = 0.014$). This confirms earlier findings that work stress is transferred to the family, and emotional and time resources to spend together as a husband and wife are limited (Bagherzadeh et al., 2016; Khalil ur Rahman et al., 2021; Nadeem et al., 2023). The negative correlation ($r = -0.308$; Rahman and Khan, 2018) is observed as the one which is in line with the Spillover-Crossover Theory according to which the negative effect of work is transferred to the domestic sphere (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). The findings highlight that holistic interventions such as policies and stress management in the workplace should be implemented to maintain marital satisfaction in high WFC states.

Cultural norms were among the factors that had a significant moderating role in the communication-marital satisfaction relationship ($\beta = 0.023$, $p = 0.016$). Egalitarian and modern value orientations positively contributed to the advantages of the effective communication, and hierarchical and patriarchal norms limited the relational gains. This result is in line with that of Ali et al. (2022) and can be attributed to the fact that the VSA model holds that the environment interacts with adaptive behavior to produce marital outcomes. It was found that couples who act within the culture which supports them gained greater relational payoff as a result of similar communicative effort, referring to the significance of culturally aware interventions.

The most robust moderator became conflict management ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.002$), which indicates the critical importance of this intervention in improving the impact of communication on marital satisfaction. The positive effects of communication are enhanced through efficient strategies, which include negotiation and mutual respect, and problem-solving. These results corroborate the ideas by Gottman about the percentage of positive to negative interactions as the key factor in marital stability and the findings of Saba et al. (2023), who demonstrated that conflict resolution style can reduce the adverse impact of WFC on marital satisfaction.

The results are consistent with the Social Exchange Theory (SET) that views communication as a relationship reward. Proper role performance, behavior guided by culture and efficient conflict management can be considered an investment, which enhances relational returns and reduces the perceived cost of emotional labor (Lavelle et al., 2007; Stoll, 2017). The quality of communication produces marital satisfaction when relation rewards outnumber the cost of inter-role conflict, and WFC and restrictive cultural norms high costs and low benefits.

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses identified five preeminent themes, which were verbal involvement, giving time, empathy, silence, and relationship problems. Members highlighted open communicating, sharing feelings, and quality time and advocated the quantitative data on communication and satisfaction (Stafford, 2011; Laurenceau et al., 2005). Empathic listening came out as an important skill in avoiding misunderstanding and creating intimacy (Weger et al., 2014). Interestingly, silence or avoidance was also cited as a strategic mode of communication, which resonates with Caughlin and Scott (2010) when it comes to managing conflicts depending on the situation. The other qualitative results revealed the influence of in-law interference, WFC, and self-directed approaches like counseling and self-reflection, which supports the quantitative data and indicates the possible practical ways to improve marital communication and satisfaction (Markman and Rhoades, 2012).

Combined with previously mentioned studies, this paper validates that communication plays a key role in marital well-being, yet its efficacy is conditional on both contextual (WFC, cultural norms) and interpersonal (conflict management) elements. The occupational demands of working couples in Punjab can give them higher levels of marital satisfaction when they balance occupational demands by adopting open and egalitarian communication scripts and effective strategies to resolve conflict. By combining both quantitative and qualitative results, the Social Exchange Theory is expanded on the integration of communication, cultural context, and conflict management to create relational rewards and costs.

Recommendations

According to the results of this study a number of recommendations can be suggested to aid marital satisfaction and communication among working couples in Pakistan. The couples need to be advised to undergo emotion communication and empathy training, which involve emotion recognition, validation, and comprehensive emotional intelligence, to achieve intimacy and relational satisfaction (Fincham and Beach, 2010). Therapists and community organizations should also introduce culturally sensitive couple counseling and workshops on communication that focus on conflict management, active listening, and assertive communication as these interventions have been demonstrated to enhance dispute resolution and general satisfaction of relationships (Gottman and Levenson, 2019). Work-family balance can be ensured by employers enforcing family-friendly policies that include flexible work arrangements, paid parental leave, and psychological services, whereas couples should be trained in stress management and problem-solving solutions to improve the adjustment process in marriages (Odmann et al., 2017). Within the framework of joint-family system, couples need to build a respectful boundary that allows them to be culturally sensitive, but protect their autonomy, and these steps may be supported by family counseling and premarital education. It is also necessary to promote egalitarian values in marriage and allow both partners to exchange messages assertively, sharing the emotional contribution of each other, thus building equal partnership (Ali and Haider, 2021). At the community level, interventions are also significant; media, religious leaders, and

non-governmental organizations can cooperate to create awareness of empathy, mutual respect, and conflict management and destigmatize counseling and help seeking behavior. Last but not least, couples ought to invest in personal and relationship education with self-directed studies, Internet, and local studies in Urdu and regional languages, whereby they become more aware of themselves and are more attentive to their relationships. All these multi-level interventions, which focus on individual skills, social-cultural and work-related stressors, are intended to enhance communication, marital satisfaction and family well-being.

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