

Exploring the Mediating Role of Perceived Partner Responsiveness and the Moderation of Trust in the Relationship between Relationship Maintenance Behavior and Marital Quality

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Abstract

Present study intended to explore the role of relationship maintenance behavior on marital quality. Moreover, present study aimed to investigate the moderating role of trust and mediating role of perceived partner responsiveness on the study variables. Through purposive sampling, 592 married individuals both men and women participated in the study. The key instruments utilized in the study were relationship Maintenance Behavior Measure by Stafford and Canary (1991), Trust in Close Relationship Scale (Remple et al., 1985), Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS) developed by Reis et al. (2011), Norton's Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983). Correlation analysis was carried out to measure the relationship among studied variable. Moderation was used to examine the moderating role of trust on the studied variables as well as mediation analysis was performed to examine whether perceived partner responsiveness mediates the relationship of studied variables. Study findings revealed a significant positive correlation between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital quality which suggests that higher levels of relationship maintenance behavior are associated with higher marital quality. Moderation analysis revealed that trust did not moderate the relationship between relationship maintenance behavior and marital quality. Mediation analysis showed indirect effect of relationship maintenance behavior on marital quality through perceived partner responsiveness. Present study highlighted the role of perceived partner responsiveness in dyadic relationships and makes key recommendations for family counselors working with clients in troubled marriages for improving clients' marital quality.

I. Introduction

Religious and cultural obligations include marriage. Marriage is one attempt to bring people together in a way that creates a family, which helps build society. Marriage is a specific sort of personal partnership. Close partners will inevitably disagree with one another and need to make accommodations, harm one another and need to make

amends, be distressed and need one another's support, and be furious with one another and need to make accommodations. It takes a range of relationship maintenance practices to keep a close connection satisfying.

The phrase "relationship maintenance" refers to a wide array of actions and efforts undertaken by individuals to ensure the strength and desired condition of their relationships (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2023). In a dialectical approach, relationship maintenance is described as the process employed to preserve the quality of the union, particularly the degree of partner satisfaction (Ogolsky & Monk, 2020). This idea essentially relates to how happy both spouses are in their relationship. RMB is divided into two classes (Pasaribu & Arjadi, 2023). Usual maintenance behaviors consist of ordinary encounters that fulfill the implicit purpose of maintenance and typically happen without the intention of keeping up a connection. But relationship maintenance is the explicit goal of strategic maintenance practices.

Five maintenance techniques that are crucial to relationship functioning were identified by Canary and Stafford (2013). Adopting prosaically behaviors that convey warmth, kindness, and politeness was a requirement for positivity. Openness was defined as direct, honest communication behaviors, such as problem-solving, conflict resolution, and self-disclosure. A partner's wish to stay in the relationship was expressed through encouraging and consoling remarks that were included in assurances. Utilizing social media meant including loved ones in romantic activities. Last but not least, task sharing involved carrying out one's obligations by finishing recurring duties and household chores that were relevant to the relationship.

Relationship maintenance behaviors, such as those in the aforementioned categories, improve people's evaluations of the commitment, contentment, and likeability of their relationships (Orehek, Forest, & Barbaro, 2018). These behaviors directly influence the quality, contentment, and dedication within a marriage. Marital quality is the level of contentment, trust, shared respect, and shared interests shared between the two spouses in a wedding (Delatorre, Wagner, 2020). According to earlier research, marital quality is based on evaluating the marriage across various dimensions, encompassing attitudes, accounts of behaviors and interactions, as well as both the relationship's positive and negative elements (Slatcher, 2017). According to Robles et al. (2013), excellent marital quality is characterized by elevated levels of personal perception and reported contentment within the relationship, primarily positive attitudes towards one's partner, coupled with minimal instances of hostile or negative behaviors. On the other hand, low marital quality is marked by diminished reported and self-perceived relationship contentment, a predominantly negative outlook toward one's spouse, and an elevated presence of hostile or adverse actions (Robles et al., 2013).

According to how it was initially defined, marital quality includes marital stability, adaptability, contentment, and happiness. The success and functionality of the spouses in the marriage are considered as part of marital adjustment, which also includes concepts of marital happiness and satisfaction (Ünal & Akgün, 2022). According to Pourmeidani et al., (2014), one of the indications of a good marriage is marital satisfaction, which shows how interested and sympathetic spouses are with one another as well as how happy they are to be married. Marital happiness is an evaluation of one's overall level of happiness with their marriage's numerous aspects. In relation to other measures of wedded quality like wedded interaction, wedded conflict, wedded

confrontations, and the likelihood of annulment, marital happiness serves as a powerful gauge of the overall worth of a marriage (Merlos, 2019).

Canary & Dainton (2006) and Stafford (2011) found a significant correlation between couples' utilization of connection maintenance actions and the worth of the wedding. In their 2021 study on relationship maintenance actions and the quality of the marriage, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch. Found that the effectiveness of a pair's marriage is affected by each partner's usage of preservation practices. Additionally, wives' overall maintenance behavior usage was more closely related to marital quality than husbands' maintenance behavior use.

Another research on the long-term connection between maintenance practices and wedded contentment was done by Weigel and Ballard-Reisch in 2021. Analysis showed that views of wedded contentment were linked to the usage of maintenance actions. An investigation was conducted to examine how factors such as relational equity, perceived and expressed gratitude, perceived and expressed openness, task-sharing, and positivity influence marital satisfaction. Results showed that the mediator functions of relational equality and recognition were responsible for the indirect correlations between self-reported usage of preservation behaviors and wedded contentment. According to study findings on the sacredness of matrimony, the efforts put into maintaining the relationship, and the overall worth of marriage among married couples, relationship maintenance behavior and marital quality are positively correlated (Stafford, 2016). Therefore, previous research strongly suggests that engaging in maintenance behaviors promotes a higher sense of marriage quality in close, personal partnerships. In addition to this, there are numerous more elements that can be taken into consideration while determining the ideal personal connection. Trust is one such factor that affects marital quality, and it is used as a moderator in the present study.

According to Weiss et al. (2021), trust is the degree to which a person is prepared to take a chance on developing a close relationship with a partner. They contend that trust is an essential element of happy partnerships and stands for one's comfort level while taking a chance to develop an intimate relationship. According to Givertz et al. (2013), trust involves a crucial place in shaping the worth of associations. Since it is a psychological internal state characterized by an anticipation of receiving benefits from a connection and confidence in a partner's responsiveness.

According to Leck and Orser (2013) trust is a key component of interpersonal relationships. Lower levels of marital satisfaction in couples are associated with differences in reported levels of trust (Atta, Adil, Shujja & Shakir, 2013). According to Makhdoom and Malik (2019) a relationship becomes satisfying for both partners with more autonomy and independence when a person trusts his or her spouse. According to a study by Makhdoom and Malik from 2019, when levels of trust were low, there was a moderating effect on the relationship between Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction. There was a noticeable decline in the strength of the correlation between Machiavellianism and marital contentment. Thus, it can be said that while marital quality is strongly predicted by trust, trust is not the only factor. There may be additional contributing factors to marital quality than trust, such as perceived partner responsiveness, which is used as a mediator in the current study.

It describes the extent to which a person believes that his spouse notices and positively reacts to his basic features (Reis et al., 2011). Perceived partner responsiveness

is the concept that a person's interaction partner comprehends and affirms their identity while being open to fulfilling their requirements. PPR rests on three main characteristics: a feeling of being confirmed, understood, and attended by the relationship. Feeling understood more particularly relates to the conviction that partners are aware of self-related traits. Experiencing validation pertains to the belief that one's partners hold individual preferences and goals in high regard. The idea that partners assist in satiating psychological and personal needs is symbolized by feeling cared for (Reis, 2011).

A couple's marital quality can be improved by their perception of their partner's reactivity (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2020). People will feel heard, cared for, and valued when they believe their partner is actively considering their interests, desires, hobbies (Merwin & Rosen, 2020), which is helpful for improving marital quality (Reuma et al., 2016). According to numerous researches, perceived partner responsiveness is crucial for the initiation, upkeep, and growth of intimate relationships (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021). In the current study, the mediator in this context is the partner's perceived responsiveness. In 2022, Yuan, Fan, and Leng conducted a study to investigate how perceived partner responsiveness mediates the relationship between emotional reactivity and marital quality in Chinese couples. Results showed that the effect of marital qualities of both men and wives on emotional reactivity was mediated by couples' perceptions of their partners'. Another study looked at how newlywed couples' perceptions of their partners' responsiveness (PPR) influence the relationship between sexual and marital pleasure. Analysis showed that PPR was a partial mediator of the relationship between sexual and wedded contentment (Gadassi et al., 2016).

Although there has been a lot of study on relational maintenance and marital quality, it is still unclear whether trust and perceived partner reactivity act as mediators in the association between these two factors. To close this gap, it was necessary to conduct a current analysis to determine whether trust moderates this association as well as the mediating effects of perceived partner responsiveness on both variables. In Pakistani married persons, there is also a major paucity of empirical evidence on these issues. The purpose of the present research is to fill in gaps in the body of knowledge and provide the targeted group with reliable results.

The three main goals of the present research are to first establish whether association alimentation behaviors are associated with marital quality, second determine whether trust moderates this association, and third determine whether perceived partner responsiveness mediated this association.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a positive link between maintenance behavior and marital quality.

H2: Perceived partner reactivity and wedded quality are positively correlated.

H3: The link between relationship maintenance behavior and marriage quality is mediated by perceived partner responsiveness.

H4: Trust moderates the relationship between relationship maintenance behavior and marital quality.

II. Methodology

Research Design

Current study was correlational study based on cross sectional research design.

Participants and Procedure

Married people who were research participants were included. The sample was chosen from a variety of ethnic origins and lengths of relationships in order to provide a varied representation of participants. Adults who were willing to actively participate in the study were the participants. 592 married people made up the sample, including men and women. The hiring process was carried out using a variety of techniques, including an online survey and community engagement. Participants were given a confidentiality assurance regarding the information they provided and were asked for their informed consent before using it for research purposes. The respondents were informed that there were no correct or incorrect responses for the items and that there was no deadline for finishing the questionnaire. Every time they received a request, they were asked to select just one from each statement's available options. All surveys were examined for missing information after data collection was complete, and participants were sincerely thanked.

Operational Definitions

Relationship Maintenance Behavior

Relationship maintenance refers to the actions, efforts, strategies, and activities owned by people to keep their relationship healthy and in the inclination condition (Canary et al., 2006).

Trust

According to Rempel et al. (1985) it is the belief a person has in their partner's readiness to respond to their demands, despite the fact that doing so may go against their own preferences.

Perceived Partner Responsiveness

It describes the degree to which a person believes that his spouse notices and positively reacts to his basic features (Reis et al., 2011).

Marital Quality

Marital quality is personal assessment of quality of relationship between couples. It is determined by intimacy, marital attitudes and behavior, relationship quality and communication in the relationship (Norton, 1983).

Research Instruments

Relationship Maintenance Behavior Measure

The present study made use of the relationship maintenance behavior measure created by Stafford and Canary (1991). It is consisted of comprises of 29 items which measure five sub-scales indicating diverse maintenance techniques of positivity, openness, reassurance, reliance upon social networks, and sharing tasks. It is a 7-point Likert scale with 1 denoting very strong disagreement, 2 denoting strong disagreement, 3 denoting disagreement, 4 denoting neither disagreement nor agreement, 5 denoting agreement, 6 denoting strong agreement, and 7 denoting very strong agreement. High scores indicate maintained relationship of respondent while lower scores indicate neglected relationship of respondent. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for scale was of the sub scales are as follows: positivity, $\alpha=0.89$, openness, $\alpha=0.86$, assurance, $\alpha=0.79$, network, $\alpha=0.85$ and task, $\alpha=0$.

Trust in Close Relationship Scale

Remple et al. developed the scale in 1985. The 17-item scale is broken down into three subscales: dependability, faith, and predictability. Scores are calculated using a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 7 denoting "strongly agree." Three subscales can be used individually or in combination to calculate the overall score for trust in intimate relationships. High score indicates high level of trust in close relationships.

Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS)

Reis et al. (2011) designed this scale, which has 12 components. It is a Likert scale with a range of 0 to 7, with 7 being the most like me. The 12 items' average scores are computed. The more responses a person perceives from their spouse, the better the score. Internal consistency reliability for the information provided by men and spouses in this study was 0.97 and 0.98, respectively.

Norton's Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983)

The study made use of the Quality of Marriage Index formed by Norton in 1983. Responses to the first five questions are based on a 6-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting very strong disagreement, 2 strong disagreement, 3 disagreement, 4 agreement, 5 agreement, and 6 very strong agreement, without a neutral midpoint. The sixth item is measured using the 10-point scale ranging from "10 = completely happy 9 = pretty happy 8 = happy 7 = slightly happy 6 = moderately happy 5 = not too unhappy 4 = slightly unhappy 3 = unhappy 2 = pretty unhappy 1 completely unhappy. Each point 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 indicates the happiness level of respondent in his/her marital relationship, 1 is the lowest level while 10 is the highest. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of scale was $\alpha = 0.97$.

I. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix is presented in table 1. According to the mean and standard deviation of the indices representing each variable, marital quality obtained a lower average ($M = 33.21$, $SD = 6.23$) compared to relationship maintenance behavior, perceived partner responsiveness and trust. Cronbach's alpha illustrates the good reliability values which indicate that all scales are internally consistent.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	K	A	M	SD	Range	
					Actual	Potential
RMB	29	.93	149.68	23.62	34-198	29-203
PPR	12	.72	45.96	10.94	12-84	0-84
Trust	17	.75	65.57	12.04	17-119	17-119
MQ	6	.88	33.21	6.23	13-42	6-36

Based on the theoretical grounding it was posited in hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 that relationship maintenance behavior and perceived partner relationship would share a positive association with marital quality. Table 2 presents the findings pertaining to

hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2. As observed in Table 2, RMB has a strong positive correlation with Marital Quality ($r = 0.609^{**}$) which suggests that higher levels of relationship maintenance behavior are associated with higher marital quality. RMB has a moderate positive correlation with Perceived Partner Responsiveness ($r = 0.172^{**}$). Which indicates that people who engage in more relationship maintenance behavior tends to perceive their partners as more responsive? PPR has a strong positive correlation with Trust ($r = 0.351^{**}$). This means that individuals who perceive their partners as more responsive are more likely to trust their partner. It has a moderate positive correlation with MQ ($r = 0.242^{**}$). This suggests that perceiving a partner as responsive is related to higher levels of marital quality. Trust has a significant positive correlation with MQ ($r = 0.202^{**}$). This indicates that higher levels of trust are associated with perceiving higher levels of MQ (table 2).

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Relationship Maintenance Behavior	-	.172**	-.176**	.609**
2. Perceived Partner Responsiveness		-	.351**	.242**
3. Trust			-	.202**
4. Marital Quality				-

Mediation analysis was performed to assess the benefaction of perceived partner responsiveness on the relationship between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital worth. Results showed that there's an indirect effect of RMB on MQ through a mediator. The estimated effect is 0.0054, indicating that changes in PPR contribute to changes in MQ (Table 3)

Table 3: Mediation analysis

Effect (Path)	Effect	LL	95% of CI UL
RMB PPRMQ	.005	.007	.011
RMB MQ	.152	.143	.169

Note. PMB = Relationship Maintenance Behavior, MQ = Marital quality

The predictors explain about 2.96% of the variation in "Perceived Partner Responsiveness. The model is significant, suggesting that at least one predictor affects "PPR." The variable "RMB" has a significant impact on "PPR." The predictors explain around 39.37% of the variation in "Marital quality. The model is highly significant, indicating that RMB and PPR have significant effects on MQ. Trust doesn't seem to have a strong impact on MQ. The interaction between RMB and Trust doesn't show a significant effect.

RMB has a considerable impact on MQ, as evidenced by its coefficient of 0.168 and p-value of 0.000. PPR's coefficient of 0.0680 and p-value of 0.0007 indicate that it has a considerable impact on MQ. Although "Trust" has a coefficient of 0.0670 and a p-value of 0.3296, it does not seem to have any statistical significance. RMB and Trust interaction term has a coefficient of -0.0003 and a p-value of 0.5712. According to the R-squared (R-sq) value of 0.3937, the predictors in the model account for around 39.37% of the variability in the outcome variable ("MQ"). The model appears to be statistically significant, indicating that at least one predictor has a substantial effect, according to the F-test (F-statistic) of 95.2758 with a p-value of 0.0000.

I. Discussion

The present research aimed to investigate the association between marital quality and relationship maintenance behaviors among married adults as well as the moderating effect of trust between the variables under investigation. The study also aimed to explore if the relationship between the two variables was mediated by perceptions of the responsiveness of the partner.

Regarding theory 1, it was presumed that behavior aimed at maintaining relationships predicts marriage quality favorably. The results of the study supported the idea that behavior toward maintaining relationships positively predicts marriage quality. According to study results that are also consistent with other research, self-reported relationship maintenance behavior and marital adjustment have a favorable relationship (Kayabol, 2020). In a study on the impact of commuting marriage couples, Pasaribu et al. (2023) examined. The impact of strategies such as positivity, empathy, self-disclosure, relationship dialogue, reassurance, task-sharing, and social connections as they pertain to maintaining a relationship and their influence on marital satisfaction. Findings show that marriage satisfaction in commuter marriages is significantly predicted by each the usage of association maintenance behavior and perception of spouse behavior.

The current study also made the assumption that marriage quality and relationship maintenance behavior have a favorable link. The theory, which is also backed by earlier research, was supported by study results. In a study on couples managing Parkinson's illness, responsiveness and relationship satisfaction were examined. The outcomes of the research showed that spouses reported greater relationship contentment when they thought their care partner was more attentive (Champagne & Muise, 2022). In keeping with the present findings, Candel and Turliuc (2021) found a substantial positive interaction between the couple's relationship happiness and perceived responsiveness from their spouse.

According to hypothesis 3 of the current study, the connection between relationship maintenance behavior and marital quality is mediated by perceptions of partner responsiveness. The study's findings, which are consistent with other research, showed that perceived partner responsiveness serves as mediator in the interaction between relationship maintenance behavior and marital quality. These findings are in line with results of Adair et al. (2018), who identified perceived partner responsiveness as a key mediating factor in the link between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness. A strong correlation between relationship mindfulness and changes in relationship quality via perceived partner responsiveness was discovered in a different study on mindfulness, perceived partner responsiveness, and relationship quality (Stanton et al., 2021).

Interesting study results reveal that trust has no moderating effect in the interplay between relationship maintenance behavior and marital quality (contrary to H4). The current study's findings are inconsistent with earlier research, as Gondal, Makhdoom, and Malik (2020) found that trust acted as a moderator for the relationship between Machiavellianism and Marital Satisfaction. Perhaps due to the phenomenon of social desirability, participants did not express their true responses, as marital relationship is very sensitive topic in social scenario.

Implications

Based on the study's findings, married people might be encouraged to strategically alter how they use maintenance behavior in order to improve the quality of their own marriages. These modifications may also alter how their partners feel about the marriages and how they use maintenance behavior going forward. According to the study, the quality of a couple's relationship can be improved if the partners trust one another and give in to each other's needs and desires.

Our findings have important practical ramifications as well. In an effort to help couples improve the quality of their marriage, researchers advise mental health professionals (psychologists, marriage counselors, and other involved professions) to include relational maintenance behavior, particularly positivity and shared task strategies. Our findings may therefore be useful for marriage and relationship education programs that aim to assist people in reducing relational distress and maintaining healthy relationships.

Our results also suggested that perceptions of partner responsiveness play a critical role in marital partnerships. To better express and understand their own and their partners' responsiveness, therapists and relationship practitioners should include tactics that develop their own communication and interaction abilities.

The study makes key recommendations for family counselors working with clients in troubled marriages in that they can improve their clients' marital quality and, ultimately, solve relationship issues, if they concentrate on raising levels of partner responsiveness and trust.

Limitations and Suggestions

It is important to interpret our results in the context of these constraints. First and foremost, study chose a cross-sectional research design; yet, marriage quality is a subjective feeling and dynamic process. Additionally, a person's development, attitudes toward marriage, and changes in the couple's relationship can all affect trust and perceived responsiveness. As a result, tracking can be used to further study the relationship between the three in future investigations.

Second, because just a questionnaire survey was used for this study, recollection bias or social desirability could have an impact on the results, making it impossible to determine how a marriage actually functions. Future research can take experimental, interview, and other research methodologies into consideration.

Additionally, the sample for the current study was made up of married individuals from a small number of regions, which raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of Pakistan. Recruitment of a more diversified sample, including partners in objectively conflicting relationships, will be advantageous for future research in this area.

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