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## Exploring the Mediating Role of Fear of Intimacy in the Interplay of Partner Rejection and Marital Satisfaction among Married Women



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**Abstract:** *The study investigated the association between intimate partner rejection and marital satisfaction in a sample of 250 married women ( $M = 32.38$ ,  $SD = 3.73$ ; age range: 25-45). This research made use of the Intimate Adult Relationship Questionnaire (IARQ), the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI), and the Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS). A correlation between couple rejection, fear of intimacy, and marital satisfaction was hypothesized. Findings suggested a significant positive association between partner rejection and fear of intimacy and a significant negative correlation between partner rejection and marital satisfaction. The mediating effect of fear in intimate relationships, or the correlation between partner rejection and marital pleasure, has been shown via structural equation modelling (SEM). Findings emphasized the link between marital satisfaction, intimacy, and the partner's rejection. The research points to the need for counsellors to address intimacy fears and strengthen relationships via the use of individualized strategies and focused communication treatments.*

**Key Words:** Intimate Partner's Acceptance-rejection, Fear of Intimacy, Marital Satisfaction

### Introduction

The family is one of the most important social structures and a crucial influence in determining mental health. The family, which serves as the cornerstone for human emotional development, caters for the emotional, material, and spiritual necessities of couples. Families are environments for closeness and interpersonal interactions (K. Adamczyk, 2019). Families that are attractive and strong maintain social harmony. Thus, the only way we can have a healthy society is if we take excellent care of our families. Marrying may assist both partners achieve inner peace, which can have

a favourable influence and result in the happy marriage that all couples desire (Y. Levin, X. Zhou, G. Zerach, Z. Solomon, R. Bachem, 2018). Satisfaction in marriage, according to Bachm et al. (2018), is the total of a couple's sentiments regarding their partner and marriage. Marital happiness acts as a critical and trustworthy measure of a family's capacity to adapt and survive. Marital contentment is the condition of enjoyment and satisfaction that both genders report experiencing with their marriages

Better mental health, longer marriages, deeper bonds with children, and more favourable family

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dynamics are all fostered by satisfied marriages. Specifically, happiness in marriage may have an influence on the success of a marriage (Randles and Avishai, 2018). Research indicates that the degree of intimacy, interpersonal interaction, as well as dedication between couples, affects how long their relationship will last. According to research, the two best indicators of marital pleasure are intimacy and commitment yet, consistent religious attendance can strengthen happy relationships. Marital happiness will increase overall if you and your spouse partake in these activities (Fraser et al., 2021). Studies reveal that opinions on how happy a marriage is differ depending on a person's gender (Jackson et al., 2014). It is stated that women are less content with their marriages than men are because they are more perceptive and more prone to notice marital issues (Mitchell, 2010).

Intimacy is said to be an essential part of couples & studies reveal its impacts on relationship quality, happiness, and relationship satisfaction (Decutner & Thelen, 1991). The majority of folks exclusively consider sexual closeness or intimacy when considering marriage, while physical closeness is only one aspect of the marriage or couple relationship. Spouses have differing perspectives on the emotional, social, physical, mental, recreational, and spiritual aspects of marital intimacy. Further research is necessary to examine the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction, as the majority of studies have concentrated on marital happiness. The potential of marriage is to allow for honest communication, mutual trust, and emotional connection between two individuals (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2016; Timmerman, 1991). Physical closeness: Hugging, holding hands, and other nonsexual actions between couples are examples of physical closeness; nonetheless, the desire for sexual pleasure is a component of sexual intimacy as well (Bagarozzi, 2001). Expressing your delight and grief to your spouse is an indication of emotional connection (Bagarozzi, 2001).

Five separate phobias of intimacy are described by Feldman's theory of marital intimacy, each of which has an underlying reason. The first, which is observed in persons with limited self-awareness, is the dread of fusion, or the anxiety of losing identity in a dyadic relationship. The second is exposure anxiety,

which is more prominent in individuals who lack acceptance and self-worth. The third sort of dread is the fear of aggression, which occurs when fears from early in life are related to an individual's interpersonal interactions. According to Courkoutas and Erkman, persons who have endured traumatic separation and unwittingly build relationships around intimacy and loss tend to hold a fear of abandonment, which is the fourth dread.

According to Sobral et al. (2015), one of the main obstacles to forming romantic connections is a complicated phenomenon known as fear of intimacy. This fear significantly affects the quality of intimate relationships. One who experiences "a fear of intimacy" is one who is "reserved in their ability to exchange personally significant thoughts and feelings with another highly valued person.". The impact of attachment bonding in childhood on the ability to form meaningful intimate relations as an adult has been the subject of much prior thought and study (Firestone and Firestone, 2004; Phillips et al., 2013). Patterns of insecure attachment in early infancy may lead to a variety of intimate disorders. Those who suffer from an extreme aversion to proximity are more likely to repress their desires for intimacy or try to force themselves to be near when they aren't ready, claims Bartholomew (1990).

Since marriage and marital happiness are so important, we must examine the factors that contribute to these outcomes; love is a key component in both the pursuit and maintenance of marital happiness. When it comes to marriage, love is key (R.C. Bean, T. Ledermann, B.J. Higginbotham, & R.V. Galliher, 2020). Satisfying marriages promote better mental health, longer marriages, stronger bonds with children, and more positive dynamics within families. More explicitly, satisfaction in marriage may influence the success of marriage (Randles and Avishai, 2018). Aman et al., explored that long marital partnerships are usually the product of assurances, good communication and the level of intimacy couples have. In contrast, though, Fraser et al. (2021) found that married individuals who are more often involved in religious practices with each other may have a more enjoyable and joyful marriage overall. According to Rohner et al. (2019), who studied multicultural groups for their relationships with interpersonal anxiety,

intimacy-related dread may be a result of interpersonal anxiety.

## **Literature Review**

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In the past few decades, researchers have focused on what makes a marriage endure and what makes it whole. It is important to study and assess the many factors that lead to fulfilling marriages and relationships in light of the increasing divorce rate. Couples that report high levels of marital satisfaction also tend to be quite stable (Mitchell, 2010). According to research, marital satisfaction tends to decline within the first decade of marriage (Margelisch et al., 2017) and fifty per cent of marriages end in divorce or separation. (Hook et al., 2017, 2011). Research has shown that couples who are able to communicate effectively report greater contentment levels in a marriage (Epstein et al., 2016). A number of additional characteristics impact marriage success, including intimacy, gender inequality, religious views, and marital strife (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Boerner et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021; Langeslag & Surti, 2022; Sarac & Sonber G, 2021).

Research on marriage is grounded on three theoretical frameworks: social learning, family systems, and cognitive behaviour. Because they provide useful frameworks for dealing with issues that affect people, families, and couples, these theories are relevant to research on marital satisfaction. People might pick up new habits just by watching others. According to Randles and Avishai (2018), younger generations may not understand the need for good interpersonal behaviours for a happy marriage only by seeing bad examples. When working with couples who are experiencing marital problems, counsellors utilize different therapeutic interventions, including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), marriage education (CRE), emotionally focused couples therapy (EFCT), and couples cognitive behavioural therapy (CBCT). Cognitive behavioural theory, family systems theory, and social learning theory provide the theoretical and scientific foundations for these treatments.

Marital happiness, or the satisfaction one feels from being married, is an essential quality for a healthy marriage (Kayabol & Sumer, 2020; Randles & Avishai, 2018). The difficulties of maintaining a happy marriage have, unsurprisingly, been the subject of much

contemporary study. There has been a dramatic change in American marriage patterns in the last few decades, with people waiting longer to tie the knot (Ruggles, 2015). The median duration in the first marriages increased by two years for both genders in 2021, according to a press release from the United States Census Bureau.

Margelisch et al. (2017) established that early in a marriage, spousal contentment often falls. According to Masoumi et al. (2017), infertility and sexual dysfunction may sometimes be healed with nothing more than a loving connection and an increase in a feeling of "connectedness" that binds the self and the other. This is because marital happiness is so powerful. (Prause et al., 2021). How emotionally and mentally healthy a pair is depends on how lonely each spouse feels (Zhang & Li, 2021). The following concepts were examined in a quantitative study including 129 participants: closeness, dedication, affection, faith, and relationship satisfaction (Cassepp-Borges, 2021). Findings indicate that complementarity in romantic and theological aspects is favourably associated with fruitful partnerships (Cassepp-Borges, 2021). In addition, research shows that people are happier, more dedicated, and more intimate in relationships that continue longer (Cassepp-Borges, 2021).

There are a lot of things that affect marital intimacy, and some of them have very personal roots. Palancas et al. (2021) studied the impact of several mediation models on various emotional components, attachment security, and diagnostic alexithymia (fear of intimacy). Generally, unhappy marriages are associated with a dread of intimacy, according to research (Lyvers et al., 2021). Although one partner's deep-seated phobia of intimacy may play a factor, it may nonetheless hurt the relationship for everyone involved (Lyvers et al., 2021). The authors of the research (Lyvers et al., 2021) talk about how cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) helps people who have alexithymia. Ramezani et al. (2022) conducted a similar research that looked at 342 women's marital conflict and alexithymia. The study's findings show that alexithymia is harmful to marriages because of the high correlation between the disorder and marital strife (Ramezani et al., 2022).

Couples counselling is a common professional solution for many couples dealing

with marital and intimate issues. Several studies have shown that cognitive behavioural therapy, the PREPARE/ENRICH programme, and Gottman couples therapy are effective treatment strategies (Davoodvandi et al., 2018; Javadivala et al., 2019; Lyvers et al., 2021). For couples who have lost some of their desire for physical intimacy. According to Javadivala et al. (2019), 32 married Marital intimacy significantly improved for couples who took part in the relationship enhancement education and counselling (REEC) component of the PREPARE/ENRICH program. The Personal Assessment of Relationship Intimacy (PAIR) was used to assess couple relationships before and after the intervention in the research (Javadivala et al., 2019). Statistically substantial increases in physical closeness were among the many ways in which REEC increased men's and women's levels of intimacy, according to research by Javadivala et al. (2019).

Marriage counselling, the most common method for improving relationships, is one of many alternatives to talking strategies that may bring partners closer together. This study set out to answer the question, "Do close relationships promote good health?" (Prowse et al., 2021). The research brings into being a positive association between intimate partner contact and marital intimacy measures including kissing and embracing (Prause et al., 2021). Psychotherapy remains the gold standard for relationship improvement, but other methods, including physical contact, meditation, and sexual stimulation, have also shown promise (Prause et al., 2021). Previous research failed to discover evidence that different kinds of intimacy interact to predict marital pleasure (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1983), thus future studies should focus on this relationship. According to Goddard et al. (2012), marriage counsellors should prioritise assisting clients in developing empathy as a means to enhance their relationships. Key components of marital kindness, according to a study by Dillon et al., include treating your spouse respectfully and minimising your expectations during disagreements. 2015 was the year.

Some of the many factors that directly affect marriage satisfaction include adultery, misunderstandings, gender differences, and marital strife. According to Abreu-Afonso et al. (2021), the most important elements that might improve marital satisfaction are effective

communication, intrinsic motivation, professionalism, and academic accomplishment. Research has shown that couples who are able to communicate effectively report higher levels of marital satisfaction (Epstein et al., 2016). (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Boerner et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021; Langeslag & Surti, 2022; Salak & San Burke, 2021). The success of a marriage is influenced by gender disparities, patterns of communication between spouses, and the ability to resolve conflicts.

A successful relationship requires both partners to have a good work-life balance. With 633 married individuals, Worley and Shelton studied the impact of work-family conflict (WFC) on marital happiness in 2020. A spouse's job interfering with family time was shown to have a negative link with marital quality. Worley and Shelton argue that spouses whose work commitments prevent them from spending quality time with their family are less likely to have a happy marriage (2020). That is, studies like these (Minnotte et al., 2013; Yoo et al., 2014) try to deduce how gender ideology affects things like marital happiness and work-family conflicts. Husbands' work-family conflict is associated with reduced marital satisfaction, according to Worley and Shelton's (2020) research. According to Yoo et al., (2014), there is a weak but discernible effect of gender role ideology on the correlation between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction.

In their 2021 study, Boiman-Meshita and Littman-Ovadia looked at the effects of an intervention on marital satisfaction for 134 couples. According to the study's findings, a simple intervention called the "Three Good Things" may help couples feel less tired, increase intimacy with few adjustments, and spend more time focusing on the good things in their relationship. Participants who were completely cooperative and committed to the intervention suggested that the supportive environment may have contributed to increased marital closeness (Boiman-Meshita and Littman-Ovadia, 2021).

Demerdjian (2018) looked at how physical closeness relates to marital pleasure. She claims that misconceptions about men's responsibilities and expectations of masculinity (Ferreira et al., 2012), as well as sexual dysfunction and infidelity (Nik et al., 2021), may be devastating to relationships. The correlation between marital

happiness and general physical closeness has not been shown. According to Demerdjian (2018), more research is needed to establish a connection between this personal area and marital contentment as a whole.

Also, the effects of marital decision-making on families and marital happiness are mostly unknown. Li Zhongwu (2022) conducted new research to examine the relationship between women's marital satisfaction and their power to make decisions inside the family. When spouses "transcend traditional norms and become family decision-makers," marital satisfaction drops significantly, as shown by a negative association between the two (Li, 2022). Without considering men's perspectives, the research focused only on women's marital happiness.

### **The Theory of Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection**

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Newer versions of this theory, such as PAR Theory or Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection/Control Theory (IPAR Theory), provide a framework for studying closeness in relation to different personal, relational, and environmental factors. It has proven to be an accurate measure of marital adjustment. Examining and predicting the main elements that lead to acceptance-rejection and control in intimate relationships across cultural boundaries is the purpose of IPAR theory, an evidence-based theory of socialisation and development across the lifespan. That was Rona (2016). Conversely, when an intimate partner shows acceptance, it's because they care about you and want you to feel the same way. This might be via words, actions, or culturally constructed symbols of support and approval. When a close friend or family member fails to meet expectations in terms of warmth, compassion, care, support, or love, it may lead to feelings of rejection (Rohner, 2016). No matter one's culture, gender, age, race, or ethnicity, the theory's progenitor, Rohner (2016), said that all humans have an innate and substantial desire for parental and other attachment figure approval. When this desire isn't met to one's satisfaction, the individual exhibits violent behaviour, poor self-esteem and inadequacy, emotional instability, a negative attitude, and maybe protective or independent self-confidence. When used together, these measures may significantly impact mental illness. Equally important are the

kind, frequency, intensity, and duration of the perceived rejection in determining the degree of variation. Despite the underexplored function of control in intimate relationships, the acceptance-rejection and control components of IPAR theory are relevant to specific implications for the psychological adjustment of children and teens. Theoretically, as a result of its potential association with experienced rejection, perceived behavioural control by an intimate partner may be associated with poor relationship functioning and psychological adjustment.

### **Rationale**

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As the most basic kind of human connection, marriage sets the ground rules for how families interact and how children are raised. It gives them a sense of purpose and who they are. Societal expectations for couples have changed over time and now include things like sexual fulfilment, building a family, being committed to each other, and achieving professional and economic success (Garcia & Tassara, 2003; Perlin & Diniz, 2005; Villa & Del 2013).

Our research focuses on how the dread of intimacy influences partner acceptance/rejection and marital happiness. Personal, family, and societal factors are all profoundly affected by how successfully a couple adjusts to life together as a married couple. An understudied component in marital disputes and satisfaction is the fear of intimacy, since most research focuses on partner acceptance-rejection in relation to parental dynamics and very rarely examines marital contentment. We shifted our attention to the possible effects of intimate partner fear of intimacy in order to fill in gaps in the research. Problems in relationships might arise from a lack of emotional connection and the sharing of personal experiences caused by a fear of intimacy. If a couple wants to understand each other, they need to communicate well. Additionally, marital pleasure is affected by a fear of intimacy, which in turn is influenced by spousal approval or rejection (Garcia & Tassara, 2003; Perlin & Diniz, 2005; Villa & Del 2013).

### **Objectives of the Study**

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1. To investigate potential connections between married women's fear of intimacy,



acceptance rejection, and marital satisfaction.

2. Examining the relationship between partner acceptance or rejection and marital satisfaction as mediated by married women's fear of intimacy.

## Hypotheses

1. There might be a connection between marital satisfaction and a married woman's partner's fear of allowing or refusing intimacy.
2. Fear of intimacy may have an impact on married women's satisfaction with their marriages and their ability to accept and reject their partners.

## Method

### Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research approach. This research set out to answer the question, "How does a married woman's fear of intimacy mediate the relationship between her intimate partner's rejection and marital satisfaction?" by looking at some empirical evidence.

### Sample and Sampling Technique

A group of 250 married women (125 employed and 125 unemployed) were chosen using a non-probability purposive selection approach. Participants were only included if they had been married for at least three years and had at least one kid less than nineteen years old, according to precise inclusion criteria. The participants varied in age from 25 to 45 and had a bachelor's degree or higher (equal to 16 years of schooling) or higher.

## Assessment Measures

### Demographic Information Sheet

A self-developed questionnaire, entitled the Demographic Information Sheet, was applied to examine several demographic features of the participants. These comprised age, gender, marital status, kind of marriage, family system, education, working status, length of marriage, number of children, spouse age, spouse qualification, and spouse working status.

### Intimate Adult Relationship Questionnaire (IARQ)

In 2004, Rohner created the Intimate Adult Relationships Questionnaire (IARQ), a tool that measures 39 questions on a 4-point Likert scale, including "It doesn't always work for me" (1) to "It always works for me" (4). Both partners evaluate each other based on their acceptance or rejection behaviours. By averaging the answers, we were able to get a total score; higher scores indicate a stronger rejection. The survey is comprised of four parts: indiscriminate rejection, indifference/neglect, aggression/hostility, and warmth/liking. Things like "My husband/wife says nice things about me" (warmth/affection) and "He yells at me when he is angry" (hostility/aggression) are examples of sample items. Rohner (2004) and Rohner and Meléndez (2008) found that the IARQ was valid and trustworthy in both national and international research settings. Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.73 to 0.97 ( $M = 0.82$ ) among the eleven investigations. Using  $\alpha$  values of 0.97 for men and 0.95 for wives, the current analysis demonstrated the excellent internal consistency of the scale's Urdu version.

### Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS)

On a 5-point Likert scale, the 35 items that make up the Descutner and Thelen (1991) Fear of Intimacy Scale go from "It doesn't seem real to me at all" on the one end to "It's very real to me" on the other. Intended for use in assessing anxiety connected to intimacy, a higher score indicates more fear and a lower score indicates less dread. Strong validity and internal consistency are shown by the instrument's alpha coefficient of  $\alpha = .93$ . Over time, the test-retest correlation remained consistent with a reported  $\alpha = .89$ .

### Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI)

In order to gauge how happy a couple is with their relationship, Funk and Rogge (2007) created the Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI). The scale provides versatility with answer scales since it has distinct items that indicate different elements of pleasure. Statements such as "I truly feel like a team with my partner" and "My relationship with my partner makes me happy" are indicative of this. Based on the study needs, It is possible to modify the scale to a 16-item or 4-item format.

The responses are documented using Likert scales with 5 and 6 points. With an alpha value of  $\alpha=.98$ , the CSI shows a high level of internal consistency.

## Procedure

Obtaining consent from the authors of the three measures utilised was the first step in starting the study. A kind of the Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI) was created and rendered in Urdu. Using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, participants were recruited by non-probability purposive sampling. Following the acquisition of informed consent Participants in the study had the choice to end their involvement at any moment. The privacy of the individuals who took part in the study was assured. Distributing the surveys was the subsequent stage. Quantitative analysis was conducted using STUDY GUI and SPSS when data collection was complete.

## Data Analyses

Data analysis was carried out using the SPSS 21 programme, and a descriptive analysis was used to provide a detailed description of the sample. In addition, we made sure the study instrument had enough internal consistency by conducting a reliability assessment. Afraid of intimacy, rejected by an intimate partner, and marital happiness were all examined using Pearson's product-moment correlations. The last step was to use mediation analysis using structural equation modelling (SEM) (AMOS) to look at how intimacy fear mediated the relationship between partner rejection and marital satisfaction.

## Results

This research was carried out to examine the connection between intimate partners' rejection (warmth, anger, neglect, and rejection), marital satisfaction and their fear of intimacy, Investigate and investigate the relationship between partner acceptance-rejection and marital satisfaction, and the mediating role that fear of intimacy plays.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics and correlation for IARQ, (Warmth, Hostility, Neglect and Rejection), Fear of Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction (N=250).*

Variable s	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Warmth	250	18.07	6.56	-	-.72***	-.75***	-.68**	-.74***	.78***
Hostility	250	11.42	4.81	-	-	.73***	.84***	.72***	-.77**
Neglect	250	13.41	7.810	-	-	-	.73***	.65***	-.74***
Rejection	250	7.81	3.17	-	-	-	-	.65***	-.78***
FIS	250	98.62	24.7	-	-	-	-	-	-.81***

Note \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  FIS= Fear of Intimacy Scale, CSI= Couple's Satisfaction Index.

In our research on partner acceptance and rejection, which centred on the four subscales of warmth, antagonism, neglect, and rejection, we found robust connections. A Pearson product-moment analysis discovered warmth was related to lower levels of hostility, neglect, rejection, and intimacy anxiety. There was a favourable correlation between these characteristics and marital satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was negatively impacted by rejection, neglect, and intimacy anxiety; conversely, increasing anger was favourably associated with all three. There was a positive correlation between neglect and rejection and intimate anxiety and a negative correlation with marital enjoyment. A higher fear of intimacy and worse relationship satisfaction are

associated with rejection. According to the study, women who experienced higher levels of anxiety also reported being less satisfied with their relationships, indicating a negative correlation between fear of intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

## Mediation Analysis

The suggested research model was tested using AMOS-based Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Model fits and sample estimates were computed using AMOS's path analysis. In line with the literature's guidelines, a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) bias-corrected bootstrap was used to detect indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Values for model fit obtained by route analyses are shown in the table below (Table 4).

**Table 2**

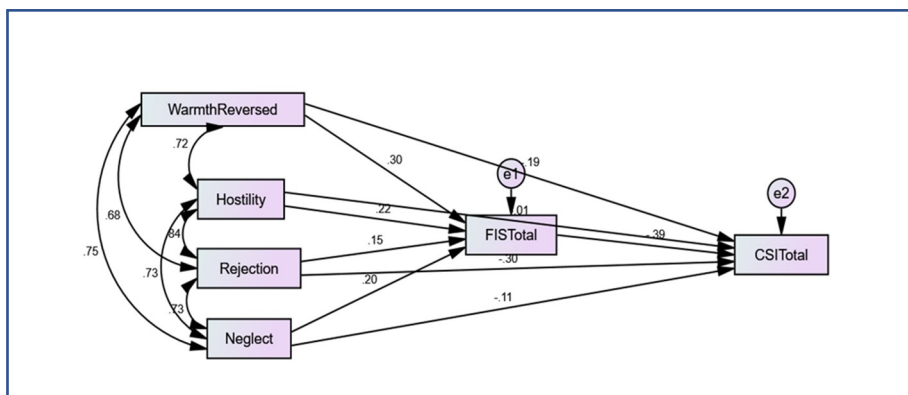
*Fit Indices for IARQ (Warmth, Hostility, Neglect and rejection), Fear of Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction (N=250).*

Model	$\chi^2$	P	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90%CI)
Final Model	11.36	.02	3	.99	.98	.08

According to Kline (2000), the model fit was shown by chi-square and relative chi-square, with a value of CMIN/df=3.76, which should be less than the threshold value of 3.000. Moreover, the RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) value was .08, the CFI value was .99, and the TLI value was 0.98, all of which are more than or equal to .90.

The suitable model fit is given in Figure 4.1 below, and the mediation model is provided in Table 4.4 above [ $\chi^2$  (3, N=250) = 11.36,  $p$  = .02]. Several fit indices, including chi-square, RMSEA, CFI, and TLI, demonstrated that the evaluated model was a good match to the data. Figure 1 depicts the model's prediction routes.

**Figure 1**



*Note, FIS = Fear of Intimacy, CSI= Couples Satisfaction Index*

We tested the hypothesis that Fear of Intimacy mediates the connection between Intimate Partner Acceptance-Rejection and Marital Satisfaction by examining both direct and indirect routes in the model. The estimates for the direct and indirect impacts are shown in Table 3.

Six of the nine direct effects examined in Table 3 were determined to be statistically significant, suggesting that Warmth, Hostility, Neglect, and Rejection were strong predictors of Fear of Intimacy. Furthermore, Marital

Satisfaction was substantially predicted by Warmth and Rejection but not by Hostility and Neglect. Marital Satisfaction was adversely and strongly predicted by Intimacy Fear. The association between IARQ (Warmth, Hostility, Neglect, and Rejection) and Marital Satisfaction was shown to be negative and statistically significant when looking at indirect effects using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals. This lends credence to the idea that Fear of Intimacy mediates the predictive link to some extent.

**Table 3**



*Effect estimates, Standardized Indirect and Direct Effects from Structural Equation Modelling for IARQ (Warmth, Hostility, Neglect and Rejection), Fear of Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction.*

Effect	Direct Effects			Indirect Effects		
	Estimate	SE	P	Estimate	p	95%CI
Warmth → FIS	.30	.06	.00***	-	-	-
Hostility → FIS	.19	.06	.00***	-	-	-
Neglect → FIS	.15	.06	.00***	-	-	-
Rejection → FIS	.22	.06	.00***	-	-	-
Warmth → CSI	-.19	.23	.12	-.118	.00***	-.14--.09
Hostility → CSI	-.11	.38	.06	-.077	.00***	-.09--.06
Neglect → CSI	-.30	.36	.00**	-.05	.01**	-.06--.05
Rejection → CSI	-.01	.55	.81	-.086	.00***	-.11--.07
FIS → CSI	-.39`	.05	.00***	-	-	-

Note \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$  CSI=Couple's Satisfaction Index, FIS= Fear of Intimacy Scale. CI= Confidence Interval

## Discussion

Consistent with other studies, this research study finds that marital pleasure, intimacy anxiety, and partner acceptance rejection all go hand in hand. Partner acceptance-rejection is a strong predictor of marital satisfaction and intimacy anxiety, according to our results.

Our research supported our initial conclusion, showing that a warm partner's acceptance is positively correlated with marital satisfaction and negatively correlated with fear related to intimacy. That being said, there was a significant negative correlation found for marital happiness and a positive correlation found for anger, abandonment, and rejection when it came to fear of intimacy. Consistent with research by Kuyumcu and Rohner (2015), this highlights the significance of good interactions and warmth in promoting relationship satisfaction and decreasing fear of intimacy.

Notable are the findings' cross-cultural implications. Achieving marital fulfilment and pleasure is a universally shared objective, regardless of cultural variations. Acceptance has a favourable effect on marital happiness and rejection has a negative one; these expectations hold true across cultures.

The findings are in agreement with those of Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, and Conger (2005). Findings from the research support the assumption that marital happiness is greatly

enhanced when one spouse feels accepted by the other.

By advancing our knowledge of how Fear of intimacy mediates the relationship between partner acceptance/rejection and marital satisfaction, this study adds to the body of literature already in existence. Fear of closeness is common in our culture and often results from cultural norms that discourage open communication. The importance of self-disclosure and empathetic responses in bonding may be better understood in order to tackle this problem.

We found that fear of intimacy, which stems from partners' approval or rejection, has direct and indirect effects on marital satisfaction. According to this two-pronged effect, partner acceptance-rejection affects marital pleasure directly and increases intimacy-related anxiety, which in turn diminishes relationship quality. The results corroborate those of Descutner and Thelen (1991), who found that relationship pleasure decreased as one's fear of closeness increased.

Overall, the results show that the acceptance-rejection dynamic within a marriage is a major factor in marital happiness and the degree to which individuals experience anxiety about intimacy. The research offers insightful explanations of the intricate dynamics of close relationships, emphasising the need for open and honest communication as well as sympathetic responses in promoting happiness and reducing anxiety associated with intimacy. The

implications of these findings for therapies aiming to improve the mental well-being and quality of relationships are substantial.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

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It is important to note the study's limitations, even if it helps fill a vacuum in the literature by investigating the mediating effect of intimacy anxiety. The lack of generalizability is a result of the study's exclusive emphasis on literate women (Matric - Masters). It is possible that survey answers were impacted by social desirability bias. Because of the wide variety of cultural settings in Pakistan, the results from this study, which only included one city, cannot be generalised. The sample, which consists mostly of middle-class individuals, highlights just one aspect of marital pleasure and raises concerns about its generalizability. It would be wise for researchers to broaden their sample sizes in the future by thinking about factors like age, relationship duration, religion, socioeconomic position, and geographical location. The results would be more complete if we looked at married couples from both the male and female points of view.

### **Implications**

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Improving personal relationships may be aided by the key insights provided by this research. It highlights the significance of marital happiness in avoiding separation and divorce. This study provides counsellors with practical advice by identifying rejection and intimacy anxiety as major causes of client discontent and by highlighting strategies to overcome this fear.

In addition, the research stresses the importance of communication and empathy as universal abilities that may be used to strengthen marital connection. There have to be tailored treatments, and the suggestion to modify counselling based on cultural context and couple traits is a prime example of this.

Clinicians may benefit greatly from this study since it sheds light on the function of intimate anxiety in overall health and helps to influence treatment strategies. As a whole, it has far-reaching consequences for the fields of psychology, counselling, and relationship therapy, opening up new possibilities for helping couples and preventing problems.

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