

Conflict Styles & Relationship Satisfaction

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Abstract— *The study aims to explore conflict resolution styles as predictors of relationship satisfaction among emerging adults (18-25-year-olds) engaged in romantic relationships in Kerala using a correlational research design. Data was collected using a purposive sampling method. The participants were provided with informed consent, a personal data sheet, romantic partner conflict scale, and a relationship assessment scale. The collected data from the participants were subjected to statistical analysis. As the data lacked a normal distribution, Spearman's rank correlation and multiple regression were used to analyze the relationship between variables. Findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction. Conflict resolution styles (collaboration and interactional reactivity) are significant predictors of relationship satisfaction.*

Index Terms- Conflict resolution styles, emerging adults, relationship satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

A romantic partnership is described as a consensual and continuous interaction between two individuals, marked by distinctive displays of fondness and closeness [3]. One of the key developmental milestones indicating one's transition into adulthood is the acquisition of intimacy in a romantic relationship[4]. According to Erikson's theory, people may feel alienated and alone if they struggle in the sixth stage and are unable to develop intimate relationships. In adulthood, this could cause a feeling of detachment and separation. Isolation, loneliness, and even depression can result from avoiding intimacy and fearing commitment and relationships [8].

A relationship encounters a conflict when two people clash, quarrel, or fight over a specific issue. Romantic partners may be comparable in terms of age, education, values, views, and physical appeal, but they are still distinct people with their conflicts that need to be addressed. The majority of conflicts are caused by issues like disagreements over values, a lack of cooperation, a lack of quality time spent together, problems with children and extended families, issues with communication, money, household chores, jealousy, or the amount of affection a partner shows [2]. For women, greater conflict by the partner was related to elevated levels of anxiety, which in turn was associated with shorter sleep duration and worse sleep efficiency. For men, it was related to greater symptoms of anxiety and depression [6].

Depending on one's preferences, people use various methods of dispute resolution. There are six types of conflict resolution styles: The Compromise strategy seems to involve both collaboration and negotiation, to achieve both partners' satisfaction. Dominance is marked by one partner's effort to take charge and emerge victorious in a disagreement, while submission is marked by one partner yielding to the other's desires in order to please them and/or bring the conflict to a close. On the other hand, separation entails a period of cooling off with the intention of addressing the issue at a later

time, whereas avoidance involves preventing conflict situations from arising in the first place. Interactional Reactivity is characterized by verbal aggression, emotional volatility, and lack of trust between partners. Compromise is a constructive strategy. Domination and interactional reactivity are clearly destructive strategies, and submission may on occasion be actively destructive. Avoidance and separation are not constructive or destructive. How they function may be determined by several contextual factors [13]. According to a study conducted by Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring in 1998, mother-adolescent and father-adolescent resolution was found to have a direct relationship with sibling and romantic couple resolution, and sibling resolution was found to have a direct relationship with romantic couple resolution for negative resolution styles, but not for the positive resolution style of compromise, therefore, it is evident that these styles are learned in one's family [9].

Need and significance of the study

The success or failure of a romantic relationship affects not just the couple, but also the individual's adjustment in general and in his connections with others. Therefore, it will be crucial to keep researching for the elements that make them up.

As per National Crime Records Bureau(2020), in Kerala 3,031 of 29,193 recorded murders were motivated by love affairs. Health and Family Welfare Minister Veena George revealed that in Kerala alone 350 women died in the last four years. Out of the total cases, 10 girls lost their lives due to homicide, while 340 tragically succumbed to suicide, all linked to matters of the heart. Recent year's data are yet to be released but data would have jumped many folds because nowadays majority of the crimes are related to violence in relationships [11]. It now turns out romantic relationships, including extramarital affairs, account for more than ten percent of all murders in the country. This issue is a source of conflict and tension for the individuals involved, as well as their families and society as a whole. Divorce rate and

conflicts between partners which are even leading to crime are increasing daily in Kerala. Instances of physical attacks in the form of burning, shooting, stabbing, and poisoning within relationships are witnessing an alarming rise. The way a relationship conflict is handled and concluded is what determines whether it is satisfying (healthy) or unsatisfying (unhealthy) rather than the frequency of conflict.

This study intends to find out which conflict resolution styles predict relationship satisfaction. Although there were many studies explaining relationship satisfaction, only a few studies were conducted on relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution styles in the Indian context, especially in Kerala. The present comprehensive investigation sought to seal the knowledge gap and will pave the way for further in-depth research. The results of this study are likely to be highly relevant for relationship counselors and therapists, shaping their views, assessments, and approaches to helping couples achieve more positive relationship outcomes.

The present study is entitled — Conflict Resolution Styles as Predictors of relationship satisfaction among emerging adults engaged in Romantic Relationships.

Objective

To examine the relationship between conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction among emerging adults engaged in romantic relationships.

To understand the predictors of relationship satisfaction among emerging adults engaged in romantic relationships.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a relationship between conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction among emerging adults engaged in romantic relationships.

H2: Conflict resolution styles are significant predictors of relationship satisfaction among emerging adults engaged in romantic relationships.

Variables

Romantic relationship

A romantic relationship is defined as mutual, ongoing, and voluntary interactions between two partners that are characterized by specific expressions of affection and intimacy [3].

Conflict resolution styles

Conflict resolution strategies in romantic relationships refer to the techniques and approaches used by partners to address and resolve disagreements, differences, or disputes.

Relationship Satisfaction

Romantic relationship satisfaction can be defined as a person's internal evaluation of their partner's positive feelings and the attractiveness of their relations [10].

II. METHOD

Participants

A total of 160 participants both male and female students of the age range 18 to 25 years, residing in Kerala and currently in a romantic relationship for at least 6 months or more (for conflicts to arise, a minimum period of 6-12 months is needed) were included. Men and women who currently have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, or are in a homosexual relationship were excluded from the study.

Instruments

The Romantic Partner Conflict Scale

The scale was introduced by Tammy L. Zacchilli. The purpose of this scale is to measure conflict resolution styles by individuals in romantic relationships. It measures six styles: Compromise, avoidance, interactional reactivity, separation, domination, and submission using a 1(*disagree*) to 5(*agree*) scale. Analysis of alpha coefficients showed good reliability as each subscale ranged from .82 to .95 [13]. For our study, the alpha coefficients were .82 for avoidance, .91 for compromise, .81 for react, .88 for submission, .88 for separation, and .90 for domination.

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

It is a seven-item generic measure of relationship satisfaction. Participants provide their responses to each question using a 5-point scale that spans from 1 (indicating low satisfaction) to 5 (indicating high satisfaction). The questions are sufficiently detailed to assess various aspects of the relationship, such as love, problems, and expectations yet general enough to be appropriate for married couples, couples who are living together, dating couples, gay couples, and, with minimal changes even for friendships [7] and [8]. Items 4 and 7 are reverse-scored. The scores can vary between 7 (indicating low satisfaction) and 35 (indicating high satisfaction). This assessment is applicable beyond marital relationships and has demonstrated robust predictive accuracy with couples in dating scenarios. Findings suggest there is a high degree of convergence between the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) and RAS.

Procedure for data collection

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Participants were given completed informed consent and two questionnaires along with a brief explanation of the study's goals. The researchers ensured the confidentiality of the data.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data were analysed for assessing normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test and it was concluded as not normal therefore non-parametric tests were used.

Table 1. Relationship between conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction

Conflict resolution styles	Relationship Satisfaction
Interactional reactivity	-0.45 ***
submission	-0.07
separation	0.05
avoidance	0.19 *
collaboration	0.53 ***
domination	-0.06

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Spearman's rank correlation was used to understand the relationship between conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction and the results are depicted in Table 1. A significant negative relationship was found between interactional reactivity and relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.001$) which indicates that if interactional reactivity increases, relationship satisfaction will decrease, and if interactional reactivity decreases, relationship satisfaction will increase. It may be because verbal/physical arguments can lead to emotional distancing between partners.

A significant positive relationship was found between avoidance and relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.05$) which indicates that higher levels of avoidance lead to increased relationship satisfaction while a decrease in avoidance results in decreased relationship satisfaction. In some cases, individuals might use avoidance as a coping mechanism to manage conflicts or difficult discussions within their relationship. It is possible that this avoidance could lead to temporary relief from tension or discomfort, which could contribute to higher levels of perceived relationship satisfaction. However, this satisfaction may be short-lived, as unresolved issues can potentially build up over time.

A significant positive relationship was found between collaboration and relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.001$) which indicates that as collaboration levels rise, so does relationship satisfaction. Conversely, as collaboration diminishes, so does relationship satisfaction. Collaboration often involves open and effective communication, active listening, and the willingness to work together to address challenges or make decisions leading to a better understanding of each other's needs and preferences, which contributes to higher relationship satisfaction.

Table 2. Regression analysis for predicting relationship satisfaction among young adults engaged in romantic relationships.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig
1	.566a	.320	.316	74.426	.000
2	.600b	.360	.352	44.155	.000

a. Predictors: (constant), colab

b. Predictors: (constant), collab, inter

The analysis was done using stepwise regression to check whether collaboration, avoidance, and interactional reactivity predicted relationship satisfaction among emerging adults engaged in romantic relationships. The R square values for collaboration and interactional reactivity were found to be .32 and .36 indicating that collaborative style predicted 32% relationship satisfaction and the combination of collaborative and interactional reactivity style predicted 36% relationship satisfaction which indicates that interactional reactivity alone predicted 4 % in relationship satisfaction.

The collaborative approach is a significant predictor, accounting for 32% of relationship satisfaction. It may be because this approach involves open communication, active listening, and a cooperative search for solutions to all worries. Collaboration fosters a sense of oneness by acknowledging the shared commitment to the success of the relationship. Partners feel more emotionally connected and safe when disputes are settled through cooperation rather than dominance or avoidance. By using a collaborative conflict resolution style, one shows a willingness to work with others to overcome obstacles, which leads to better problem-solving abilities and a greater understanding of each other's contributions. Relationship satisfaction is strongly impacted by this determined attempt to resolve problems peacefully because it cultivates a climate of trust, empathy, and harmonious interaction.

The relationship between interactional reactivity and relationship satisfaction is negative and this style predicts 4% in relationship satisfaction. It could be because people's increased reactivity, especially when it involves negative emotions like anger or defensiveness, can result in frequent arguments, miscommunications, and a tense interpersonal atmosphere. Such unfavorable reactions could undermine trust and obstruct productive conversation, which would ultimately reduce overall happiness. Additional research findings that support this notion are [1] and [5].

IV. CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between conflict resolution styles (collaboration, avoidance, and interactional reactivity) and relationship satisfaction among emerging adults engaged in romantic relationships. Collaboration and interactional reactivity are significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. This indicates that addressing partner conflicts as well as modifying maladaptive conflict resolution styles are important for relationship satisfaction. Individual therapy, couples counseling, anger management, group therapy, conflict resolution skill training, and psychoeducation that can be offered at universities/colleges are some psychological strategies to address couple conflict and violence.

The absence of constructive coping mechanisms, such as verbal argument, avoidance, criticism, etc causes the buildup and escalation of issues that negatively impact relationship satisfaction. The effectiveness of any relationship is greatly

impacted by the method of conflict resolution that is selected, taking into account the urgency of the moment and the circumstances rather than the disputed event itself. Cramer (2004) emphasized that conflict strategy is one of the most powerful predictors of relationship satisfaction. People start romantic relationships with well-known, taught conflict resolution techniques from one's family of origin and certain conflict resolution coping mechanisms pose a significant risk to successful relationship outcomes. Therefore its significance can also be conveyed to parents.

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