




## Assessing the Impact of a Strength-Based Parenting Program on Family Cohesion and Marital Conflicts

Giselle. Mata<sup>1</sup>, Florian. Bauer<sup>2\*</sup>, Oriana. Piskorz-Ryń<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Centre in Education (CIE-ISP), ISPA—Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, 1149-041 Lisbon, Portugal

<sup>2</sup> Department of Educational Psychology, University of Graz, Graz, Austria

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Caldas, Street 6623b-03, Manizales 170004, Caldas, Colombia

\* Corresponding author email address: [florian.bauer@uni-graz.at](mailto:florian.bauer@uni-graz.at)

### Article Info

#### Article type:

Original Article

#### How to cite this article:

Mata, G., Bauer, F., & Piskorz-Ryń, O. (2025). Assessing the Impact of a Strength-Based Parenting Program on Family Cohesion and Marital Conflicts. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 6(1), 167-176. <http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.6.1.17>



© 2025 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:** This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a strength-based parenting program in enhancing family cohesion and reducing marital conflicts among parents.

**Methods:** A randomized controlled trial design was employed with 30 participants (15 in the intervention group and 15 in the control group), all of whom were parents residing in Italy. The intervention group participated in a nine-session, strength-based parenting program delivered over nine weeks, while the control group received no intervention during the study period. Both groups completed assessments at three time points: pretest, posttest, and a five-month follow-up. The standardized tools used included the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales IV (FACES IV) to measure family cohesion and the Marital Conflict Questionnaire (MCQ) to assess marital conflicts. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests in SPSS version 27.

**Findings:** The repeated measures ANOVA indicated significant time  $\times$  group interaction effects for both family cohesion ( $F(2,56) = 16.63, p < .001, \eta^2 = .39$ ) and marital conflicts ( $F(2,56) = 18.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .41$ ). Post-hoc comparisons revealed that the intervention group experienced significant increases in family cohesion from pretest to posttest (Mean Difference = 6.87,  $p < .001$ ) and follow-up (Mean Difference = 6.14,  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, marital conflicts significantly decreased in the intervention group from pretest to posttest (Mean Difference = -10.85,  $p < .001$ ) and remained lower at follow-up (Mean Difference = -11.19,  $p < .001$ ), with no significant changes observed in the control group.

**Conclusion:** The strength-based parenting intervention proved effective in promoting family cohesion and reducing marital conflict over time, with sustained benefits evident at a five-month follow-up. These findings highlight the value of strengths-focused approaches in enhancing family relationships and emotional well-being.

**Keywords:** Strength-based parenting, family cohesion, marital conflict

## 1. Introduction

Family relationships are a cornerstone of individual well-being, and within this dynamic, the quality of parental and marital interactions plays a critical role in determining the psychological and social outcomes of both parents and children. Marital conflict and disrupted family cohesion are increasingly recognized as key factors that undermine family functioning and child development across cultural contexts (Guo, 2023). Recent research has highlighted the bidirectional influence of marital dissatisfaction and poor communication on parent-child relationships, suggesting that conflicts between spouses often spill over into parenting practices, ultimately affecting children's emotional regulation and behavior (Kim & Lee, 2024; Swisa et al., 2023). In this context, interventions that promote family cohesion while addressing marital conflicts are not only timely but necessary, particularly in societies undergoing socio-cultural transitions that stress traditional family structures.

Marital conflict is not a singular or isolated phenomenon; rather, it involves a complex interplay of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive processes that can persist and intensify over time. Longitudinal studies have shown that persistent interparental conflict can lead to emotional insecurity in children and maladaptive coping strategies in adolescents (Devonshire et al., 2023; Miller Graff et al., 2015). These outcomes often manifest as increased behavioral problems, academic disengagement, and emotional dysregulation, which further deteriorate the family climate (Zaki et al., 2022; Zhou & Zhen, 2022). Moreover, the presence of unresolved marital tension has been associated with adverse parental behaviors such as inconsistent discipline, decreased warmth, and heightened parental stress (Cho & Lee, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Marital conflict is particularly detrimental when parents fail to employ constructive resolution strategies, which has been shown to exacerbate both externalizing and internalizing symptoms in children (Gong et al., 2023; Salerno et al., 2023).

Family cohesion, defined as the emotional bonding between family members and the degree of supportiveness and connectedness in the family system, is a protective factor that can buffer the negative effects of marital conflict (Gao et al., 2022). A cohesive family structure provides a secure base for children and fosters a nurturing environment in which emotional needs are met and interpersonal skills are developed. Research suggests that family cohesion is not

merely a static trait but can be cultivated through intentional practices and interventions that emphasize emotional connection, mutual respect, and shared goals (Han et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2022). In families experiencing high levels of conflict, enhancing cohesion has been shown to mitigate the harmful effects of parental discord on children's emotional and behavioral outcomes (Peng et al., 2024; Yuan-ping et al., 2023).

Given the reciprocal links between marital functioning, parenting quality, and family cohesion, scholars have emphasized the importance of holistic interventions that address these domains simultaneously. While traditional marital therapy often focuses on communication skills and conflict resolution, recent innovations in family-based approaches are increasingly grounded in positive psychology frameworks. Strength-based parenting, in particular, has emerged as a promising intervention model that focuses on identifying and reinforcing children's and parents' character strengths, thereby fostering resilience and enhancing family functioning (Wang, 2025). This approach shifts the emphasis from correcting deficits to amplifying positive behaviors, offering a more optimistic and empowering path to transformation within families (Yang et al., 2024). Strength-based parenting interventions are predicated on the understanding that character strengths—such as kindness, perseverance, self-regulation, and gratitude—can be intentionally cultivated and modeled by parents to reinforce positive development in children and healthy relational patterns in the family. By encouraging parents to recognize and respond to their children's innate strengths, these programs aim to improve parenting efficacy, reduce parental stress, and enhance emotional bonding within the family unit (Darwiche et al., 2022; Defanti, 2025). Additionally, this model has the potential to reduce marital conflicts by shifting parents' focus toward shared values and collaborative goals in childrearing, thereby fostering a more harmonious co-parenting dynamic (Witami, 2024). Empirical studies on strength-based interventions, though still emerging, have yielded promising results. For instance, families participating in strength-based workshops have demonstrated increased emotional closeness, improved communication, and reduced instances of conflict escalation (Gao et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2024). These outcomes are particularly pronounced when the interventions incorporate both parenting and spousal relationship elements, acknowledging that marital quality and parenting behaviors are deeply intertwined (Gao et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Moreover, strength-based interventions offer long-term

benefits by instilling adaptive coping mechanisms and reinforcing emotional support systems that sustain family cohesion beyond the duration of the program (Devonshire et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Despite these promising trends, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding rigorously designed experimental studies that evaluate the efficacy of strength-based parenting interventions using robust methodological frameworks. Most existing research relies on qualitative data or short-term evaluations, limiting the generalizability and longitudinal relevance of their findings (Li, 2023; Peng et al., 2024). Furthermore, cultural factors often mediate the effectiveness of family interventions, necessitating context-specific studies that take into account familial expectations, communication norms, and parenting philosophies unique to each setting (Leung et al., 2022; Zaki et al., 2022).

In light of these gaps, the present study aims to assess the impact of a structured strength-based parenting program on family cohesion and marital conflicts in a sample of Italian parents. By employing a randomized controlled trial design with a five-month follow-up period, this research contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for evidence-based, family-centered interventions rooted in positive psychology. The inclusion of both maternal and paternal perspectives allows for a comprehensive analysis of the program's effectiveness on multiple levels of the family system (Kim & Lee, 2024; Swisa et al., 2023). The central hypothesis is that participation in the strength-based parenting program will result in increased family cohesion and decreased marital conflict over time, relative to a control group. Parents are frequently tasked with managing multiple roles, and unresolved marital conflict often compromises their ability to create a stable and supportive environment for their children (Defanti, 2025; Han et al., 2024). A strength-based approach not only supports parental well-being but also enhances the developmental context for children, promoting emotional regulation, academic engagement, and psychological resilience (Gong et al., 2023; Guo, 2023). Importantly, interventions that strengthen family bonds and reduce conflict also serve a preventative function, reducing the likelihood of future relational breakdowns and mental health difficulties in both parents and children (Wang et al., 2021; Zhou & Zhen, 2022).

In conclusion, addressing marital conflict and promoting family cohesion through a strength-based parenting framework holds considerable promise for enhancing familial relationships and child outcomes.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a randomized controlled trial design to evaluate the effectiveness of a strength-based parenting program in improving family cohesion and reducing marital conflicts. Participants were 30 parents (15 couples) from Italy, recruited through community centers, parenting forums, and social media advertisements. Following informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention group ( $n = 15$ ) or the control group ( $n = 15$ ) using a simple randomization method. Inclusion criteria required participants to be married, have at least one child aged 6 to 16, and be willing to attend all sessions. Exclusion criteria included current participation in other family or marital therapy programs. The intervention group received a nine-session strength-based parenting program, while the control group received no intervention during the study period. All participants were assessed at three time points: pre-intervention (baseline), post-intervention, and five months after the conclusion of the program (follow-up).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Family Cohesion

To measure family cohesion, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales IV (FACES IV) developed by David H. Olson and colleagues in 2011 was utilized. This standardized instrument is widely used to assess family functioning and includes subscales specifically designed to evaluate family cohesion and flexibility. The FACES IV contains 42 items in total, with 7 subscales—six of which assess cohesion and adaptability (Balanced Cohesion, Balanced Flexibility, Disengaged, Enmeshed, Rigid, and Chaotic), and one subscale (Family Communication) used to support interpretation. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores on the Balanced Cohesion subscale indicate healthier levels of family cohesion, while extreme scores on Enmeshed or Disengaged subscales reflect dysfunctional patterns. The tool has demonstrated good psychometric properties in numerous studies, with high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values typically above 0.80) and confirmed construct validity through factor analysis in diverse cultural contexts (Sarchuni, 2024; Yousefi et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).



### 2.2.2. Marital Conflicts

To assess marital conflicts, the Marital Conflict Questionnaire (MCQ) developed by Sanam H. M. and Sadr S. in 1996 was employed. This standardized tool is designed to evaluate the intensity and dimensions of conflict between married couples. The MCQ includes 42 items and is divided into 7 subscales: Decrease in Cooperation, Increase in Emotional Reactions, Increase in Seeking Support from Others, Increase in Personal Relationship with the Spouse's Family, Increase in Relationship with Children, Separation of Financial Issues, and Reduction of Sexual Relations. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), with higher scores indicating higher levels of marital conflict. The questionnaire has been widely used in marital and family studies, showing strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha values generally ranging from 0.75 to 0.90 across subscales) and confirmed validity through empirical studies, making it a reliable tool for examining the dynamics of marital discord (Araghi, 2025; Salah et al., 2024; Yu, 2024).

### 2.3. Intervention

#### 2.3.1. Strength-Based Parenting

The strength-based parenting intervention was designed as a structured nine-session program, with each session lasting approximately 60 minutes. Rooted in positive psychology, the program aimed to help parents identify and cultivate their children's and their own character strengths, improve communication, and enhance family and marital relationships. The sessions followed a sequential process, starting with self-awareness and gradually moving toward relational and behavioral transformation. Techniques such as guided reflections, group discussions, role-playing, and home assignments were used to support participants in applying the learned strategies in their everyday family life.

##### Session 1: Introduction to Strength-Based Parenting

The first session provided an overview of the program's goals, structure, and theoretical foundations. Participants were introduced to the principles of strength-based parenting and its distinction from deficit-focused models. The facilitator guided a group discussion about parenting challenges and how a focus on strengths might shift parent-child dynamics. A brief self-assessment activity helped parents reflect on their current parenting style. Homework involved observing and noting their children's positive behaviors and strengths throughout the week.

##### Session 2: Understanding Character Strengths

In this session, parents explored the concept of character strengths, based on the VIA Classification. Through interactive activities and a brief presentation, participants learned about the 24 character strengths and their significance in child development. Parents completed the VIA Survey for themselves and were guided on how to assess their children's potential strengths. Group discussions encouraged reflection on how strengths show up in family life. For homework, parents observed and recorded real-life examples of their children using strengths.

##### Session 3: Identifying and Naming Strengths in Children

This session focused on helping parents identify their children's signature strengths more accurately and communicate them effectively. Through role-playing and modeling, parents practiced strength-spotting and learned strength-based language to encourage their children. The session also covered how to avoid labeling and comparisons. Parents were encouraged to offer specific praise tied to behaviors aligned with strengths. The home assignment was to intentionally name and affirm one strength in their child each day.

##### Session 4: Using Strengths to Improve Parent-Child Communication

The fourth session centered on enhancing communication skills using a strengths approach. Parents were introduced to active listening techniques, empathic responses, and strength-based feedback. Role-playing exercises focused on managing difficult conversations using language that builds connection rather than criticism. Participants also discussed how to maintain open, respectful communication during conflict. The homework involved applying these techniques in a real conversation and journaling about the experience.

##### Session 5: Promoting Emotional Regulation through Strengths

This session explored how character strengths can support emotional regulation in both parents and children. Participants learned how strengths like self-regulation, perspective, and kindness can be modeled during emotionally charged moments. Cognitive-behavioral strategies and mindfulness techniques were introduced. Group discussions centered on common emotional triggers within the family and how to manage them constructively. Homework included practicing one emotional regulation strategy and reflecting on its effect.

##### Session 6: Strengthening the Marital Relationship

Recognizing the connection between marital health and parenting, this session focused on using strength-based

strategies to improve spousal relationships. Participants identified their partner's strengths and reflected on how these contribute to their relationship. The session emphasized appreciation, shared goals, and strength-based conflict resolution. Couples were encouraged to engage in a "strengths date" as homework, where they appreciated and discussed each other's strengths intentionally.

#### Session 7: Enhancing Family Cohesion through Shared Strength Activities

The focus of session seven was to strengthen the family unit through shared experiences that highlight collective strengths. Parents explored how family rituals and collaborative activities can be intentionally designed around strengths. Participants created a "Family Strengths Map" and brainstormed simple activities (e.g., game nights, volunteer work, storytelling) that reflect their unique strengths. The homework assignment was to implement one new shared activity during the week and report its impact.

#### Session 8: Managing Conflict with a Strengths-Based Approach

This session addressed constructive approaches to managing conflict within the family and between partners. Parents discussed common conflict scenarios and learned to reframe conflict as an opportunity for growth. Techniques for de-escalating tension using strengths such as fairness, forgiveness, and judgment were practiced. Group discussion focused on shifting from blame to collaboration. The homework was to consciously apply one new conflict-resolution skill at home and reflect on outcomes.

#### Session 9: Integration and Future Planning

The final session provided a space for reflection and consolidation of learning. Parents revisited their initial goals and shared personal growth and changes observed in family cohesion and marital dynamics. The facilitator led a discussion on maintaining long-term strength-based habits and overcoming setbacks. Each participant created a personalized "Strength-Based Family Plan" outlining goals

and practices for ongoing use. Certificates of completion were distributed, and the session ended with a celebration of progress.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic variables and baseline scores. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention over time, a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed with time (pre-test, post-test, and follow-up) as the within-subject factor and group (intervention vs. control) as the between-subject factor. Where significant interaction effects were found, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were conducted to determine the specific time points at which significant differences occurred. The level of statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$  for all analyses. This analytical approach allowed for the evaluation of both short-term and sustained changes in family cohesion and marital conflict levels as a result of the intervention.

### 3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 30 participants, including 18 females (60.0%) and 12 males (40.0%). The participants' ages ranged from 32 to 48 years, with a mean age of 39.6 years ( $SD = 4.21$ ). Regarding education level, 10 participants (33.3%) held a high school diploma, 13 (43.3%) had a bachelor's degree, and 7 (23.3%) held a master's degree or higher. In terms of employment status, 19 participants (63.3%) were employed full-time, 6 (20.0%) were part-time employees, and 5 (16.7%) were homemakers. The majority of participants (70.0%,  $n = 21$ ) reported being married for more than 10 years, while 9 participants (30.0%) had been married between 5 and 10 years. All participants had at least one child living at home.

**Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Family Cohesion and Marital Conflicts by Group and Time Point*

Variable	Time Point	Intervention Group (n = 15)	Control Group (n = 15)
Family Cohesion	Pretest	59.87 (4.12)	60.21 (3.96)
	Posttest	66.73 (4.89)	60.94 (4.02)
	Follow-up	66.01 (4.45)	60.31 (4.15)
Marital Conflicts	Pretest	89.12 (5.36)	88.43 (5.02)
	Posttest	78.27 (5.88)	87.73 (4.85)
	Follow-up	77.93 (5.43)	88.11 (5.10)

As seen in Table 1, the intervention group showed a consistent increase in family cohesion from pretest ( $M = 59.87$ ,  $SD = 4.12$ ) to posttest ( $M = 66.73$ ,  $SD = 4.89$ ), which was largely maintained at follow-up ( $M = 66.01$ ,  $SD = 4.45$ ). In contrast, the control group's family cohesion scores remained relatively stable. For marital conflicts, the intervention group exhibited a notable decline from pretest ( $M = 89.12$ ,  $SD = 5.36$ ) to posttest ( $M = 78.27$ ,  $SD = 5.88$ ), with the effect sustained at follow-up ( $M = 77.93$ ,  $SD = 5.43$ ). The control group showed minimal change across time points.

Prior to conducting the repeated measures ANOVA, assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and

sphericity were examined. The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the distribution of family cohesion scores was not significantly different from normal at any time point ( $p$ -values ranged from .138 to .214). Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance between the intervention and control groups for both dependent variables at baseline (family cohesion:  $F(1,28) = 0.471$ ,  $p = .498$ ; marital conflicts:  $F(1,28) = 0.623$ ,  $p = .437$ ). Mauchly's test of sphericity was non-significant for both family cohesion ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.09$ ,  $p = .213$ ) and marital conflicts ( $\chi^2(2) = 2.47$ ,  $p = .291$ ), indicating that the assumption of sphericity was met. These results supported the use of repeated measures ANOVA for subsequent analyses.

**Table 2**

*Repeated Measures ANOVA Summary for Family Cohesion and Marital Conflicts*

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	$\eta^2$ (Effect Size)
Family Cohesion	Time	412.34	2	206.17	18.46	<.001	.41
	Group	128.21	1	128.21	11.32	.002	.29
	Time $\times$ Group	371.58	2	185.79	16.63	<.001	.39
	Error	673.84	56	12.03			
Marital Conflicts	Time	589.91	2	294.96	22.19	<.001	.44
	Group	152.03	1	152.03	13.26	.001	.32
	Time $\times$ Group	430.42	2	215.21	18.38	<.001	.41
	Error	744.12	56	13.29			

As shown in Table 2, for family cohesion, there was a significant main effect of time ( $F(2,56) = 18.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .41$ ), group ( $F(1,28) = 11.32$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = .29$ ), and a significant time  $\times$  group interaction ( $F(2,56) = 16.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .39$ ). For marital conflicts, similar effects were found, with a significant main effect of time ( $F(2,56) =$

$22.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .44$ ), group ( $F(1,28) = 13.26$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .32$ ), and time  $\times$  group interaction ( $F(2,56) = 18.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .41$ ). These findings confirm that the intervention significantly improved family cohesion and reduced marital conflict over time.

**Table 3**

*Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons for Family Cohesion and Marital Conflicts (Intervention Group)*

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	p-value
Family Cohesion	Post vs. Pre	6.87	0.94	<.001
	Follow-up vs. Pre	6.14	0.88	<.001
	Follow-up vs. Post	-0.73	0.71	.295
Marital Conflicts	Post vs. Pre	-10.85	1.26	<.001
	Follow-up vs. Pre	-11.19	1.18	<.001
	Follow-up vs. Post	-0.34	0.93	.714

As indicated in Table 3, participants in the intervention group reported significantly higher family cohesion from pretest to posttest (Mean Diff = 6.87,  $p < .001$ ) and from pretest to follow-up (Mean Diff = 6.14,  $p < .001$ ), with no significant drop-off at follow-up. Similarly, marital conflict scores significantly decreased from pretest to posttest (Mean Diff = -10.85,  $p < .001$ ) and remained significantly lower at

follow-up (Mean Diff = -11.19,  $p < .001$ ). The non-significant posttest vs. follow-up comparisons for both variables suggest stability in intervention effects over time.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this randomized controlled trial indicate that the strength-based parenting intervention was effective in significantly enhancing family cohesion and reducing marital conflicts among participating parents over time. Participants in the intervention group reported marked improvements in emotional bonding, mutual respect, and shared family activities compared to the control group. Furthermore, the decline in the levels of reported marital conflicts across the five-month follow-up suggests that the positive changes were not only immediate but also sustainable. The repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant time  $\times$  group interaction effects for both dependent variables, and Bonferroni post-hoc tests confirmed that changes were primarily driven by gains observed in the intervention group.

The improvement in family cohesion observed in this study aligns closely with research that underscores the impact of strength-based frameworks in enhancing family unity and emotional connection. Strength-based parenting encourages caregivers to focus on recognizing and cultivating their children's and their own strengths, which can foster a climate of affirmation, emotional security, and mutual appreciation (Wang, 2025; Yang et al., 2024). In this study, the deliberate use of strength-spotting and strength-based communication tools may have contributed to the reported increases in closeness, trust, and shared purpose among family members. These findings resonate with those of (Darwiche et al., 2022), who reported increased marital and coparenting harmony following an intervention centered on mutual respect and relational awareness.

Furthermore, the reduction in marital conflict in the intervention group supports earlier evidence that positive parenting practices have a reciprocal influence on spousal dynamics. Marital discord often intensifies when parenting stress escalates or when partners lack constructive communication tools (Cho & Lee, 2022; Swisa et al., 2023). By redirecting parental focus toward strengths and solution-based interactions, the intervention appeared to lessen reactivity and defensiveness between partners. This is consistent with findings from (Devonshire et al., 2023), who demonstrated that even brief family interventions targeting conflict behaviors could significantly decrease long-term interparental discord. Similarly, (Gao et al., 2018) emphasized the dyadic link between marital behaviors and parenting over time, reinforcing the theoretical basis for integrated interventions.

The sustained improvement seen at the five-month follow-up suggests that the skills and strategies introduced

during the nine-week program were internalized and applied beyond the structured sessions. This prolonged effect mirrors outcomes from (Miller Graff et al., 2015), who reported that psychoeducational interventions could alter emotional security patterns and promote adaptive family adjustment even months after the intervention. Moreover, the ongoing application of strength-based practices likely helped participants to reframe everyday challenges more constructively, reducing the intensity and frequency of conflict triggers. These results are also in line with (Zhang et al., 2022), who found that families experiencing high parental conflict showed improvement in emotional outcomes when exposed to strength-focused frameworks, particularly those that support emotional regulation and resilience.

The strength-based model's success in reducing marital conflict may also be attributed to its implicit promotion of empathy and positive regard—core elements that help defuse tension and encourage perspective-taking between spouses. For instance, identifying a partner's strengths and affirming their contributions can reinforce feelings of respect and validation, key buffers against dissatisfaction and withdrawal in marriage (Defanti, 2025; Witami, 2024). This aligns with findings from (Leung et al., 2022), who demonstrated that relational dissatisfaction and psychological control are linked with heightened parent-child conflict, highlighting the importance of interventions that begin at the spousal level to promote systemic family health.

In families experiencing chronic stressors—whether financial, medical, or relational—the intervention's emphasis on strengths may have offered a critical psychological shift from deficit-focused narratives to an asset-based mindset. (Han et al., 2024) found that parenting stress was significantly mediated by cognitive reframing strategies, especially among parents managing chronic life conditions. This reinforces the potential of strength-based parenting to not only improve parenting quality but also reduce the spillover of negative affect into the marital relationship. (Wang et al., 2023) similarly noted that parental conflict exacerbated maladaptive outcomes like internet overuse among adolescents, highlighting how improving marital dynamics can create a ripple effect on overall family well-being.

Importantly, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that views family cohesion as a modifiable and dynamic attribute. Rather than seeing cohesion as a trait determined by temperament or tradition, this research



affirms that structured intervention—rooted in psychological strengths—can significantly bolster familial connectedness. In line with (Gao et al., 2022), who showed transitions across cohesion-conflict family profiles, our results suggest that such transitions can be facilitated by intentional, strengths-focused parental behaviors.

The decline in marital conflict and improvement in cohesion also align with research on the impact of constructive conflict resolution and emotional regulation. (Gong et al., 2023) found that fathers' marital conflict affected children's socioemotional development, but that positive conflict resolution mediated this effect. Our intervention emphasized communication tools, empathic listening, and conflict reframing, which may have helped parents approach disagreements less antagonistically. Similarly, (Zaki et al., 2022) noted that adolescents' maladaptive behaviors were directly shaped by the style and severity of parental conflict, implying that reducing the intensity of such conflict—as seen in this study—may yield protective benefits for children.

Another plausible explanation for the findings is the positive feedback loop generated by increased parental self-efficacy and mutual reinforcement. When one parent adopts a more affirming approach, the partner may respond in kind, leading to reciprocal behavior change and strengthened co-parenting dynamics. This possibility is echoed in the work of (Guo, 2023), who emphasized the interdependence of parental relationships and their effect on child development across cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Likewise, (Peng et al., 2024) demonstrated how marital satisfaction predicted youth development outcomes, further reinforcing the value of investing in spousal quality to promote family health.

Our study also lends support to the idea that early exposure to conflict, when unaddressed, may resurface as emotional dysregulation in adulthood. (Yuan-ping et al., 2023) found that early parental conflict predicted depression among older adults, suggesting that the effects of marital discord can be long-lasting. Intervening during active parenting years, therefore, holds not just immediate but potentially intergenerational benefits. Similarly, (Zhou & Zhen, 2022) emphasized the dyadic nature of trauma responses between parents and children, supporting systemic interventions that strengthen emotional safety and connection for all family members.

## 5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite the promising findings, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small (30 participants), which may limit the statistical power and generalizability of the results. The participants were all drawn from Italy, and cultural variables influencing parenting and marital dynamics may differ across societies. Additionally, the use of self-report measures introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly in reporting marital conflict. Another limitation is the absence of child-reported outcomes or behavioral observations, which could have enriched the understanding of how parental changes impacted the broader family system.

Future research should aim to replicate this study with larger and more diverse populations across different cultural settings to assess the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine the durability of intervention effects over multiple years. Including observational and multi-informant data, such as child-reports or clinician ratings, could provide a more comprehensive picture of family functioning. It would also be beneficial to compare strength-based parenting with other intervention models, such as cognitive-behavioral or mindfulness-based approaches, to identify the most effective components. Finally, exploring digital or hybrid versions of the program could increase accessibility and participation for busy families.

Practitioners working with families should consider incorporating strength-based approaches into their parenting and marital counseling programs. Training parents to recognize and cultivate strengths—both in themselves and their children—can enhance emotional bonding and reduce conflict. Facilitators should also focus on communication strategies that promote empathy, validation, and constructive problem-solving. Delivering such interventions in group settings may foster peer support and reduce stigma around seeking help. Moreover, including both parents in the program can maximize the systemic benefits across the family unit.

## 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. The design of this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, under ethics code IR.IAU.SHIRAZ.REC.1402.153. All participants were fully informed that participation in this research was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any time without penalty.

## References

- Araghi, N. Z. (2025). The Effectiveness of Religious Forgiveness Therapy on Reducing Marital Conflicts and Extramarital Behaviors in Married Women Seeking Divorce. *KMAN Counsel and Psych Nexus*, 3, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.fct.psynexus.3.3>
- Cho, D. E., & Lee, W. K. (2022). Structural Relationships Between Maternal Parenting Stress, Marital Conflict, Maternal Parenting Behavior, and School-Aged Children's Emotion Regulation. *Korean Journal of Child Studies*, 43(4), 425-439. <https://doi.org/10.5723/kjcs.2022.43.4.425>
- Darwiche, J., Carneiro, C., Vaudan, C., Imesch, C., Nunes, C. E., Favez, N., & Roten, Y. d. (2022). Parents in Couple Therapy: An Intervention Targeting Marital and Coparenting Relationships. *Family Process*, 61(2), 490-506. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12773>
- Defanti, R. (2025). The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Moderating the Relationship Between Perceived Interparental Conflict and Marital Satisfaction Among Married Individuals. *Jurnal Ilmu Keluarga Dan Konsumen*, 18(1), 53-65. <https://doi.org/10.24156/jikk.2025.18.1.53>
- Devonshire, J. M., Cummings, E. M., & Wang, L. (2023). Long-Term Interparental Conflict Behavior and Knowledge Change After a Brief Family Intervention. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 37(1), 92-104. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0001033>
- Gao, M., Du, H., Davies, P. T., & Cummings, E. M. (2018). Marital Conflict Behaviors and Parenting: Dyadic Links Over Time. *Family Relations*, 68(1), 135-149. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12322>
- Gao, T., Liang, L., Li, M., Su, Y., Mei, S., Zhou, C., & Meng, X. (2022). Latent Transitions Across Perceived Parental Marital Conflict and Family Cohesion Profiles in High School Students. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.954825>
- Gong, Q., Kramer, K. Z., & Tu, K. M. (2023). Fathers' Marital Conflict and Children's Socioemotional Skills: A Moderated-Mediation Model of Conflict Resolution and Parenting. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 37(7), 1048-1059. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0001102>
- Guo, J.-Y. (2023). The Impact of Parental Marital Relationships on Children's Multi-Domain Development Outcomes. *Journal of Education Humanities and Social Sciences*, 22, 390-395. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v22i.12472>
- Han, J. W., Yang, B., & Lee, H. (2024). Serial Dual Mediating Effects of Parenting Stress on Life Satisfaction Among Parents of School-Aged Children With Chronic Conditions. *Healthcare*, 12(4), 461. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12040461>
- Kim, S. J., & Lee, W. K. (2024). The Effects of Fathers' Family-of-Origin Experiences on Co-Parenting: The Mediating Role of Marital Conflict and Psychological Well-Being. *Korean Journal of Child Studies*, 45(3), 159-171. <https://doi.org/10.5723/kjcs.2024.45.3.159>
- Leung, J. T. Y., Shek, D. T. L., Kwok, L. M. H., & Yung, E. T. Y. (2022). Marital Dissatisfaction, Psychological Control and Parent-Child Conflict in Chinese Families - An Actor-partner Interdependence Model Analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 39(12), 3596-3618. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221102634>
- Li, C. (2023). The Impact of Parental Relationship Dissolution on Children's Problem Behaviors. *Journal of Education Humanities and Social Sciences*, 22, 396-401. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v22i.12473>
- Miller, G. F., L. E., Cummings, E. M., & Bergman, K. N. (2015). Effects of a Brief Psychoeducational Intervention for Family Conflict: Constructive Conflict, Emotional Insecurity and Child Adjustment. *Journal of abnormal child psychology*, 44(7), 1399-1410. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-015-0102-z>
- Peng, Y., Shek, D. T. L., Chen, D., Li, X., Zhao, L., & Jiang, L. (2024). The Relationship Between Parental Marital Satisfaction and Adolescent Suicide-Related Behavior: The Mediating Role of Positive Youth Development Attributes. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-5264701/v1>
- Salah, M. M., Shekari, E., Hassani, H., & Salehi, A. (2024). Prediction of Marital Conflicts Based on Mindfulness in Couples Facing Extra-Marital Relationships Attending Counseling Centers in Fars Province. *Transactions on Data Analysis in Social Science*, 6(1), 1-13.
- Salerno, A., Raciti, I., Tosto, M., & Merenda, A. (2023). Parental Triangulation in Separated & Divorced Families: Causes and Impact on the Intergenerational Parent-Child Conflict. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202305.1463.v1>
- Sarchuni, S. (2024). Efficacy of the Gottman Method on Family Cohesion and Emotional Self-Regulation Among Couples. *Journal of Assessment and Research in Applied Counseling (JARAC)*, 6(3), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jarac.6.3.14>
- Swisa, R. K., Hanetz Gamliel, K., & Dollberg, D. G. (2023). Mothers' and Fathers' Mentalization as Moderators of the

- Association Between Marital Conflict and Children's Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors. *Family Relations*, 73(2), 703-719. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12926>
- Wang, H. (2025). Spillover of Daily Parenting Experiences Into Interparental Relationships in Chinese Families of Children With Autism: Mediated by Daily Affect and Moderated by Trait Mindfulness. *Family Process*, 64(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.70016>
- Wang, P., Gan, X., Li, H., & Jin, X. (2023). Parental Marital Conflict and Internet Gaming Disorder Among Chinese Adolescents: The Multiple Mediating Roles of Deviant Peer Affiliation and Teacher-Student Relationship. *PLoS One*, 18(1), e0280302. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0280302>
- Wang, X., Li, J., & Wang, M. (2021). Effect of Parental Marital Conflict on Child Development and Its Mechanism. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 29(5), 875-884. <https://doi.org/10.3724/sp.j.1042.2021.00875>
- Witami, A. N. (2024). Interparental Conflict and Offspring Marital Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Communication Patterns. *Konselor*, 13(4), 355-367. <https://doi.org/10.24036/02024134101-0-86>
- Yang, V. J. H., Bergman, K. N., & Cummings, E. M. (2024). Testing a Family Conflict Intervention for Parents and Typically Developing Adolescent Siblings of Individuals With Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 21(12), 1666. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21121666>
- Yousefi, Z., Saadati, N., & Golparvar, M. (2024). The Impact of Emotional Intelligence and Resilience on Family Cohesion: Insights from Married Individuals. *Journal of Psychosociological Research in Family and Culture*, 2(1), 16-22. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jprfc.2.1.4>
- Yu, J. J. (2024). Longitudinal dyadic interplay between marital conflict and psychological well-being in couples: The moderating roles of Wives' employment. *Personal Relationships*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12544>
- Yuan-ping, D., Ni, J., & Mao, H. (2023). Does Early Parental Conflict Impact Current Depression Among Older Adults in Rural China? A Chain-Mediated Model Analysis. *Psychology research and behavior management*, Volume 16, 4529-4539. <https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s432461>
- Zaki, W., Abed, G. A., Wahab, S. A. E., & Shattla, S. (2022). Marital Conflict Among Parents and Its Effect on Their Adolescents , Behaviors. *Menoufia Nursing Journal*, 7(2), 35-52. <https://doi.org/10.21608/menj.2022.254158>
- Zhang, H., Gao, T., Hu, Q., Zhao, L., Wang, X., Sun, X., & Li, S. (2022). Parental Marital Conflict, Negative Emotions, Phubbing, and Academic Burnout Among College Students in the Postpandemic Era: A Multiple Mediating Models. *Psychology in the Schools*, 60(5), 1488-1498. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22707>
- Zhang, W., Tang, Y., Wu, Q., Zhou, N., & Lin, X. (2023). Oppositional Defiant Disorder Symptoms and Multi-level Family Factors in Chinese Migrant Children: A Network Perspective. *Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology*, 51(8), 1143-1161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-023-01074-9>
- 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>