

Exploring the Psychological and Relational Factors Shaping Marital Commitment in Long-Term Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the psychological and relational factors associated with marital commitment in long-term relationships among married adults in Slovenia.

Methods and Materials: This quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational study was conducted with 417 married adults from Slovenia who had been continuously married for at least seven years. Participants completed standardized self-report measures assessing marital commitment, relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, constructive and demand-withdraw communication, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, emotion-regulation difficulties, relationship investment, and perceived quality of alternatives. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients, hierarchical multiple regression, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling. Indirect effects were examined using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

Findings: Hierarchical regression showed that psychological variables significantly increased the explained variance in marital commitment beyond demographic characteristics, $\Delta R^2 = .245$, $p < .001$, while relational factors produced a further substantial increase, $\Delta R^2 = .388$, $p < .001$. The final regression model explained 67.4% of the variance in commitment. Relationship satisfaction was the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), followed by relationship investment ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$), whereas quality of alternatives was negatively associated with commitment ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$). Emotional intimacy and constructive communication were also significant positive predictors, while demand-withdraw communication, attachment anxiety, and attachment avoidance were significant negative predictors. Structural equation modeling demonstrated acceptable fit, $\chi^2/df = 2.08$, CFI = .946, TLI = .938, RMSEA = .051, and SRMR = .047, and explained 69.1% of the variance in marital commitment. Significant indirect effects indicated that attachment insecurity and emotion-regulation difficulties influenced commitment partly through relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, and constructive communication.

Conclusion: Marital commitment in long-term relationships appears to be shaped primarily by relational quality and investment processes, while psychological vulnerabilities exert both direct and indirect effects through key interpersonal mechanisms.

Keywords: marital commitment, relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, attachment insecurity, emotion regulation, communication patterns, relationship investment, long-term relationships

1. Introduction

Marital commitment is a central construct in the study of intimate relationships because it reflects the extent to which partners intend to preserve their relationship, remain psychologically invested in the marital bond, and orient themselves toward a shared future despite inevitable fluctuations in satisfaction, stress, and life circumstances. In long-term marriages, commitment is particularly important because relationship continuity depends not only on positive affect or satisfaction at a given moment, but also on the capacity of partners to maintain emotional connection, regulate conflict, adapt to developmental transitions, and continue investing in the relationship over time. Contemporary relationship research increasingly recognizes that marital functioning cannot be explained by a single factor. Rather, relationship quality emerges from a dynamic system involving personal characteristics, attachment patterns, emotional processes, communication behaviors, contextual stressors, partner responsiveness, and perceptions of the relationship itself. Network-based conceptualizations of romantic relationship quality further suggest that relationship functioning is better understood as an interconnected configuration of mutually influential psychological and relational processes than as a single global dimension (Li et al., 2026). This perspective is especially relevant to marital commitment, which may be simultaneously shaped by enduring individual dispositions and by ongoing exchanges between spouses.

Relationship satisfaction is among the most consistently examined relational correlates of marital stability and commitment. Satisfaction represents an individual's global evaluation of the quality, rewards, emotional climate, and fulfillment provided by the marital relationship. Yet satisfaction itself is multidetermined and changes in response to interpersonal and contextual experiences. Partner responsiveness, for example, appears to be especially consequential because people tend to experience greater marital and life satisfaction when they perceive their spouse as understanding, validating, and responsive to their needs (Thargay & Giri, 2024). Similarly, everyday acts of relational exchange may contribute to marital quality by communicating care, appreciation, and investment. Recent evidence concerning gift-giving in marriage indicates that seemingly ordinary prosocial behaviors can have relational meaning insofar as they serve as expressions of affection and reciprocity (Liang et al., 2026). Conversely, behaviors that communicate inattentiveness or relational disengagement

may undermine need fulfillment and relationship satisfaction. Longitudinal research on perceived partner phubbing, for instance, indicates that technology-related partner neglect may interfere with relational needs and subsequently diminish marital satisfaction (Li et al., 2026). These findings reinforce the view that long-term commitment is embedded within everyday patterns of responsiveness, attention, reciprocity, and perceived relational value.

Communication constitutes another fundamental mechanism through which marital relationships are maintained or weakened. Effective communication enables partners to negotiate differences, express emotional needs, manage stress, and preserve a sense of mutual understanding. Poor communication, in contrast, may intensify conflict, generate emotional distance, and erode satisfaction. Research focusing on interpersonal communication in marriage has identified communication quality as a meaningful antecedent of relational functioning and as an important factor in understanding marital disruption (Kamal et al., 2023). Dyadic research among couples coping with serious health challenges has similarly shown that communication between spouses is closely intertwined with marital satisfaction and adaptation under stress (Krok et al., 2023). Communication difficulties may also mediate the relationship between broader psychological vulnerabilities and marital outcomes. For example, social anhedonia has been associated with communication processes and marital satisfaction, suggesting that reduced capacity to experience interpersonal reward may influence marital functioning partly through diminished relational engagement (Tan et al., 2023). Accordingly, constructive communication may function as a protective relational resource, whereas avoidance, withdrawal, criticism, and emotional disengagement may gradually weaken commitment.

The role of emotional intimacy is closely related to communication but extends beyond the exchange of information. Intimacy involves emotional openness, trust, perceived closeness, mutual understanding, and the ability to disclose personally meaningful experiences to one's spouse. Authenticity may be especially important in this process. When individuals conceal significant aspects of themselves or maintain secrecy within marriage, relational closeness may be compromised. Research examining secrecy and marital happiness has suggested that relationship authenticity may mediate the impact of secrecy on marital well-being (Bimantara & Karsten, 2024). The broader

literature on positive relationship functioning also emphasizes the importance of positive emotional states, constructive cognitions, and relational mindsets in building and maintaining satisfying relationships (Mohamad et al., 2022). Thus, emotional intimacy may represent one of the most direct relational pathways linking individual psychological functioning to commitment, because partners who feel accepted, understood, and emotionally connected may be more willing to invest in the relationship and maintain a long-term orientation toward it.

Adult attachment theory provides an important psychological framework for understanding variation in marital functioning. Attachment anxiety is characterized by heightened concerns about rejection, abandonment, and partner unavailability, whereas attachment avoidance reflects discomfort with closeness, emotional dependence, and vulnerability. Both dimensions can influence marital adjustment by shaping how individuals interpret their partner's behavior, respond to conflict, seek support, and regulate intimacy. Dyadic research has shown that adult attachment patterns are associated with marital adjustment through both actor and partner effects, highlighting the interpersonal consequences of attachment-related expectations and schemas (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Cross-cultural research has also demonstrated connections among parental attachment, adult romantic attachment, and marital satisfaction, suggesting that attachment processes are embedded within both developmental histories and cultural contexts (Huang et al., 2020). Attachment insecurity may therefore weaken commitment not only directly, through doubts about dependence or relationship security, but also indirectly by reducing satisfaction, closeness, trust, and constructive interaction.

Early life experiences may further shape adult relationship functioning through their effects on attachment, personality development, emotional regulation, and expectations of intimacy. Adverse childhood experiences have been linked to later marital adjustment, with personality development and resilience potentially functioning as important mechanisms through which early adversity influences adult relationships (Parajuli, 2024). A broader review of childhood maltreatment and adult relationship quality similarly indicates that the type of abuse experienced, as well as mediating and protective factors, can meaningfully influence later romantic functioning (Zamir, 2021). These developmental findings underscore the importance of considering marital commitment within a lifespan framework. The psychological resources

individuals bring into marriage are partly shaped before the relationship begins, yet their effects may be amplified, modified, or buffered by the relational environment that develops between spouses over time.

Personality and psychopathology also contribute substantially to relationship quality. Psychological difficulties do not occur in isolation from intimate relationships; instead, individual pathology and relational functioning often influence one another reciprocally (South, 2021). Longitudinal evidence suggests that personality characteristics, relationship satisfaction, and psychopathology are interrelated across time, indicating that changes in one domain may have implications for the others (Dashineau et al., 2023). Depressive symptoms, for example, have demonstrated prospective associations with marital satisfaction, suggesting that psychological distress can become embedded in couple dynamics and may contribute to deteriorating relationship evaluations (Jenkins et al., 2020). Disillusionment within intimate relationships may also have broader psychological consequences, including associations with depressive symptoms (Niehuis, 2020). These findings suggest that marital commitment may be shaped by an ongoing reciprocal process in which psychological well-being affects relational functioning and relationship experiences, in turn, affect psychological well-being.

Specific personality-related characteristics may be especially relevant to marital adjustment. A systematic review and meta-analysis has shown that perfectionism can influence marital outcomes, although its effects vary depending on the form of perfectionism and interpersonal context (Hamedani et al., 2024). Research on object relations and relational outcomes has further indicated that narcissistic and borderline personality traits can mediate associations between deeper relational representations and relationship satisfaction, marital adjustment, and sexual satisfaction (Kahraman & Aktan, 2024). At a more general level, network analyses linking personality, approach-avoidance goals, marital adjustment, and psychological well-being demonstrate that relationship functioning is embedded within a complex system of personality-based motivational tendencies and interpersonal adjustment (Gyeong & Shin, 2026). These findings support the argument that commitment should be examined as an outcome of multiple interconnected psychological tendencies rather than as a simple consequence of satisfaction.

Emotion regulation represents another major psychological process that may influence long-term marital commitment. Partners routinely encounter disappointment, frustration, stress, jealousy, conflict, and competing needs. The capacity to identify, tolerate, and regulate emotional reactions can therefore affect how individuals communicate and respond to relational difficulties. Emotional intelligence, which includes awareness and management of emotional states, has been associated with interpersonal and intimate relationship processes. Evidence linking emotional intelligence to sexual satisfaction demonstrates the relevance of emotional competencies to the broader quality of romantic relationships (Özbay & Balaban, 2024). Related work has also connected emotional intelligence with marital anxiety, with emotional strain and compassion fatigue serving as psychologically meaningful mechanisms in populations exposed to interpersonal stress (Mukba & Oruç, 2026). Although such findings emerge from different relational contexts, they support a broader conceptualization in which emotional competencies shape how individuals interpret and manage emotionally demanding relationship experiences.

Cognitive flexibility may similarly facilitate relationship adaptation by enabling individuals to reconsider rigid interpretations, generate alternative responses, and accommodate differences between personal expectations and relational realities. Research among young adults has demonstrated that cognitive flexibility may mediate the association between romantic relationship satisfaction and attitudes toward marriage (Ekinci & Canpolat, 2025). Positive relational adaptation may therefore require not only favorable emotional states but also the cognitive capacity to revise expectations and respond constructively to change. This becomes especially relevant in long-term relationships, in which couples encounter evolving roles, aging, occupational transitions, parenting responsibilities, health challenges, and changes in intimacy. Gender-linked roles and expectations may also shape relationship satisfaction, as research on sex roles and romantic satisfaction suggests that socially structured expectations can influence individuals' perceptions of relationship quality (Arora & Chauhan, 2024).

Long-term marital relationships are also embedded within broader social and developmental contexts. Couples may experience chronic stressors, discrimination, illness, caregiving burdens, retirement, financial pressures, or major social disruptions. Research during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that marital distress and satisfaction could

change substantially under conditions of uncertainty, confinement, financial strain, and altered family routines (Epifani et al., 2021). Strength-and-strain perspectives developed in relation to romantic relationships during the pandemic likewise emphasize that couples may simultaneously experience relational resources and relational pressures, with outcomes depending on the balance between these processes (Adhikari & Shilpa, 2025). Such findings are important because they demonstrate that commitment does not develop in a psychological vacuum. External stress can expose pre-existing vulnerabilities but may also activate strengths such as mutual support, adaptive coping, and shared meaning.

Other contextual stressors may similarly affect relationship dynamics. Systematic evidence concerning racial discrimination among Black Americans has shown that experiences of discrimination can spill over into romantic relationships and influence relational processes (Rice et al., 2023). Weight stigma can likewise affect romantic partners and undermine a sense of relational kinship or mutual support (Schmidt et al., 2022). These forms of social stress demonstrate that relationship functioning must be understood within the social environments in which couples live. Even when partners themselves are not the origin of the stressor, external stigma and discrimination may alter mood, communication, self-perceptions, sexual intimacy, and partner support. Research on psychosocial correlates of marital satisfaction similarly emphasizes that marital outcomes are influenced by a combination of individual and social factors rather than by purely intrapersonal characteristics (David et al., 2022).

Health-related challenges can also reshape couple functioning. A review of adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in intimate relationships suggests that attention, impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, and executive functioning difficulties may create persistent challenges for communication, role performance, conflict resolution, and marital satisfaction (He, 2024). At the same time, personal relationships can have important implications for both physical and mental health, reinforcing the bidirectional relationship between intimate functioning and individual well-being (Kanth, 2022). These findings indicate that long-term commitment may depend partly on the couple's capacity to accommodate vulnerabilities and health-related stress while maintaining responsiveness and mutual support.

The dyadic nature of marriage further means that the psychological characteristics of one partner may influence

the experiences of the other. Research using actor-partner interdependence approaches has demonstrated that marital adjustment is shaped by reciprocal interpersonal processes rather than isolated individual effects (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Among retired couples, relational turbulence has similarly been examined through dyadic models, illustrating how partners' experiences become interdependent during major life transitions (Nashef-Hamuda et al., 2025). Latent profile research among couples has also shown that dyadic adjustment may vary according to patterns of social value perception and gender-related differences (Delelis et al., 2026). This dyadic perspective is particularly important in long-term marriages because repeated interaction over years may create mutually reinforcing patterns of closeness, withdrawal, responsiveness, or insecurity.

Relationship functioning may also be influenced by biological and developmental processes that extend beyond conscious interpersonal behavior. A scoping systematic review of genetic and epigenetic influences on couple adjustment suggests that biological predispositions may interact with relational experiences in shaping romantic functioning (Khani et al., 2023). Although such mechanisms do not determine relationship outcomes, they highlight the multilayered nature of couple adjustment and reinforce the importance of integrating psychological, interpersonal, and contextual explanations. Similarly, studies examining the combined mediation of individual and couple psychological factors indicate that relational satisfaction reflects complex pathways involving both personal characteristics and couple-level processes (Chiş et al., 2022).

Marital harmony may therefore be best conceptualized as the product of reciprocal interpersonal functioning, emotional closeness, psychological adaptation, and constructive relational behavior. Research on interpersonal correlates of marital harmony has emphasized the importance of interpersonal processes in understanding positive marital functioning (George, 2023). At the same time, positive relationship outcomes should not be reduced to the absence of psychopathology or conflict. Psychological well-being within romantic relationships has its own predictors, including personal and relational resources that support positive functioning (Yöyen et al., 2025). This distinction is important because individuals may remain married despite dissatisfaction, while others may report high satisfaction without necessarily possessing strong long-term commitment. Commitment therefore represents a related but conceptually distinct outcome that encompasses persistence,

future orientation, attachment to the relationship, and willingness to maintain the marital bond.

Despite substantial research on marital satisfaction, adjustment, intimacy, and psychological well-being, comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining how multiple psychological and relational factors operate together in shaping commitment specifically within established long-term marriages. Existing studies frequently emphasize individual predictors, newlywed samples, young adults, specific clinical groups, or couples facing particular stressors. Yet long-term relationships provide a distinctive context in which accumulated relational investments, habitual communication patterns, attachment processes, emotional regulation capacities, perceived alternatives, and relationship satisfaction may become increasingly intertwined. Theories of relationship maintenance suggest that continued commitment should be especially likely when partners experience the relationship as rewarding, perceive substantial investments in the partnership, and view alternatives as relatively less attractive, while psychological security and effective interpersonal functioning may strengthen these relational mechanisms. At the same time, relational vulnerabilities may become more consequential when maintained over long periods because recurrent emotional avoidance, communication difficulties, insecurity, or dissatisfaction can accumulate across repeated interactions.

The available literature consequently supports an integrated model in which psychological characteristics such as attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and emotion-regulation difficulties influence commitment both directly and indirectly through relationship satisfaction, intimacy, communication processes, perceived alternatives, and accumulated investments. Such an approach is consistent with evidence showing that marital satisfaction and adjustment arise from multiple interacting psychological and dyadic processes (Chiş et al., 2022), that couple functioning is associated with health and psychological adjustment (Kanth, 2022), and that relational quality is best represented as an interconnected system rather than a unitary outcome (Li et al., 2026). It also recognizes that long-term commitment may reflect both vulnerability and resilience: partners bring personal histories and psychological tendencies into the relationship, but the relational system they jointly create can intensify, mediate, or buffer these influences. Investigating these processes in Slovenia may further extend the geographical scope of the literature, which remains dominated by research conducted in other cultural

and national contexts, and may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how individual and relational processes converge in established European marriages.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine the psychological and relational factors shaping marital commitment in long-term relationships among married adults in Slovenia, with particular attention to the direct and indirect roles of attachment insecurity, emotion-regulation difficulties, relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, communication patterns, relationship investment, and perceived quality of alternatives.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design to investigate the psychological and relational factors associated with marital commitment among individuals involved in long-term marital relationships in Slovenia. The study population consisted of married adults residing in different regions of Slovenia, with recruitment conducted primarily in Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje, Kranj, and Koper in order to obtain a geographically diverse sample. A total of 438 individuals initially agreed to participate in the study. Following data screening, 21 questionnaires were excluded because of substantial missing data, patterned responding, or failure to satisfy the eligibility criteria. Consequently, the final analytic sample consisted of exactly 417 married adults. Participants were eligible for inclusion if they were at least 25 years old, were legally married at the time of participation, had been continuously married to their current spouse for at least seven years, were currently living with their spouse, were able to read and understand Slovenian, and provided informed consent to participate. The minimum duration of seven years was selected to ensure that the study specifically addressed established long-term marital relationships rather than relationships in their early developmental stages. Individuals who were currently separated from their spouse, undergoing divorce proceedings, or reporting that their spouse had permanently moved out of the shared household were excluded because their current relational circumstances could substantially alter the meaning and assessment of marital commitment. Participants were recruited using a combination of community-based and online recruitment procedures. Invitations were distributed through community organizations, family and counseling centers, social media platforms, workplace networks, and electronic

announcements circulated among adults residing in Slovenia. A purposive sampling strategy supplemented by convenience and snowball recruitment was used to reach individuals meeting the predefined long-term marriage criterion. Participation was voluntary, no personally identifying information was included in the analytical dataset, and respondents were informed that they could discontinue participation at any point before submitting the questionnaire without any adverse consequences. The questionnaire was completed individually to minimize the possibility of spouses influencing one another's responses. Where both members of a couple expressed interest in participating, they were instructed to complete the survey independently and not to discuss their answers until both had submitted their responses. The study was conducted in accordance with generally accepted ethical principles for research involving human participants, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and secure handling of research data.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected using a structured self-report questionnaire comprising demographic and relationship characteristics and standardized instruments assessing marital commitment and theoretically relevant psychological and relational factors. The demographic section recorded participants' age, gender, educational level, employment status, number of children, duration of marriage, and approximate duration of the relationship before marriage. Marital commitment, which constituted the principal outcome variable, was assessed using the commitment component of the Investment Model Scale developed within Rusbult's investment model framework. The instrument evaluates the extent to which individuals intend to maintain their relationship, feel psychologically attached to their partner, perceive their relationship as important to their future, and demonstrate a long-term orientation toward continuation of the partnership. Responses were provided on the scale's Likert-type response format, with higher scores indicating stronger commitment to maintaining the marital relationship. The Investment Model Scale was particularly appropriate for the present study because it conceptualizes commitment in relation to relationship satisfaction, perceived quality of alternatives, and accumulated investments, thereby providing a theoretically coherent framework for examining the maintenance of long-term intimate relationships. In addition

to the commitment component, the satisfaction, quality-of-alternatives, and investment components were administered to capture central relational mechanisms that may contribute to enduring marital commitment.

Adult romantic attachment was assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised questionnaire. This 36-item measure assesses two major dimensions of attachment insecurity in intimate relationships: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Attachment anxiety reflects concerns regarding rejection, abandonment, insufficient responsiveness, and uncertainty about a partner's availability, whereas attachment avoidance represents discomfort with emotional dependence, intimacy, closeness, and reliance on a romantic partner. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Separate mean scores were calculated for attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance after reverse-scoring the relevant items, with higher scores indicating greater attachment insecurity. Attachment was included as a core psychological variable because internal working models of intimacy and partner availability can affect emotional dependence, trust, conflict responses, and willingness to maintain a long-term marital bond.

Emotion regulation difficulties were measured using the 16-item version of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. The measure assesses difficulties in understanding, accepting, and managing emotional experiences, particularly when individuals encounter distressing interpersonal circumstances. Items address dimensions such as nonacceptance of emotional responses, difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior when distressed, impulse-control difficulties, limited access to effective emotion-regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity. Respondents rated the frequency with which each statement applied to them using the instrument's five-point response format. After appropriate reverse coding, item responses were combined to obtain a total score, with higher scores reflecting greater difficulties in emotion regulation. Emotion regulation was considered theoretically relevant because effective management of negative affect may support constructive communication, reduce escalation of marital conflict, and facilitate the maintenance of emotional connection during stressful periods of a long-term relationship.

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the 16-item Couple Satisfaction Index. The instrument measures global satisfaction with the intimate relationship and includes evaluations of relationship happiness, perceived quality of the relationship, warmth, enjoyment, and the extent to which

the relationship fulfills personal expectations and needs. Items use response formats appropriate to their wording and are summed according to the scoring procedure of the instrument, with higher total scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. The Couple Satisfaction Index was selected because it provides a sensitive assessment of overall relationship quality and is particularly useful in samples in which substantial variability in satisfaction is expected. Emotional intimacy was assessed with items examining perceived emotional closeness, openness, understanding, affection, and the perceived ability to disclose important personal thoughts and feelings to one's spouse. Higher scores represented greater perceived intimacy within the marital relationship. Constructive and destructive patterns of couple communication were assessed using the Communication Patterns Questionnaire. This instrument evaluates typical interaction patterns occurring when partners discuss relationship problems, including mutual constructive communication, demand-withdraw patterns, mutual avoidance, and other conflict-related behaviors. Particular attention was given to constructive communication and demand-withdraw interaction because these patterns have been consistently conceptualized as central indicators of relational functioning. Higher constructive-communication scores represented more collaborative problem solving and emotional engagement, whereas higher demand-withdraw and avoidance scores indicated less adaptive interaction patterns.

All instruments were administered in Slovenian. Where an established Slovenian version of an instrument was available, that version was used. For measures requiring linguistic adaptation, a translation and back-translation procedure was applied. The original English items were first translated into Slovenian by a bilingual researcher familiar with psychological and relationship terminology. A second bilingual professional, who had not reviewed the original wording during the initial translation, independently translated the Slovenian version back into English. Differences between the original and back-translated versions were examined and resolved by consensus, with emphasis on semantic rather than strictly literal equivalence. The complete questionnaire was subsequently pilot-tested with a small group of married adults who met the general eligibility criteria but were not included in the main analytic sample. Participants in the pilot phase evaluated the clarity, comprehensibility, cultural appropriateness, and response burden of the questionnaire. Minor linguistic adjustments were made where necessary before the main data collection

commenced. Internal consistency of each multi-item construct was subsequently evaluated in the final sample, and reliability coefficients of .70 or higher were considered acceptable for inclusion in the principal analyses.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics and IBM SPSS AMOS. Prior to hypothesis testing, the dataset was screened for accuracy, missing values, univariate and multivariate outliers, normality, and response patterns suggesting insufficient engagement with the questionnaire. Cases containing extensive missing information were excluded from the final dataset, while the extent and pattern of any remaining item-level missingness were examined before computation of scale scores. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, ranges, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to characterize the participants and summarize the distributions of the principal study variables. Distributional assumptions were evaluated through skewness and kurtosis coefficients in conjunction with graphical inspection of the variables. Potential multicollinearity among predictors was examined using intercorrelations, tolerance statistics, and variance inflation factors. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with coefficients of .70 or above regarded as evidence of acceptable reliability. The factorial validity of the measurement model was examined using confirmatory factor analysis before testing relationships among the latent constructs. Standardized factor loadings were inspected to assess indicator performance, while convergent validity was evaluated using average variance extracted and composite reliability. Average variance extracted values approaching or exceeding .50 and composite reliability values above .70 were considered supportive of convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed by examining correlations among latent variables and the distinctiveness of the proposed constructs.

Bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients were initially calculated to determine the direction and magnitude of associations between marital commitment and the principal psychological and relational variables, including attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, emotion-regulation difficulties, relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, constructive communication, quality of alternatives, and relationship investment. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was then conducted to estimate the incremental

contribution of psychological and relational factors to marital commitment. Demographic and relationship characteristics considered theoretically relevant, including age, duration of marriage, number of children, and educational level, were entered as control variables in the first stage of the model. Psychological variables, including attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and emotion-regulation difficulties, were entered subsequently, followed by relational variables such as relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, communication patterns, perceived alternatives, and relationship investments. This procedure made it possible to determine whether relational characteristics explained additional variance in marital commitment beyond individual psychological characteristics and basic sociodemographic factors.

Structural equation modeling was subsequently used to evaluate the integrated conceptual model of marital commitment. The model specified attachment insecurity and emotion-regulation difficulties as psychological antecedents of relational functioning, while relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, communication quality, relationship investment, and perceived quality of alternatives were modeled as proximal predictors of marital commitment. Direct and indirect relationships were estimated simultaneously, allowing examination of whether relational processes statistically mediated associations between individual psychological characteristics and commitment to the marriage. Maximum-likelihood estimation was used for model estimation. Overall model fit was evaluated using multiple complementary indices, including the chi-square statistic relative to degrees of freedom, the comparative fit index, Tucker–Lewis index, root mean square error of approximation, and standardized root mean square residual. A chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio below 3.00, comparative fit index and Tucker–Lewis index values of approximately .90 or higher, root mean square error of approximation below .08, and standardized root mean square residual below .08 were interpreted as indicating an acceptable overall fit, while values approaching the more stringent conventional thresholds were interpreted as evidence of good fit. Standardized path coefficients were reported to facilitate interpretation of the relative magnitude of associations. The statistical significance of indirect effects was assessed using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. All statistical tests

were two-tailed, and a probability level of $p < .05$ was adopted as the criterion for statistical significance.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 417 married adults were included in the final analyses. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 68 years, with a mean age of 45.83 years ($SD = 9.21$). Of the total sample, 226 participants (54.20%) were women and 191 (45.80%) were men. The mean duration of marriage was 17.46 years ($SD = 8.32$), with marital duration ranging from 7 to 43 years. The mean duration of the relationship before marriage was 3.74 years ($SD = 2.69$). Most participants were currently employed, with 333 respondents (79.86%) reporting either full-time or part-time employment, 38 (9.11%) being self-employed, 22 (5.28%) retired, and 24 (5.76%) unemployed or otherwise outside the labor force. Regarding educational attainment, 61 participants (14.63%) had completed

secondary education or less, 103 (24.70%) had completed post-secondary vocational or college-level education, 176 (42.21%) held a bachelor's or equivalent university degree, and 77 (18.47%) held a master's degree or doctorate. A total of 343 respondents (82.25%) had at least one child, while 74 (17.75%) had no children. Among parents, the mean number of children was 1.92 ($SD = 0.81$). Preliminary inspection indicated that the distributions of the principal continuous variables were acceptable for parametric analyses. Absolute skewness values ranged from 0.08 to 0.71, while absolute kurtosis values ranged from 0.05 to 0.96, indicating no substantial departure from normality. No evidence of problematic multicollinearity was identified; tolerance values exceeded .44 and variance inflation factor values ranged from 1.18 to 2.26. Consequently, all principal variables were retained for the subsequent correlational, regression, and structural equation analyses.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Bivariate Correlations among the Main Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Marital commitment	6.01	0.91	.91	.92	.66	1.00								
2. Relationship satisfaction	60.84	10.72	.94	.95	.71	.68***	1.00							
3. Emotional intimacy	4.37	0.69	.90	.91	.63	.61***	.71***	1.00						
4. Constructive communication	6.12	1.04	.88	.89	.58	.53***	.62***	.64***	1.00					
5. Demand-withdraw communication	3.28	1.16	.85	.86	.55	-.39***	-.54***	-.48***	-.57***	1.00				
6. Attachment anxiety	3.17	1.02	.92	.93	.60	-.36***	-.47***	-.43***	-.34***	.39***	1.00			
7. Attachment avoidance	2.91	0.98	.90	.91	.58	-.45***	-.56***	-.59***	-.45***	.46***	.41***	1.00		
8. Emotion-regulation difficulties	41.72	11.36	.89	.90	.56	-.34***	-.46***	-.42***	-.37***	.42***	.51***	.48***	1.00	
9. Relationship investment	5.79	0.96	.87	.88	.60	.57***	.49***	.44***	.41***	-.28***	-.25***	-.31***	-.27***	1.00
10. Quality of alternatives	2.64	1.08	.86	.87	.57	-.49***	-.41***	-.34***	-.30***					

As shown in Table 1, all multi-item measures demonstrated satisfactory to excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .85 for demand-withdraw communication to .94 for relationship satisfaction. Composite reliability coefficients ranged from .86 to .95, and all average variance extracted values exceeded .50, supporting the convergent validity of the measurement model. Marital commitment was significantly and positively associated with relationship satisfaction ($r = .68$, $p < .001$), emotional intimacy ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), constructive communication ($r = .53$, $p < .001$), and relationship investment ($r = .57$, $p < .001$). The strongest bivariate association with marital commitment was observed for relationship satisfaction, indicating that participants who perceived their marriages as more satisfying also reported substantially stronger intentions to maintain their marital relationships over time. Emotional intimacy also

demonstrated a strong positive association with commitment, suggesting that perceived emotional closeness, understanding, and openness between spouses were closely related to long-term relational orientation. Constructive communication showed a moderate-to-strong positive correlation with commitment, whereas demand-withdraw communication was negatively associated with marital commitment ($r = -.39$, $p < .001$), indicating that interaction patterns characterized by pressure, withdrawal, and disengagement were associated with weaker commitment. Both attachment dimensions were significantly negatively related to marital commitment. Attachment anxiety was associated with lower commitment ($r = -.36$, $p < .001$), whereas attachment avoidance showed a somewhat stronger negative relationship ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$). Emotion-regulation difficulties were also negatively correlated with marital commitment ($r = -.34$, $p < .001$). Relationship investment

displayed a substantial positive association with commitment, whereas perceived quality of alternatives was negatively related to commitment ($r = -.49, p < .001$). Collectively, these correlations supported the proposed theoretical expectation that marital commitment in long-

term relationships is linked not only to evaluations of relationship rewards and investments but also to emotional security, intimacy, communication processes, and individual psychological functioning.

Table 2

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Marital Commitment

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Model 1: Demographic and relationship controls						
Age	0.006	0.005	.06	1.21	.228	[-0.004, 0.016]
Duration of marriage	0.012	0.006	.11	2.06	.040	[0.001, 0.023]
Number of children	0.041	0.036	.05	1.14	.254	[-0.030, 0.112]
Educational level	-0.026	0.029	-.04	-0.90	.369	[-0.083, 0.031]
Model 2: Psychological factors						
Age	0.004	0.004	.04	0.98	.328	[-0.004, 0.012]
Duration of marriage	0.009	0.005	.08	1.78	.076	[-0.001, 0.019]
Number of children	0.026	0.031	.03	0.84	.400	[-0.035, 0.087]
Educational level	-0.018	0.025	-.03	-0.72	.472	[-0.067, 0.031]
Attachment anxiety	-0.148	0.040	-.17	-3.70	<.001	[-0.227, -0.069]
Attachment avoidance	-0.247	0.043	-.27	-5.74	<.001	[-0.332, -0.162]
Emotion-regulation difficulties	-0.010	0.003	-.13	-3.15	.002	[-0.016, -0.004]
Model 3: Psychological and relational factors						
Age	0.002	0.003	.02	0.60	.551	[-0.004, 0.008]
Duration of marriage	0.005	0.004	.04	1.24	.216	[-0.003, 0.013]
Number of children	0.014	0.024	.02	0.58	.562	[-0.033, 0.061]
Educational level	-0.009	0.019	-.01	-0.47	.639	[-0.046, 0.028]
Attachment anxiety	-0.061	0.031	-.07	-1.97	.049	[-0.122, -0.001]
Attachment avoidance	-0.092	0.036	-.10	-2.56	.011	[-0.163, -0.021]
Emotion-regulation difficulties	-0.004	0.002	-.05	-1.79	.074	[-0.008, 0.001]
Relationship satisfaction	0.029	0.004	.34	7.25	<.001	[0.021, 0.037]
Emotional intimacy	0.207	0.059	.16	3.51	<.001	[0.091, 0.323]
Constructive communication	0.103	0.034	.12	3.03	.003	[0.036, 0.170]
Demand-withdraw communication	-0.066	0.028	-.08	-2.36	.019	[-0.121, -0.011]
Relationship investment	0.245	0.034	.26	7.21	<.001	[0.178, 0.312]
Quality of alternatives	-0.184	0.031	-.22	-5.94	<.001	[-0.245, -0.123]

Note. N = 417. Model 1: $R^2 = .041$, adjusted $R^2 = .032$, $F(4, 412) = 4.40$, $p = .002$. Model 2: $R^2 = .286$, adjusted $R^2 = .274$, $\Delta R^2 = .245$, $\Delta F(3, 409) = 46.78$, $p < .001$. Model 3: $R^2 = .674$, adjusted $R^2 = .664$, $\Delta R^2 = .388$, $\Delta F(6, 403) = 79.92$, $p < .001$.

The hierarchical regression analysis presented in Table 2 showed that demographic and relationship-duration characteristics explained only a small proportion of the variance in marital commitment. In Model 1, age, duration of marriage, number of children, and educational level jointly accounted for 4.1% of the variance in commitment, $F(4, 412) = 4.40$, $p = .002$. Among these variables, only duration of marriage reached statistical significance ($\beta = .11$, $p = .040$), indicating a modest tendency for individuals in longer-established marriages to report higher commitment. When attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and emotion-regulation difficulties were added in Model 2, the explained variance increased substantially to 28.6%, representing an additional 24.5% of explained variance,

$\Delta F(3, 409) = 46.78$, $p < .001$. Attachment avoidance emerged as the strongest psychological predictor at this stage ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$), followed by attachment anxiety ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .001$) and emotion-regulation difficulties ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .002$). These results indicated that lower attachment insecurity and better emotional regulation were associated with stronger marital commitment independently of demographic characteristics. The inclusion of relational factors in Model 3 produced a further pronounced increase in explanatory power. The final model explained 67.4% of the variance in marital commitment, adjusted $R^2 = .664$, representing an additional 38.8% of variance beyond demographic and psychological factors, $\Delta F(6, 403) = 79.92$, $p < .001$. Relationship satisfaction was the strongest positive

predictor of commitment in the final model ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), followed by relationship investment ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$), while perceived quality of alternatives was the strongest negative relational predictor ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$). Emotional intimacy also made a significant positive contribution ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$), as did constructive communication ($\beta = .12$, $p = .003$). Demand-withdraw communication remained a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .019$). After relational factors were entered, the

effects of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were reduced but remained statistically significant, whereas emotion-regulation difficulties no longer made a unique statistically significant contribution at the .05 level. This attenuation suggested that part of the association between individual psychological functioning and marital commitment may operate indirectly through relational processes such as satisfaction, intimacy, communication quality, and accumulated investment in the relationship.

Table 3

Structural Equation Model: Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects on Marital Commitment

Structural path	β	SE	z/t	p	95% Bootstrap CI	Result
Relationship satisfaction → Marital commitment	.36	.047	7.66	<.001	[.27, .45]	Significant
Emotional intimacy → Marital commitment	.17	.049	3.47	<.001	[.08, .27]	Significant
Constructive communication → Marital commitment	.13	.043	3.02	.003	[.05, .22]	Significant
Relationship investment → Marital commitment	.28	.039	7.18	<.001	[.20, .35]	Significant
Quality of alternatives → Marital commitment	-.23	.039	-5.90	<.001	[-.31, -.15]	Significant
Attachment anxiety → Marital commitment	-.06	.030	-2.00	.046	[-.12, -.01]	Significant
Attachment avoidance → Marital commitment	-.09	.035	-2.57	.010	[-.16, -.02]	Significant
Emotion-regulation difficulties → Marital commitment	-.04	.026	-1.54	.123	[-.09, .01]	Not significant
Attachment anxiety → Relationship satisfaction	-.29	.041	-7.07	<.001	[-.37, -.21]	Significant
Attachment avoidance → Emotional intimacy	-.43	.040	-10.75	<.001	[-.51, -.35]	Significant
Emotion-regulation difficulties → Constructive communication	-.31	.042	-7.38	<.001	[-.39, -.22]	Significant
Attachment avoidance → Relationship satisfaction	-.25	.043	-5.81	<.001	[-.33, -.16]	Significant
Attachment anxiety → Emotional intimacy	-.19	.044	-4.32	<.001	[-.28, -.10]	Significant
Emotion-regulation difficulties → Relationship satisfaction	-.21	.041	-5.12	<.001	[-.29, -.13]	Significant
Attachment anxiety → Relationship satisfaction → Marital commitment	-.10	.022	—	<.001	[-.15, -.06]	Significant indirect effect
Attachment avoidance → Relationship satisfaction → Marital commitment	-.09	.021	—	<.001	[-.14, -.05]	Significant indirect effect
Attachment avoidance → Emotional intimacy → Marital commitment	-.07	.020	—	<.001	[-.12, -.04]	Significant indirect effect
Emotion-regulation difficulties → Relationship satisfaction → Marital commitment	-.08	.020	—	<.001	[-.12, -.04]	Significant indirect effect
Emotion-regulation difficulties → Constructive communication → Marital commitment	-.04	.015	—	.004	[-.07, -.02]	Significant indirect effect

The structural equation model demonstrated an acceptable-to-good fit to the observed data, $\chi^2(356) = 742.18$, $\chi^2/df = 2.08$, CFI = .946, TLI = .938, RMSEA = .051, 90% CI [.046, .056], and SRMR = .047. These indices collectively indicated that the hypothesized model adequately represented the covariance structure among the psychological, relational, and commitment variables. Consistent with the hierarchical regression results, relationship satisfaction showed the strongest direct positive association with marital commitment ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$).

Relationship investment also had a substantial positive direct effect ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), whereas quality of alternatives demonstrated a significant negative direct association ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$). Emotional intimacy contributed positively to commitment ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), and constructive communication showed a smaller but statistically significant direct effect ($\beta = .13$, $p = .003$). Among the psychological variables, attachment anxiety retained a small negative direct effect on marital commitment ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .046$), while attachment avoidance also remained negatively associated

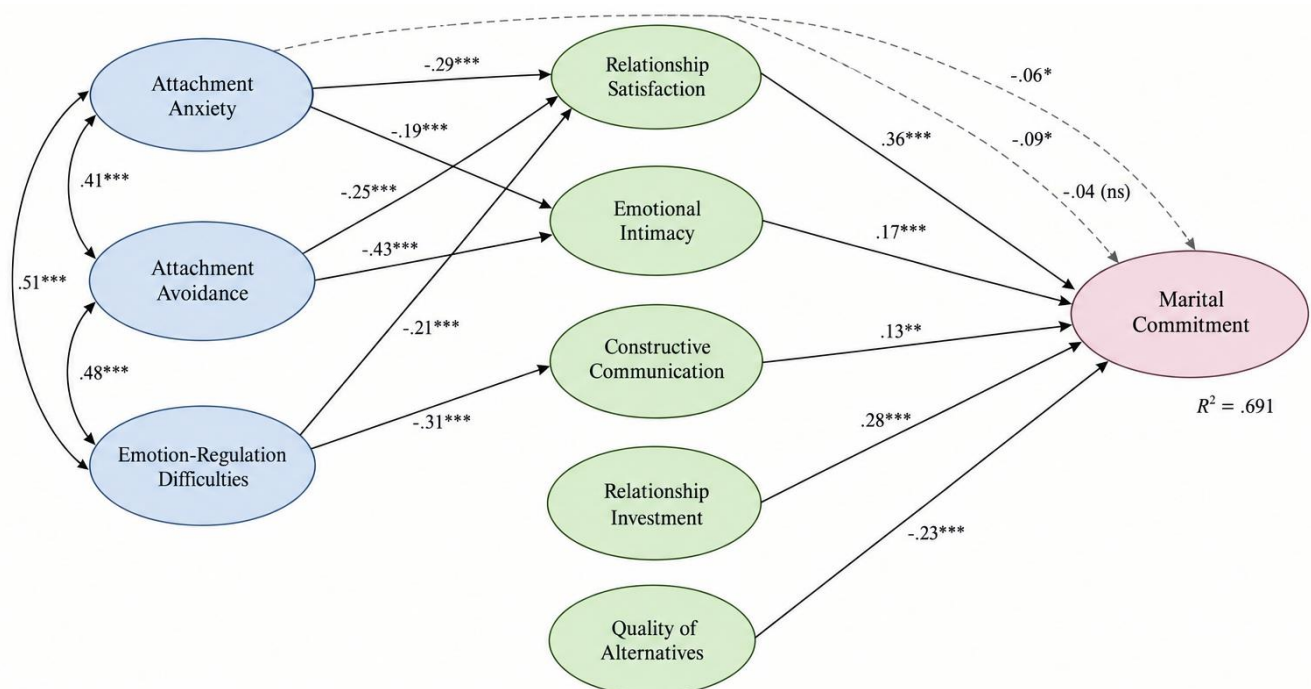
with commitment ($\beta = -.09, p = .010$). The direct effect of emotion-regulation difficulties on marital commitment was not statistically significant once relational mediators were included in the model ($\beta = -.04, p = .123$), suggesting that emotion-regulation difficulties were more strongly associated with commitment through their influence on relationship processes than through a direct pathway.

The mediation analysis provided further support for this interpretation. Attachment anxiety significantly predicted lower relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.29, p < .001$), and its indirect effect on marital commitment through relationship satisfaction was statistically significant ($\beta = -.10, 95\%$ bootstrap CI $[-.15, -.06]$). Attachment avoidance significantly predicted both lower relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.25, p < .001$) and lower emotional intimacy ($\beta = -.43, p < .001$). The corresponding indirect effects on marital commitment through satisfaction ($\beta = -.09, 95\%$ bootstrap

CI $[-.14, -.05]$) and emotional intimacy ($\beta = -.07, 95\%$ bootstrap CI $[-.12, -.04]$) were both statistically significant. Emotion-regulation difficulties were associated with lower relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.21, p < .001$) and lower constructive communication ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$). Their indirect effects on commitment through satisfaction ($\beta = -.08, 95\%$ bootstrap CI $[-.12, -.04]$) and constructive communication ($\beta = -.04, 95\%$ bootstrap CI $[-.07, -.02]$) were likewise significant. Because the corresponding bootstrap confidence intervals did not include zero, these indirect associations were considered statistically reliable. The findings therefore indicated that psychological vulnerabilities, particularly insecure attachment and difficulties regulating emotions, were associated with weaker marital commitment partly because they undermined satisfaction, emotional intimacy, and constructive patterns of communication within the marital relationship.

Figure 1

Structural Model of Psychological and Relational Factors Predicting Marital Commitment in Long-Term Relationships



Note. Standardized path coefficients are shown. Dashed lines represent direct paths from psychological variables to marital commitment. Correlations among psychological variables are shown with curved double-headed arrows.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. (ns) = not significant.

$\chi^2(356) = 742.18$, $\chi^2/df = 2.08$,
CFI = .946, TLI = .938,
RMSEA = .051, SRMR = .047

The structural pattern depicted in Figure 1 indicates that marital commitment was shaped by both individual psychological characteristics and proximal relational processes, although relational factors showed the most pronounced direct associations with the outcome. Relationship satisfaction, relationship investment, emotional

intimacy, and constructive communication formed the principal positive pathways to commitment, whereas greater perceived availability or attractiveness of alternatives exerted a comparatively strong negative effect. Attachment insecurity influenced marital commitment through both direct and indirect mechanisms. In particular, attachment

avoidance was strongly associated with reduced emotional intimacy and lower relationship satisfaction, while attachment anxiety was primarily linked to diminished satisfaction and, to a lesser extent, reduced intimacy. Emotion-regulation difficulties were associated with poorer relationship satisfaction and less constructive communication but did not retain a statistically significant direct path to commitment after these relational pathways were modeled. The combined model explained 69.1% of the variance in marital commitment, indicating substantial explanatory capacity. Relationship satisfaction accounted for the largest unique standardized direct effect, while relationship investment and quality of alternatives also emerged as central determinants. Taken together, the findings suggest that commitment in long-term marriage is not merely a function of relationship duration or demographic circumstances; rather, it appears to be closely associated with the subjective quality of the relationship, the emotional and behavioral resources available within the partnership, the extent of personal investment in the relationship, and the degree to which alternative relational possibilities are perceived as attractive or viable. The findings further indicate that psychological vulnerabilities may become especially consequential when they disrupt the relational mechanisms through which long-term partnerships are sustained.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the psychological and relational factors shaping marital commitment in long-term relationships among married adults in Slovenia. The findings showed that marital commitment was strongly associated with a combination of relational satisfaction, emotional intimacy, communication patterns, attachment insecurity, emotion-regulation difficulties, relationship investment, and perceived quality of alternatives. Among the examined variables, relationship satisfaction emerged as the strongest positive predictor of marital commitment, followed by relationship investment, while quality of alternatives had a substantial negative association with commitment. Emotional intimacy and constructive communication also made significant positive contributions, whereas demand-withdraw communication was negatively related to commitment. Attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were both negatively associated with marital commitment, although their direct effects were reduced after relational factors were introduced into the model. Emotion-

regulation difficulties were significantly related to commitment at the bivariate and intermediate regression stages but did not retain a significant direct effect in the final structural model. Instead, their effects were transmitted indirectly through relationship satisfaction and constructive communication. Overall, the final model explained a substantial proportion of the variance in marital commitment, supporting the view that long-term commitment is best understood as the product of interacting psychological and relational processes rather than as a consequence of demographic characteristics alone.

The finding that relationship satisfaction was the strongest positive predictor of marital commitment is consistent with a broad body of relationship research showing that positive evaluations of the partnership contribute fundamentally to marital continuity and relational stability. Individuals who experience their marriage as emotionally rewarding, supportive, responsive, and fulfilling are more likely to maintain a future-oriented commitment to their spouse. This interpretation is supported by research indicating that partner responsiveness is closely associated with both marital and life satisfaction, particularly because responsive partners communicate understanding, care, and validation (Thargay & Giri, 2024). Likewise, relationship satisfaction has been linked to broader patterns of psychological and dyadic functioning, emphasizing that the subjective quality of the marital bond is central to how partners evaluate the continuation of their relationship (Chis et al., 2022). Recent longitudinal findings also show that relational behaviors that interfere with need fulfillment, such as perceived partner phubbing, can undermine marital satisfaction over time (Li et al., 2026). These studies align with the present results by suggesting that commitment is more likely to be sustained when spouses experience the relationship as satisfying and responsive to important emotional and interpersonal needs.

The positive association between relationship investment and marital commitment also supports theoretical expectations regarding the maintenance of long-term partnerships. Investments may include shared time, emotional energy, joint experiences, social networks, financial resources, parenthood, shared goals, and a sense of accumulated history. As these investments increase, the perceived costs of relationship dissolution may become greater and the motivation to preserve the relationship may strengthen. In the present study, relationship investment remained a strong predictor even after accounting for psychological vulnerabilities and other relational factors,

indicating that commitment was not determined by satisfaction alone. This finding is compatible with evidence that everyday exchanges, acts of giving, and reciprocal relational behaviors may reinforce a sense of mutual value and strengthen the marital bond (Liang et al., 2026). It also aligns with perspectives emphasizing the simultaneous contribution of relationship strengths and strains, whereby relational resources can offset or buffer pressures threatening couple stability (Adhikari & Shilpa, 2025). In long-term marriages, accumulated investment may therefore provide a structural and psychological foundation that supports commitment even during periods in which satisfaction temporarily declines.

Perceived quality of alternatives was one of the strongest negative predictors of marital commitment. Participants who viewed alternative partners, lifestyles, or relational possibilities as more attractive tended to report weaker commitment to their current marriage. This pattern is consistent with the logic of relationship maintenance models, according to which commitment is shaped partly by comparison between the current relationship and perceived alternatives. Although many previous studies have focused primarily on satisfaction and adjustment, the broader literature supports the idea that evaluations of one's relationship are inherently comparative and embedded in cognitive appraisals of available options, personal needs, and expectations. Research on cognitive flexibility and marriage attitudes suggests that how individuals interpret and cognitively organize relationship experiences can influence their attitudes toward relational continuation (Ekinci & Canpolat, 2025). Similarly, network-based approaches to romantic relationship quality emphasize that judgments about the relationship are embedded within a larger system of interconnected perceptions and behavioral tendencies. The present findings extend this perspective by showing that perceived alternatives retain explanatory power even when satisfaction, intimacy, communication, and psychological factors are considered simultaneously.

Emotional intimacy was also positively associated with marital commitment. Participants who reported greater emotional closeness, openness, trust, and understanding with their spouse showed stronger commitment to the relationship. Emotional intimacy likely promotes commitment because it strengthens the sense that the marital bond is unique, personally meaningful, and psychologically secure. This interpretation is consistent with findings showing that relationship authenticity can mediate the association between secrecy and marital happiness,

indicating that openness and congruence within the relationship are important for positive marital functioning (Bimantara & Karsten, 2024). The relevance of intimacy is also consistent with research emphasizing positive emotional states and constructive relational mindsets in the development of healthy and enduring relationships (Mohamad et al., 2022). Thus, emotional intimacy appears to function as a core relational resource through which partners experience the marriage as safe, personally meaningful, and worthy of sustained investment.

Constructive communication significantly predicted stronger marital commitment, whereas demand-withdraw communication predicted weaker commitment. These results highlight the importance of communication as an ongoing mechanism of relationship maintenance. Constructive communication allows partners to address disagreements collaboratively, articulate needs, negotiate solutions, and maintain emotional connection during conflict. In contrast, demand-withdraw patterns can foster frustration, perceived rejection, unresolved problems, and emotional distance. Previous studies strongly support this interpretation. Communication quality has been identified as a central antecedent of marital functioning and as an important factor in understanding relationship deterioration (Kamal et al., 2023). Dyadic research among couples coping with breast cancer has likewise demonstrated that partner communication is closely related to marital satisfaction and adaptation (Krok et al., 2023). Research on social anhedonia has further shown that communication processes are related to marital satisfaction, suggesting that deficits in interpersonal engagement can influence broader relationship outcomes (Tan et al., 2023). The current findings therefore reinforce the view that communication is not merely a correlate of commitment but an important relational process through which partners preserve or erode the quality of their marital connection over time.

Attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were both negatively related to marital commitment. However, their effects became smaller once relational factors were included, suggesting that attachment insecurity influences commitment partly through its impact on satisfaction, intimacy, and other dyadic processes. Attachment anxiety may weaken commitment through persistent concerns about rejection, heightened sensitivity to signs of partner unavailability, and difficulty maintaining a stable sense of relationship security. Attachment avoidance may be particularly detrimental to commitment because discomfort with dependence and emotional closeness can restrict

intimacy and reduce willingness to invest deeply in the relationship. The present results are consistent with dyadic evidence showing that adult attachment patterns influence marital adjustment through both actor and partner effects (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Cross-cultural research has also identified significant associations among parental attachment, adult romantic attachment, and marital satisfaction (Huang et al., 2020). These findings suggest that attachment-related internal working models shape not only individuals' emotional experiences but also the relational environment that develops between spouses.

The stronger role of attachment avoidance in predicting reduced emotional intimacy is particularly consistent with attachment theory. Avoidantly attached individuals may minimize emotional dependence, suppress attachment needs, and disengage during relational stress, thereby reducing opportunities for closeness and mutual reassurance. In the current study, attachment avoidance significantly predicted lower intimacy and lower satisfaction, which in turn predicted reduced commitment. This indirect pathway is consistent with evidence that early adverse experiences and developmental vulnerabilities can affect adult marital adjustment through their influence on personality, resilience, and relational functioning (Parajuli, 2024). It also aligns with broader findings showing that childhood maltreatment can compromise later relationship quality through multiple mediating mechanisms (Zamir, 2021). Thus, insecure attachment may represent a developmental vulnerability whose influence on long-term commitment becomes expressed through repeated patterns of distancing, insecurity, reduced trust, and lower satisfaction.

Emotion-regulation difficulties were negatively associated with marital commitment at the correlational level but did not retain a significant direct effect in the final structural model. This pattern suggests that emotion regulation may affect commitment primarily through relational mechanisms rather than directly. Participants with greater difficulties managing emotions tended to report lower relationship satisfaction and poorer constructive communication, and these relational deficits were associated with weaker commitment. This is theoretically plausible because emotion regulation is especially important during conflict, disappointment, stress, and perceived rejection. Poor regulation may increase impulsive responding, escalation, defensiveness, or withdrawal, thereby damaging communication and satisfaction. Research linking emotional intelligence to intimate relationship outcomes, including sexual satisfaction, supports the broader importance of

emotional competencies within romantic relationships (Özbay & Balaban, 2024). Likewise, work examining emotional intelligence and marital anxiety demonstrates that emotional functioning is related to relationship-related distress and vulnerability (Mukba & Oruç, 2026). The present findings extend this literature by showing that the influence of emotion regulation on commitment may be mediated through the quality of ongoing relational interactions.

The indirect pathways observed in the structural model are particularly important because they indicate that psychological vulnerabilities do not operate independently from the relational context. Attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and emotion-regulation difficulties were associated with poorer relational functioning, which in turn predicted weaker commitment. This supports a transactional view of marital functioning in which individual psychological characteristics shape the relationship environment and are simultaneously reinforced or buffered by that environment. Such an interpretation is compatible with broader evidence showing that psychological and couple-level factors jointly contribute to relational satisfaction (Chiş et al., 2022). It is also consistent with the perspective that psychopathology and relationship functioning are reciprocally connected (South, 2021). Longitudinal evidence linking personality, relationship satisfaction, and psychopathology similarly indicates that these domains influence one another across time rather than functioning as independent systems (Dashineau et al., 2023).

The present results also fit with evidence that depressive symptoms and relational dissatisfaction can be prospectively associated. Previous work has shown that depressive symptoms may predict lower marital satisfaction over time (Jenkins et al., 2020), while relational disillusionment has also been associated with depressive outcomes (Niehuis, 2020). Although depression was not directly assessed in the present study, these studies reinforce the broader interpretation that negative psychological states can disrupt relational functioning and that impaired relationship quality can, in turn, contribute to psychological distress. This reciprocal vulnerability may be especially relevant in long-term marriages, where repeated patterns of dissatisfaction, avoidance, and poorly regulated conflict can become increasingly entrenched.

Personality-related vulnerabilities may further help explain why some individuals experience persistent difficulties in long-term relationships. Evidence from systematic review and meta-analysis indicates that

perfectionism is associated with marital outcomes in ways that depend on the form and interpersonal expression of perfectionistic tendencies (Hamedani et al., 2024). Similarly, narcissistic and borderline personality traits have been shown to mediate relationships between deeper object-relational patterns and marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction (Kahraman & Aktan, 2024). Recent network analyses also demonstrate that personality, motivational goals, marital adjustment, and psychological well-being are interconnected through multiple pathways (Gyeong & Shin, 2026). These findings are compatible with the present model, which indicates that individual psychological characteristics influence commitment partly by altering relational processes rather than by operating as isolated determinants.

The results should also be interpreted within a broader contextual framework. Long-term marriages unfold across changing social and developmental circumstances, and external stressors may intensify relational vulnerabilities. Reviews of marital functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic documented substantial changes in marital distress and satisfaction under conditions of confinement, uncertainty, and altered family roles (Epifani et al., 2021). Strength-and-strain models similarly indicate that relationship outcomes reflect the balance between relational resources and stressors (Adhikari & Shilpa, 2025). Other forms of contextual strain, including discrimination and stigma, can also spill over into romantic relationships and affect couple functioning (Rice et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2022). These findings suggest that commitment should not be conceptualized solely as a personal decision but as an outcome shaped by both relational dynamics and the external conditions under which couples live.

Health-related and neuropsychological factors may similarly affect long-term commitment through their impact on everyday couple functioning. Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, for example, may create difficulties in attention, impulsivity, emotional regulation, and role performance that can place strain on intimate relationships (He, 2024). More broadly, personal relationships have important implications for physical and mental health, emphasizing the reciprocal connection between relationship quality and individual well-being (Kanth, 2022). In long-term marriages, the capacity to accommodate health-related vulnerabilities and maintain responsive communication may therefore be particularly important for preserving commitment.

The dyadic nature of marriage also deserves emphasis. The present study relied on individual reports, but marital commitment develops within an interpersonal system in which one partner's attachment style, emotional functioning, communication behavior, and satisfaction can affect the other partner. Research using actor-partner interdependence approaches has demonstrated precisely such reciprocal influences in marital adjustment (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Studies of retired couples likewise show that relational turbulence operates dyadically during major life transitions (Nashef-Hamuda et al., 2025), while latent profile analyses of couple adjustment indicate meaningful gender-related and interpersonal patterns in relational functioning (Delelis et al., 2026). These findings suggest that the pathways identified in the current study may be even more complex when both spouses are assessed simultaneously.

5. Conclusion

Taken together, the findings support a multidimensional understanding of marital commitment in long-term relationships. Commitment was strongest among individuals who were satisfied with their relationship, felt emotionally close to their spouse, communicated constructively, had invested substantially in the relationship, and perceived fewer attractive alternatives. Psychological vulnerabilities such as attachment insecurity and emotion-regulation difficulties were associated with weaker commitment, but much of their influence occurred through relational mechanisms. This pattern is consistent with broader evidence suggesting that marital harmony depends on interpersonal processes (George, 2023), that positive relationship functioning is associated with psychological well-being (Yöyen et al., 2025), and that couple adjustment reflects interacting psychological, relational, developmental, and even biological processes (Khani et al., 2023). The findings therefore underscore the importance of examining long-term commitment as an emergent property of the broader marital system rather than as a single attitude or isolated individual characteristic.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions regarding the direction of associations among psychological characteristics, relational processes, and marital commitment. Although the structural model was theoretically specified, alternative causal

pathways are possible, including the possibility that lower commitment contributes to reduced satisfaction, poorer communication, or greater perceptions of alternative relationships. Second, all variables were assessed using self-report instruments, which may introduce common-method variance, social desirability bias, recall bias, and subjective distortion. Third, although the sample included 417 married adults from Slovenia, the use of purposive, convenience, and snowball recruitment limits the representativeness of the sample and may reduce generalizability to the broader Slovenian population or to couples in other cultural contexts. Fourth, only one partner's perspective was required for inclusion in the analyses, and the absence of matched dyadic data limited the ability to examine reciprocal actor and partner effects. Fifth, the study focused on legally married adults in relationships lasting at least seven years and therefore may not generalize to cohabiting couples, remarried individuals, same-sex couples, newlyweds, or individuals in distressed relationships approaching separation. Finally, some potentially relevant factors, including sexual satisfaction, financial strain, parenting stress, physical health, personality traits, religiosity, and major life transitions, were not included in the model and may account for additional variance in marital commitment.

Future research should use longitudinal and dyadic designs to clarify the temporal ordering and reciprocal nature of the relationships identified in this study. Following couples over multiple years would make it possible to determine whether attachment insecurity and emotion-regulation difficulties prospectively predict reductions in satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment, or whether deteriorating relationship quality intensifies psychological vulnerability over time. Studies that include both partners should apply actor-partner interdependence models to examine how one spouse's attachment style, emotional regulation, communication behavior, and commitment influence the other spouse's outcomes. Future research should also examine whether the identified pathways differ according to gender, age, marital duration, parenthood status, socioeconomic position, or relationship stage. Cross-cultural comparative studies would be valuable for determining whether the structure of marital commitment observed in Slovenia is replicated in other European and non-European contexts. Additional work should incorporate potentially relevant constructs such as sexual satisfaction, forgiveness, trust, perceived equity, financial stress, parenting burden, physical illness, personality characteristics, and shared values. Experimental and

intervention studies could also test whether targeted improvement in emotion regulation, communication, or intimacy produces measurable increases in commitment over time.

The findings have several implications for couple counseling, marital education, and preventive relationship programs. Practitioners should assess marital commitment in conjunction with relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, communication patterns, attachment insecurity, emotion-regulation capacities, relationship investments, and perceived alternatives rather than treating commitment as an isolated construct. Couple interventions may benefit from helping partners identify recurring demand-withdraw cycles, replace defensive or avoidant interaction with constructive communication, and increase responsiveness during emotionally significant exchanges. Interventions should also address attachment-related fears and distancing strategies that interfere with closeness and security. Training in emotion regulation may be particularly useful when partners experience escalation, impulsive reactions, or difficulty recovering after conflict. Counselors can also help couples recognize and strengthen meaningful investments in their shared relationship, including common goals, rituals, supportive behaviors, and long-term plans. Preventive programs for established couples should therefore focus not only on conflict reduction but also on strengthening intimacy, satisfaction, mutual responsiveness, emotional security, and shared relational meaning, as these processes appear central to the maintenance of commitment over time.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed 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.

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