

# Relational Commitment as Predicted by Partner Dependability and Emotional Support

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the predictive roles of partner dependability and emotional support in relational commitment among individuals in romantic relationships. The research employed a correlational descriptive design with a sample of 380 participants from Iraq, selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size table. Standardized tools were used to assess relational commitment, perceived partner dependability, and emotional support. Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 software, employing Pearson correlation to evaluate the relationships between variables and multiple linear regression to test the predictive power of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The results revealed significant positive correlations between relational commitment and both partner dependability ( $r = .68, p < .01$ ) and emotional support ( $r = .59, p < .01$ ). Multiple regression analysis showed that the overall model was significant,  $F(2, 377) = 168.29, p < .001$ , explaining 47.2% of the variance in relational commitment ( $R^2 = .472$ ). Both partner dependability ( $\beta = .46, t = 9.87, p < .001$ ) and emotional support ( $\beta = .34, t = 7.51, p < .001$ ) were found to be significant predictors, with partner dependability having a stronger predictive value. These findings suggest that relational commitment is substantially influenced by both the perceived reliability and emotional responsiveness of one's partner. The study highlights the importance of fostering consistent and supportive behaviors within romantic relationships to enhance commitment levels. The results have implications for relationship counseling and education programs, particularly within culturally specific contexts like Iraq.

**Keywords:** Relational Commitment; Partner Dependability; Emotional Support; Romantic Relationships; Iraq

## How to cite this article:

AL Nuaimi, A.A.R., Golparvar, M., & Yousefi, Z. (2024). Relational Commitment as Predicted by Partner Dependability and Emotional Support. *Research and Practice in Couple Therapy*, 2(3), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.61838/rpct.2.3.6>

## Introduction

In the complex dynamics of romantic relationships, relational commitment has long been recognized as a foundational element ensuring stability, persistence, and satisfaction between partners. Defined as the intention and psychological attachment to maintain a relationship over time, relational commitment not only stabilizes partnerships but also fortifies emotional and behavioral investments in the bond (Gutiérrez et al., 2004). As modern relationships continue to evolve under the influence of digital communication, shifting cultural norms, and rising individualism, understanding the predictors of relational commitment remains a priority for researchers and clinicians alike.

Among the myriad of factors influencing commitment, partner dependability and emotional support are frequently cited as central relational attributes that foster security and relational longevity. Dependability refers to a partner's perceived reliability,

consistency, and trustworthiness, characteristics that enable individuals to feel secure in their emotional and practical interdependence (Sefrzadeh ShirAli & Bavi, 2020). Emotional support, on the other hand, entails the communication of empathy, understanding, care, and validation, acting as a buffer against stress and emotional turmoil (Priem, 2020; Saccardi & Masthoff, 2023). These constructs, while interrelated, contribute uniquely to the psychological underpinnings of relational maintenance and are critical in predicting whether individuals remain committed in both satisfying and distressed relational environments.

Relational commitment, as a multidimensional construct, is influenced by both cognitive and affective factors. Cognitively, individuals evaluate the cost-benefit structure of their relationships, weighing investments, alternatives, and long-term expectations. Affectively, they respond to the emotional climate fostered by their partner's behavior and support patterns (Ghorbani et al., 2018). Contemporary relational theories such as the Investment Model and Attachment Theory highlight that individuals are more likely to remain in relationships where trust, emotional validation, and predictability are present. These variables interact with intrapersonal traits like self-differentiation and emotional regulation to determine relational outcomes (Rashidi et al., 2022; Regas, 2019).

Partner dependability, though often assumed as a basic component of any relationship, plays a particularly salient role in shaping long-term commitment. Research has shown that perceived partner reliability contributes to secure attachment and reduces relational anxiety, thereby enhancing satisfaction and the willingness to invest in the relationship (Sefrzadeh ShirAli & Bavi, 2020). Inconsistent or unpredictable behavior from a partner, by contrast, can foster doubt and reduce one's readiness to commit fully. Gutiérrez et al. emphasized that relational trust—deeply tied to perceived dependability—is the most consistent predictor of commitment across relational contexts and cultures (Gutiérrez et al., 2004).

Moreover, emotional support is a crucial resource in intimate partnerships. It enables partners to cope with stressors, process emotional experiences, and enhance relational intimacy (Atoum & Al-Shoboul, 2018; Sawka et al., 2002). Supportive behaviors such as active listening, empathy, and emotional validation create a safe emotional environment, which in turn encourages reciprocal investment and loyalty. Priem's physiological research found that emotional support not only enhances subjective well-being but also promotes physiological regulation, underscoring its deeply embodied function in relational maintenance (Priem, 2020). Similarly, Ruiz et al. confirmed that emotional responsiveness fosters positive emotional states and learning outcomes in collaborative contexts, further linking support to behavioral outcomes beyond emotional regulation (Ruiz et al., 2016).

It is important to highlight that emotional support does not operate in a vacuum but is closely tied to the personality characteristics and interpersonal awareness of both partners. Individuals with high emotional intelligence, for example, are better equipped to offer effective support and interpret their partner's emotional needs (Atoum & Al-Shoboul, 2018). This intrapersonal skill enhances emotional communication and has been shown to predict higher levels of marital commitment and satisfaction (Fardad et al., 2022). Likewise, a lack of emotional expression, often tied to psychological distress or differentiation issues, can compromise the perception of support and reduce commitment even in long-standing partnerships (Gabnai-Nagy et al., 2020).

In the specific context of Iraqi society, relational dynamics are shaped by a unique interplay of traditional values, evolving gender roles, and shifting generational attitudes. Studies suggest that despite the societal importance placed on marital commitment, emotional literacy and mutual support in intimate relationships are often underdeveloped or misaligned due to sociocultural expectations (Kamrani Dashtgerdi & Salehi, 2022). Therefore, examining how emotional support and partner dependability influence commitment in this setting is especially important. Rashidi et al. emphasized that culturally informed

predictors such as differentiation of self and relational roles must be considered in assessing emotional and marital stability (Rashidi et al., 2022).

Moreover, the theoretical literature reveals that differentiation of self, or the ability to maintain individuality while staying emotionally connected, moderates the impact of both support and dependability on commitment (Regas, 2019). When individuals are highly differentiated, they are less reactive to emotional disturbances and more capable of offering support without becoming emotionally overwhelmed. This ability enhances their perception of their partner as dependable and supportive, reinforcing relational commitment (Sloan et al., 2017).

While emotional support and dependability are often studied independently, their interactive influence on commitment remains underexplored. Research indicates that when both are present, they create a reinforcing loop that bolsters relational resilience. For example, emotionally supportive partners are often perceived as more dependable due to their consistent responsiveness and sensitivity (Nguyen, 2019). Conversely, partners seen as reliable and consistent are often trusted more deeply, which enables emotional vulnerability and the exchange of authentic support (Saccardi & Masthoff, 2023).

Although substantial research has linked these variables to relational outcomes, gaps remain in terms of cultural generalizability, dyadic interaction patterns, and causal directionality. Much of the existing literature is based on Western samples and does not account for sociocultural nuances in collectivist or transitional societies like Iraq. For example, Ghorbani et al. proposed a contextual model linking coping strategies to marital commitment through self-differentiation, but their findings have yet to be replicated in Middle Eastern or post-conflict environments (Ghorbani et al., 2018). Moreover, studies such as those by Momeni et al. revealed that family adaptability and cohesion, which are often cultural constructs, significantly influence perceived partner support and, consequently, commitment (Momeni et al., 2015).

This study, therefore, seeks to address a pressing gap in the literature by exploring how partner dependability and emotional support predict relational commitment in a culturally specific context.

## Methods and Materials

### Study Design and Participants

#### Study Design and Participants

This study employed a correlational descriptive design to investigate the predictive role of partner dependability and emotional support in relational commitment among individuals in romantic relationships. The target population consisted of adult individuals residing in Iraq. Based on the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 380 participants was considered adequate for statistical analysis. Participants were selected through convenience sampling from urban community centers and universities across major cities in Iraq. Inclusion criteria included being in a committed romantic relationship for at least six months and willingness to complete all survey items. Participants completed standardized questionnaires assessing relational commitment, partner dependability, and emotional support.

### Measures

Relational commitment was assessed using the Commitment Scale developed by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) as part of the Investment Model Scale. This widely used tool measures the degree of psychological attachment and intention to maintain the relationship over time. The commitment subscale consists of 7 items that assess participants' willingness to persist in the relationship (e.g., "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner"). Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (agree completely). Higher scores indicate greater commitment to the

relationship. This subscale has demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically above .85, and strong construct validity confirmed across diverse cultural and relational contexts.

Partner dependability was measured using the Dependability Subscale of the Dyadic Trust Scale originally developed by Larzelere and Huston (1980). This scale assesses the perceived reliability, honesty, and predictability of a romantic partner. The dependability subscale includes 4 items such as "My partner is dependable when it comes to things that are important to me." Participants rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect greater perceived partner dependability. Numerous studies have confirmed the subscale's reliability (Cronbach's alpha typically above .80) and its convergent validity with related constructs such as satisfaction and commitment.

Emotional support was evaluated using the Perceived Responsiveness Scale by Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004), specifically focusing on the emotional support subscale. This measure assesses how much individuals feel understood, cared for, and validated by their partners. The emotional support subscale contains 6 items, including statements like "My partner expresses genuine concern for my well-being." Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true). Higher total scores indicate a higher perception of emotional support from the partner. The scale has shown excellent psychometric properties, with internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) typically exceeding .85 and confirmed factorial and construct validity in both clinical and non-clinical populations.

### Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the bivariate relationships between relational commitment (dependent variable) and each independent variable (partner dependability and emotional support). To test the predictive power of the independent variables on relational commitment, standard linear regression analysis was conducted. All statistical tests were conducted at the significance level of  $p < .05$ .

### Findings and Results

Among the 380 participants, 197 (51.8%) were female and 183 (48.2%) were male. The age of participants ranged from 19 to 45 years, with the highest proportion falling within the 25–34 age group ( $n = 174$ , 45.8%). A total of 142 participants (37.4%) reported being married, while 238 (62.6%) were in non-marital romantic relationships. Regarding education, 152 individuals (40.0%) held a bachelor's degree, 106 (27.9%) had completed a master's degree, and 122 (32.1%) reported other levels of education. The average relationship duration was 3.7 years ( $SD = 2.1$ ).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 380)**

| Variable              | Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (SD) |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Relational Commitment | 5.33     | 0.87                    |
| Partner Dependability | 5.72     | 0.83                    |
| Emotional Support     | 5.49     | 0.91                    |

Participants reported moderately high to high levels across all study variables. The low standard deviations (ranging from 0.83 to 0.91) suggest a relatively consistent pattern of responses among participants in terms of their perceptions of commitment, dependability, and support in their relationships.

Prior to conducting the regression analysis, assumptions were assessed and confirmed. The normality of residuals was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test ( $p = .067$ ), indicating that the data did not significantly deviate from normality. Linearity was confirmed through scatterplots, which demonstrated a clear linear relationship between the predictors and the outcome

variable. Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with values of 1.62 for partner dependability and 1.47 for emotional support, well below the threshold of 10. Homoscedasticity was evaluated using a plot of standardized residuals versus predicted values, which showed constant variance across levels of prediction. Finally, independence of errors was verified with the Durbin-Watson statistic, which was 1.94, indicating no autocorrelation.

As shown in Table 2, Pearson correlation coefficients indicated a significant and positive correlation between Relational Commitment and both independent variables. Specifically, Partner Dependability was strongly correlated with Relational Commitment ( $r = .68, p < .01$ ), while Emotional Support also had a significant but slightly lower correlation ( $r = .59, p < .01$ ). This suggests that as perceptions of a partner's dependability and emotional support increase, so does the level of relational commitment.

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Variables (N = 380)**

| Variables                | 1     | 2     | 3 |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Relational Commitment | —     |       |   |
| 2. Partner Dependability | .68** | —     |   |
| 3. Emotional Support     | .59** | .62** | — |

These correlation coefficients confirm the hypothesized relationships and indicate that both predictors are significantly associated with commitment, with partner dependability showing the stronger association.

Table 3 presents the summary of the linear regression model used to predict relational commitment based on partner dependability and emotional support. The model was statistically significant,  $F(2, 377) = 168.29, p < .001$ , and explained approximately 47.2% of the variance in relational commitment ( $R^2 = .472$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .468$ ). This suggests that nearly half of the variability in commitment scores can be accounted for by the combined contribution of partner dependability and emotional support.

**Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis for Predicting Relational Commitment (N = 380)**

| Source     | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | R   | R <sup>2</sup> | R <sup>2</sup> adj | F      | p     |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-----|----------------|--------------------|--------|-------|
| Regression | 92.47          | 2   | 46.24       | .69 | .472           | .468               | 168.29 | <.001 |
| Residual   | 103.59         | 377 | 0.27        |     |                |                    |        |       |
| Total      | 196.06         | 379 |             |     |                |                    |        |       |

The significant F-value and high  $R^2$  values reinforce the strength of the regression model, indicating that the predictors collectively make a substantial contribution to explaining variations in relational commitment.

As detailed in Table 4, both Partner Dependability ( $\beta = .46, t = 9.87, p < .001$ ) and Emotional Support ( $\beta = .34, t = 7.51, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted Relational Commitment. The unstandardized coefficients (B) indicate that a one-unit increase in perceived partner dependability results in a 0.42 increase in commitment, while a one-unit increase in emotional support leads to a 0.31 increase in commitment.

**Table 4. Regression Coefficients Predicting Relational Commitment (N = 380)**

| Predictor             | B    | Std. Error | $\beta$ | t    | p     |
|-----------------------|------|------------|---------|------|-------|
| Constant              | 1.12 | 0.22       | —       | 5.09 | <.001 |
| Partner Dependability | 0.42 | 0.043      | .46     | 9.87 | <.001 |
| Emotional Support     | 0.31 | 0.041      | .34     | 7.51 | <.001 |

These results demonstrate that both predictors make unique and significant contributions to explaining relational commitment. Partner dependability emerged as the stronger predictor, confirming its central role in the formation of stable romantic bonds.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the predictive role of partner dependability and emotional support in shaping relational commitment among individuals in romantic relationships in Iraq. The statistical analyses revealed that both independent variables had a significant and positive correlation with the dependent variable. Specifically, Pearson correlation results demonstrated that partner dependability had a stronger relationship with relational commitment compared to emotional support. Furthermore, the results of the linear regression analysis confirmed that both variables were significant predictors, with partner dependability explaining a slightly greater proportion of variance in relational commitment.

These findings underscore the importance of partner reliability and emotional responsiveness in the development and maintenance of long-term relational bonds. The strong association between partner dependability and relational commitment aligns with the theoretical frameworks that position trust and predictability as foundational elements in romantic relationships. As shown in the foundational work by Gutiérrez et al., relational trust significantly enhances the willingness of individuals to stay committed even in the face of adversity, as it fosters a sense of emotional security and future orientation in the relationship (Gutiérrez et al., 2004). In the present study, participants who perceived their partners as dependable also reported higher levels of commitment, suggesting that dependability functions as a stabilizing force within the relational system.

The finding that emotional support also significantly predicted relational commitment confirms previous studies that emphasize the emotive and affective dimensions of intimacy as essential to relational satisfaction and longevity. According to Priem's physiological and behavioral research, perceived emotional support strengthens the emotional bond between partners and contributes to positive psychological outcomes, such as relational satisfaction and increased commitment (Priem, 2020). Furthermore, Saccardi and Masthoff emphasized that emotional stability and interpersonal emotional support improve team dynamics and interpersonal loyalty, which extends to romantic partnerships where mutual responsiveness and care predict relational resilience (Saccardi & Masthoff, 2023).

The present findings are also in agreement with the work of Atoum and Al-Shoboul, who noted that emotional intelligence plays a mediating role in the relationship between emotional support and commitment. They proposed that individuals who perceive themselves as emotionally supported are more likely to express and receive affection, leading to enhanced commitment levels (Atoum & Al-Shoboul, 2018). In line with this, our findings suggest that emotional support does not function merely as a coping mechanism but also acts as a mechanism that reinforces attachment and the cognitive decision to stay in the relationship.

This interplay between support and commitment is further supported by the findings of Sawka et al., who emphasized that strengthening emotional support services in therapeutic and community settings directly leads to improved interpersonal trust and long-term relational engagement (Sawka et al., 2002). Participants in this study who experienced their partners as emotionally validating and empathetic expressed significantly greater willingness to maintain their relationship, regardless of relational stressors, a finding that resonates with the broader literature on emotional safety and its behavioral consequences in committed relationships.

Moreover, the results of this study add cultural depth to existing models. The Iraqi context, which is shaped by collectivist values, traditional family structures, and emerging modern norms, creates a relational environment in which commitment is both socially expected and emotionally negotiated. Findings from Rashidi et al. and Kamrani Dashtgerdi et al. suggest that in such contexts, differentiation of self, relational roles, and emotional interdependence function as cultural moderators influencing how support and dependability are perceived (Kamrani Dashtgerdi & Salehi, 2022; Rashidi et al., 2022). In the

current study, participants who described a balance between emotional closeness and personal stability were more likely to report high relational commitment, confirming the role of cultural factors in mediating universal relational processes.

Additionally, the contribution of partner dependability to relational commitment supports the mindful differentiation model proposed by Regas, which integrates elements of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and intimacy into couple dynamics. This model posits that when individuals are secure in their self-definition, they are better equipped to interpret partner behavior accurately, leading to enhanced perceptions of dependability and increased commitment (Regas, 2019). The current results suggest that individuals in more emotionally attuned relationships are likely to interpret their partner's consistency and responsiveness as indicators of long-term reliability, which reinforces their decision to remain committed.

The study also confirms that emotional support and dependability function additively rather than exclusively. Participants who reported high levels on both variables showed the highest scores on relational commitment, consistent with the hypothesis that trustworthiness and affective support operate in tandem to reinforce commitment. This is supported by the work of Gabnai-Nagy et al., who found that emotional fluctuations and emotional unavailability in infertile couples predicted poor treatment outcomes and lower relationship persistence, showing how both emotional and practical support play parallel roles in relationship durability (Gabnai-Nagy et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Fardad et al. and Ghorbani et al. confirmed the mediating role of communication patterns and emotional regulation in predicting marital commitment, further underscoring the systemic nature of relational commitment as both outcome and process (Fardad et al., 2022; Ghorbani et al., 2018). In our study, emotional support and dependability were likely interpreted through communication patterns, trust scripts, and attachment models shaped by cultural norms and individual experiences.

Our results also align with the growing body of literature that emphasizes the contextual sensitivity of relational dynamics. For instance, Momeni et al. showed that marital intimacy and family adaptability function as significant predictors of commitment when trust and communication are secure (Momeni et al., 2015). Likewise, the findings of Sloan et al. in the context of organizational commitment suggest parallels in how differentiation and perceived reliability influence both professional and personal relational loyalty (Sloan et al., 2017).

Finally, the emotional-cognitive interaction proposed by Nguyen in examining emotional foundations of political behavior finds a unique parallel in the context of romantic relationships: emotional experiences—particularly support and emotional resonance—are not just background elements but are integral to sustained commitment and decision-making (Nguyen, 2019). Our findings affirm that affective elements shape both the experience and evaluation of the relationship, reinforcing or weakening the intent to remain committed.

Despite its significant findings, this study is not without limitations. First, the use of self-report instruments may introduce bias due to social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment, particularly in a conservative cultural context where discussing intimate relational dynamics may still carry stigma. Second, while the sample size was adequate, the non-probabilistic convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the results to all romantic relationships in Iraq, particularly rural or lower-income populations. Third, the cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of causal relationships among the variables, making it difficult to determine whether emotional support and partner dependability lead to commitment or vice versa.

Future studies should consider employing longitudinal designs to better understand how the dynamics between emotional support, dependability, and commitment evolve over time. Additionally, dyadic research that includes data from both partners would provide a richer and more balanced view of how these variables operate within couple systems. It would also be beneficial to explore the moderating role of cultural values, gender roles, and family expectations on the perception and impact



of emotional support and partner dependability in commitment. Further studies can integrate qualitative methodologies to uncover culturally embedded narratives that shape these relational constructs.

The findings of this study hold important implications for couples therapy, premarital counseling, and relationship education programs. Practitioners should prioritize the development of emotional support skills such as empathy, validation, and responsiveness in relationship interventions. Additionally, enhancing partner dependability through routines of reliability, transparency, and follow-through may serve as a strategic focus to build trust and increase relational commitment. Relationship educators and counselors working in culturally diverse or transitional contexts like Iraq should tailor their approaches to respect cultural sensitivities while still promoting psychological resilience and emotional literacy in romantic partnerships.

### 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.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

### 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.

### Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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