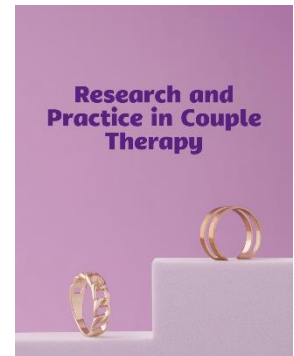




The Role of Constructive Feedback on Marital Adjustment Mediated by Partner Validation

1. Abbie. Wilson¹: Department of Psychology, Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA
2. Klein. Verena^{2*}: Section of Sexual Psychopathology, Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, and Health Studies, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy
3. Lia. Corazza³: Department of Psychology and Cognitive Science, University of Trento, Italy

*corresponding author's email: kleinverena@uniroma1.it



ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effect of constructive feedback on marital adjustment, with the mediating role of partner validation among married individuals in Kenya. A descriptive correlational design was employed involving 385 married participants selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) sample size table. Participants completed validated Likert-scale instruments assessing constructive feedback, partner validation, and marital adjustment. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). SPSS version 27 was used for descriptive and inferential statistics, while AMOS version 21 was employed to test the structural relationships among variables and the model's fit indices. Pearson correlation results showed significant positive relationships between constructive feedback and partner validation ($r = .62, p < .001$), constructive feedback and marital adjustment ($r = .57, p < .001$), and partner validation and marital adjustment ($r = .69, p < .001$). SEM analysis confirmed the model fit with acceptable indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.95$, GFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.047). Constructive feedback had significant direct effects on both partner validation ($\beta = .62, p < .001$) and marital adjustment ($\beta = .24, p = .004$). Partner validation had a strong direct effect on marital adjustment ($\beta = .65, p < .001$). The indirect effect of constructive feedback on marital adjustment through partner validation ($\beta = .40, p < .001$) was also significant, highlighting the mediating role of partner validation. The total effect of constructive feedback on marital adjustment was $\beta = .64$. The findings suggest that constructive feedback significantly enhances marital adjustment, both directly and indirectly, by fostering partner validation. Emotional validation acts as a key mechanism through which respectful communication strengthens relational outcomes. These results underscore the importance of integrating communication and validation training into marital support programs.

Keywords: Constructive feedback, partner validation, marital adjustment.

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Introduction

Marriage, as a socio-legal institution, serves not only as a contract but as a foundation for emotional, economic, and moral cohesion between individuals and their wider communities. Across Islamic jurisprudence and customary legal contexts, marriage is both a spiritual bond and a legal relationship regulated by norms of legitimacy, mutual consent, and interpersonal responsibilities. Studies have explored the foundations of marriage contracts and guardianship within this context, emphasizing the significance of valid consent, legal witnesses, and equitable negotiation of terms (Arifuddin, 2024; Faizah, 2023). For instance, the legal presence of a guardian (wali) and the permissibility of specific guardianship arrangements for special circumstances, such as children born out of wedlock, continue to generate debate in both classical and modern jurisprudence (Rahman, 2024). In parallel, notarial roles in safeguarding the integrity of prenuptial agreements and marriage registration are



being reaffirmed through judicial interpretations, such as the Constitutional Court Decision Number 69/PUU-XIII/2015 in Indonesia, which has strengthened the legal enforceability of marital agreements (Izza, 2024; Ridwan, 2025).

However, while the legal conditions of marriage have received ample attention, less emphasis has been placed on the psychosocial dimensions that affect long-term marital adjustment. Marital adjustment refers to the degree of harmony, satisfaction, and emotional coordination between spouses, which is often shaped not only by formal structures but by day-to-day relational exchanges. Research indicates that factors such as mutual respect, validation, and constructive communication are crucial for promoting marital resilience and preventing emotional disengagement (Munir, 2025; Muzakki et al., 2024). In particular, constructive feedback—defined as the delivery of critique or input in a respectful, growth-oriented manner—has been associated with better conflict resolution, increased intimacy, and lower levels of defensiveness among couples (Tonekaboni et al., 2024).

Recent empirical studies support the assertion that the way couples communicate significantly impacts their sense of adjustment. For instance, Evanurfitriani (2025) underscored the urgency of addressing emotional compatibility in marital bonds, especially in the face of psychological or physical challenges that hinder relational reciprocity (Evanurfitriani, 2025). Partner validation—where one spouse feels seen, understood, and accepted by the other—is a crucial emotional experience that mediates the impact of communication patterns, particularly during conflict or feedback exchanges. Validation fosters empathy, minimizes defensiveness, and cultivates a sense of emotional security that is foundational for enduring marital harmony (Hager, 2023; Manthwa & Lekolwana, 2024).

Moreover, contextual and cultural dimensions strongly influence how validation and feedback are expressed within marriages. In settings where customary or religious norms prioritize ritualistic components of marriage, such as in Sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia, the expectations surrounding emotional expressiveness and gendered roles within communication are deeply embedded (Sibisi, 2024; Solihandhana et al., 2025). For instance, the legal recognition of customary marriages and the waiving of bride rituals in South African jurisprudence reflect shifting social dynamics, where traditional forms of legitimacy intersect with evolving marital expectations (Manthwa & Lekolwana, 2024; Sibisi, 2024).

Similarly, within the Indonesian context, religious courts have increasingly addressed the consequences of unregistered or informal marriages, as in the case of *itsbat nikah* (marriage validation) proceedings, which often arise in cases of administrative neglect or socio-economic vulnerability (Solihandhana et al., 2025). These legal developments have implications for how spouses navigate legitimacy and emotional connection, particularly when institutional trust is compromised. Emotional neglect and lack of validation in such marriages can erode the very moral fabric that sustains the institution, especially in fragile legal settings (Apip et al., 2023).

Another dimension of interest is how technological and legal innovations are reshaping spousal interaction and access to marital support. Satria and Alda (2024) developed a mobile application aimed at facilitating marriage counseling and divorce mediation, emphasizing the growing demand for structured feedback channels within marriages (Satria & Alda, 2024). These innovations signal a shift from reactive to proactive approaches to marital adjustment, where constructive feedback mechanisms can be institutionalized and supported technologically. Similarly, Aufia (2024) emphasized the preventive power of notarial involvement in prenuptial agreements, which not only establish economic boundaries but also reflect mutual expectations and responsibilities in communication and decision-making (Aufia, 2024).

Notably, structural support mechanisms also play a crucial role in shaping communication patterns within marriage. Institutions such as the KUA (Religious Affairs Office) in Indonesia have been active in educating couples about the dangers of *nikah siri* (unregistered marriages), which often result in asymmetrical power dynamics, hidden obligations, and lack of

partner recognition (Sukur, 2023). This institutional gap directly affects the feedback and validation dynamics in such marriages, as partners often lack legal and emotional recourse to address conflicts or express needs (Nofitri et al., 2023).

The intersection of law, culture, and emotional processes in marriage becomes even more evident in cases involving mixed-religion or identity-based marriages. Research by Tjajindra and Djaja (2023) highlighted the contentious role of notaries in facilitating interfaith marriages in Indonesia, where legal ambiguity often forces couples to choose between personal beliefs and institutional legitimacy (Tjajindra & Djaja, 2023). Similarly, Lin (2024) explored false marriages initiated for administrative or identity purposes, revealing how relational authenticity and emotional investment are compromised when marriages are reduced to transactional arrangements (Lin, 2024).

Despite the diversity of marital practices across cultural contexts, a consistent theme emerges: emotional alignment through constructive communication is indispensable for long-term adjustment. This is echoed in Susantijo and Zulistia's (2025) findings, which show that structured marriage agreements in mixed marriages not only protect financial interests but also reduce relational ambiguity, fostering transparency and validation in daily interactions (Susantijo & Zulistia, 2025). In the same vein, Wahyono et al. (2023) documented how the resolution of *wali adhal* (obstructive guardianship) cases contributes to emotional relief and empowerment for women, leading to stronger alignment and validation within the marital unit (Wahyono et al., 2023).

The present study, therefore, seeks to investigate the relationship between *constructive feedback* and *marital adjustment*, and to examine the *mediating role of partner validation* in this relationship.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study adopted a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationship between constructive feedback and marital adjustment, with partner validation as a mediating variable. The target population comprised married individuals residing in urban and peri-urban areas of Kenya. Using the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) table, a sample size of 385 participants was determined to be adequate for representing a larger population size with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Participants were selected using a multistage cluster sampling method from various community and counseling centers in Nairobi and Kisumu counties. Inclusion criteria required participants to be legally married for at least one year and willing to participate voluntarily. All participants completed a self-administered questionnaire, which included standardized scales measuring constructive feedback, partner validation, and marital adjustment.

Measures

To measure partner validation, the study employed the Validation and Invalidation Behavior Coding System (VIBCS) developed by Cordova, Gee, and Warren (2005). This observationally-derived measure has been adapted into a self-report format for survey-based research and focuses on perceived validation in romantic relationships. The partner validation subscale includes 10 items that assess behaviors such as empathy, understanding, and acceptance during interpersonal interactions. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much. Sample items include "My partner acknowledges my feelings during disagreements" and "I feel accepted by my partner when I express concerns." High scores indicate greater perceived validation. Several studies have confirmed the construct validity and internal consistency of this scale, reporting Cronbach's alpha values above .80, affirming its reliability in measuring partner validation across diverse marital contexts.

Constructive feedback was assessed using the Feedback Environment Scale (FES) developed by Steelman, Levy, and Snell (2004). Although originally developed for workplace settings, the scale has been adapted in relational contexts to assess the degree to which feedback is supportive, accurate, and useful. The adapted version used in this study includes 18 items across four subscales: source credibility, feedback quality, feedback delivery, and feedback support. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Example items include “My partner provides feedback in a helpful and respectful way” and “The feedback I receive from my partner helps me improve our relationship.” The FES has demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .82 to .89) and strong convergent validity in both organizational and interpersonal settings, making it suitable for measuring constructive feedback within romantic relationships.

Marital adjustment was measured using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) developed by Spanier (1976), one of the most widely used instruments in marital research. The DAS contains 32 items and evaluates the quality of marital relationships across four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, and Affectional Expression. Participants respond using varying Likert-type scales tailored to the content of each item. For instance, items may be rated on a 6-point or 5-point scale, depending on the question format. Sample items include “How often do you and your partner calmly discuss something?” and “How often do you kiss your mate?” The total score ranges from 0 to 151, with higher scores indicating better marital adjustment. The DAS has consistently shown excellent psychometric properties, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients exceeding .90 in numerous studies, and its validity has been corroborated through correlations with other measures of relationship quality.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 for preliminary descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the dependent variable (partner validation) and each independent variable (constructive feedback and marital adjustment). Additionally, to test the hypothesized mediating role of partner validation in the relationship between constructive feedback and marital adjustment, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS version 21. Model fit was evaluated using standard indices including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Chi-square/df ratio.

Findings and Results

Among the 385 participants, 212 (55.06%) were female and 173 (44.93%) were male. The majority of respondents were aged between 31–40 years ($n = 139$, 36.10%), followed by those aged 21–30 years ($n = 107$, 27.79%), 41–50 years ($n = 91$, 23.63%), and those above 50 years ($n = 48$, 12.46%). Regarding education, 152 participants (39.48%) held a university degree, 118 (30.64%) had completed secondary education, 67 (17.40%) had a diploma, and 48 (12.46%) had only primary education. The average duration of marriage was 9.87 years ($SD = 5.74$), ranging from 1 to 29 years. These demographic results indicate a diverse and representative marital sample for the Kenyan context.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Study Variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Constructive Feedback	5.42	0.89
Partner Validation	4.96	0.74
Marital Adjustment	5.11	0.81

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that participants reported relatively high levels of constructive feedback ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 0.89$), partner validation ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 0.74$), and marital adjustment ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 0.81$) on scales ranging from 1 to 7. These results suggest a generally positive perception of relational dynamics among the sampled married individuals in Kenya.

Prior to performing inferential statistics, all relevant statistical assumptions were tested and confirmed. Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values for each continuous variable, with all skewness values ranging between -0.41 and 0.52 and kurtosis values between -0.73 and 0.61, well within the acceptable range of ± 2.0 . Linearity was verified through scatterplots, which showed a consistent linear pattern between the variables. Multicollinearity was examined using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all VIF values ranging from 1.23 to 1.68, indicating no significant multicollinearity. The assumption of homoscedasticity was also met, as residual plots displayed constant variance across predictor values. These results support the appropriateness of conducting Pearson correlations and SEM analyses for hypothesis testing.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Constructive Feedback	—		
2. Partner Validation	.62** ($p < .001$)	—	
3. Marital Adjustment	.57** ($p < .001$)	.69** ($p < .001$)	—

As shown in Table 2, constructive feedback was significantly and positively correlated with both partner validation ($r = .62$, $p < .001$) and marital adjustment ($r = .57$, $p < .001$). Partner validation also demonstrated a strong, significant positive correlation with marital adjustment ($r = .69$, $p < .001$), supporting the assumption that these variables are interrelated and appropriate for structural modeling.

Table 3. Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
χ^2 (Chi-Square)	124.83	—
df	64	—
χ^2/df	1.95	< 3.00
GFI	0.93	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.91	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.96	≥ 0.95
TLI	0.94	≥ 0.95 (acceptable if $\geq .90$)
RMSEA	0.047	≤ 0.06

The model fit indices in Table 3 indicate a good fit between the hypothesized structural model and the observed data. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ($\chi^2/df = 1.95$) falls within the acceptable range, and all other indices (GFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.047) suggest an excellent fit. These findings validate the hypothesized relationships among constructive feedback, partner validation, and marital adjustment.

Table 4. Standardized and Unstandardized Path Coefficients in the Structural Model

Path	b	S.E	β	p
Constructive Feedback $\rightarrow$ Partner Validation	0.54	0.06	.62	$< .001$
Partner Validation $\rightarrow$ Marital Adjustment	0.61	0.07	.65	$< .001$
Constructive Feedback $\rightarrow$ Marital Adjustment	0.21	0.08	.24	.004
Constructive Feedback $\rightarrow$ Marital Adjustment (Indirect) via Partner Validation	0.33	0.05	.40	$< .001$
Constructive Feedback $\rightarrow$ Marital Adjustment (Total Effect)	0.54	—	.64	$< .001$

As seen in Table 4, constructive feedback had a significant direct effect on partner validation ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$), and partner validation had a strong direct effect on marital adjustment ($\beta = .65$, $p < .001$). The direct path from constructive feedback to

marital adjustment was also significant ($\beta = .24$, $p = .004$), but the indirect path via partner validation ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) was stronger. The total effect of constructive feedback on marital adjustment was $\beta = .64$, indicating that the mediating role of partner validation significantly enhanced the predictive power of the model.

Structural Model of Constructive Feedback, Partner Validation, and Marital Adjustment

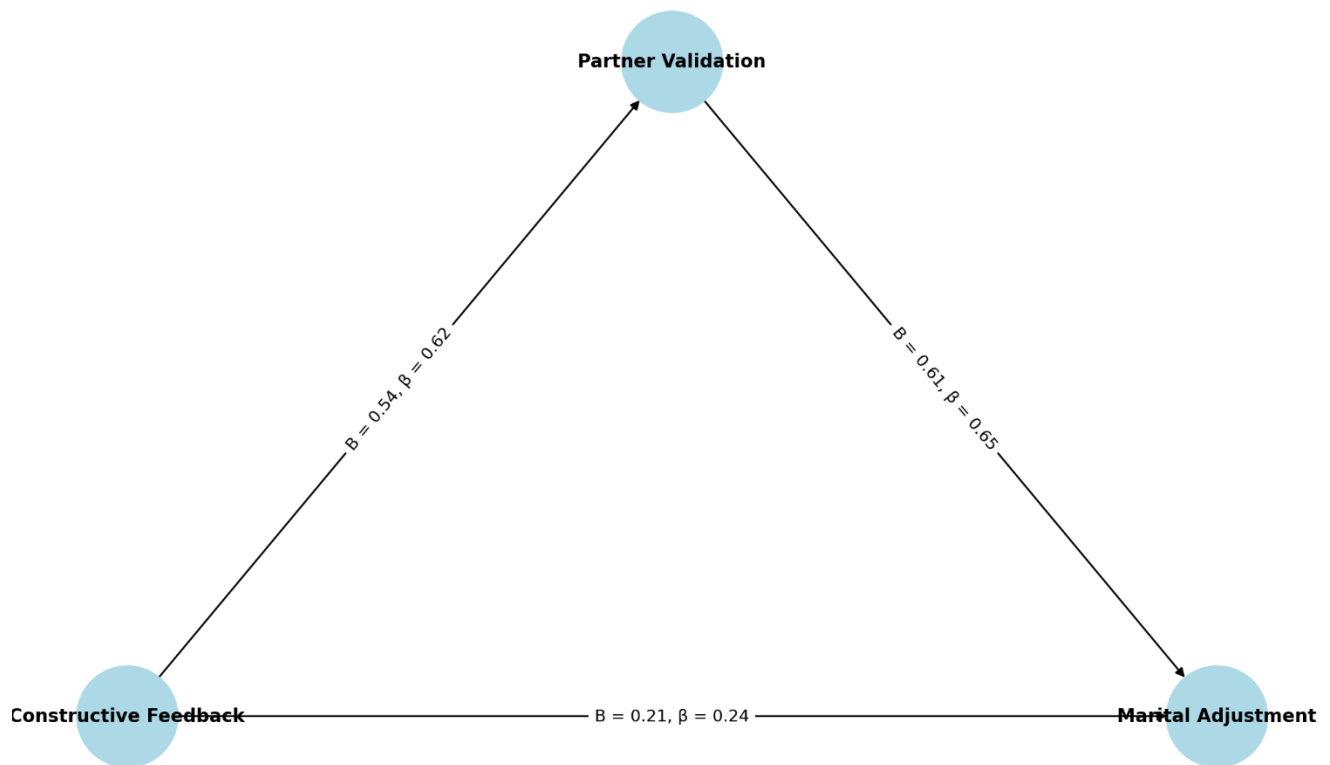


Figure 1. Model with Standard Coefficients

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of constructive feedback on marital adjustment, with partner validation as a mediating variable. The findings of this study revealed significant positive correlations among the three core variables. Constructive feedback was positively and significantly associated with both partner validation and marital adjustment. Furthermore, partner validation significantly mediated the relationship between constructive feedback and marital adjustment, indicating that the emotional experience of being validated by one's partner is a key mechanism through which constructive communication enhances overall relationship functioning.

The strength of the direct relationship between constructive feedback and marital adjustment aligns with previous theoretical propositions and empirical evidence suggesting that effective and respectful communication fosters emotional intimacy, mutual respect, and adaptive conflict resolution strategies. Constructive feedback—when provided in a non-critical, supportive, and solution-focused manner—serves as a relational tool that not only conveys important concerns but also communicates investment in the partner and the relationship. This aligns with the broader understanding of marital communication as a vehicle for regulation, repair, and relational growth (Tonekaboni et al., 2024).

Moreover, the mediating role of partner validation provides further insight into the process by which constructive feedback exerts its influence. When feedback is perceived as validating, it contributes to a sense of emotional safety and mutual recognition, which are foundational to relationship satisfaction and adjustment. This emotional safety allows partners to be

more receptive to behavioral changes, engage in reciprocal efforts, and experience a deeper sense of connection. The finding resonates with the cultural and relational contexts described by scholars such as (Munir, 2025) and (Muzakki et al., 2024), who emphasize that emotional validation reinforces normative relational values in Islamic and customary marriages, thereby enhancing marital stability.

These results also mirror observations in legal and administrative discourses around marriage. For instance, the necessity of validation—whether emotional, social, or legal—is echoed in (Solihandhana et al., 2025), which examines the formal validation process of unregistered marriages (*itsbat nikah*) in Indonesia. Much like legal recognition stabilizes the marital status, emotional validation stabilizes the relational experience, suggesting a conceptual parallel between legal legitimacy and psychological acceptance.

Additionally, the findings are consistent with the broader sociocultural understanding of marriage as a dynamic process that requires active engagement, emotional investment, and equitable negotiation. The use of constructive feedback embodies this engagement. As described by (Satria & Alda, 2024), technological platforms that promote guided feedback in counseling and mediation can enhance couples' capacity to adjust to marital demands, showing that the presence of structured feedback mechanisms—technologically or relationally—supports marital resilience.

Furthermore, the importance of feedback quality and partner responsiveness has been emphasized in culturally diverse studies. (Manthwa & Lekolwana, 2024) highlights the role of symbolic rituals and their suspension in customary marriages, showing how emotional acknowledgment (or lack thereof) impacts perceived marital fulfillment. The current findings similarly suggest that partner validation—a form of symbolic and emotional ritual—plays a critical role in determining the effectiveness of feedback and ultimately, marital adjustment.

The legal-literary analysis by (Apip et al., 2023) of marginalized groups like Ahmadiyah communities also contributes to understanding the importance of recognition—legal or relational—in the face of systemic neglect. In the current study, the experience of validation can be interpreted as a micro-level counterpart to broader structural legitimacies. Just as marriages that lack formal recognition are vulnerable to instability, relationships lacking emotional validation are at higher risk for dissatisfaction and disengagement.

Moreover, the intersection of legal legitimacy and emotional transparency is addressed by (Aufia, 2024) and (Izza, 2024), who explore the notary's role in formalizing marital agreements. These contracts often require explicit dialogue about expectations and boundaries—forms of feedback that mirror the constructive feedback mechanism studied here. When such feedback is delivered in validating ways, it strengthens relational alignment and mutual accountability, increasing marital cohesion.

In addition to the psychological function of validation, the findings also resonate with cultural critiques of marital dynamics. (Susantijo & Zulistia, 2025) discusses how mixed marriages require carefully structured agreements to protect financial and personal rights—an endeavor deeply reliant on mutual trust and respectful communication. This aligns with the present findings that emphasize the necessity of constructive, affirming exchanges to foster relationship equity and adjustment. Similarly, (Tjajindra & Djaja, 2023) and (Ridwan, 2025) highlight that interfaith or post-marital legal arrangements demand heightened clarity, feedback, and transparency to manage relational complexity—again supporting the centrality of constructive communication in marital functioning.

Another dimension supported by this study is the role of cultural institutions in regulating and supporting relational behaviors. (Sukur, 2023) and (Nofitri et al., 2023) show that local religious and governmental institutions (e.g., KUA or DP3A) actively engage in community education and conflict resolution, aiming to reduce informal or underage marriages. These

institutions serve as macro-level mechanisms for constructive feedback, paralleling the micro-level dynamics observed between spouses. In both cases, timely, respectful, and validating feedback leads to more adaptive relational outcomes.

Finally, this study adds to the growing recognition that psychological factors such as communication quality and emotional attunement are not separate from legal and cultural contexts but are embedded within them. (Rahman, 2024) and (Faizah, 2023) demonstrate that marriage is both a legal and moral commitment. When constructive feedback is coupled with validation, it reflects and reinforces these moral underpinnings, making adjustment not only a psychological state but a lived expression of shared values.

Although the findings provide meaningful contributions to the literature on marital communication and adjustment, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study utilized a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to infer causality. While mediation analysis was conducted, the directionality of effects remains tentative and could be better examined through longitudinal designs. Second, the sample was limited to married individuals residing in Kenya, which, while culturally diverse, may not reflect relational patterns in other regions or contexts with differing marital laws, norms, and religious practices. Third, all data were collected via self-report instruments, which are susceptible to social desirability and response biases, especially given the sensitivity of marital topics. Lastly, the study did not account for moderating variables such as gender, length of marriage, or conflict frequency, which could influence how feedback and validation function in marital dynamics.

Future research should consider longitudinal or experimental designs to establish stronger causal inferences about the pathways linking constructive feedback, partner validation, and marital adjustment. It would also be valuable to examine potential moderating variables such as cultural background, gender roles, attachment styles, or power dynamics, which may condition the effects of validation and feedback. Expanding this model to include other relational processes—such as empathy, forgiveness, or emotional regulation—could enrich the theoretical understanding of marital adjustment. Additionally, future studies should explore these variables in varying marital structures, such as polygamous unions, interfaith marriages, or unregistered marriages, to assess the generalizability of findings across diverse cultural and legal contexts.

Based on these findings, practitioners such as marital counselors, religious leaders, and legal advisors should prioritize training couples in the delivery and reception of constructive feedback. Interventions aimed at enhancing partner validation should be incorporated into premarital education and ongoing relationship support services. Legal and religious institutions might also consider developing community-based programs that encourage open, respectful communication as a core marital skill. Moreover, incorporating partner validation into conflict resolution models could help prevent emotional disengagement and strengthen relational bonds. Finally, policies supporting marital counseling at the institutional level—particularly for underrepresented or at-risk groups—may improve not only legal marital legitimacy but also relational quality and satisfaction.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Transparency of Data

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

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