



Impact Factor: 4.081

## Role of Emotional Competence on In-law interaction issues and marital well-being relationship

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### Abstract

In-law relationships are perhaps the most complicated in the family system. Due to their intergenerational nature, in-law relations are influenced by differences in developmental stages and generational differences. The dynamic nature of these relationships provides the opportunity for the best of relationships or the worst of relationships. Emotional competence indicates talent in the realm of relationships. The study is an attempt to investigate the moderating effect of Emotional competence on In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship. The sample included 467 married people from various districts of Kerala. Emotional Competence scale (Jayan, 2010), In-law interaction issues inventory (Fashiya, Baby Shari, & Jayan, 2015), Marital well-being inventory (Fashiya & Jayan, 2018), and Personal data sheet were the tools used for data collection. Moderation analysis was done to identify the role of Emotional competence on In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship. It was found that the relationship between In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being could be moderated by Emotional Competence.

**Key words:-** Emotional competence, In-law interaction issues, Marital well-being.

### Introduction

Relationships are among the most common topics of our thoughts and the most potent sources of emotion. In turn, these thoughts and feelings influence the development of our relationships. Relationship quality depends on beliefs about a relationship partner's responsiveness; that is, on the perception that a partner understands, values, and supports important aspects of the self (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004, as cited in Gable & Reis, 2012). One of the major adjustments in adulthood is adjustment with in-laws. Marriage marks the beginning of a new exclusive relationship, requiring the development of new roles each other. It also marks the beginning of new role with the spouse's family, without marking the termination of old roles developed through the years with one's own parents and siblings. As new role relationships are taken on, the old ones are altered somewhat but in most instances are not severed completely. Each of these roles is subject to the expectations of all participants (Christensen & Johnsen, 1971).

Emotions play a large role in relationships and are central to personal and relational health. Emotion signals whether a social situation is pleasant or

unpleasant and helps organize personal actions to respond to the social situation. Emotion also communicates information to others about one's current state (positive or negative), informs others about one's relational orientation (e.g., dominance, affiliation) and intentions (e.g., "I want to hug you") toward them, and communicates need of a *socially coordinated response* (e.g., "I need support to manage the situation"). Although the architecture of the emotion system may be personal, the function is a consequence of the social world, including relationships.

In human relationships, emotional abilities such as positive emotions, emotional stability, self-esteem and secure attachment style (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005), emotion work (Hochschild, 1983), emotional intelligence and the like predict quality relationships, even though they take various forms. An important concept of emotion which has a vast role interpersonal relationships is **emotional competence (EC)** which is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work (Goleman, 1996). Boyatzis, Goleman, and Rhee (2000) defined emotional competence in four factors: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills. According to them emotional intelligence is observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation. **Self-awareness** is defined as "to know what we feel, to be able to evaluate our skills in a realistic way and to have self-confidence." **Self-management** is defined as "to manage our feelings in a way that it would ease our job and to conserve our positive mood for completing our object." **Social awareness** is defined as "to behave empathetic towards other people, to be able to accept their point of views and to adapt to these various kinds of people." **Social skills** is defined as "to be able to regulate the feelings in relationships and to understand the network correctly, to interact properly."

Marital well-being (MW) can be defined as a dynamic state of perceiving reasonable amount of gratification in couple relationship which is characterised by *Communication, Intimacy, Concern for relation, Commitment, Personal characteristics, and Romanticism* which will be facilitated by cognitive, behavioural, and affective domains.

Studies reveal that interaction pattern with in-laws influence couple relationship in several forms. It is small wonder that in-law troubles are a rather common source of marital tension, especially during the early years following the wedding (Christensen & Johnson, 1971). Timmer and Veroff (2000) found that when husbands and wives felt close to their in-laws early in marriage (and perceived these bonds as having low conflict), couples reported higher marital well-being in later years. It has been reported that in-law relational quality is associated with the child/child-in-law's marital happiness and predict whether the marriage will last or not (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001). Even though there are smooth relationships, in a collectivistic country like India, the role of in-law relationship has to be considered extensively while

studying couple relationship. In collectivist background, it was found that the satisfaction between couples is related to the way how the relatives of the spouses are treated (Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2004). In-law interaction issues (ILI) are the issues created by the interaction patterns that may occur among in-laws. The major characteristics of In-law interaction issues involves *Conflict and anger expression, Stress and consequences, Discrimination, Uninvited indulgence, and Lack of support and close contacts*. **Conflict and anger expression**:- The conflicts that may occur between in-laws and the way son-in-law/ daughter-in-law express out their anger are meant here. It can be either in a physical or verbal way from both sides. **Stress and consequences**:- Due to the difficulties in in-law interaction, stress can be created. As a consequence psychological and physiological problems may occur. Psychosomatic disorders were reported among the participants of the study conducted by Fashiya and Baby Shari (2018). **Discriminations**:- Daughter-in-law/son-in-law may sometimes experience some kind of discriminations. Some acts usually done by father-in-law/mother-in-law or their own children are not supposed to be done by children-in-law. **Uninvited indulgence**:- Some parents keep close interference in their married children's life as if they are like younger ones. Most of the time they act as dominant power structure and maintain over attachment with own child. They make evaluations of couple relationship. They try to influence decision making done by the couples in the name of over protection. **Lack of support and close contacts**:- It is meant by the lack of support among in-laws. It may take different forms; that is, it can be either physical, psychological, or financial support from the part of in-laws when necessary. It also includes when son-in-law/daughter-in-law does not maintain a close contact with spouse's parental home and thus not providing support to in-laws.

Previous researches on Emotional competence has explored its role in conflict resolution pattern which added favourably to relationship satisfaction (Zeidner & Kloda, 2013; Choi & Kluemper, 2012; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008; Smith, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2008) as well as in couple relationship (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Fitness, 2001). Fashiya and Jayan (2015) have explored the role of Emotional Competence on Marital well-being. The present study is an attempt to find out the moderating effect of Emotional Competence on In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship.

## Objectives

Even though researches regarding the relationship between Emotional Competence and marital relationship as well as the relationship between quality of in-law relationship and couple relationship have been explored, there is no research explicitly connecting the role of Emotional Competence on In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship. Thus the aim of the study was to identify the relationship between In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being. The study also aimed to explore the role of Emotional Competence on In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship.

### **Hypotheses of the study**

- (a) There will be significant relationship among the sub-variables of Marital well-being and Emotional Competence.
- (b) There will be significant relationship among the sub-variables of Marital well-being and In-law interaction issues.
- (c) Emotional Competence shall moderate the relationship between In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being.

### **Method**

#### **Sample**

The population for the present study was 467 married people (324 females & 143 males) from various districts of Kerala, who were drawn using random sampling. Their age ranged from 20 years to 60 years. Their longevity of marriage included six months to 35 years.

#### **Measures**

Emotional competence scale (Jayan, 2010), In-law interaction issues inventory (Fashiya, Baby Shari, & Jayan, 2015) and Marital well-being Inventory (Fashiya & Jayan, 2018) were the tools used for collecting data.

#### **Administration**

After establishing a good rapport with the participants, they were advised to follow the instructions in the tools. Emotional competence scale included 48 items, In-law interaction issues inventory had 18 items whereas Marital well-being Inventory possessed 70, all of which were in a five-point Likert scale format. All the items of Emotional competence scale and Marital well-being Inventory were positive in nature whereas the In-law interaction issues inventory had three negative items.

#### **Reliability and Validity**

Test-retest reliability of Emotional competence scale was found to be .87 (N = 60). The test-retest reliability of each dimensions were reported as self-awareness (.74), self-management (.72), social awareness (.76), and social skills (.79). Construct validity of the inventory was estimated by correlating the emotional intelligence inventory with the scores of emotional intelligence scale of Rajitha and Jayan (2005). It was found that the Pearson's  $r = .68$  (N = 60).

The Cronbach's alpha of the In-law interaction issues inventory was found to be .894. The inventory has content validity, face validity and predictive validity.

The reliability of the Marital well-being inventory was established and the Cronbach's alpha was found to be .979. The inventory has content validity. The face validity of the scale has been assured by many experts in the field. The predictive

validity was assured as all items in the final scale had high discrimination power revealed by the significant *t* values during item analysis. The criterion related validity of the scale was found to be 0.68 with the Relationship Quotient Inventory (Jayan & Sreelatha, 2010).

**Scoring**

For each response, a score ranging from five to one were given for both Emotional competence scale and Marital well-being Inventory. In-law interaction issues inventory were also scored in the same manner except negative ones; which were scored in a reverse manner.

**Statistical analyses**

Correlation and moderation analyses were done for statistical purposes.

**Results and Discussions**

Table 1 shows the correlation between Marital well-being and Emotional competence.

**Table 1: The Correlation among the Sub Variables of both Marital Well-being and Emotional Competence**

MW	Emotional Competence				Overall EC
	Self awareness	Self management	Social awareness	Social skills	
Communication	.27**	.21**	.21**	.19**	.23**
Intimacy	.24**	.16**	.19**	.16**	.20**
Concern for relation	.28**	.23**	.23**	.22**	.25**
Commitment	.27**	.23**	.21**	.22**	.25**
Personal characteristics	.23**	.20**	.18**	.18**	.21**
Romanticism	.24**	.16**	.22**	.20**	.22**
Overall MW	.29**	.22**	.24**	.22**	.26**

\*\* Significant at .01 level

A significant positive correlation was found between Marital well-being and Emotional competence ( $r = .26$ ) at .01 level. Emotional competence had highest correlation with Concern for relation and Commitment ( $r = .25$ ) which means that as Emotional competence of the individual increases, Concern for relations and Commitment also increases in the couple relationship; and vice versa. Self awareness

has significance correlation with overall Marital well-being ( $r = .29$ ) at .01 level. That means, as Self-awareness of the individual increases, the overall Marital well-being increases; and vice versa. Self-management is also found to have a significant correlation with Marital well-being. It can be supported with the finding that individuals with a high self-reported ability to manage emotions predicted a greater disposition to forgive (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007). The results of the works conducted by Veroff, Douvan, Orbuch, and Acitelli (1998) suggested that affective balancing regarding marital interaction can have a causal connection to later marital well-being. Social awareness is found to have a positive correlation with Marital well-being. Social skills is also found to have a positive correlation with Marital well-being. Thus the hypothesis that there will be significant relationship among the variables of Marital well-being and Emotional competence is accepted.

Correlation between the sub variables of In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being has been reported (Table 2).

**Table 2: The Correlation among the Sub Variables of Both Marital Well-being and In-Law Interaction Issues**

Variables	ILI					
	Conflict & anger expression	Stress & consequences	Discriminations	Uninvited indulgence	Lack of support & close contacts	Overall ILI
MW						
Communication	-.08	-.15**	-.15**	-.18**	-.29**	-.22**
Intimacy	-.12*	-.14**	-.14**	-.20**	-.31**	-.23**
Concern for relation	-.12**	-.19**	-.20**	-.25**	-.29**	-.28**
Commitment	-.17**	-.24**	-.21**	-.32**	-.31**	-.34**
Personal characteristics	-.14**	-.18**	-.20**	-.25**	-.22**	-.27**
Romanticism	-.03	-.09	-.12**	-.13**	-.26**	-.16**
Overall MW	-.13**	-.19**	-.19**	-.25**	-.32**	-.28**

\*\* Significant at .01 level, \* Significant at .05 level.

As per Table 2, a significant negative correlation between Marital well-being and In-law interaction issues ( $r = - 0.28$ ) were found at .01 level. Thus the formulated hypothesis that there will be significant relationship among the variables of Marital well-being and In-law interaction issues is accepted.

Table 3 shows the moderation analysis showing the moderating effect of Emotional Competence on In-law interaction Issues and Marital well-being.

**Table 3: Moderating Effect of Emotional Competence on In-Law Interaction Issues and Marital Well-Being**

Model	R	R square	Change statistics		
			R square change	F change	Significant F change
z ILI	.283	.080	.080	40.630	.000
z ILI , z EC	.372	.138	.058	31.171	.000
z ILI, z EC, z ILI × z EC	.395	.156	.018	9.605	.002

Dependent variable : Marital well-being; R square = .156, F change = 9.605 (0.002,  $p < .01$ ).

R square shows that 8% of Marital well-being can be predicted by zILI alone. R square value in the second step shows that 13.8 % of Marital well-being can be predicted by zILI and zEC. From the R square values of the combined effect of In-law interaction Issues and Emotional Competence on Marital well-being (zILI, zEC & zILI × zEC), it is found that 15.6 % of Marital well-being can be accounted by the combined and the interaction effect of Emotional Competence and In-law interaction Issues on Marital well-being. This means that there is a moderating effect by Emotional Competence on In-law interaction Issues and Marital well-being relationship significant at .01 level.

While considering the change in the *F value*, it was found that there was a significant interaction between In-law interaction Issues and Marital well-being (*F change*= 40.630, significant at .01 level). In-law interaction Issues and Emotional Competence also has significant increment in the values of R square (*F change*=31.171, significant at .01 level). When the interaction effect of Emotional Competence and In-law interaction Issues were considered, there was a significant increment in the value of R square (*F change*= 9.605, significant at .01 level). This means that Emotional Competence significantly produced more of moderating effect and that there is a significant change in the existing relationship between In-law interaction Issues and Marital well-being because of the moderating effect of Emotional Competence. Thus the formulated hypothesis is accepted.

The relationship between In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being can be moderated by Emotional competence. For those individuals with high In-law interaction issues and low Marital well-being, the presence of Emotional competence

can markedly reduce the strength of In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship. That is, the negative relationship between In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being can be reduced by Emotional Competence. Emotionally competent individuals have the capacity to know what they feel and manage their feelings; at the same time accept the views of others and regulate the feelings in relationships. The conflicts and expression of anger experienced during in-law interaction issues may be easily managed by those individuals who are high in Emotional competence. It may allow them to experience less amount of stress which may not cause psychosomatic disorders that may arise as a part of in-law interaction issues. Those individuals may be better able to empathise with the in-laws during discrimination and uninvited indulgence from their part; and also may be able to manage negative emotions arising within themselves. These emotionally competent characteristics may reduce the negative effects of In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship which in turn may enhance couple relationship.

People with high emotional intelligence are lively, happy and level-headed and resist against worrying thoughts. They think positively about themselves and are social and extroverts. They are happy and relaxed, rarely do they feel qualms and life for them is full of meaning (Nouri, 2006, as cited in Sanamnejad, Pashavi, Oftadehal, Ostadhasanloo, Khodayarifard, Aryan, & Farahani, 2011). High Emotionally intelligent people have effective coping strategies and thus serve to enhance their subjective well-being (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 2000). High Emotionally competent people are more acquired with stress management skills and are able to evaluate, express and manage their emotions (Madahi, Javidi, & Samadzadeh, 2013). Due to this reason, the stress that may arise as a result of in-law interaction issues may be alleviated. Regulating emotions improve negative emotions and nurture pleasant and positive emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, as cited in Madahi, Javidi, & Samadzadeh, 2013). Thus Emotional competence has a significant role in reducing stress which may facilitate decision making. These characteristics of emotionally competent people may enable them to deal effectively during their in-law interaction issues. Also they may easily forget the negative consequences created during in-law interaction. In such ways Emotional competence might have reduced the negative effects of In-law interaction issues and Marital well-being relationship.

## **Conclusion**

It is the ambiguity experienced by both generations about what the relationship “should be”, which increases the fragility of in-law relationships. Identifying the dynamic interactional styles across generations opens the opportunity for building unique family relationships like no other in the kinship network, thus provide the opportunity for the best of the relationships. The findings enable the individuals to handle the individual issues that are transferred into the relationship from personal and family-of-origin histories, as a team.

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