

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Saving Marital Relationships Beyond Love

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Abstract

Divorce rates in Indonesia, particularly in Central Java, remain very high, with a significant proportion happening among couples in their early years of marriage, a period frequently marked by adjustment difficulties and conflict. This study looks at the association between emotional intelligence and marital relationship quality among couples who have been married for less than five years in Central Java, Indonesia. A quantitative correlational design was used to collect data from 196 married people chosen through purposive selection. The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) was used to measure emotional intelligence, and the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) were used to measure marital relationship quality. Spearman's rank correlation was used to examine the data. The results showed that both male and female participants marital relationship quality and emotional intelligence were significantly and strongly positively correlated, suggesting that people with higher emotional intelligence typically have more fulfilling and stable relationships. These findings demonstrate how emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in promoting good communication, emotional control, and conflict resolution, which are critical in the early stages of marriage. Notably, this study adds empirical data to the comparatively unexplored field of Central Java early stage marriages. In general, it becomes clear that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in promoting marital quality and sustaining the stability of long-term relationships.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Marital Quality; Newlyweds

Abstrak

Angka perceraian di Indonesia, khususnya di Jawa Tengah, masih sangat tinggi, dengan proporsi yang signifikan terjadi di antara pasangan yang baru menikah, suatu periode yang sering ditandai dengan kesulitan penyesuaian dan konflik. Studi ini meneliti hubungan antara kecerdasan emosional dan kualitas hubungan perkawinan di antara pasangan yang telah menikah kurang dari lima tahun di Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Desain korelasional kuantitatif digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data dari 196 orang yang sudah menikah yang dipilih melalui seleksi bertujuan. Skala Kecerdasan Emosional Wong dan Law (WLEIS) digunakan untuk mengukur kecerdasan emosional, dan Komponen Kualitas Hubungan yang Dirasakan (PRQC) digunakan untuk mengukur kualitas hubungan perkawinan. Korelasi peringkat Spearman digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa kualitas hubungan perkawinan dan kecerdasan emosional peserta pria dan wanita berkorelasi positif secara signifikan dan kuat, menunjukkan bahwa orang dengan kecerdasan emosional yang lebih tinggi biasanya memiliki hubungan yang lebih memuaskan dan stabil. Temuan ini menunjukkan bagaimana kecerdasan emosional memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan komunikasi yang baik, pengendalian emosi, dan penyelesaian konflik, yang sangat penting pada tahap awal pernikahan. Yang perlu diperhatikan, penelitian ini

menambahkan data empiris pada bidang yang relatif belum banyak dieksplorasi, yaitu pernikahan tahap awal di Jawa Tengah. Secara umum, menjadi jelas bahwa kecerdasan emosional memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan kualitas pernikahan dan menjaga stabilitas hubungan jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: Kecerdasan Emosional; Kualitas Pernikahan; Pasangan Pengantin Baru

Introduction

Divorce has become a significant issue in Indonesia, with Central Java recording the second-highest divorce rate, reaching 68,133 cases in 2023 (BPS, 2023). Continuous conflicts and arguments are identified as the leading causes of divorce, surpassing factors such as financial difficulties, forced marriages, and polygamy. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that persistent disputes and economic problems are the primary drivers of divorce, particularly among couples married for less than five years (Absor, 2023). These patterns suggest that early years of marriage represent a vulnerable phase that requires not only physical commitment but also emotional readiness and adaptability. Marriage itself is a meaningful life transition, representing both a spiritual and physical bond aimed at forming a harmonious and lasting family (Sekarayu and Nurwati, 2021; Suyaman, 2021). However, as Thomas in Beirne (2014) metaphorically states, marriage brings both joy and sorrow, highlighting the inevitability of challenges within marital life. Empirical data further reinforce this reality.

Studies in regions such as Jepara, Wonogiri, and Semarang consistently show that a substantial proportion of divorces occur within the first five years of marriage (Absor and Suhadi, 2022; Luhung, 2024; Rosita and Azizah, 2023). This indicates that marital instability in early years is not incidental but systemic, requiring deeper examination of underlying relational factors. Among the factors influencing marital stability, emotional well-being plays a crucial role in determining marital quality. Marital quality refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of their marriage, encompassing satisfaction, stability, closeness, and mutual support (Norton, 1983; Nurhayati, 2021).

Research consistently shows that individuals with better emotional regulation tend to experience higher relationship satisfaction and lower levels of conflict (Raharja et al., 2020). In this context, emotional intelligence defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own and others' emotions Goleman (2015) becomes a key determinant in fostering healthy marital interactions. Previous studies demonstrate that emotional intelligence contributes significantly to conflict resolution, empathy, and relationship satisfaction (Christy, 2022; Beirne, 2014).

However, findings by Brackett et al., (2005) reveal a more complex dynamic, where excessively high emotional intelligence in both partners may lead to competition in emotional control, potentially affecting relationship outcomes. This indicates that the role of emotional intelligence in marriage is not entirely linear and requires further contextual understanding. Despite extensive research on emotional intelligence and marital quality, there remains a gap in studies that specifically examine this relationship among couples in the early years of marriage, particularly within the Indonesian context where divorce rates are notably high in this phase. Most studies focus either on general marital populations or treat emotional intelligence as a uniformly positive factor without considering its nuanced dynamics. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital quality among couples married for less than five years. The findings are expected to contribute to theoretical development and provide practical insights for couples, counselors, and policymakers in designing interventions to promote healthier and more sustainable marriages.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital relationship quality among couples in the early years of marriage. The population consisted of married individuals residing in Central Java with a marriage duration of 0-5 years. A purposive sampling technique was used with the justification that the study specifically targeted individuals who met particular criteria relevant to early marital experiences. Based on G*Power analysis with a medium effect size ($w = 0.3$), the minimum required sample was 82 couples; however, the unit of analysis in this study was individuals, resulting in 196 respondents (husbands and wives analyzed separately). Data were collected using questionnaires distributed across several cities in Central Java. Emotional intelligence was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) adapted by Fitri et al., (2024) consisting of 16 items across four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Marital relationship quality was measured using the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) scale adapted by Sidhu et al., (2019) consisting of 18 items covering satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. Both instruments used a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Prior to hypothesis testing, data assumption tests were conducted, including normality testing, which indicated non-normal distribution; therefore, Spearman's rank correlation was applied as a non-parametric alternative. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital relationship quality.

Result and Discussion

Table 1. Demographic Statistics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	96	50.0
	Female	96	50.0
Age	20-25 years	71	36.2
	26-30 years	100	51.0
	31-35 years	22	11.2
	>36	3	1.5
Employment Status	Not Working	17	8.7
	Working	179	91.3
Highest Education	Junior High School	1	.5
	Senior High School	56	28.6
	Diploma/Bachelor's Degree	131	66.8
	Master's Doctoral Degree	8	4.1
Number of Children	0	70	35.7
	1	89	45.4
	2	25	12.8
	3	12	6.1

The majority of respondents were aged 26-30 years (51%), employed (91.3%), and held a diploma (D3) or bachelor's degree (66.8%). Most respondents had one child (45.4%). Overall, the sample was dominated by individuals in early adulthood who were employed and had at least one child.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables by Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	Male	98	92.11	12.163
	Female	98	92.48	10.311
Relationship Quality	Male	98	102.81	13.271
	Female	98	102.56	13.095

Based on Table 2, the data analysis of 196 respondents showed that the mean emotional intelligence score for male respondents was 92.11 (SD = 12.163), while for female respondents it was 92.48 (SD = 10.311). Meanwhile, the mean marital relationship quality score for male respondents was 102.81 (SD = 13.271), and for female respondents it was 102.56 (SD = 13.095). These findings indicate that, in general, the respondents exhibited relatively good levels of emotional intelligence and marital relationship quality in the early years of marriage. Overall, the results suggest that respondents tend to have relatively high emotional intelligence and marital relationship quality within marriages of less than five years.

Table 3. Spearman Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Quality by Gender

Group	N	Correlation Coefficient (ρ)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	98	.695**	<.001
Female	98	.481**	<.001

For both male respondents ($r = 0.695$; $p < 0.001$) and female respondents ($r = 0.481$; $p < 0.001$), the Spearman correlation analysis revealed a high positive link between emotional intelligence and marital relationship quality. According to the findings, individuals who scored higher on emotional intelligence also tended to have better marriages. In addition, emotional intelligence scores were higher among female respondents than male respondents. The results of this study indicate a positive and statistically significant correlation between emotional intelligence and marital relationship quality among individuals married for less than five years.

Based on the correlation coefficient obtained (ρ), the strength of the relationship can be categorized as moderate to strong according to commonly accepted interpretation guidelines (e.g., Cohen). This finding suggests that higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with better perceived marital quality, particularly in terms of satisfaction, intimacy, and conflict management. However, the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital quality should not be interpreted as linear or universally optimal at higher levels. Previous research by Brackett, Warner and Bosco (2005) highlights a more complex dynamic, where couples in which both partners possess very high emotional intelligence may experience less optimal outcomes compared to couples with complementary levels. This phenomenon can be explained by the tendency of individuals with high emotional intelligence to perceive themselves as more competent in managing emotions, which may lead to subtle competition or dominance in emotional regulation within the relationship. Thus, while emotional intelligence is generally beneficial, its interaction within dyadic relationships requires balance rather than uniformity.

The present findings are consistent with Beirne (2014) who emphasized the role of emotional intelligence in enhancing relationship quality, while also identifying gender-based differences in its application. Emotional intelligence in men tends to be more strongly associated with social engagement within the relationship, whereas in women it is more closely linked to emotional communication and relational expression. This

suggests that emotional intelligence operates not only as an individual capacity but also as a socially constructed skill shaped by relational roles and expectations. Therefore, its contribution to marital quality may vary depending on how these roles are enacted within the relationship. From a theoretical perspective, emotional intelligence facilitates adaptive emotional regulation, empathy, and effective communication, which are essential components of marital adjustment, particularly in the early years of marriage. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better able to identify and process their own emotions, rather than suppressing negative feelings such as anger, disappointment, or frustration.

At the same time, they are more capable of understanding their partner's emotional state, which promotes constructive conflict resolution and reduces the likelihood of prolonged disputes (Fitri et al., 2024; Ikishima, 2025). This is particularly relevant given that early marriage is often characterized by role adjustment and heightened vulnerability to conflict. Despite these positive contributions, it is important to critically note that emotional intelligence alone is not sufficient to ensure high marital quality. External factors such as economic stability, communication patterns, cultural expectations, and role distribution within the marriage also play significant roles.

Therefore, emotional intelligence should be understood as a facilitating factor rather than a sole determinant of marital success. In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that the development of emotional intelligence should be prioritized both before and during marriage. Interventions such as premarital education, counseling, and emotional skills training have been shown to enhance emotional regulation, communication, and conflict resolution abilities (Lumunder et al., 2024).

However, these programs should not merely focus on increasing emotional intelligence at the individual level but also consider relational dynamics, including how emotional skills are negotiated and applied between partners. This study also has several limitations. First, the use of a correlational design does not allow for causal conclusions, meaning that while emotional intelligence is associated with marital quality, it cannot be confirmed as its direct cause. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce subjective bias, as responses are based on individual perceptions rather than objective assessments. Third, although the sample consisted of 196 individuals (98 males and 98 females), the analysis was conducted at the individual level rather than the dyadic (couple) level. This limits the ability to capture interaction effects between partners, which are crucial in understanding marital dynamics. Future research is therefore recommended to adopt a dyadic approach (e.g., Actor-Partner Interdependence Model) to better examine how each partner's emotional intelligence influences both their own and their partner's marital satisfaction. Additionally, incorporating longitudinal designs would provide deeper insight into how emotional intelligence and marital quality evolve over time, particularly across different stages of marriage.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates Emotional intelligence and the relationship quality of a marriage are positively correlated. among couples with a marriage duration of less than five years. These findings indicate that an individual's comprehension and control of emotions is crucial in fostering a more harmonious and high-quality marital relationship. Individuals who are more emotionally intelligent typically react to relational dynamics more adaptively and maintain relationship stability when facing various challenges. Thus, emotional intelligence can be understood as a key factor contributing to the development and maintenance of marital relationship quality, particularly during the early stages of marriage, which are characterized by ongoing adjustment processes.

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