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Beyond Romantic Ideals: Marriage as a Dyadic Fortress for Containing Distress and Building Resilience

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Abstract

This study examined marriage as a dyadic regulatory system — a shared psychosocial fortress through which couples jointly contain emotional distress and cultivate long-term resilience, moving the scholarly discourse beyond conventional romantic idealism. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, data were collected from 520 married individuals across urban and peri-urban settings through structured questionnaires measuring dyadic coping, psychological distress, marital satisfaction, resilience outcomes, and sociodemographic characteristics. Univariate analyses revealed that the majority of respondents reported moderate-to-high levels of dyadic coping (Mean = 3.84, SD = 0.71) and marital satisfaction (Mean = 3.67, SD = 0.82), while psychological distress was inversely distributed. Bivariate analyses using Pearson correlation and independent samples t-tests confirmed statistically significant associations between dyadic coping and resilience ($r = 0.61$, $p < .001$), and between marital satisfaction and distress containment ($r = -0.53$, $p < .001$). Multilevel modelling (MLM) revealed that, after controlling for individual-level covariates including age, education, and income, dyadic coping ($\beta = 0.47$, SE = 0.06, $p < .001$) and joint problem-solving ($\beta = 0.39$, SE = 0.07, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of resilience, with couple-level clustering accounting for 24% of the variance in resilience outcomes (ICC = 0.24). Furthermore, couples who engaged in mutual emotional support demonstrated significantly lower levels of psychological distress compared to those with low dyadic engagement. The study concludes that marriage, when characterized by active dyadic coping and mutual emotional investment, functions as a potent buffer against psychological distress and a robust incubator of resilience. Interventions targeting couples should prioritize dyadic coping skill-building, communication enhancement, and joint crisis management to leverage the relational fortress that healthy marriages uniquely provide.

Keywords: Dyadic coping, psychological distress, marital resilience, multilevel modelling, relational fortress, marital satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

The institution of marriage has long occupied a central position in psychological, sociological, and public health research, yet its conceptualization has often remained tethered to romantic paradigms that privilege affection, attraction, and companionship over its functional and regulatory capacities (Choi, 2020; Mark & Moses, 2025; Popenoe, 2018). While romantic frameworks offer important insights into marital formation and maintenance, they insufficiently account for the ways in which marriage operates as a joint psychological infrastructure — one through which partners actively negotiate, absorb, and transform individual and shared stressors. Globally, rising rates of psychological distress, anxiety, and depression have placed renewed emphasis on understanding the protective social environments that buffer against mental health deterioration (Batyra & Pesando, 2021; Zahra, 2020). Marriage, in this context, emerges not merely as a relational choice but as a dyadic architecture capable of containing psychological distress and generating the kind of shared resilience that individual coping mechanisms alone cannot sustain. This study therefore positions marriage as a dyadic fortress — a co-constructed, emotionally regulated relational space that transcends romantic idealization and functions as a critical social determinant of psychological wellbeing and resilience.

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A growing body of literature has documented the mental health benefits of marriage, pointing to lower rates of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress among married individuals compared to their unmarried counterparts (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Umberson & Montez, 2010). However, the mechanisms through which these benefits are realized remain undertheorized. The concept of dyadic coping — introduced by Bodenmann (2005) and elaborated within the Systemic Transactional Model (STM) — offers a theoretically robust framework for understanding how couples co-regulate stress and mutually reinforce psychological resources (Ghimire et al., 2023; Njiru & Purkayastha, 2018; Zahra, 2020). Unlike individual coping, which locates the locus of regulation within a single person, dyadic coping recognizes that stress is communicated, interpreted, and responded to within an interpersonal matrix (Julius & Mategeko, 2025b; Julius & Sula, 2025c; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025b). Empirical evidence from longitudinal studies consistently demonstrates that couples who engage in supportive, delegated, and common dyadic coping report not only higher marital satisfaction but also superior psychological outcomes, including enhanced resilience, reduced burnout, and lower distress levels (Shah et al., 2019; Vincent & Peter, 2023). In sub-Saharan African contexts, where collectivist values and kinship obligations intersect with marital dynamics, the relational dimensions of coping may be particularly salient, yet they remain insufficiently studied (Julius & Mategeko, 2025a; Julius & Sula, 2025a). This study addresses that lacuna by empirically investigating the pathways through which marriage functions as a dyadic fortress, with specific attention to the roles of dyadic coping, mutual emotional support, and joint problem-solving as mediating constructs in the distress-resilience relationship.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the well-documented association between marital status and psychological wellbeing, the field lacks a nuanced, empirically grounded understanding of the specific relational mechanisms within marriage that enable distress containment and resilience building (Faisal et al., 2023; Julius & Sula, 2025b; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025a). Existing research predominantly examines marital quality in terms of satisfaction, conflict frequency, or dissolution risk — thereby underemphasizing the active, co-regulatory processes through which couples jointly manage adversity (Jane & Isaac Kazaara, 2023; Kirana & Idris, 2022; Yudaya & Aggrey, 2023). Moreover, most quantitative studies on marriage and mental health employ individual-level analytical frameworks that fail to capture the nested, interdependent nature of couple-level data, resulting in biased estimates and incomplete theoretical accounts (Aminiha et al., 2019; Ariho & Kabagenyi, 2020; Dögüş, 2022). The neglect of dyadic-level analysis has consequently produced fragmented evidence base that neither adequately models the relational fortress function of marriage nor informs the design of couple-centred psychological interventions (Abdulahi et al., 2020; Kistiana et al., 2020; Nausheen et al., 2021). This study therefore addresses the critical gap between romantic-idealist models of marriage and the empirical reality of marriage as a psychosocial regulatory system, using multilevel modelling to appropriately capture couple-level variance and illuminate the dyadic pathways from marital engagement to resilience outcomes.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main Objective

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The main objective of this study was to examine marriage as a dyadic regulatory fortress for the containment of psychological distress and the cultivation of resilience among married individuals.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the prevalence and distribution of dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, psychological distress, and resilience among married individuals.
2. To examine the bivariate associations between dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, psychological distress, and resilience outcomes.
3. To determine the multilevel predictors of resilience and distress containment among married couples, accounting for couple-level clustering effects.

Research Questions

1. What are the levels and distributions of dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, psychological distress, and resilience among the study participants?
2. What bivariate associations exist between dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, psychological distress, and resilience?
3. What are the significant multilevel predictors of resilience and distress containment, after controlling for individual and couple-level covariates?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to investigate the dyadic mechanisms through which marriage functioned as a psychosocial fortress for the containment of psychological distress and the building of resilience among married adults. A sample of 520 married individuals (260 couples) was recruited through stratified random sampling from urban and peri-urban communities, with strata defined by residential zone, sex, and socioeconomic status to ensure representativeness. Structured, self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data on five primary constructs: dyadic coping, measured using the 37-item Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI; Bodenmann, 2008) on a five-point Likert scale; psychological distress, assessed using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10); marital satisfaction, measured with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS); resilience, assessed using the 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 10); and joint problem-solving, captured through a validated 8-item subscale adapted from the STM framework. Sociodemographic information including age, sex, educational attainment, income quintile, duration of marriage, and number of children was also collected. Data entry and cleaning were conducted in SPSS version 26, and all scales were tested for internal consistency, with all Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. Three levels of statistical analysis were then applied. First, univariate analyses were conducted to describe the distribution of all study variables using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and measures of skewness and kurtosis; continuous variables were assessed for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test, and where normality was confirmed, parametric procedures were applied. Second, bivariate analyses were performed to examine associations between key study variables: Pearson correlation coefficients were used to quantify the direction and magnitude of associations between continuous variables (dyadic

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coping, marital satisfaction, resilience, and distress), while independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were applied to compare mean resilience and distress scores across categorical sociodemographic groups (sex, education level, income quintile), with post-hoc Tukey HSD tests applied where ANOVA yielded significant omnibus effects; statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ throughout. Third, two-level multilevel models (MLM) were specified using the R package lme4, with individuals (Level 1) nested within couples (Level 2), to account for the non-independence of couple-member responses that would otherwise violate the assumptions of ordinary least squares regression; a null (intercept-only) model was first estimated to calculate the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), which quantified the proportion of variance in resilience attributable to couple-level effects, followed by a random intercept model that introduced individual-level predictors (dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, psychological distress, age, education, income) at Level 1 and couple-level predictors (joint problem-solving, couple duration, mutual emotional support) at Level 2, with model fit assessed through likelihood ratio tests and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC); all continuous predictors were grand-mean centred prior to model estimation to facilitate interpretation of fixed effects and reduce multicollinearity (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, all participants provided written informed consent, and data confidentiality was maintained throughout.

RESULTS

Univariate Analysis: Sociodemographic and Study Variable Distributions

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables (N = 520)

Variable	Category/Statistic	n / Mean	% / SD	Min	Max
Sex	Male	260	50.0%		
	Female	260	50.0%		
Age (years)	Mean (SD)	38.4	9.7	22	67
Education	No formal education	42	8.1%		
	Primary	91	17.5%		
	Secondary	187	36.0%		
	Tertiary/University	200	38.5%		
Income Quintile	Lowest (Q1)	104	20.0%		
	Low-Middle (Q2)	104	20.0%		
	Middle (Q3)	104	20.0%		
	Upper-Middle (Q4)	104	20.0%		
	Highest (Q5)	104	20.0%		
Marriage Duration (yrs)	Mean (SD)	11.3	7.6	1	42
Dyadic Coping (1–5)	Mean (SD)	3.84	0.71	1.20	5.00
Marital Satisfaction (1–5)	Mean (SD)	3.67	0.82	1.00	5.00
Psychological Distress (K10)	Mean (SD)	18.42	6.31	10	45

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Resilience (CD-RISC 10)	Mean (SD)	31.76	7.14	8	40
Joint Problem-Solving (1–5)	Mean (SD)	3.59	0.79	1.00	5.00

The univariate analysis presented in Table 1 provided a comprehensive demographic and descriptive overview of the 520 study participants. The sample was equally distributed by sex, with 260 males and 260 females (50.0% each), reflecting the dyadic sampling strategy that recruited both partners from each couple. The mean age of participants was 38.4 years (SD = 9.7), ranging from 22 to 67 years, indicating a predominantly working-age adult sample with sufficient marital experience. Educational attainment was reasonably distributed, with the largest proportion holding tertiary or university qualifications (38.5%), followed by secondary education (36.0%), while a combined 25.6% reported primary or no formal education — a distribution that reflected the mixed urban-peri-urban composition of the sample. Income quintiles were equally distributed by design, enabling balanced comparisons across socioeconomic strata. The mean marriage duration of 11.3 years (SD = 7.6) suggested that the majority of couples had established, enduring marital relationships with sufficient relational history to have developed dyadic coping patterns.

With respect to the primary study constructs, dyadic coping registered the highest mean score (M = 3.84, SD = 0.71), indicating that, on average, participants reported moderately high levels of joint coping behaviour with their spouses. Marital satisfaction (M = 3.67, SD = 0.82) and joint problem-solving (M = 3.59, SD = 0.79) followed closely, suggesting that the majority of participants experienced their marriages as satisfying and characterized by collaborative problem resolution. Psychological distress, measured by the K10, yielded a mean score of 18.42 (SD = 6.31), which, according to established K10 cut-off criteria, places the average respondent in the mild distress category, with the upper range extending into severe distress territory (max = 45). Resilience scores on the CD-RISC 10 averaged 31.76 (SD = 7.14) out of a possible 40, indicating relatively robust resilience capacity across the sample. The observed variability across all constructs — reflected in meaningful standard deviations and wide ranges — confirmed sufficient dispersion for the subsequent bivariate and multilevel analyses. These distributions collectively laid the empirical groundwork for examining how dyadic relational processes translated into differential patterns of distress and resilience across couples.

Bivariate Analysis: Correlations and Group Comparisons

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix and Group Mean Comparisons for Key Study Variables

Variable	**Dyadic Coping**	**Marital Satisfaction**	**Psych. Distress**	**Resilience**	**Joint Prob.-Solving**
Dyadic Coping	1.00	0.58**	−0.49**	0.61**	0.64**
Marital Satisfaction	0.58**	1.00	−0.53**	0.55**	0.51**
Psych. Distress	−0.49**	−0.53**	1.00	−0.62**	−0.44**
Resilience	0.61**	0.55**	−0.62**	1.00	0.57**

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Joint Problem-Solving	0.64**	0.51**	−0.44**	0.57**	1.00
	t-test / ANOVA comparisons				
Sex (Resilience)	Male M=32.14	Female M=31.38	t(518)=1.84	p = .066	NS
Education (Resilience)	F(3,516)=14.73	p < .001	η^2= 0.079	Tertiary > Others	Tukey p<.05
Income (Resilience)	F(4,515)=19.62	p < .001	η^2= 0.132	Q4–Q5 > Q1–Q2	Tukey p<.01

** p < .001 (two-tailed); NS = not significant

The Pearson correlation analysis presented in Table 2 revealed a consistent and theoretically coherent pattern of associations among the five primary constructs. Dyadic coping demonstrated the strongest positive correlation with joint problem-solving ($r = 0.64$, $p < .001$), confirming that collaborative stress management was deeply intertwined with the couple's capacity for coordinated problem resolution — a finding aligned with the Systemic Transactional Model's proposition that dyadic coping encompasses both emotional and instrumental dimensions of couple-level regulation. Dyadic coping was also significantly and positively associated with resilience ($r = 0.61$, $p < .001$) and marital satisfaction ($r = 0.58$, $p < .001$), and negatively correlated with psychological distress ($r = −0.49$, $p < .001$). Marital satisfaction exhibited a strong negative correlation with psychological distress ($r = −0.53$, $p < .001$), substantiating the widely documented protective function of marital quality. The largest negative correlation observed in the matrix was between psychological distress and resilience ($r = −0.62$, $p < .001$), underscoring the well-established inverse relationship between distress load and adaptive capacity and confirming that the dyadic fortress framework needed to account for both directions of this relationship simultaneously.

The group comparison analyses further enriched the bivariate portrait. While no statistically significant sex difference in resilience was observed ($t(518) = 1.84$, $p = .066$), education and income yielded highly significant omnibus effects. A one-way ANOVA revealed that resilience scores differed significantly across educational groups ($F(3, 516) = 14.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.079$), with post-hoc Tukey HSD tests indicating that tertiary-educated participants reported significantly higher resilience than all lower education groups ($p < .05$). This finding suggested that educational attainment conferred psychological capital — potentially through enhanced cognitive reappraisal skills, social network access, and problem-solving efficacy — that amplified the resilience-building function of marital dyadic processes. Income quintile exerted an even stronger effect on resilience ($F(4, 515) = 19.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.132$), with participants in the two highest income quintiles (Q4 and Q5) demonstrating significantly superior resilience scores compared to those in the two lowest quintiles ($p < .01$ for all pairwise Tukey comparisons). This gradient effect suggested that material security moderated the extent to which dyadic coping could be converted into resilient outcomes, indicating

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that while marriage functioned as a relational fortress across socioeconomic strata, the structural integrity of that fortress was substantially reinforced by economic resources.

Multilevel Modelling: Predictors of Resilience

Table 3: Multilevel Model Results — Predictors of Resilience (N = 520 individuals, 260 couples)

Predictor	**Model 0 (Null)**		**Model 1 (Full MLM)**		
	β / Variance	SE	β	SE	p-value
Fixed Effects					
Intercept	31.76	0.34	31.81	0.29	< .001
Dyadic Coping (L1)	—	—	0.47	0.06	< .001
Marital Satisfaction (L1)	—	—	0.31	0.08	.001
Psychological Distress (L1)	—	—	−0.29	0.05	< .001
Age (L1)	—	—	0.08	0.04	.044
Education: Tertiary (L1)	—	—	1.94	0.48	< .001
Income Quintile (L1)	—	—	0.62	0.17	< .001
Joint Problem-Solving (L2)	—	—	0.39	0.07	< .001
Couple Duration (L2)	—	—	0.11	0.05	.034
Mutual Emotional Support (L2)	—	—	0.44	0.08	< .001
Random Effects					
Level-2 Variance (Couples)	12.47	—	6.83	—	—
Level-1 Variance (Individuals)	39.33	—	22.14	—	—
ICC	0.24	—	—	—	—
AIC	3284.6	—	3101.2	—	—
Likelihood Ratio Test (χ^2)	—	—	183.4 (df=9)	—	< .001

L1 = Level 1 (Individual); L2 = Level 2 (Couple). All continuous predictors grand-mean centred.

The multilevel modelling results presented in Table 3 provided the most analytically rigorous and theoretically illuminating findings of the study. The null model (Model 0) established that a statistically significant and substantively meaningful proportion of variance in resilience was attributable to the couple level, as evidenced by an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.24. This meant that 24% of the total variability in individual resilience scores could be attributed to between-couple differences — a finding that critically validated the use of multilevel modelling over single-level regression, as ignoring this clustering would have produced downwardly biased standard errors and spuriously inflated significance levels for all predictors. The full multilevel model (Model 1) substantially improved upon the null model, as confirmed by a highly significant likelihood ratio test ($\chi^2 = 183.4$, df = 9, $p < .001$) and a reduction in AIC from 3284.6 to 3101.2, indicating superior model fit. At the individual level, dyadic coping

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emerged as the strongest fixed-effect predictor of resilience (β = 0.47, SE = 0.06, p < .001), indicating that a one-unit increase in dyadic coping was associated with a 0.47-unit increase in resilience after controlling for all other predictors. Marital satisfaction (β = 0.31, SE = 0.08, p = .001) and mutual emotional support at the couple level (β = 0.44, SE = 0.08, p < .001) also demonstrated strong and significant positive effects on resilience, collectively reinforcing the study's central thesis that the relational quality of marriage — particularly its co-regulatory dimensions — drove resilience outcomes far beyond what sociodemographic characteristics alone could predict.

At the couple level, joint problem-solving (β = 0.39, SE = 0.07, p < .001) and mutual emotional support (β = 0.44, SE = 0.08, p < .001) were the two most influential Level-2 predictors, confirming that couple-level dyadic processes exerted independent effects on individual resilience over and above individual-level characteristics. Couple duration also reached significance (β = 0.11, SE = 0.05, p = .034), suggesting a modest but statistically reliable positive association between marital longevity and resilience, potentially reflecting the accumulation of shared coping repertoires and deepened relational trust over time. Psychological distress, as expected, exerted a significant negative effect on resilience (β = −0.29, SE = 0.05, p < .001), reinforcing the inverse distress-resilience dynamic observed in the bivariate analyses and highlighting the importance of distress as a competing process in the resilience model. Sociodemographic predictors including tertiary education (β = 1.94, SE = 0.48, p < .001), income quintile (β = 0.62, SE = 0.17, p < .001), and age (β = 0.08, SE = 0.04, p = .044) remained significant after full model adjustment, but their effect sizes were substantially smaller than those of the dyadic process variables, reinforcing the conclusion that it was the relational and co-regulatory dimensions of marriage — rather than sociostructural endowments — that constituted the primary operative mechanisms of the marital fortress.

6.4 Multilevel Modelling: Predictors of Psychological Distress Containment

Table 4: Multilevel Model Results — Predictors of Psychological Distress Containment

Predictor	β	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	p-value
Intercept	18.39	0.41	17.59	19.19	< .001
Dyadic Coping (L1)	−1.83	0.19	−2.21	−1.45	< .001
Marital Satisfaction (L1)	−1.47	0.22	−1.90	−1.04	< .001
Resilience (L1)	−0.61	0.09	−0.79	−0.43	< .001
Age (L1)	−0.07	0.04	−0.15	0.01	.083
Sex: Female (L1)	0.82	0.38	0.08	1.56	.030
Education: Tertiary (L1)	−1.78	0.52	−2.80	−0.76	.001
Income Quintile (L1)	−0.91	0.21	−1.32	−0.50	< .001
Joint Problem-Solving (L2)	−1.21	0.24	−1.68	−0.74	< .001
Mutual Emotional Support (L2)	−1.56	0.27	−2.09	−1.03	< .001
Couple Duration (L2)	−0.09	0.06	−0.21	0.03	.144

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Level-2 Variance (ICC)	0.19	—	—	—	—
R^2 Marginal	0.46	—	—	—	—
R^2 Conditional	0.61	—	—	—	—

L1 = Individual level; L2 = Couple level. Outcome variable = K10 Psychological Distress Score (lower = less distress).

Table 4 presented the multilevel model for the outcome of psychological distress containment, operationalized as lower scores on the K10 distress scale. The ICC of 0.19 confirmed that 19% of the variance in psychological distress was attributable to couple-level clustering, again validating the multilevel analytical approach. The marginal R^2 of 0.46 indicated that the fixed effects alone explained 46% of variance in distress, while the conditional R^2 of 0.61 — which incorporated both fixed and random effects — represented the model's total explained variance, suggesting that the combination of individual-level and couple-level predictors provided a substantial and comprehensive account of psychological distress among married adults. Dyadic coping was the strongest single predictor of distress containment at the individual level ($\beta = -1.83$, SE = 0.19, $p < .001$), with a one-unit increase in dyadic coping associated with a 1.83-unit reduction in K10 distress scores. Marital satisfaction also exerted a significant and substantial negative effect on distress ($\beta = -1.47$, SE = 0.22, $p < .001$), reinforcing the protective function of marital quality in buffering against psychological adversity and supporting the central thesis of the dyadic fortress framework.

At the couple level, mutual emotional support demonstrated the strongest distress-reducing effect ($\beta = -1.56$, SE = 0.27, $p < .001$), indicating that couples characterized by high levels of emotional validation and shared affect regulation experienced significantly lower individual distress than their counterparts. Joint problem-solving also contributed significantly to distress reduction at the couple level ($\beta = -1.21$, SE = 0.24, $p < .001$), underscoring the dual emotional-instrumental nature of dyadic coping in distress containment. A notable finding was the significant positive coefficient for female sex ($\beta = 0.82$, SE = 0.38, $p = .030$), indicating that, after controlling for all other variables, female participants reported slightly higher distress levels than males — a finding consistent with the broader epidemiological literature on sex differences in psychological distress and potentially reflective of disproportionate emotional labour burdens within marital relationships. Couple duration did not reach significance in the distress model ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = .144$), contrasting with its modest positive effect on resilience, suggesting that the protective effect of marital longevity operated more through resilience accumulation than through direct distress reduction. Taken together, the distress containment model powerfully affirmed that the active relational processes of dyadic coping and mutual emotional support — rather than passive marital cohabitation — constituted the operative mechanisms through which marriage served its fortress function.

CONCLUSION

This study provided compelling empirical evidence that marriage, when characterized by active dyadic coping, mutual emotional support, joint problem-solving, and high marital satisfaction, operates as a potent dyadic fortress that meaningfully contained psychological distress and cultivated resilience among married adults. The multilevel

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analytical framework revealed that 24% of variance in resilience was attributable to couple-level effects — an empirically critical finding that demanded dyadic rather than individual-level explanatory models. Dyadic coping consistently emerged as the most influential predictor across all analytical levels, confirming the Systemic Transactional Model's central proposition that stress regulation in intimate partnerships was fundamentally a shared, co-constructed process. The inverse gradient effects of socioeconomic resources on both distress and resilience underscored that structural conditions moderated the effectiveness of the marital fortress, yet dyadic process variables retained their significance after full sociodemographic adjustment, demonstrating their independent and robust contribution to psychological outcomes. Together, the findings repositioned marriage from a romantic ideal to an evidence-based psychosocial infrastructure whose health-protective potential was unlocked specifically through the quality and intentionality of dyadic engagement — a conclusion with profound implications for clinical, public health, and policy-level responses to the growing burden of psychological distress in married populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Integrate Dyadic Coping Training into Premarital and Couples Counselling Programmes: Given that dyadic coping was the strongest predictor of both resilience and distress containment, mental health practitioners, marriage counsellors, and clinical psychologists should systematically incorporate evidence-based dyadic coping skill-building — including training in supportive coping communication, delegated coping strategies, and joint stress-processing techniques — into all premarital education and ongoing couples therapy frameworks.

Address Structural Inequalities That Undermine the Dyadic Fortress: Since income and education significantly moderated the resilience-building capacity of marital dyadic processes, public health and social welfare policies should prioritize economic empowerment and educational access for low-income married couples, recognizing that structural vulnerabilities erode the psychosocial infrastructure of marriage and limit its health-protective potential particularly among the most socioeconomically disadvantaged households.

Adopt Dyadic Analytical Approaches in Marital and Family Mental Health Research: The significant couple-level ICC values obtained in both multilevel models demonstrated that individual-level analyses of marital data produce biased and theoretically incomplete findings; future research in this domain should routinely employ multilevel or actor-partner interdependence models (APIM) that appropriately account for couple-level clustering, enabling more valid causal inference and more targeted intervention design for couple-based psychological wellbeing programmes.

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