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## Interparental Conflict and Offspring Marital Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Communication Patterns

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# Interparental Conflict and Offspring Marital Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Communication Patterns



Adela N. Witami<sup>\*</sup>, Cantyo A. Dannisworo, Fivi Nurwianti, & Lathifah Hanum

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**Abstract:** This study examines how interparental conflict affects offspring's future marital satisfaction, with a focus on the mediating role of communication patterns. A total of 364 married couples participated, using self-report questionnaires and instruments, including the Parental Conflict Intensity/Frequency Scale (PIC-I/F), Spousal Satisfaction Index (CSI-16), and Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ-SF). The results showed that communication patterns did not mediate the relationship between interparental conflict and marital satisfaction. Instead, perceived interparental conflict directly predicted marital satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of reframing individuals' perceptions of past parental conflict, rather than just focusing on improving communication skills, to achieve greater marital satisfaction. The study offers valuable insights for family researchers and mental health practitioners in Indonesia, suggesting intervention approaches or therapies to support married individuals from high-conflict families in improving their marital satisfaction.

**Key Words:** Communication patterns; Interparental conflict; Marital satisfaction; Married couple; Perception of interparental conflict

## INTRODUCTION

Various studies have described the impact of marital satisfaction on aspects of life, especially on mental and physical well-being (Kamp Dush et al., 2008; Proulx et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2013). Marital satisfaction is known to be an important factor contributing to the mental well-being of married adults (Kamp Dush et al., 2008; Proulx et al., 2007). Individuals who are satisfied in their marriage have been reported to have higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem (Kasapoğlu & Yabanigül, 2018). In contrast, individuals with low marital satisfaction are known to be more likely to have experienced mental health disorders, such as depressive symptoms, anxiety, and loneliness (Mund & Johnson, 2021; Roberson et al., 2018; Yildiz & Baytemir, 2016). Furthermore, the impact of marital satisfaction is not only felt by the husband or wife but also contributes to the well-being of children through increasing the quality of parenting for child development (Chen, 2022).

Roach et al. (1981) identified marital satisfaction as an individual's subjective assessment of his or her favorability in the marital relationship, which can shift over time. However, not all married individuals are satisfied with their marital relationship. The phenomenon of increasing divorce rates in Indonesia, which have consistently reached 14.9% over the past four years (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023), reflects this. Several studies on divorce suggest that one of its causes is low marital satisfaction (Devine & Forehand, 1996; Røsand et al., 2014). Various factors, both internal and external, influence low marital satisfaction. Internal factors such as emotional intelligence, level of intimacy, commitment, and ability to resolve conflict are known to predict the realisation of marital satisfaction (Kazim & Rafique, 2021). In addition, external factors such as family of origin and upbringing also contribute to marital satisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Dennison et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2015).

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Barthassat (2014) explains that interparental conflict that children witness from their families of origin can have developmental impacts, both constructively and destructively. Interparental conflict is described as aggressive actions, both verbal and physical, hostility, or distrust between husband and wife (M. D. Johnson et al., 2022). Although interparental conflict is common in families, its impact depends on how children perceive it (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Grych et al., 1992). Conflict can have a constructive impact if the offspring perceive it as a process leading to resolution, but it can be detrimental if the offspring perceive it as intense, persistent, and unresolvable that leads to insecurity in future romantic relationships (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Cummings & Miller-Graff, 2015).

The studies suggest that exposure to interparental conflict may influence children's future level of marital satisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Shanoora et al., 2020). In a number of studies, such as Sağkal and Özdemir (2019) and Paul and Chukkali (2022), this effect was often explained through social learning theory developed by Bandura (1977). Social learning theory suggests that children learn by observing their environment, known as observational learning (Bandura, 1977). In this process, children will imitate the observed behaviour of the people around them, especially from parents as primary carers. The imitated pattern will be stronger if the behaviour is given reinforcement, such as rewards or positive outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, children who see their parents' maladaptive conflict patterns continuously may tend to imitate them and transfer them to their own relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Delevi, 2008; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019; Skuja & Halford, 2004). This pattern is also supported by research explaining that children who are persistently exposed to interparental conflict tend to develop negative views, such as pessimism, low relationship efficacy, and low ability to establish interpersonal relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Delevi, 2008; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019; Skuja & Halford, 2004).

Previous research identifies two main potential pathways regarding the impact of interparental conflict on children's future marital satisfaction. Cui and Fincham (2010) and Dennison et al. (2014) suggest that interparental conflict directly reduces marital satisfaction. However, several other studies have shown that the impact of interparental conflict is explained indirectly, through the mediating variables (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019). Braithwaite et al. (2016) found that high exposure to interparental conflict may decrease commitment in the relationship, which ultimately results in low relationship satisfaction. Moreover, other studies have also shown that patterns of conflict with a partner, marital attitudes, and commitment levels may play a mediating role in the relationship between interparental conflict and relationship satisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019).

Furthermore, Cui and Fincham (2010) statistically tested both pathways and found that the effect of interparental conflict on children's relationship satisfaction is better explained through indirect than direct pathways. Later, this finding was also corroborated by Singh and Thomas's (2023) systematic review, which showed that only one article supported the direct relationship, while the remaining six articles supported the mediating role. Despite western populations' well-established understanding of the relationship's mechanism, no Indonesian research has yet explored how interparental conflict affects marital satisfaction. Thus the only study by Rakhmah and Tantiani (2024) explains the correlative relationship between interparental conflict and romantic relationship satisfaction. It is important to note that societies with collectivist cultures, such as Indonesia, tend to be heavily influenced by families of origin in shaping marital behaviour and satisfaction (Bejanyan et al., 2015; T. Li & Fung, 2011).

Research suggests that communication patterns in conflict resolution could potentially mediate the relationship between interparental conflict and marital satisfaction. Adaptive conflict communication patterns may provide a bridge for couples to convey their emotions and thoughts constructively (Li & Fung, 2011), whereas failures in communication may hinder conflict resolution and decrease relationship quality (Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019). In fact, a qualitative study from Manna et al. (2021) revealed that poor communication patterns of couples are the cause of divorce in Indonesia. The difficulty of couples to convey their thoughts and feelings to each other makes problems in the relationship prolonged and makes the relationship more uncomfortable until spouses decide to divorce (Manna et al., 2021).

Interparental conflict is known to consistently affect communication patterns in marital relationships. Research from Skuja and Halford (2004) showed that men exposed to high-intensity interparental conflict often used dominant and invalidative communication patterns. The same applies to women, where exposure to unresolved interparental conflict may decrease the use of positive communication and increase the use of negative communication, especially after parental divorce (Braithwaite et al., 2016). Furthermore, several previous studies have also revealed the impact of communication patterns on marital satisfaction. Positive communication patterns play an important role in promoting conflict resolution and enhancing couples' emotional connection (T. Li & Fung, 2011). In contrast, negative communication patterns can escalate conflicts, increase misunderstandings, and even lead to relationship violence (Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019). Uncorrected negative communication patterns in Indonesia can trigger domestic violence (Purba & Ruslianty, 2023). Other studies have also found significant associations between positive communication patterns and increased marital satisfaction and between negative

communication patterns and decreased marital satisfaction, which have been tested in Western and Asian populations (Christensen et al., 2006; Haris & Kumar, 2018; Parvandi et al., 2016; Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2016).

Not only indicating a significant relationship between the three variables, the potential of communication patterns in conflict resolution as a mediator is also supported by several previous studies (Dennison et al., 2014; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019). The research revealed that the individual's ability in conflict resolution became a significant mediator in the relationship of marital satisfaction (Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019). This finding explains the mechanism of social learning theory, where children adopt their parents' maladaptive conflict patterns in their marriage (Amato, 1996; Braithwaite et al., 2016).

Although communication patterns have been sufficiently illustrated as potential mediators, there are inconsistencies in Braithwaite et al. (2016) research, which shows that communication patterns are not proven to play a significant role as mediators. Braithwaite (2016) suggested that individuals from intact or divorced families, communication patterns did not mediate the relationship between interparental conflict and marital satisfaction, but rather the level of commitment in the relationship. The study highlighted that the key of relationship satisfaction is not the ability of the couple to resolve the conflict, but how individuals can remain committed to the relationship despite constant conflict, as learned from their parents (Amato, 1996). Due to these inconsistencies, it is important to re-examine how relationship satisfaction is measured. Because of these inconsistencies, it is important to re-examine the role of communication patterns in the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and marital satisfaction.

Another intriguing point is the difference in the direction of the effect of types of communication patterns on marital satisfaction. Although many studies show a significant relationship between communication patterns and marital satisfaction (Christensen et al., 2006; Haris & Kumar, 2018; Parvandi et al., 2016; Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2016), there is inconsistency regarding the direction of influence for different types of communication patterns. (Gottman, 1998) divided communication patterns related to conflict resolution into two types: functional communication patterns, which include positive interaction, and dysfunctional communication patterns, which include demand/withdraw and criticise/defend (Christensen et al., 2006; Futris et al., 2010). Several studies regarding positive interaction communication patterns have shown a significant positive impact on marital satisfaction (Ebrahimi & Ali Kimiaei, 2014; Parvandi et al., 2016).

This occurs due to positive interaction communication patterns directing couples to understand each other's feelings and opening up in negotiations for conflict resolution (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Noller & White, 1990). Positive interaction communication patterns involve couples in joint problem solving, resulting in emotional bonding, togetherness, and flexibility in dealing with changing roles, rules, and conditions in the household (Akhlaq et al., 2013; South et al., 2010). On the other hand, Johnson et al. (2022) revealed that positive interaction communication patterns do not play a significant role in achieving marital satisfaction, but rather a significant decrease in dysfunctional communication patterns. In high-conflict relationships, the ability to reduce dysfunctional communication tends to have a greater influence on relationship satisfaction because it can reduce tension, while positive interaction is indicated to have a greater influence in more positive or neutral situations.

Furthermore, dysfunctional communication patterns, such as demand/withdraw and criticise/defend, are known to reduce marital satisfaction (Ebrahimi & Ali Kimiaei, 2014; Parvandi et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2008), because they make couples avoid each other when conflict occurs, which then triggers greater conflict (Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Heavey et al., 1995). In addition, avoidance patterns can make couples lose the ability to solve problems together (Smith et al., 2008) and interfere with various aspects that support marital satisfaction, such as increasing the risk of depression and reducing intimacy and sexual function (P. Li & Johnson, 2018; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). However, Amazue et al. (2015) found a positive correlation between demand/withdraw and marital satisfaction. This happens because there is an opportunity to give distance to the problem, especially if it comes from a demanding individual (Amazue et al., 2015).

The literature review revealed several key findings about the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and marital satisfaction. First, it was discovered that the indirect relationship involving possible variables was more significant and could be used to explain the link between how much conflict parents feel with each other and marital satisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Singh & Thomas, 2023; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019). Second, communication patterns are hypothesised to be a potential variable mediating the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and marital satisfaction (Parvandi et al., 2016; Haris & Kumar, 2018; Christensen et al., 2006; Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2016), although this relationship is still inconsistent and needs further substantiation (Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019; Braithwaite, 2016). Moreover, research also shows inconsistencies in the direction of influence between types of communication patterns, such as positive interaction, demand/withdraw, and criticise/defend, on marital satisfaction (Akhlaq et al., 2013; South et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2022; Ebrahimi & Kimiaei, 2014; Amazue, 2015).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of the three types of communication patterns (positive interaction, demand/withdraw, and criticise/defend) on the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and marital satisfaction. The researcher suggests that high perceived interparental conflict may cause individuals

to adopt dysfunctional communication patterns such as demand/withdraw and criticise/defend in their marriage, thus indirectly decreasing marital satisfaction. In contrast, individuals with low exposure to interparental conflict tend to adopt functional communication patterns, such as positive interaction, which in turn increases marital satisfaction. We expect this study to serve as a paradigm foundation for mental health practitioners, guiding them in selecting the appropriate intervention approach to enhance marital satisfaction, particularly for individuals from conflict-prone families.

## METHOD

### Procedures

This study is a non-experimental quantitative study with a cross-sectional design. We used a non-probability or convenient sampling method, which is based on participants' willingness to participate. Gravetter et al. (2021) The study set two inclusion criteria: (1) individuals who were in a marital relationship, and (2) having a heterosexual orientation. These criteria were in line with the purpose of the study, which focused on the dynamics of individuals in legally recognised marriages in Indonesia. In Indonesia, non-heterosexual marriages are not legally recognised and often face stigma and controversies (Manik et al., 2021). Therefore, this study focuses on heterosexual relationships, supported by previous research that suggests there are different dynamics between homosexual and heterosexual relationships, which may be due to cultural differences in society (Aarskaug Wiik et al., 2014; Lau, 2012; Schwartz & Graf, 2009). Additionally, based on the results of the G-power version 3.1 analysis from similar research by Braithwaite et al. (2016), the minimum required sample size for this study is 277 participants (effect size  $f^2 = .04$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ , power  $(1-\beta) = .80$ ).

### Participants

We conducted the research by distributing questionnaires via Google Forms and sharing them online through various parenting communities on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Line, and WhatsApp. These communities primarily consisted of followers who were young married couples, particularly new mothers. We collected the data over a two-month period, from October to December 2023. The questionnaire started by collecting informed consent and demographic data, followed by the completion of 91 items in parallel with other measures from our umbrella research group. After answering the reflective questions on the questionnaire, participants received a debriefing sheet with the researcher's contact information for further consultation. There was electronic money as a reward for 40 randomly selected participants. The [redacted for anonymous review] Research Ethics Committee reviewed and approved the research protocol prior to the study.

### Instrumentations

Funk and Rogge (2007) developed the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-16) and Ratnasari and Fatheya (2022) adapted it into Indonesian to measure marital satisfaction. The CSI-16 is a unidimensional measurement tool that has a total of 16 items (e.g., "In general, how often do you feel that the relationship with your partner is going well?"). CSI-16 using a Likert scale from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (6). We conduct the CSI-16 scoring by adding up the overall scores of the items on the measuring instrument. The higher the score obtained, the higher the individual's marriage satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Ratnasari and Fatheya (2022) have demonstrated the validity and reliability of the CSI-16 in the Indonesian population, with a score of approximately 0.94. However, the researcher ensured the suitability of the measuring instrument on 30 samples that fit the participant criteria through a pilot study. Based on these results, it is known that the CSI-16 is valid and reliable to measure the marital satisfaction of research participants ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ). This finding was reinforced by the analysis of the main data from 364 participants, which showed a high reliability value ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

Kline et al. (2003) developed the Perception of Interparental Conflict Intensity/Frequency Scale (PIC-I/F) to measure interparental conflict. This measure has two subscales, intensity and frequency, with a total of 13 items: 6 for frequency (e.g., "I often see my parents arguing") and 7 for intensity (e.g., "My parents hardly ever argue"). We measure the scores by summing all items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very untrue) to 6 (very true), with higher scores reflecting higher perceptions of interparental conflict. Kline et al. (2003) found the PIC-I/F to be both valid and reliable, with a score of approximately 0.930. Because there is no adaptation to Indonesian, the researcher conducted translation using the back-translation method by a graduate of the University of Indonesia Psychology who is studying Master of Political Psychology at New York University and has an IELTS score in the good user category. Its items were also reviewed by two lecturers from the Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia, as well as clinical psychologists with more than 10 years of experience. The pilot study with 30

participants showed the IPC I/F was valid and reliable ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), which was confirmed in the main data with 364 research participants ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

We measured communication patterns using the Communication Pattern Questionnaire Short Form (CPQ-SF) (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Futris et al., 2010). CPQ-SF is a multidimensional instrument with 11 items covering three dimensions: positive interaction (CP PI,  $\alpha = 0.61$ ), demand/withdraw (CP DW,  $\alpha = 0.71$ ), and criticise/defend (CP CD,  $\alpha = 0.83$ ). We computed scores per dimension, where higher scores indicate a stronger tendency towards a particular communication pattern. Because there is no Indonesian version available, the translation process was carried out using the back-translation method by a UI Psychology graduate who is a Masters student at New York University with an IELTS score in the good user category. The process was also followed by expert judgement by two UI Psychology lecturers who are also clinical psychologists with more than 10 years of experience. The pilot test on 30 participants only showed valid and reliable results on CP PI ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ) and CP CD ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ), while the demand/withdraw ( $\alpha = 0.53$ ) showed a low reliability category (Assh & Byers, 1990), and therefore revisions were made on items 3 and 4. Following the revisions, the main data analysis on 364 participants showed all three CPQ-SF dimensions to be valid and reliable: CP PI ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ), CP DW ( $\alpha = 0.62$ ), and CP CD ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ). Therefore, according to the reliability cutoff from Kaplan & Saccuzzo (2001) ( $\alpha > 0.60$ ), it is known that all instruments used in this study are considered valid and reliable.

## Data Analysis

The research data will be analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0 software and the Hayes Process version 4.2 program (Hayes, 2012). We use IBM SPSS for descriptive analysis to understand the mean, frequency, and percentage of demographic data, and to assess the reliability and validity of each variable. Meanwhile, the researcher will conduct a mediation analysis using the multiple mediation model program from Hayes Process version 4.2 (Hayes, 2012) to examine the role of communication patterns on the relationship between IPC and marital satisfaction. The mediation analysis will be conducted with a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

### Participant Demographics

After applying two screening criteria: (1) married individuals and (2) heterosexual orientation, the study initially involved 408 participants, but ultimately reduced the final sample size to 346 participants. The sample was predominantly young women in the early stages of marriage or young mothers. Participants were mainly in the young adult age range, with an unbalanced gender proportion, whereas 74% of the participants were female. The majority of participants were in their first marriage, at the early family stage, with a marriage duration of 0-2 years, and either had children or only one infant or toddler. Additionally, 68.5% of participants reported that their biological parents were still married.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics (N=346)

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
22-30	213	62,5%
31-40	111	32%
41-50	18	5,4%
51-62	4	0.12%
Gender		
Female	257	74.3
Male	89	25.7
Education		
High school/equivalent	15	4.3%
D1/D2/D3	28	8.1%
D4/S1	237	68.5%
Profesi	1	0.3%
S2	63	18.2%
S3	1	0.3 %
Other	1	0.3%
Marriage Duration		
0-3 Years	205	59.2%
3-6 Years	63	18.1%



Categories	Frequency	Percentage
6-10 Years	48	12.5%
> 10 Years	30	8.8%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
First marriage	337	97.4%
Married, but not the first	9	2.6%
<b>Number of Children</b>		
0	140	40.5%
1	123	35.5%
2	66	19.1%
3	16	4.6%
4	1	0.3%
<b>Parents' Marital Status</b>		
Married	237	68.5%
Divorced	30	8.7%
Divorced by death	78	22.5%
Married, separated house	1	0.3%

## Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of all variables measured. The table reveals that the IPC variable has a score range of 13-78, with a mean of 39.65 (SD = 14.59). When comparing the median score with the mean, it indicated that the participant's perception of parental conflict is relatively neutral. The marital satisfaction variable is known to have a range of scores from 13 to 75, with a mean of 57.15. The comparison of the median and mean score reveals a tendency towards low marital satisfaction among the study participants. Furthermore, three dimensions demonstrate the types of communication pattern variables that participants typically employ when encountering marital problems. Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that the mean CP PI is 11.49 (SD = 2.51), CP DW is 15.59 (SD = 7.26), and CP CD has a mean of 12.11 (SD = 6.13). When comparing the mean scores of the three types of communication patterns, CP DW has a higher score than CP PI and CP CD.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Analysis (N=346)

Variables	Mean	SD	Median	Max	Min
IPC	39.65	14.59	39.00	13.00	78.00
MS	57.15	11.16	59.00	13.00	75.00
CP PI	11.79	2.51	12.00	2.00	15.00
CP DW	15.59	7.26	15.50	5.00	35.00
CP CD	12.11	6.13	12.00	3.00	27.00
IPC	39.65	14.59	39.00	13.00	78.00

*Notes.* MS = Marital Satisfaction; IPC = Interparental conflict; CP PI = Positive Communication; CP DW = Demand/Withdraw Communication; CP CD = Criticize/Defend Communication; SD= Standard Deviation.

## Correlational Analysis

This study used Spearman correlation analysis. Based on these results, it is known that there is a significant negative relationship between IPC and marital satisfaction ( $r = -0.110$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This means that the higher the IPC, the lower the individual's marital satisfaction.

## Mediation Analysis

Figure 1 presents a summary of the relationships between variables analysed through multiple mediation analyses, where the three variables, IPC, marital satisfaction, and the three types of communication patterns, were run simultaneously. Before that, the researcher also controlled covariate variables consisting of age, education level, duration of marriage, and number of children that were found to be significantly correlated with the results of the marital satisfaction. Mediation analysis revealed that none of the three communication patterns—positive interaction ( $\beta = -0.569$ , 95% CI [-0.128, 0.013]), demand/withdraw ( $\beta = 0.000$ , 95% CI [-0.126, 0.011]), and criticise/defend ( $\beta = -0.000$ , 95% CI [-0.005, 0.002])—played a significant role in mediating the relationship between IPC and marital satisfaction. On the other hand, the results of the direct effect analysis show that IPC has a significant negative effect on marital satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.038$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , 95% CI [-0.074, -0.003]). This indicates

that the higher the perceived level of interparental conflict, the lower the level of marital satisfaction in married individuals.

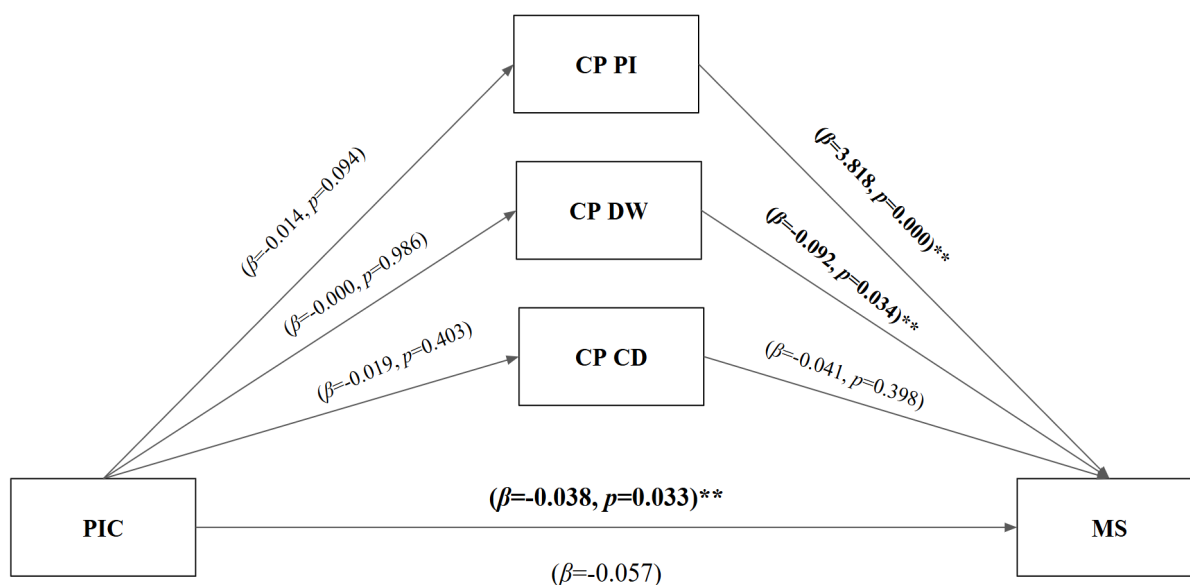


Figure 1 Multiple Mediation Model

Next, two of the communication patterns also showed a significant direct effect on marital satisfaction. The positive interaction communication pattern had a significant positive effect ( $\beta = 3.181, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI } [3.581, 4.055]$ ), indicating that communication that encourages openness and mutual understanding contributes to increasing marital satisfaction. In contrast, the demand/withdraw communication pattern, characterised by one partner demanding while the other avoiding, showed a significant negative effect on marital satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.092, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.178, -0.006]$ ). This communication pattern tends to avoid constructive discussions, which ultimately adversely affects relationship satisfaction. However, the criticise/defend communication pattern did not show any significant effect on marital satisfaction. Likewise, IPC was not significantly associated with any of the communication patterns.

Table 3. Multiple Mediation Analysis Results (N = 346)

Pathways	$\beta$	SE	p	CI 95%	
				Upper	Lower
<b>Direct Effect</b>					
IPC → MS	-0.038	0.018	0.033**	-0.074	-0.003
IPC → CP PI	-0.014	0.008	0.094	-0.032	0.002
IPC → CP DW	-0.000	0.026	0.986	-0.053	0.052
IPC → CP CD	-0.019	0.227	0.403	-0.025	0.063
CP PI → MS	3.181	0.120	0.000**	3.581	4.055
CP DW → MS	-0.092	0.043	0.034**	-0.178	-0.006
CP CD → MS	-0.031	0.048	0.393	-0.137	0.054
<b>Indirect Effect</b>					
IPC → CP PI → MS	-0.569	0.036		-0.128	0.013
IPC → CP DW → MS	0.000	0.035		-0.126	0.011
IPC → CP CD → MS	-0.000	0.001		-0.005	0.002
<b>Total Effect</b>					
IPC → MS	-0.057	0.036		-0.138	-0.013

Notes. \*\* $p < .05$ ; MS = Marital Satisfaction; IPC = Interparental conflict; CP PI = Positive Communication; CP DW = Demand/Withdraw Communication; CP CD = Criticize/Defend Communication; SE=Standard Error; CI=Confidence Interval



## DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to examine the role of positive interaction, demand/withdraw, and criticise/demand communication patterns as mediators in the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and marital satisfaction. The results showed that none of the communication patterns significantly mediated the relationship. However, this study revealed a direct effect of perceived interparental conflict on marital satisfaction. This finding tends to contradict previous research that highlighted the primacy of the indirect influence of interparental conflict on marital satisfaction. Previous research suggests that interparental conflict indirectly affects marital satisfaction but rather impacts communication patterns and other interpersonal skills (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Cui et al., 2008; Delevi, 2008; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019; Skuja & Halford, 2004). Differences in findings could be due to several reasons related to participant characteristics, Indonesian culture, research methods, or other potential mediator variables.

Initially, we compared the participants' relationship status with those from earlier studies. This study focused on married individuals, whereas previous studies by Cui and Fincham (2010) and Braithwaite et al. (2016) examined dating or non-committed relationships. Tam et al. (2011) suggest that there are significant differences in the dynamics of these relationships. Individuals who are dating tend to engage in more positive communication, show affection through verbal and nonverbal gestures, and try to build a favorable impression of their partner (Assh & Byers, 1990). In contrast, married individuals are more likely to express support and realistic behaviours to maintain commitment, such as sharing household and parenting responsibilities (Floyd & Wasner, 1994). Differences in interpersonal dynamics between married and non-married individuals may explain the non-contribution of communication patterns, as married individuals tend to use less communication than in non-marital romantic relationships.

The failure of communication patterns in mediating IPC and marital satisfaction can be explained by the stage of marriage that predominantly characterises the participants. Based on the research data, 59.2% of participants were in the 0-3 years of marriage duration, with the majority having no or only one child. According to Duvall's family development theory (2002), these participants are in the early stage of marriage. At this stage, couples are in the process of transition, including the formation of communication patterns. Vidanska et al. (2019) mentioned that the duration of time spent with a partner is an important variable in shaping marital satisfaction. In addition, Benyamin et al. (2019) showed that families in the early stages of marriage in Indonesia often face interventions from the family of origin, such as expectations of husband-wife roles, additional financial burdens, and exposure to family conflicts. These interventions can prevent couples from building healthy communication patterns, so that communication dynamics are not able to fully mediate between the experience of family of origin conflict and marital satisfaction.

The insignificant role of communication patterns in the relationship between IPC and marital satisfaction can be attributed to methodological factors. as the present study utilised the PIC I/F in measuring perceived interparental conflict, which focuses on the sub-dimensions of conflict intensity and frequency. Although Kline et al. (2003) stated that this measure adequately provides an overview of the forms of interparental conflict, it is not as comprehensive as the full version of the PIC developed by Grych et al. (1992). This full version includes additional dimensions, such as the emotional states that children experience when parents fight, thus providing a more comprehensive view. These limitations may explain the lack of a significant relationship between IPC and marital satisfaction, which contrasts with the results of previous studies (Christensen et al., 2006; Haris & Kumar, 2018; Parvandi et al., 2016; Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2016). Those studies also measured the conflict resolution subdimension, referring to how parents resolve their conflicts. Children can imitate the way parents resolve conflicts, which can shape their communication patterns in problem solving, including romantic relationships.

Moreover, descriptive analysis showed that participants' IPC scores were only 0.65 above the mean, indicating a relatively neutral perception. The majority of participants also came from intact families (68.5%), which may provide a more stable environment. This may partly explain why the impact of IPC on communication patterns and marital satisfaction was less pronounced. Moreover, this study's cross-sectional design has its own limitations. Cross-sectional only captures the relationship between variables at a single point in time without establishing causality. However, it is essential to demonstrate how one variable influences another over time in mediation analysis (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; O'Laughlin et al., 2018). This could potentially lead to less accurate interpretations of the mediation effects between the variables. Additionally, the use of self-report questionnaires in this study may also have led participants to provide biased and socially desirable answers, particularly among Indonesian participants.

The non-significant result also may be explained by the presence of other potential variables. Research reveals that high exposure to interparental conflict can reduce relationship commitment, potentially leading to a decrease in relationship satisfaction (Braithwaite et al., 2016). Furthermore, relationship efficacy also plays an important role as a mediator, where children exposed to interparental conflict often develop negative views about relationships, such as pessimism and low relationship efficacy, which impact their ability to build satisfying

interpersonal relationships (Amato, 1996; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Sanders et al., 1999). Children's perception of conflict, when perceived as destructive, can lead to feelings of insecurity, potentially affecting their future relationships (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Grych et al., 2000). Furthermore, Kazim & Rafique (2021) closely relate the level of intimacy and emotional intelligence to an individual's ability to resolve conflict and build healthy relationships, making them potential mediators.

However, this study discovered that intergenerational processes, influenced by cultural differences, directly influence marital satisfaction. Research in Asian countries, such as Korea, Iran and Malaysia, has observed that family of origin conditions have a direct impact on marital satisfaction (Botha et al., 2009; Ha, 2008; Shademani, 2020). Yoshida and Busby's (2012) cross-cultural study revealed that family of origin dynamics significantly influence marital satisfaction in individuals born and raised in Asian countries, more so than in North America or Native Americans. This is often attributed to the collectivist culture in Asia, which emphasises emotional and social dependence among family members (Segal, 1991). This dependency creates a pattern of intense relationships, where parental behaviours and emotions have a significant impact on individual development.

The direct relationship between perceived interparental conflict and marital satisfaction in the Indonesian population can also be better understood through the lens of Bowen's (1993) family systems theory. As mentioned in the literature review (Li, 2014), this theory argues that families are emotional units that influence each other through intense interactions among their members. The multi-generational process of this theory explains that parents can transmit their emotional and behavioural problems through conscious learning to automatic unconscious reactions and behaviours to their child (Bowen, 1993). Therefore, it is likely that the family of origin plays an important role in transmitting emotions, values, and behaviours across generations, as well as their potentially negative long-term consequences on children, including lower marital satisfaction. (Aihui, 2024; Johnson & Greenberg, 2013)

Finally, the dominance of female participants in the gender imbalance could potentially influence the direct relationship. After conducting a difference test, researchers found that women tend to have higher perceptions of interparental conflict than men. This study is in line with the findings of Li et al. (2023), which showed that men and women process perceptions of interparental conflict differently, especially in terms of its impact on romantic relationships. For example, Davies & Lindsay (2004) found that adolescent girls are more vulnerable and sensitive to interparental conflict than adolescent boys. This vulnerability often leads to greater insecurity and dissatisfaction in future romantic relationships (David & Murphy, 2004). Similarly, Dennison et al. (2014) reported that newly married wives experienced a direct impact of perceived interparental conflict on their marital satisfaction. In line with these findings, the demographic data in this study showed that participants with high levels of perceived interparental conflict were also predominantly female. This finding suggests that the outcome may be direct, obviating the need for the mediating role of communication, as the high perceived interparental conflict was more prevalent among female participants.

## Study Limitation and Future Research

Based on the results of this study, there are several limitations that affect the generalisability and interpretation of the results. The majority of participants were in the early stages of marriage, where interaction between spouses is not widely visible and marital satisfaction is not yet stable. Therefore, future research should focus on grouping participants according to their marital stage to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of marital relationships. It is important to control for variables of marriage duration that may affect communication patterns and marital satisfaction.

Moreover, the gender imbalance in this study, which is dominated by female participants, may affect the results and interpretations. Future research should recruit a more balanced sample of men and women to understand gender differences in processing interparental conflict and its impact on marital satisfaction. The researcher also recommends considering the perceived level of interparental conflict in future research. Participants with more extreme perceptions of interparental conflict may provide greater insight into communication patterns and their impact on marital satisfaction.

We recommend using the entire IPC measurement tool, or at least include the conflict resolution subscale, in our research methods. These additions could aid in comprehending parents' conflict resolution patterns and offer a more comprehensive understanding of offspring's emotional perceptions that children might emulate. We also recommend replacing the cross-sectional design in this study with a longitudinal design approach. With a longitudinal approach, the dynamics of the relationship between perceived interparental conflict, communication patterns, and marital satisfaction can be more accurately analysed over time. Considering that communication patterns did not significantly mediate the relationship between variables, exploration of other mediators such as attachment style, emotion regulation, and self-efficacy may provide new insights into the mechanisms of indirect pathways between perceived interparental conflict and marital satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that communication patterns do not play a significant role as a mediator between children's perceptions of parental conflict and their current marital satisfaction. Instead, children's perception of the level of parental conflict has a direct influence on marital satisfaction. The more children perceive parental conflict as intense and persistent, the lower their marital satisfaction, and vice versa.

These findings provide important insights for family researchers and mental health practitioners in Indonesia on using intervention approaches to handle married individuals who came from high-conflict families and are facing marital satisfaction difficulties. Instead of focusing on improving communication skills, it may be more effective to help individuals reframe their subjective perceptions of past parental conflict. In addition, it is important to improve individuals' ability to separate their current marital identity from their parents' past marriages. One recommended approach is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Cognitive flexibility, which is a key outcome of ACT, may allow individuals to accept the unavoidability of pain, develop a full awareness of their present moment, and encourage actions based on values that are important to them in the future. We assume that ACT can help individuals normalise their perceptions of parental conflict while motivating them to take steps that support their current marital goals. Therefore, we anticipate that these actions will gradually enhance marital satisfaction.

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