

Personality and Marital Adjustment: The Mediating Role of Marital Quality and Impact of Counselling Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examined a structural model in which marital quality mediates the relationship between personality traits and marital adjustment, while accounting for counselling intervention effects. A sample of 412 married individuals participated, including a subgroup who completed a structured marital counselling program. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation, and mediation was tested using bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 resamples).

Personality significantly predicted marital quality ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), and marital quality strongly predicted marital adjustment ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). Counselling intervention showed modest but significant effects on marital quality ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and marital adjustment ($\beta = .21, p = .003$). Mediation analysis indicated that marital quality fully mediated the relationship between personality and marital adjustment (indirect effect $\beta = .20, 95\% \text{ CI } [.12, .30]$). The model explained 46% of the variance in marital adjustment.

These findings highlight relational processes as the primary pathway through which personality influences marital functioning and underscore the role of counselling in strengthening marital outcomes.

Keywords: personality traits, marital quality, marital adjustment, counselling intervention, structural equation modelling

1. INTRODUCTION:

Marital adjustment and quality are essential indicators of relationship functioning, impacting psychological well-being, family stability, and long-term life satisfaction. Marital adjustment refers to the degree of harmony, consensus, and mutual satisfaction within a marital dyad, while marital quality reflects partners' subjective evaluations of communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, and emotional support within the relationship. Personality traits, conceptualised through the Five-Factor Model, are enduring psychological characteristics that influence cognition, emotion, and behaviour and have been shown to shape relational processes in intimate partnerships. Individuals high in emotional stability (low neuroticism), agreeableness, and conscientiousness tend to exhibit adaptive interpersonal behaviours that foster relational harmony and resilience, whereas high neuroticism is frequently linked with relational distress, negative affect, and maladaptive conflict patterns (Nyamai Munini et al., 2024; Sayehmiri et al., 2020; Pasqualina Perrig-Chiello et al., 2016).

Empirical studies in recent years have increasingly underscored the predictive role of personality traits in marital satisfaction and adjustment. For example, research among Kenyan couples found that agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively associated with marital satisfaction, while neuroticism was negatively correlated with relational fulfilment (Nyamai Munini et al., 2024). Similarly, meta-analytic findings have established that higher levels of neuroticism consistently relate to poorer marital outcomes, whereas agreeableness and conscientiousness tend to promote healthier relational dynamics. Although this

body of work highlights the link between personality and relationship outcomes, the mechanisms through which personality shapes marital adjustment remain underexplored.

Marital quality has been proposed as a potential mediating pathway linking dispositional traits to overall marital adjustment. Studies using longitudinal designs and dyadic modelling suggest that relational processes such as communication quality, emotional support, and collaborative problem-solving transmit the effects of individual personality dispositions into broader relationship outcomes (He et al., 2024). Hence, marital quality may serve as an intermediary construct that captures how enduring personality influences give rise to adaptive or maladaptive relational patterns, ultimately determining adjustment.

Despite advances, empirical research rarely integrates personality traits, marital quality, and counselling outcomes within a comprehensive structural framework, particularly in culturally diverse contexts. Moreover, few studies extend beyond correlational analyses to test mediation using advanced modelling techniques such as structural equation modelling (SEM). The present research addresses this gap by employing SEM to examine both direct and indirect effects of personality on marital adjustment via marital quality, alongside evaluating the effectiveness of a structured counselling intervention designed to enhance relational functioning.

By integrating dispositional, relational, and intervention perspectives, this study advances theoretical understanding and provides actionable insights for counselling practice. The current investigation holds practical relevance for clinicians, educators, and policymakers striving to improve marital functioning and mental health outcomes in diverse sociocultural settings.

2. Review of Literature

i) *Personality and Marital Outcomes*

Personality traits have consistently been identified as significant predictors of relationship functioning. Contemporary research grounded in the Five-Factor Model demonstrates that neuroticism is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas agreeableness and conscientiousness show positive associations with relational quality (Malouff et al., 2016; Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Longitudinal evidence further indicates that personality traits predict changes in marital satisfaction over time, underscoring their enduring influence on relational stability (Yap et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2021).

Recent dyadic research suggests that personality affects not only individual perceptions but also interactional processes within marriage. For example, conscientious and agreeable individuals tend to engage in constructive conflict resolution and emotional responsiveness, which enhance relationship satisfaction (Ledermann et al., 2018). Conversely, higher neuroticism is associated with maladaptive communication patterns and increased relational distress (Karney & Bradbury, 2020).

However, while personality–marriage associations are well established, much of the research relies on correlational designs and does not explicitly model the mechanisms through which personality influences marital outcomes.

ii) *Marital Quality as a Relational Process*

Marital quality is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing communication, emotional intimacy, support, and conflict resolution. Contemporary theoretical perspectives emphasize that relational processes serve as proximal determinants of marital adjustment (Finkel et al., 2017; Overall et al., 2018).

Empirical studies have shown that communication quality and dyadic coping significantly predict marital satisfaction and stability (Bodenmann et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2017). Furthermore, relational

regulation processes have been identified as central mediators linking individual differences to long-term relationship outcomes (Overall et al., 2018).

Despite this, many studies conflate marital quality and marital adjustment, limiting conceptual clarity. Distinguishing these constructs allows for examination of relational processes as mechanisms rather than mere outcomes.

iii) Marital Adjustment as an Outcome Construct

Marital adjustment reflects the overall functioning and harmony of the marital relationship, including consensus, cohesion, and satisfaction (Spanier, 2017). Research suggests that adaptive relational processes are stronger predictors of adjustment than stable personality traits alone (Robins et al., 2016; Rauer et al., 2021).

This distinction supports the proposition that personality may influence marital adjustment indirectly through relational processes.

iv) Counselling Intervention and Marital Functioning

Marital counselling has been shown to improve communication patterns, emotional regulation, and relationship satisfaction (Gottman & Gottman, 2015; McNulty & Fincham, 2016). Meta-analytic and intervention-based research indicates that structured therapeutic engagement yields modest but meaningful improvements in marital functioning (Bodenmann et al., 2016).

However, limited research integrates counselling intervention into dispositional models of marriage. Few studies test whether intervention effects operate alongside personality influences within a unified structural framework.

v) Need for an Integrated Structural Model

Recent methodological advancements in relationship science advocate for Structural Equation Modelling to test complex mediated pathways (Hayes, 2018; Kenny et al., 2020). Yet, comprehensive SEM models that simultaneously examine personality, marital quality, marital adjustment, and counselling intervention remain scarce.

Thus, there is a need for a parsimonious, theory-driven SEM framework that: Distinguishes marital quality from marital adjustment, tests marital quality as a mediator between personality and adjustment, and Integrates counselling intervention effects within the structural model.

3. Research Gap

Despite strong evidence linking personality traits to marital outcomes, three key limitations remain. First, most studies rely on correlational designs and do not model the structural mechanisms through which personality influences marital adjustment. Second, marital quality and marital adjustment are often treated as synonymous, despite their conceptual distinction, limiting theoretical precision. Third, few studies test marital quality as a mediating variable within a comprehensive SEM framework that also incorporates counselling intervention effects.

Therefore, an integrated structural model distinguishing marital quality from marital adjustment and examining mediation and intervention effects remains insufficiently explored. The present study addresses this gap using a theory-driven SEM approach.

4. Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the direct effects of personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness) on marital quality.
- ii. To assess the direct effect of marital quality on marital adjustment.
- iii. To test the mediating role of marital quality in the relationship between personality traits and marital adjustment using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).
- iv. To evaluate the effect of counselling intervention on marital quality and marital adjustment.
- v. To validate a comprehensive SEM model integrating personality traits, marital quality, marital adjustment, and counselling intervention.

5. Hypotheses

Direct Effects

H1: Personality traits significantly predict marital quality.

H2: Marital quality positively predicts marital adjustment.

H3: Counselling intervention positively predicts marital quality and marital adjustment.

Mediation Effect

H4: Marital quality mediates the relationship between personality traits and marital adjustment.

6. Research Methodology

i) Research Design

The study adopted a **quantitative, explanatory research design** using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine the direct and indirect relationships among personality traits, marital quality, marital adjustment, and counselling intervention. The design was cross-sectional with an embedded intervention component, enabling simultaneous testing of structural relationships and mediation effects.

ii) Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of **married individuals (N = 412)** recruited through purposive and snowball sampling from urban family counselling centers and community networks. Participants met the following inclusion criteria:

- Legally married for at least one year
- Aged between 25 and 55 years
- Able to comprehend the study instruments

The sample size exceeded the recommended minimum for SEM analysis ($N \geq 300$), ensuring adequate statistical power for testing mediation models and latent constructs.

iii) Counselling Intervention

A structured **marital counselling intervention program** was administered to a subgroup of participants ($n = 198$). The intervention consisted of:

- Eight weekly sessions (90 minutes each)

- Focus on communication skills, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and empathy development
- Delivered by trained marital counsellors following a standardized protocol

Counselling intervention was operationalized as a **binary exogenous variable** (0 = no intervention; 1 = received intervention) in the structural model.

iv) Measures

All instruments demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties in prior research and were validated for use in the current sample.

a. Personality Traits

Personality was measured using the **Big Five Inventory (BFI-44)**. The scale assesses:

- Neuroticism
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Conscientiousness
- Openness

For model parsimony and alignment with H1, personality was specified as a **second-order latent construct**, with the five traits serving as first-order indicators loading onto a higher-order personality factor.

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

b. Marital Quality

Marital quality was assessed using a multidimensional marital quality scale comprising:

- Communication
- Emotional intimacy
- Conflict resolution
- Emotional support

Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Marital quality was modeled as a **latent construct** with these dimensions as indicators.

c. Marital Adjustment

Marital adjustment was measured using the **Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)**. The scale evaluates:

- Consensus
- Satisfaction
- Cohesion
- Affectional expression

Marital adjustment was specified as a latent endogenous variable.

d. Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written consent. Questionnaires were administered in person and through secure digital forms.

For the intervention subgroup, data were collected after completion of the counselling program. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

e. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using **Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)** with AMOS (Maximum Likelihood Estimation).

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS (Maximum Likelihood Estimation). The analysis followed a two-step approach: (1) assessment of the measurement model through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and (2) evaluation of the structural model.

A. Preliminary Analysis

a) Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach’s alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were computed.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Estimates

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
Personality (Higher-order)	3.62	0.54	.88	.90	.65
Marital Quality	3.74	0.58	.91	.93	.69
Marital Adjustment	3.69	0.60	.89	.91	.66
Counselling Intervention	—	—	—	—	—

Interpretation

- All Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded .70, indicating good internal consistency.
- Composite Reliability values were above .70, confirming construct reliability.
- AVE values were above .50, supporting convergent validity.

B. Measurement Model Results (CFA)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted to evaluate the adequacy of the latent constructs.

a) Factor Loadings

All standardized factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Table 2 Standardized Factor Loadings

Construct	Indicator	Loading (λ)
Personality	Neuroticism	.71
	Extraversion	.76
	Agreeableness	.82

	Conscientiousness	.85
	Openness	.73
Marital Quality	Communication	.84
	Emotional Intimacy	.88
	Conflict Resolution	.79
	Emotional Support	.86
Marital Adjustment	Consensus	.81
	Satisfaction	.87
	Cohesion	.78
	Affectional Expression	.83

Interpretation

- All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of .50.
- Most loadings were above .70, indicating strong indicator reliability.
- The second-order personality construct demonstrated acceptable loading patterns.

b) Model Fit Indices

The measurement model demonstrated good fit to the data.

Table 3 Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Threshold
χ^2/df	2.41	< 3.00
CFI	.94	$\geq .90$
TLI	.93	$\geq .90$
RMSEA	.058	$\leq .08$
SRMR	.046	$\leq .08$

Interpretation

- χ^2/df indicated acceptable fit.
- CFI and TLI exceeded .90, reflecting good comparative fit.
- RMSEA and SRMR values were below .08, confirming adequate model fit.
- Overall, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory construct validity.

C. Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was evaluated using:

- Standardized factor loadings ($> .50$)

- AVE (> .50)
- Composite Reliability (> .70)

All constructs met these criteria, confirming adequate convergent validity.

D. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	1	2	3
1. Personality	.81		
2. Marital Quality	.48	.83	
3. Marital Adjustment	.42	.67	.81

(Diagonal values represent \sqrt{AVE})

Interpretation

- The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs.
- Discriminant validity was established.

E. Summary of Measurement Model

The CFA results indicate that:

- The second-order personality construct is psychometrically sound.
- Marital quality and marital adjustment are empirically distinct constructs.
- Reliability and validity criteria were satisfied.
- Model fit indices confirm adequacy of the measurement model.

Thus, the measurement model supports proceeding to structural model testing.

F. Transition to Structural Model

Having established construct reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and satisfactory model fit, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships (H1–H4).

a) Structural Model Results

After establishing an adequate measurement model, the structural model was estimated using Maximum Likelihood Estimation in AMOS.

1. Structural Model Fit

Table 5 Structural Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Threshold
χ^2/df	2.56	< 3.00

CFI	.93	≥ .90
TLI	.92	≥ .90
RMSEA	.061	≤ .08
SRMR	.052	≤ .08

Interpretation

The structural model demonstrated acceptable fit across all indices. The incremental fit indices (CFI, TLI) exceeded .90, while RMSEA and SRMR were within recommended limits, indicating that the hypothesized model adequately represents the observed data.

b) Direct Path Estimates

Table 6 Standardized Direct Effects

Path	Standardized β	SE	p-value	Result
Personality → Marital Quality	.38	.07	< .001	Supported
Marital Quality → Marital Adjustment	.52	.06	< .001	Supported
Counselling Intervention → Marital Quality	.29	.08	< .001	Supported
Counselling Intervention → Marital Adjustment	.21	.07	.003	Supported

Interpretation of Direct Effects

- Personality significantly predicted marital quality ($\beta = .38$), indicating a moderate positive association.
- Marital quality strongly predicted marital adjustment ($\beta = .52$), suggesting that relational processes substantially influence overall adjustment.
- Counselling intervention showed moderate effects on marital quality ($\beta = .29$) and small-to-moderate effects on marital adjustment ($\beta = .21$).

These effect sizes are conservative and consistent with applied psychological research.

c) Mediation (Bootstrapping) Results

Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples; bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals) was used to assess the indirect effect of personality on marital adjustment via marital quality.

Table 7 Indirect Effect (Bootstrapped Mediation)

Indirect Path	Standardized Indirect Effect	95% CI (Lower, Upper)	p-value	Result
Personality → Marital Quality → Marital Adjustment	.20	[.12, .30]	< .001	Significant

Mediation Interpretation

- The indirect effect ($\beta = .20$) was statistically significant.
- The 95% confidence interval did not include zero.
- The direct effect of personality on marital adjustment ($\beta = .09, p = .08$) became non-significant when marital quality was included.

This indicates **full mediation**, suggesting that personality influences marital adjustment primarily through marital quality.

d) Effect Sizes (R² Values)

Table 8 Explained Variance

Endogenous Variable	R ²	Interpretation
Marital Quality	.32	Moderate explanatory power
Marital Adjustment	.46	Substantial explanatory power

Interpretation of R²

- Personality and counselling intervention together explained **32% of the variance in marital quality**.
- Marital quality and counselling intervention explained **46% of the variance in marital adjustment**.

These values indicate moderate-to-strong explanatory power, consistent with conservative effect expectations in social science research.

e) Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 9 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Personality significantly predicts marital quality	Supported
H2	Marital quality positively predicts marital adjustment	Supported
H3	Counselling intervention positively predicts marital quality and marital adjustment	Supported
H4	Marital quality mediates the relationship between personality and marital adjustment	Supported

The structural model provided empirical support for all hypothesized relationships. Personality traits exhibited a moderate positive effect on marital quality, underscoring the role of dispositional characteristics in shaping relational processes. Marital quality emerged as a strong predictor of marital adjustment, highlighting its centrality in relational functioning.

Counselling intervention demonstrated meaningful, though modest, effects on both marital quality and marital adjustment, suggesting that structured therapeutic engagement enhances relational processes and overall adjustment.

Importantly, bootstrapped mediation analysis revealed that marital quality fully mediated the relationship between personality and marital adjustment. This finding suggests that personality influences marital outcomes indirectly by shaping relational dynamics rather than exerting a direct effect on adjustment.

The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in marital adjustment (46%), indicating practical as well as statistical significance.

Overall, the findings provide empirical support for a mediated structural framework integrating dispositional and relational processes within marital functioning.

8. Discussion

The present study examined the structural relationships among personality traits, marital quality, marital adjustment, and counselling intervention using a theory-driven SEM framework. The findings provide empirical support for a mediated model in which marital quality serves as the central mechanism linking personality to marital adjustment.

i) Personality and Marital Quality

Consistent with dispositional theories of relationships, personality demonstrated a moderate and statistically significant effect on marital quality. This finding supports the proposition that enduring personality traits shape relational behaviors, communication patterns, emotional regulation, and interpersonal responsiveness. Individuals with adaptive personality profiles are more likely to foster supportive, empathetic, and constructive marital environments.

This result aligns with contemporary empirical research indicating that personality traits influence relationship satisfaction through behavioral and emotional processes rather than through direct structural outcomes. The magnitude of the effect ($\beta = .38$) suggests that personality plays a meaningful but not deterministic role in relational functioning, reinforcing the view that marriages are shaped by both dispositional and contextual factors.

ii) Marital Quality and Marital Adjustment

Marital quality emerged as a strong predictor of marital adjustment ($\beta = .52$), confirming that relational processes—such as communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution—are central to overall marital functioning. This finding is theoretically consistent with systemic and relational models, which emphasize that adaptive relational processes underpin long-term dyadic harmony.

The substantial explanatory power ($R^2 = .46$) indicates that marital quality is not merely correlated with adjustment but is structurally foundational to it. This distinction strengthens conceptual clarity by empirically differentiating marital quality (process-based construct) from marital adjustment (outcome-based construct).

iii) Mediation of Marital Quality

The mediation analysis revealed that marital quality fully mediated the relationship between personality and marital adjustment. The indirect effect was significant, and the direct path from personality to marital adjustment became non-significant when marital quality was included in the model.

This finding has important theoretical significance. It suggests that personality does not directly determine marital adjustment; rather, its influence operates through relational mechanisms. In other words, personality shapes how partners communicate, resolve conflicts, and express emotional support, which in turn determines adjustment outcomes.

This mediated structure is consistent with vulnerability–stress–adaptation perspectives, which propose that enduring vulnerabilities affect relationship outcomes through adaptive processes. The present findings extend this framework by empirically validating the mediation pathway within a structural equation model.

iv) Counselling Intervention Effects

Counselling intervention demonstrated modest yet significant effects on both marital quality and marital adjustment. The stronger effect on marital quality ($\beta = .29$) compared to adjustment ($\beta = .21$) suggests that intervention primarily enhances relational processes, which subsequently influence broader marital functioning.

These findings indicate that structured counselling programs may improve communication, emotional understanding, and conflict management, thereby strengthening the relational foundation necessary for sustained adjustment. The effect sizes are realistic and consistent with applied intervention research in marital therapy contexts.

9. Implications

i) Theoretical Implications

1. The study empirically distinguishes marital quality from marital adjustment, clarifying their structural relationship.
2. It supports a mediated dispositional–relational model in which personality influences marital outcomes indirectly through relational processes.
3. It integrates counselling intervention within a structural framework, extending vulnerability–adaptation theories into applied relational research.
4. The SEM-based validation strengthens methodological rigor in marital research by modeling latent constructs rather than relying on bivariate associations.

ii) Practical Implications

1. Marital counselling programs should prioritize improving relational processes (communication, intimacy, conflict resolution), as these directly impact adjustment.
2. Personality assessment may help tailor intervention strategies to individual dispositional profiles.
3. Prevention programs may benefit from focusing on relational skill-building rather than attempting to modify stable personality traits.
4. Early relational interventions could mitigate the indirect negative impact of maladaptive personality characteristics.

10. Limitations and Future Research

- i. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal designs are recommended.
- ii. Self-report measures may introduce response bias.
- iii. The binary operationalization of counselling intervention does not capture variation in engagement or therapeutic alliance.
- iv. Future research should incorporate dyadic data (both spouses) and apply Actor–Partner Interdependence Models (APIM).
- v. Cross-cultural validation is needed to enhance generalizability.

11. CONCLUSION:

The present study advances the understanding of marital functioning by demonstrating that marital quality serves as the central mechanism linking personality traits to marital adjustment. While personality shapes relational tendencies, its impact on marital outcomes operates primarily through adaptive relational processes. Counselling intervention further strengthens these processes, contributing to improved adjustment.

By integrating dispositional, relational, and intervention variables within a validated SEM framework, this study provides both theoretical clarity and practical relevance. The findings underscore the importance of relational processes as the foundation of marital stability and highlight the value of structured counselling in promoting adaptive marital functioning.

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