

The Effect of Intergenerational Trauma on Marital Stability: The Mediating Roles of Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Trust, and Intimacy

Jone. Vakacegu¹, Nathaniel. Brooks^{2*}

¹ Department of Psychology, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji

² Department of Cognitive Psychology, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

* Corresponding author email address: nathaniel.brooks@mcgill.ca

Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Vakacegu, J., & Brooks, N. (2026). The Effect of Intergenerational Trauma on Marital Stability: The Mediating Roles of Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Trust, and Intimacy. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 7(3), 1-13.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.5425>



© 2026 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to examine the effect of intergenerational trauma on marital stability among married adults in Canada and to investigate the mediating roles of cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy in explaining this relationship.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design using structural equation modeling (SEM). The study population consisted of married adults residing in Canada. A total of 642 participants were recruited through community organizations, counseling centers, social media platforms, and online advertisements, of whom 618 completed questionnaires were retained for analysis after data screening. Participants completed the Intergenerational Trauma Scale, Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ), Dyadic Trust Scale, Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR), and Marital Stability Scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS 29 and AMOS 29. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analyses, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling were performed. The significance of indirect effects was assessed using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals.

Findings: The structural model demonstrated excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.37$, CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.955, RMSEA = 0.047, SRMR = 0.039). Intergenerational trauma negatively predicted cognitive emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.48$, $p < .001$), trust ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < .001$), intimacy ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < .001$), and marital stability ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < .001$). Cognitive emotion regulation positively predicted trust ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$), intimacy ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .001$), and marital stability ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .001$). Trust significantly predicted intimacy ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < .001$) and marital stability ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$). Intimacy emerged as the strongest direct predictor of marital stability ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < .001$). Bootstrapping analyses confirmed significant indirect effects of intergenerational trauma on marital stability through cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < .001$), indicating partial mediation. The model explained 71% of the variance in marital stability.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that intergenerational trauma exerts a substantial negative influence on marital stability through its detrimental effects on emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and intimacy.

Keywords: Intergenerational trauma; Marital stability; Cognitive emotion regulation; Trust; Intimacy.

1. Introduction

Marital stability is widely recognized as one of the most important indicators of individual well-being, family functioning, and societal health. Stable marital relationships provide emotional security, foster psychological adjustment, facilitate healthy communication, and contribute to the developmental outcomes of both partners and children. Conversely, instability within marriage has been associated with psychological distress, diminished relationship satisfaction, family dysfunction, and adverse developmental consequences across generations. Contemporary family scholars increasingly emphasize that marital stability cannot be understood solely through present relationship dynamics but must also be examined within broader intergenerational and systemic contexts that shape individuals' emotional, cognitive, and relational functioning throughout life (Kateregga, 2026; Suresh et al., 2025).

Family systems theories propose that relational patterns are transmitted across generations through complex interactions involving attachment processes, emotional learning, communication styles, and coping mechanisms. Individuals do not enter marital relationships as isolated entities; rather, they bring emotional legacies, family narratives, and behavioral patterns inherited from previous generations. Consequently, experiences of trauma occurring within one generation may continue to influence relational functioning in subsequent generations, even among family members who were not directly exposed to the original traumatic events (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024; Shmakova, 2023). This phenomenon, commonly referred to as intergenerational trauma, has emerged as a major area of investigation in family psychology, trauma studies, and relationship research.

Intergenerational trauma refers to the transmission of psychological distress, maladaptive coping strategies, emotional vulnerabilities, and relational difficulties from one generation to another. The concept originated from observations of families affected by war, genocide, displacement, and other collective traumatic experiences but has since been extended to encompass various forms of childhood adversity, abuse, neglect, family violence, and chronic relational dysfunction (Oliver, 2026; Zhao, 2022). Research suggests that traumatic experiences may affect parenting practices, emotional regulation capacities, attachment patterns, communication styles, and perceptions of interpersonal safety, thereby creating pathways through

which trauma-related consequences are transmitted across generations (Brites et al., 2026; Zhou & Zhen, 2022).

Recent empirical evidence indicates that intergenerational trauma exerts profound effects on family functioning and intimate relationships. Families affected by unresolved trauma often exhibit patterns characterized by emotional disengagement, communication difficulties, heightened conflict, and impaired relational trust. For example, research involving families of military veterans demonstrated that trauma-related experiences significantly disrupted family functioning and influenced relationship dynamics among family members (Brites et al., 2026). Similarly, investigations of intergenerational conflict have revealed that unresolved emotional burdens from previous generations contribute to ongoing family tensions and relational dissatisfaction (Wang, 2025). These findings highlight the importance of examining trauma not merely as an individual phenomenon but as a systemic process affecting multiple family relationships over time.

The relationship between trauma and marital outcomes has received increasing scholarly attention. Individuals exposed to childhood maltreatment, abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction frequently report lower relationship satisfaction, greater emotional distress, and increased vulnerability to marital instability during adulthood (Quan et al., 2025; Rokach & Chan, 2023). Childhood traumatic experiences may shape internal working models of relationships, influence expectations regarding intimacy and trust, and alter emotional responses to interpersonal stressors. Consequently, trauma survivors may encounter difficulties establishing secure and satisfying marital relationships even decades after the original traumatic experiences occurred.

Evidence suggests that the impact of trauma on marital functioning often operates through relational mechanisms rather than direct effects alone. Zamir and colleagues demonstrated that childhood maltreatment influences marital quality through maladaptive communication patterns within intimate relationships (Zamir, Gewirtz-Meydan, et al., 2025). In another study, posttraumatic symptoms mediated the association between childhood maltreatment and perceived partner responsiveness, indicating that trauma-related psychological processes significantly influence relational perceptions and experiences (Zamir, Adar, et al., 2025). These findings suggest that understanding the pathways linking intergenerational trauma to marital stability requires examination of intermediate psychological and relational variables.

One potential mechanism through which intergenerational trauma may influence marital stability is cognitive emotion regulation. Cognitive emotion regulation refers to the conscious cognitive strategies individuals use to manage emotional experiences following stressful or adverse events. Effective emotion regulation facilitates adaptive coping, psychological resilience, and constructive interpersonal interactions, whereas maladaptive regulation strategies may contribute to emotional dysregulation, interpersonal conflict, and relationship dissatisfaction (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2022). Individuals exposed to traumatic family environments often develop maladaptive emotion regulation strategies such as rumination, catastrophizing, avoidance, and self-blame, which may persist into adulthood and affect their marital relationships.

The significance of emotion regulation in relational functioning has been consistently documented. Couples possessing effective emotion regulation skills demonstrate greater communication quality, enhanced conflict resolution abilities, and stronger relationship satisfaction. Conversely, emotional dysregulation contributes to misunderstandings, reactive communication patterns, and escalating marital conflict (Gorden, 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2023). Research on intergenerational relational processes has further suggested that emotion regulation capacities may serve as a key mechanism through which family experiences influence later romantic outcomes (Olsson et al., 2023). Therefore, cognitive emotion regulation may represent an important mediator linking intergenerational trauma to marital stability.

Trust constitutes another central component of successful marital relationships. Trust reflects confidence in a partner's reliability, honesty, responsiveness, and emotional availability. High levels of trust facilitate emotional security, encourage vulnerability, and strengthen relationship commitment. In contrast, diminished trust often contributes to relational uncertainty, jealousy, emotional distancing, and instability (Okonkwo, 2024; Rawicka, 2022). Trust is particularly vulnerable among individuals with histories of trauma because traumatic experiences frequently undermine perceptions of interpersonal safety and predictability.

Trauma-related disruptions in trust may originate from adverse childhood experiences involving betrayal, neglect, inconsistency, or abuse. Individuals exposed to such experiences often develop expectations that others are unreliable or potentially harmful, which can interfere with the formation of secure adult relationships. Studies examining attachment processes have consistently found

that traumatic family experiences contribute to insecure relational patterns and reduced trust in intimate partnerships (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Quan et al., 2025). Furthermore, research investigating marital stability has identified trust as a critical determinant of relationship persistence and long-term satisfaction (Okonkwo, 2024). Consequently, trust may represent a significant pathway through which intergenerational trauma influences marital stability.

Intimacy is another fundamental characteristic of healthy and enduring marital relationships. Intimacy encompasses emotional closeness, mutual understanding, affection, self-disclosure, and a sense of connectedness between partners. The development of intimacy requires emotional openness, psychological safety, and reciprocal responsiveness, all of which may be compromised by trauma-related experiences (Perkins, 2025; Wu et al., 2024). Individuals carrying unresolved trauma may struggle with vulnerability, emotional expression, and interpersonal closeness, thereby limiting the development of intimate marital bonds.

Several studies have highlighted the relationship between trauma and intimacy difficulties. Research examining women affected by domestic abuse demonstrated that trauma symptoms were associated with significant changes in spousal intimacy, although culturally sensitive interventions produced meaningful improvements in relational closeness (Rowland et al., 2024). Similarly, investigations of relational trauma have documented persistent challenges in emotional and sexual intimacy among affected couples (Sahoo & Biswas, 2024). Trauma may therefore undermine marital stability by interfering with partners' ability to establish and maintain intimate emotional connections.

The importance of intimacy for marital outcomes has been widely documented across diverse cultural contexts. Higher levels of emotional intimacy are associated with greater relationship satisfaction, stronger commitment, and increased resilience during periods of relational stress (Navabinejad et al., 2024; Perkins, 2025). Family systems research has further demonstrated that couple intimacy influences broader family functioning and developmental outcomes, emphasizing its central role within relational systems (Wu et al., 2024). Consequently, intimacy appears to be a particularly relevant mediator when examining the effects of intergenerational trauma on marital stability.

Emerging research has increasingly emphasized systemic and multigenerational perspectives in understanding intimate relationships. Family systems scholars argue that individual psychological functioning cannot be separated

from broader relational contexts, as emotional experiences are embedded within family structures and interpersonal networks (Kateregga, 2026; Lappan, 2025). Intergenerational patterns of relational dysfunction may therefore influence contemporary marital relationships through interconnected emotional, cognitive, and behavioral pathways. Recent evidence supports this perspective by demonstrating that familial relational dysfunction, childhood trauma, and maladaptive communication patterns frequently operate together to shape adult relationship outcomes (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024; Zamir, Gewirtz-Meydan, et al., 2025).

The growing literature on intergenerational processes further indicates that childhood experiences affect not only individual well-being but also subsequent parenting practices, coparenting relationships, and family interactions. For instance, fathers' childhood trauma experiences have been linked to variations in coparenting quality and paternal involvement, illustrating the enduring influence of early adversity on later family functioning (Larouche et al., 2025). Similarly, studies examining adverse relational experiences have documented effects extending into subsequent generations, including influences on attachment relationships and family adjustment (Olsson et al., 2023; Zhou & Zhen, 2022). These findings reinforce the importance of investigating multigenerational pathways within marital research.

Although previous studies have established associations among trauma, emotional functioning, trust, intimacy, and relationship outcomes, several important gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature has focused on direct effects of childhood trauma or adverse experiences on relationship satisfaction rather than examining comprehensive mediation models involving multiple psychological and relational mechanisms simultaneously (Quan et al., 2025; Rokach & Clayton, 2023). Second, relatively few studies have integrated cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy within a single structural framework explaining marital stability. Third, despite increasing recognition of systemic and intergenerational influences, empirical investigations specifically examining intergenerational trauma as a predictor of marital stability remain limited (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024; Shmakova, 2023).

Furthermore, cultural and contextual variations in intimate relationships underscore the need for continued investigation across diverse populations. Research conducted in different sociocultural settings has highlighted variations in relationship experiences, family dynamics,

trauma responses, and marital processes (K. & S., 2024; Kateregga, 2026; Suresh et al., 2025). Understanding how intergenerational trauma influences marital stability within contemporary Canadian society may therefore contribute valuable knowledge regarding the universal and context-specific mechanisms underlying relationship functioning.

Given the theoretical significance of family systems perspectives, the documented effects of trauma on relational functioning, and the emerging evidence supporting the roles of emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy in marital outcomes, a comprehensive examination of these variables is warranted. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the effect of intergenerational trauma on marital stability among married adults in Canada, with cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy serving as mediating variables.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design using structural equation modeling to examine the direct and indirect relationships between intergenerational trauma and marital stability through the mediating roles of cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy among married adults in Canada. The research was conducted between January and June 2026 across several provinces, including Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec. The target population consisted of married individuals who had been legally married for at least one year and were living with their spouses at the time of data collection. Eligibility criteria included being at least 21 years of age, having sufficient proficiency in English to complete the questionnaires, and providing informed consent to participate in the study.

A total of 642 married adults were recruited through a combination of online advertisements, community organizations, family counseling centers, social media platforms, and university-affiliated participant recruitment networks. After screening for incomplete responses, response inconsistencies, and excessive missing data, 618 questionnaires were retained for final analysis. The final sample consisted of 302 men (48.9%) and 316 women (51.1%), with ages ranging from 22 to 68 years ($M = 41.37$, $SD = 10.84$). The average duration of marriage was 12.46 years ($SD = 8.15$). Participants represented diverse educational, occupational, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, reflecting the multicultural composition of

Canadian society. Data were collected anonymously through a secure online survey platform, and all participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

2.2. Measures

Intergenerational trauma was assessed using the Intergenerational Trauma Scale developed by Danieli (1998), which evaluates the transmission of traumatic experiences, emotional distress, maladaptive coping patterns, and unresolved family trauma across generations. The instrument consists of 24 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater perceived transmission of trauma-related experiences and emotional burdens from previous generations. The scale assesses dimensions such as family communication about trauma, emotional legacy, unresolved grief, and trauma-related behavioral patterns. Previous studies have demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically exceeding .85 and evidence supporting construct and convergent validity across diverse populations. The validity and reliability of the scale have been confirmed in several international studies.

Cognitive emotion regulation was measured using the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire developed by Garnefski, Kraaij, and Spinhoven (2001). The CERQ contains 36 items and assesses nine cognitive coping strategies individuals use after experiencing stressful or negative events, including self-blame, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, planning, positive reappraisal, putting into perspective, catastrophizing, and blaming others. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Higher scores indicate greater use of the corresponding cognitive emotion regulation strategy. The questionnaire has been widely used in psychological and family research and has demonstrated strong internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity across different cultural settings. Numerous studies have confirmed the reliability and validity of the CERQ among adult populations.

Marital trust was assessed using the Dyadic Trust Scale developed by Larzelere and Huston (1980). This instrument consists of 8 items designed to evaluate confidence in a partner's honesty, reliability, dependability, and emotional commitment. Participants respond using a seven-point

Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores reflect greater levels of trust within the marital relationship. The scale has been extensively utilized in marital and family research and has consistently demonstrated excellent psychometric properties. Previous studies have reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .80 and strong evidence of convergent and discriminant validity. The instrument has been recognized as a reliable measure of interpersonal trust in intimate relationships.

Intimacy was measured using the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships inventory developed by Schaefer and Olson (1981). The PAIR consists of 36 items assessing multiple dimensions of intimacy, including emotional intimacy, social intimacy, sexual intimacy, intellectual intimacy, and recreational intimacy. Participants rate each statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores indicate greater perceived intimacy within the marital relationship. The PAIR has been widely adopted in marital and relationship research and has demonstrated strong reliability and validity across diverse populations. Previous investigations have reported acceptable to excellent internal consistency coefficients for the overall scale and its subscales, supporting its use as a comprehensive measure of relational intimacy.

Marital stability was measured using the Marital Instability Index developed by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983). The instrument contains 14 items assessing commitment to the marriage, thoughts of separation, relationship permanence, and perceived stability of the marital union. Participants respond using a Likert-type format, with higher scores indicating greater marital stability and commitment. The scale has been extensively used in studies examining marital functioning and relationship outcomes and has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric characteristics, including high internal consistency, predictive validity, and construct validity. Previous research has consistently confirmed the reliability and validity of the measure in married adult populations.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 and AMOS version 29. Initially, descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis values, were calculated for all study variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine bivariate associations among intergenerational trauma,

cognitive emotion regulation, trust, intimacy, and marital stability. Prior to model testing, assumptions of multivariate normality, linearity, absence of multicollinearity, and adequacy of sample size were assessed. Missing data were examined and handled using the expectation-maximization procedure when appropriate.

Structural equation modeling was employed to test the hypothesized direct and indirect pathways linking intergenerational trauma to marital stability through cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy. A two-step approach was followed in which the measurement model was evaluated before testing the structural model. Model fit was assessed using multiple goodness-of-fit indices, including the chi-square statistic (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). To evaluate the significance of indirect effects, bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals were performed. Statistical significance was determined at the $p < .05$ level for all analyses. The final model provided estimates of both direct and mediated pathways, enabling a

comprehensive examination of the mechanisms through which intergenerational trauma influences marital stability among married adults in Canada.

3. Findings and Results

Among the 618 participants included in the final analysis, 302 (48.9%) were men and 316 (51.1%) were women. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 68 years, with a mean age of 41.37 years ($SD = 10.84$). The average duration of marriage was 12.46 years ($SD = 8.15$), ranging from 1 to 41 years. Regarding educational attainment, 18.3% held a high school diploma, 29.9% had completed college education, 38.5% possessed a bachelor's degree, and 13.3% had obtained postgraduate qualifications. Approximately 71.8% of participants reported having children. In terms of employment status, 82.4% were employed full-time, 9.1% part-time, and 8.5% were unemployed or retired. The demographic distribution indicated substantial variability in age, education, marital duration, and socioeconomic status, providing an appropriate sample for examining the relationships among intergenerational trauma, cognitive emotion regulation, trust, intimacy, and marital stability.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intergenerational Trauma	71.84	14.29	—				
2. Cognitive Emotion Regulation	110.37	16.84	-0.48**	—			
3. Trust	37.25	8.11	-0.56**	0.51**	—		
4. Intimacy	127.42	21.76	-0.59**	0.54**	0.69**	—	
5. Marital Stability	56.18	9.53	-0.63**	0.58**	0.74**	0.78**	—

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables. The findings demonstrated that intergenerational trauma was significantly and negatively associated with cognitive emotion regulation ($r = -0.48, p < .001$), trust ($r = -0.56, p < .001$), intimacy ($r = -0.59, p < .001$), and marital stability ($r = -0.63, p < .001$). These findings suggest that greater experiences of transmitted trauma across generations were linked to poorer emotion regulation capacities, lower levels of trust and intimacy within marital relationships, and

reduced marital stability. Cognitive emotion regulation showed significant positive associations with trust ($r = 0.51, p < .001$), intimacy ($r = 0.54, p < .001$), and marital stability ($r = 0.58, p < .001$). Trust and intimacy were also strongly related to marital stability, with intimacy demonstrating the strongest bivariate association ($r = 0.78, p < .001$). The correlation matrix provided preliminary support for the hypothesized structural model and justified proceeding with structural equation modeling analyses.

Table 2

Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loading Range
Intergenerational Trauma	0.92	0.64	0.91	0.71–0.87
Cognitive Emotion Regulation	0.90	0.61	0.89	0.69–0.85
Trust	0.93	0.69	0.92	0.74–0.89
Intimacy	0.95	0.72	0.94	0.76–0.91
Marital Stability	0.94	0.70	0.93	0.73–0.90

The measurement model demonstrated excellent psychometric properties across all latent constructs. Composite reliability values ranged from 0.90 to 0.95, substantially exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted values ranged from 0.61 to 0.72, surpassing the recommended criterion of 0.50 and supporting convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients varied between 0.89

and 0.94, reflecting excellent reliability for all scales. Furthermore, all standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.69 and were statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that the observed indicators adequately represented their respective latent constructs. Collectively, these results confirmed the adequacy of the measurement model and provided empirical support for the reliability and validity of the instruments used in the study.

Table 3

Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Structural Model

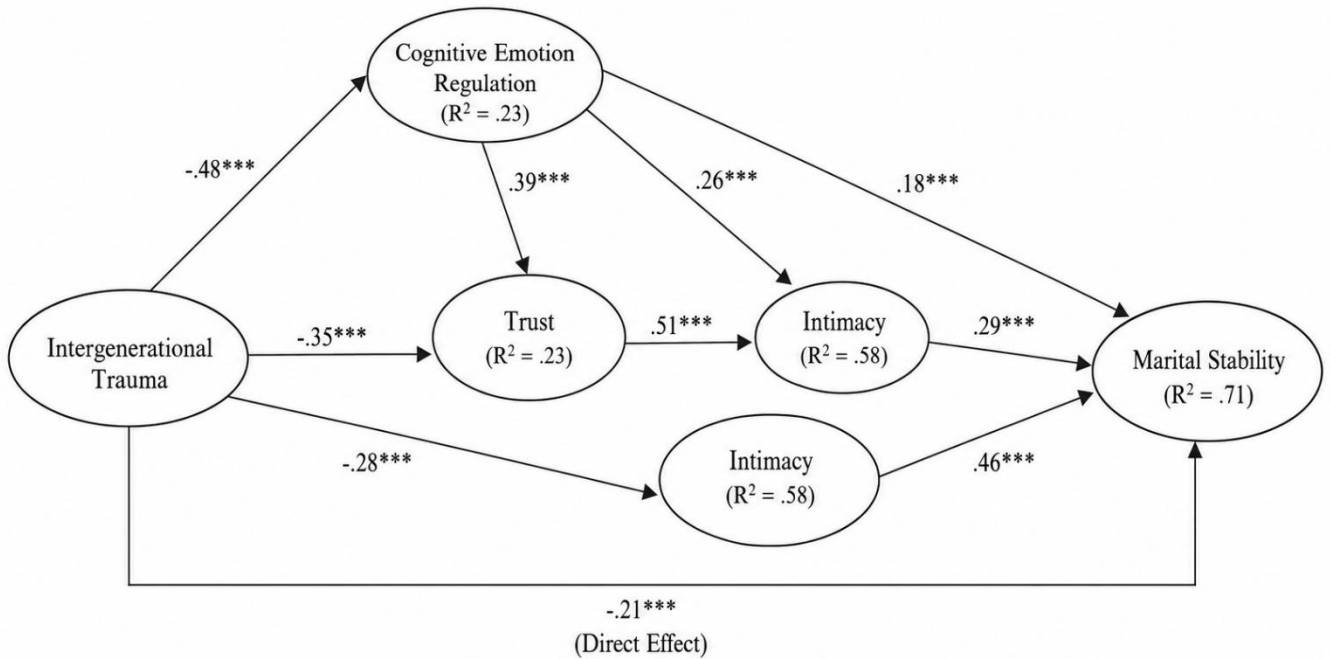
Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Value
χ^2/df	2.37	< 3.00
CFI	0.961	> 0.90
TLI	0.955	> 0.90
IFI	0.962	> 0.90
GFI	0.931	> 0.90
AGFI	0.914	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.047	< 0.08
SRMR	0.039	< 0.08

The structural model exhibited an excellent fit to the observed data. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ($\chi^2/df = 2.37$) was well below the recommended threshold of 3.00. Incremental fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.961), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.955), and Incremental Fit Index (IFI = 0.962), all exceeded 0.95, indicating outstanding model fit. Absolute fit indices were similarly satisfactory, with GFI (0.931) and AGFI (0.914)

exceeding recommended standards. Error-based indices further confirmed model adequacy, as RMSEA (0.047) and SRMR (0.039) were substantially below accepted cutoffs. Overall, these findings demonstrated that the proposed model provided an accurate representation of the relationships among intergenerational trauma, cognitive emotion regulation, trust, intimacy, and marital stability.

Figure 1

Final Model of the Relationships Among Intergenerational Trauma, Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Trust, Intimacy, and Marital Stability



Note. Standardized path coefficients are shown. R^2 values indicate the proportion of variance explained in endogenous variables. $*** p < .001$.

The final structural model illustrated both direct and indirect pathways linking intergenerational trauma to marital stability. The model indicated that intergenerational trauma exerted substantial negative effects on cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy, while these mediating variables positively predicted marital stability. The standardized path coefficients revealed that intimacy represented the strongest direct predictor of marital stability,

followed by trust and cognitive emotion regulation. The model also showed significant indirect pathways from intergenerational trauma to marital stability through each mediator independently as well as through sequential mediation pathways. The amount of explained variance was considerable, with the model accounting for a large proportion of variance in marital stability, indicating substantial predictive power.

Table 4

Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Structural Model

Path	β	SE	CR	p
Intergenerational Trauma → Cognitive Emotion Regulation	-0.48	0.04	-11.87	< .001
Intergenerational Trauma → Trust	-0.35	0.05	-8.29	< .001
Intergenerational Trauma → Intimacy	-0.28	0.04	-6.94	< .001
Cognitive Emotion Regulation → Trust	0.39	0.04	9.15	< .001
Cognitive Emotion Regulation → Intimacy	0.26	0.04	6.43	< .001
Trust → Intimacy	0.51	0.03	13.82	< .001
Cognitive Emotion Regulation → Marital Stability	0.18	0.03	4.67	< .001
Trust → Marital Stability	0.29	0.04	7.34	< .001
Intimacy → Marital Stability	0.46	0.04	11.26	< .001
Intergenerational Trauma → Marital Stability (Direct)	-0.21	0.04	-5.08	< .001
Intergenerational Trauma → Marital Stability (Indirect)	-0.42	0.05	—	< .001
Intergenerational Trauma → Marital Stability (Total)	-0.63	0.05	—	< .001

The structural path analysis revealed that intergenerational trauma significantly predicted all three mediating variables. Specifically, higher levels of intergenerational trauma were associated with lower cognitive emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.48, p < .001$), lower trust ($\beta = -0.35, p < .001$), and lower intimacy ($\beta = -0.28, p < .001$). Cognitive emotion regulation positively predicted trust ($\beta = 0.39, p < .001$), intimacy ($\beta = 0.26, p < .001$), and marital stability ($\beta = 0.18, p < .001$). Trust exerted a significant positive effect on both intimacy ($\beta = 0.51, p < .001$) and marital stability ($\beta = 0.29, p < .001$). Intimacy emerged as the strongest predictor of marital stability ($\beta = 0.46, p < .001$). Although intergenerational trauma maintained a significant direct effect on marital stability ($\beta = -0.21, p < .001$), the indirect effect through the proposed mediators was substantially larger ($\beta = -0.42, p < .001$), indicating partial mediation. The total effect of intergenerational trauma on marital stability was strong and negative ($\beta = -0.63, p < .001$). The final model explained 23% of the variance in trust, 58% of the variance in intimacy, and 71% of the variance in marital stability. These findings provide robust empirical support for the hypothesized mediational framework, demonstrating that cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy constitute important psychological mechanisms through which intergenerational trauma influences the stability of marital relationships.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the effect of intergenerational trauma on marital stability through the mediating roles of cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy among married adults in Canada. The findings revealed that intergenerational trauma was negatively associated with cognitive emotion regulation, trust, intimacy, and marital stability. Furthermore, cognitive emotion regulation positively predicted trust, intimacy, and marital stability, while trust positively predicted intimacy and marital stability. Intimacy emerged as the strongest direct predictor of marital stability. The structural model demonstrated that cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy significantly mediated the relationship between intergenerational trauma and marital stability, indicating that the effects of trauma are transmitted through both individual psychological processes and relational dynamics. The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in marital stability, highlighting the importance of these interconnected mechanisms in understanding relationship functioning.

One of the most significant findings of the study was the strong negative relationship between intergenerational trauma and marital stability. This result suggests that trauma experienced or transmitted across generations continues to exert influence on adult intimate relationships even when the original traumatic events occurred many years earlier. From a family systems perspective, trauma often becomes embedded within family narratives, communication patterns, emotional responses, and relational expectations. These patterns may be unconsciously transmitted from parents to children and subsequently influence adult romantic relationships. The findings are consistent with research demonstrating that intergenerational transmission processes contribute to long-term relational dysfunction and difficulties in maintaining healthy partnerships (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024; Shmakova, 2023). Similarly, studies examining adverse family experiences have shown that trauma-related patterns frequently persist across generations and shape adult relational functioning (Wang, 2025; Zhao, 2022). The present findings therefore support the proposition that marital stability cannot be understood solely through contemporary relational interactions but must be considered within a broader multigenerational framework.

The negative association between intergenerational trauma and cognitive emotion regulation represents another important contribution of the study. Participants reporting higher levels of transmitted trauma demonstrated lower capacities for adaptive cognitive regulation of emotions. This finding is theoretically consistent with trauma literature suggesting that exposure to adverse family environments disrupts the development of healthy emotional processing strategies. Individuals raised in traumatic family contexts may learn maladaptive coping responses such as avoidance, catastrophizing, emotional suppression, or rumination, which continue to influence emotional functioning throughout adulthood. Previous research has emphasized the importance of emotional regulation in the transmission of relational patterns across generations and has demonstrated that attachment-related experiences significantly influence individuals' capacity to manage emotional distress (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Furthermore, investigations of psychological adaptation following adversity have consistently shown that effective self-regulation functions as a protective factor against emotional and relational difficulties (Pan et al., 2022). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that deficits in cognitive emotion regulation represent one pathway through which intergenerational trauma affects marital outcomes.

The findings also revealed that cognitive emotion regulation significantly predicted trust and intimacy. Individuals who possessed stronger emotion regulation capacities reported greater trust in their partners and higher levels of intimacy within their marriages. This finding can be understood through the role of emotional regulation in interpersonal functioning. Emotionally regulated individuals are generally better able to communicate effectively, manage conflict constructively, respond empathically to partners, and maintain emotional availability during periods of stress. These characteristics foster environments in which trust and intimacy can develop and flourish. Conversely, emotional dysregulation may contribute to misunderstandings, defensiveness, emotional withdrawal, and relational insecurity. The present findings are consistent with previous studies linking emotional regulation to relationship quality and attachment security (Ibrahim et al., 2023). They also align with systemic perspectives emphasizing that individual emotional processes significantly influence relational dynamics and family functioning (Kateregga, 2026; Lappan, 2025).

Another noteworthy finding was the significant negative effect of intergenerational trauma on trust. Participants who reported greater trauma transmission experienced lower levels of trust toward their spouses. This result is consistent with attachment theory and trauma research, which suggest that adverse relational experiences frequently undermine fundamental assumptions regarding interpersonal safety and reliability. Individuals who have been exposed to family dysfunction, neglect, abuse, or inconsistent caregiving may develop expectations that others are unreliable, rejecting, or emotionally unavailable. These expectations can persist into adulthood and influence marital relationships. Similar findings have been reported in studies showing that childhood trauma and maltreatment are associated with lower partner responsiveness, greater relational insecurity, and diminished relationship quality (Quan et al., 2025; Zamir, Adar, et al., 2025). Research examining marital stability has likewise identified trust as one of the most critical predictors of relationship persistence and satisfaction (Okonkwo, 2024). Therefore, the current findings reinforce the argument that trust serves as a central mechanism connecting early traumatic experiences to later marital outcomes.

The positive association between trust and marital stability observed in the present study further highlights the importance of relational security within marriage. Trust enables partners to feel emotionally safe, disclose

vulnerabilities, cooperate during challenges, and maintain commitment despite inevitable relationship stressors. When trust is compromised, couples may experience increased suspicion, emotional distancing, conflict escalation, and reduced commitment. The strong predictive role of trust identified in this study is consistent with prior findings demonstrating that trust functions as a foundational element of healthy intimate relationships (Okonkwo, 2024; Rawicka, 2022). Moreover, research on relationship maintenance suggests that trust facilitates resilience during periods of adversity, allowing couples to navigate challenges without threatening relationship stability (Suresh et al., 2025). The present findings therefore provide additional evidence supporting trust as a key determinant of marital success.

A particularly important result was the significant negative relationship between intergenerational trauma and intimacy. Individuals experiencing higher levels of transmitted trauma reported lower levels of emotional closeness and connectedness with their spouses. Trauma often interferes with vulnerability, emotional expression, and interpersonal openness, all of which are essential components of intimacy. Trauma survivors may develop protective strategies designed to minimize emotional pain, including avoidance of closeness or reluctance to depend on others. While these strategies may initially serve adaptive purposes, they often undermine the development of satisfying intimate relationships. Similar findings have been reported in studies demonstrating that trauma symptoms negatively affect emotional and sexual intimacy within marriages (Rowland et al., 2024; Sahoo & Biswas, 2024). Additionally, investigations examining the effects of societal and relational stressors on intimate relationships have documented significant disruptions in emotional connectedness and relational closeness (Perkins, 2025). The present findings therefore suggest that intimacy may represent one of the most vulnerable dimensions of marital functioning among individuals affected by intergenerational trauma.

The role of intimacy as the strongest direct predictor of marital stability deserves particular attention. Among all predictors included in the model, intimacy demonstrated the largest effect on marital stability. This finding underscores the central role of emotional connectedness in sustaining long-term relationships. Intimacy provides couples with opportunities for mutual support, understanding, validation, and emotional fulfillment. When intimacy is high, partners are more likely to experience relationship satisfaction and remain committed despite external stressors. Conversely,

emotional distance may weaken relational bonds and increase vulnerability to instability. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating strong associations between intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and marital quality (Navabinejad et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024). Studies examining family systems processes have similarly emphasized that emotional intimacy constitutes a core mechanism underlying healthy family functioning and relational resilience (Wu et al., 2024). The current findings therefore highlight intimacy as a particularly important target for interventions designed to strengthen marital relationships.

The mediation analyses provided some of the strongest support for the theoretical framework underlying the present study. Although intergenerational trauma exerted a direct negative effect on marital stability, the indirect pathways through cognitive emotion regulation, trust, and intimacy were substantially stronger. This pattern suggests that trauma influences marital outcomes primarily through its effects on emotional and relational functioning rather than through direct effects alone. These findings align with recent studies demonstrating that communication patterns, posttraumatic symptoms, attachment processes, and relational perceptions mediate the effects of childhood maltreatment on adult relationship quality (Zamir, Adar, et al., 2025; Zamir, Gewirtz-Meydan, et al., 2025). The results also support family systems perspectives proposing that multigenerational influences operate through interconnected emotional and relational mechanisms (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024; Shmakova, 2023).

Another noteworthy aspect of the findings is their consistency with emerging evidence regarding the multigenerational consequences of trauma. Studies examining parent-child relationships, attachment processes, and family functioning have repeatedly demonstrated that adverse experiences can influence multiple generations through complex psychological and relational pathways (Olsson et al., 2023; Zhou & Zhen, 2022). Research involving fathers with histories of childhood trauma has similarly shown effects on coparenting quality and family engagement (Larouche et al., 2025). Furthermore, investigations of child abuse and other forms of adversity have documented enduring effects on interpersonal functioning and relationship outcomes throughout adulthood (Rokach & Chan, 2023). The present findings contribute to this growing body of literature by demonstrating that marital stability represents another important domain affected by intergenerational trauma.

The findings also have implications for contemporary relationship interventions. Recent developments in couple and family therapy increasingly emphasize trauma-informed and systemic approaches to treatment. Interventions that address emotional regulation deficits, strengthen trust, and foster intimacy may be particularly effective for couples affected by intergenerational trauma. Emerging clinical models highlight the importance of understanding relational difficulties within broader family and cultural contexts rather than focusing exclusively on present conflicts (Gorden, 2025; Kateregga, 2026). Preventive and promotive relationship programs have likewise demonstrated benefits for improving couple functioning and psychological well-being (Suresh et al., 2025). The present findings provide empirical support for such approaches by identifying specific mechanisms through which trauma affects marital stability.

5. Conclusion

The study's results should be interpreted in light of broader social and cultural influences on intimate relationships. Marital functioning is shaped not only by individual and family factors but also by societal expectations, cultural norms, and contextual stressors (K. & S., 2024). Experiences such as discrimination, social exclusion, community violence, and cultural transitions may interact with trauma-related vulnerabilities to influence relationship outcomes (Oliver, 2026; Perkins, 2025). Therefore, future theoretical models should continue integrating individual, relational, family, and sociocultural perspectives when examining marital stability.

6. Suggestions and Limitations

The present study possesses several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design prevents definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships among the variables. Although the structural model was theoretically grounded, longitudinal research is required to establish temporal ordering and causal mechanisms. Second, all measures relied on self-report questionnaires, raising the possibility of social desirability bias and shared method variance. Third, the sample consisted exclusively of married adults residing in Canada, which may limit generalizability to other cultural contexts, relationship forms, or demographic groups. Finally, additional variables such as attachment security, communication patterns, psychological distress, and

socioeconomic stressors were not included in the model and may also contribute to marital stability.

Future research should employ longitudinal and prospective designs to examine how intergenerational trauma influences marital relationships across time. Researchers should investigate whether the identified mediating mechanisms remain stable throughout different stages of marriage and family development. Future studies may also explore additional mediators and moderators, including attachment styles, resilience, forgiveness, communication quality, and cultural values. Comparative investigations across different countries and cultural groups would further clarify the universality or cultural specificity of the observed relationships. In addition, dyadic designs involving both partners would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how trauma-related processes operate within marital systems.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that clinicians, counselors, and family practitioners should routinely assess intergenerational trauma when working with couples experiencing relational difficulties. Interventions should focus not only on resolving current conflicts but also on addressing underlying emotional and relational patterns rooted in family histories. Programs designed to enhance cognitive emotion regulation skills, strengthen interpersonal trust, and foster emotional intimacy may be particularly effective in promoting marital stability. Couple therapy approaches that integrate trauma-informed principles with systemic and relational interventions may help couples develop healthier patterns of interaction and interrupt cycles of trauma transmission. Educational programs aimed at increasing awareness of intergenerational influences could also support prevention efforts by helping individuals recognize and modify maladaptive relational patterns before they negatively affect marital functioning.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

References

- Brites, R., Nunes, O., Hipólito, J., Brandao, T., Correia, A., & Nunes, C. (2026). Living With a Veteran With Trauma: Impact on Family Functioning Using the Genogram as a Research Tool. *The Family Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807261415864>
- Čepukienė, V., & Neophytou, K. (2024). Intergenerational Transmission of Familial Relational Dysfunction: A Test of a Complex Mediation Model Based on Bowen Family Systems Theory. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 41(11), 3385-3408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075241265472>
- Gorden, A. (2025). Somatic Work in Couple Therapy. *The Family Journal*, 33(4), 509-517. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807251348210>
- Ibrahim, M., Palit, M., & Matthews, R. (2023). Intergenerational Attachment Styles, Emotional Regulation and Relational Outcomes in Couples Therapy. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.108492>
- K., S., & S., I. (2024). Social and Cultural Implications of Live-in Relationships in India. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i03.20396>
- Kateregga, A. (2026). Towards Culturally Responsive Practices: A Scoping Review of Systemic Family Therapy Interventions in Africa. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-8717252/v1>
- Lappan, S. N. (2025). Suggested Guidelines for Applying a Systemic Lens to Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy. *Psychedelic Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/28314425251404021>
- Larouche, K., Deschênes, K., Pierce, T., Lacharité, C., & Berthelot, N. (2025). Examining How Fathers' Experience of Childhood Trauma and Current Coparenting Quality Contribute to Paternal Involvement. *Family Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.70039>

- Navabinejad, S., Rostami, M., & Parsakia, K. (2024). Influences of Family Structure and Intimacy on Emotional Divorce: A Cross-Sectional Analysis. *JPRFC*, 23-30. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jprfc.2.1.5>
- Okonkwo, K. (2024). The Role of Attachment Styles in Marital Stability: A Psychological Approach to Strengthening Relationships. *American Journal of Psychology*, 6(4), 35-50. <https://doi.org/10.47672/ajp.2474>
- Oliver, C. (2026). Psychological Health Outcomes of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Among Women of Reproductive Age in Southeast Nigeria. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-8492256/v1>
- Olsson, C. M., Greenwood, C., Letcher, P., Tan, E. S., Opie, J. E., Booth, A., McIntosh, J., & Olsson, C. A. (2023). Adverse Experiences in Early Intimate Relationships and Next-generation Infant–mother Attachment: Findings From the <scp>ATP</Scp> Generation 3 Study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 44(4), 537-548. <https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1564>
- Pan, X., Mo, L., Liu, Q., Guo, X., & Zhang, S. (2022). Factors Influencing Emotional and Behavioral Problems in Preschool Children With Cancer Based on Self-Regulation Shift Theory. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 27(3), 755-768. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591045211061799>
- Perkins, J. (2025). Racism's Impact on Black Intimacy. *The Family Journal*, 33(4), 598-606. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807251349846>
- Quan, L., Zhang, K., & Chen, H. (2025). The Relationship Between Childhood Trauma and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction: The Role of Attachment and Social Support. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2024.1519699>
- Rawicka, I. (2022). Attitudes of Spouses Towards Abortion and the Quality of Their Mutual Relations. *Kwartalnik Naukowy Fides et Ratio*, 3(51), 94-105. <https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v3i51.1109>
- Rokach, A., & Chan, S. H. (2023). Love and Infidelity: Causes and Consequences. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(5), 3904. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20053904>
- Rokach, A., & Clayton, S. (2023). The Consequences of Child Abuse. *Healthcare*, 11(11), 1650. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11111650>
- Rowland, D. L., Ehsan, M. K., & Cooper, S. E. (2024). Changes in Spousal Intimacy in Women Suffering Trauma Symptoms From Domestic Abuse: A Culturally Embedded Intervention Study in Pakistan. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 21(8), 1045. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21081045>
- Sahoo, M. K., & Biswas, H. (2024). Unraveling the Complexity of Vaginismus in Marital Relationship: A Case Series. *Cureus*. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.73414>
- Shmakova, A. I. (2023). Parenting and Family Relationships Factors in the Intergenerational Transmission of Partnerships: A Research Review. *Perspectives of Science and Education*, 62(2), 536-548. <https://doi.org/10.32744/pse.2023.2.31>
- Suresh, S., Das, A., Lokesh, S., Shah, A., & Satyanarayana, V. A. (2025). Couple Enrichment Clinic as a Model of Promotive and Preventive Mental Health Care in South India. *Journal of marital and family therapy*, 51(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.70067>
- Wang, P. (2025). A Tracking Study of Intergenerational Conflict in Chinese Rural Elderly Families. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-8186047/v1>
- Wu, Q., Han, S., Tawfiq, D., Jalapa, K., Lee, C., & Pocchio, K. (2024). A Family Systems Investigation on Couple Emotional Intimacy, Parent–child Relationships, and Child Social Skills in Middle Childhood. *Child development*, 95(6), 2195-2214. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14155>
- Zamir, O., Adar, O., Cohen, D. K., Goldberg, C., Regev, G., & Shapira, M. (2025). Intergenerational Transmission: Observed Negative Communication Mediates Dyadic Associations Between Childhood Maltreatment and Marital Quality. *Family Process*, 64(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.70059>
- Zamir, O., Gewirtz-Meydan, A., & Finzi-Dottan, R. (2025). Childhood Maltreatment and Perceived Partner Responsiveness: A Dyadic Analysis of Posttraumatic Symptoms as a Mediator. *Psychological Trauma Theory Research Practice and Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0002048>
- Zhao, S. (2022). Transgenerational Transmission of Suffering: State Violence, Memory, and Aspiration for Alternative Intimate Lives in Contemporary China. *Ethos*, 50(4), 511-527. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12374>
- Zhou, X., & Zhen, R. (2022). Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms Between Parents and Their Children Following a Natural Disaster: An Integrated Model Under a Dyadic Approach. *Psychological Trauma Theory Research Practice and Policy*, 14(1), 141-150. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001082>