

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PERCEIVED STRESS, SPOUSAL SUPPORT, EMOTION REGULATION, SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING, AND MARITAL SATISFACTION OF THAI FIRST-TIME PARENTS

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Abstract: Parenthood is new to first-time parents. While it brings excitement, hope, and joy, being a parent for the first time also brings stress and challenges as a result of the new roles and responsibilities that ‘first-timers’ have to confront during the early years of being parents. The current investigation attempted to examine the direct and indirect influences of perceived stress and spousal support on marital satisfaction, being mediated by emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression) and subjective well-being (positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction) among Thai first-time parents. In Study I and II, a total of 559 first-time parents with one child (or twin) aged no more than two years-old and living in Bangkok and suburbs participated. They were asked to complete a set of survey questionnaires in Thai, consisting of a demographic section, the Perceived Stress Scale, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support-Significant Others subscale, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the Couples Satisfaction Index. The results revealed that the ‘direct’ path model is significantly better fitting and more parsimonious than the indirect or full path models, and that the structural path relationships of the ‘full’ path model between the variables operated differently for first-time fathers and mothers. Additionally, emotion regulation played different roles between fathers and mothers.

Keywords: Perceived Stress, Spousal Support, Emotion Regulation, Subjective Well-Being, Marital Satisfaction, First-Time Parents.

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Introduction

Children are parents' source of fulfillment and happiness. A large number of studies have attempted to discover the relationship between parenthood and happiness. By being mothers or fathers, parents report better mental health and lower distress (McKenzie & Carter, 2013). Previous studies also reported a relationship between parenthood and marital satisfaction in which children are believed to play an important role in how couples experience their marriage (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). While it is true that having a child is a gift that most people expect, many studies found that parenthood does not only bring joy and happiness, but it also brings stress and challenge (e.g., Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Rizzo & Schiffrin, 2013; Twenge et al., 2003).

Many studies indicated that the arrival of the first child leads to a decrease in marital satisfaction (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003), and which might affect couples' cognition to divorce (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). From the aforementioned perspectives, it can be inferred that being a parent challenges all parents around the world, especially 'first-timers'. Parenthood is new to them and they must exert much effort to pass each stage of their child's development. According to a study by Crohan (1996), most new parents report a decrease in marital satisfaction and increase in conflict during the transition to parenthood. Spousal support, in particular, plays an important role in first-time parents' well-being (Smith, & Howard, 2008; Wolkoff, 2014). For example, mother's perception of the father's empathy is the most important contributor to marital satisfaction in the transition to first-time parents (Wolkoff, 2014). Another predictor of subjective well-being is how individuals regulate their emotions. Research has shown that reappraisal or cognitive reevaluation of a specific situation, one form of emotion regulation, is positively related to well-being. In the process of reappraisal, individuals' change their thinking before emotional responses are generated which would also change its emotional impact (Gross & John, 2003). However, there is no evidence of relationship patterns among perceived stress, spousal support, emotion regulation strategies, subjective well-being, and marital satisfaction among Thai first time parents. In addition, little is known about the difference of first-time fathers and mothers in these relationship patterns.

Research Objectives

There are two objectives:

1. To investigate which prediction model best explains the pattern of structural relationships hypothesized among perceived stress, spousal support, emotion regulation strategies, subjective well-being, and marital satisfaction among first-time parents.
2. To investigate gender differences in the pattern of structural relationships hypothesized among perceived stress, spousal support, emotion regulation strategies, subjective well-being, and marital satisfaction between Thai first-time mothers and first-time fathers.

Literature Review

The review of literature in this research comprised the five key variables of this study – perceived stress, spousal support, emotion regulation, subjective well-being, and marital satisfaction.

Perceived Stress refers to one's perception and appraisal of the potential harm of environmental events that occur in one's life, especially those that exceed one's ability to cope (Cohen, Kessler, & Gordon, 1995). When individuals perceive that they do not have available resources to cope with a stressor, they appraise the situation as stressful and concurrently experience negative emotional responses. The work on psychological distress and its appraisal process can be seen from work derived from the theory of psychological stress and coping developed by Lazarus and colleagues (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress produces different effects on each individual. Some people are able to cope effectively with stress; at a given condition, stress is great for their development. On the other hand, others are weakened because of a stressful situation.

Spousal Support is one of the most significant factors influencing marital and life satisfaction as a helping relationship between husband and wife acts as a 'buffer' against stress and enhances individual well-being (Burke & Weir, 1977). Spousal support refers to the support that individuals receive from their spouse. It is a common opinion that spousal support affects the marital relationship. Many adults perceive marriage as a source of privileged support and emotional intimacy (Weiss & Halford, 1996, as cited in Yedirir & Hamartab, 2015). Lack of spousal support is the basis for many problematic marriages, whereas supportive behavior prevents the increase of marital conflicts. Perceived spousal support in stressful situations prevents emotional withdrawal which cause harm to marriages, and increases people's belief that they are not alone and that they can easily overcome the situation in question (Rugel, 1997, Cutrona, 1996a, all as cited in Yedirir & Hamartab, 2015).

Emotion Regulation, according to Gross (1998b), emotion regulation is defined as "the process by which individuals influence the emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions. Emotion regulatory processes may be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious, and may have an effect at one or more points in the emotion generative process" (p. 275). In the present study, two strategies of emotion regulation were explored: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal is an antecedent-focused strategy, a form of cognitive change used to transform the situation in order to change its emotional impact, whereas expressive suppression is a response-focused emotion regulation strategy belonging to the response modulation stage that inhibits the way individuals express their emotions (Gross, 1998a & 1998b). The use of various emotion regulation strategies was found to be important for parents and to produce different effects. Previous research found that cognitive reappraisal used by parents had positive relationship with marital satisfaction, family warmth (Enebrink, Björnsdotterb, & Ghaderiab, 2013) and negative relationship with depressive symptoms and distress (Compas et al., 2015). Furthermore, the use of suppression is negatively correlated with marital satisfaction and family warmth (Enebrink et al., 2013).

Subjective Well-being (SWB) arose from the hedonic viewpoint stating that well-being relates to emotional state, both positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction. Some theorists believe that people must satisfy their needs in order to be happy, and that prolonged unsatisfied needs lead to unhappiness (e.g., Maslow, 1954). Needs theories, such as that of Maslow, state that the fulfillment of universal needs will enhance individuals' level of happiness? Subjective well-being can also be experienced when people achieve some of their important goals. Michalos' (1985) multiple discrepancy theory of satisfaction suggests that individuals compare their current conditions with some standard. The discrepancy between themselves and the standard affects their level of satisfaction (Michalos, 1985). Top-down theory proposes that happy people are more likely to experience situations in a positive way while bottom-up approach suggests that happiness is derived from the accumulation of many small pleasures (Diener, 1984). In the current study, SWB was defined as people's evaluation of their lives, whether they are leading a desirable and rewarding one or not, in two broad aspects: an affective component, and a cognitive component. Operationally, SWB comprises the presence of positive affect, absence/low level of negative affect, and life satisfaction (global judgment).

Marital Satisfaction. One of the most common contexts which new couples experience is the transition to parenthood. LeMasters (1957) opined that becoming a parent is one of the most difficult adjustments for married couples. The family must be reorganized for the addition of a new family member and, if seen as a crisis, may disrupt intimacy and communication in the marital relationship. During the transition to parenthood, a number of difficulties can arise which, in turn, can have a detrimental effect on marital satisfaction. Some problems that couples experience are lack of sleep (LeMasters, 1957), more housework (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003), and a decline in leisure time (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). In terms of gender differences, feeling guilty from not being a better mother (Rizzo & Schiffrin, 2013), unfair division of household labor (Dew & Wilcox, 2011), and more disagreement with one's spouse (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003) can happen in wives, whereas decrease in wife's sexual responsiveness and economic pressure can be experienced by husbands (LeMasters, 1957). These factors may lead to a decline in marital satisfaction. On a contrasting note, however, not all couples become less satisfied with their marriage after the arrival of their first child (Dew & Wilcox, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the current investigation comprises three models (see Figures 1-3) showing the hypothesized links among the core variables. Model 1 (direct model) investigated direct relationships between perceived stress and spousal support with marital satisfaction among Thai first-time parents. Model 2 (indirect model) investigated indirect relationships between perceived stress and spousal support on the participants' level of marital satisfaction, being mediated by their reported levels of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Model 3 (full model) investigated path relationships between perceived stress, spousal support, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction with marital satisfaction among first-time parents.

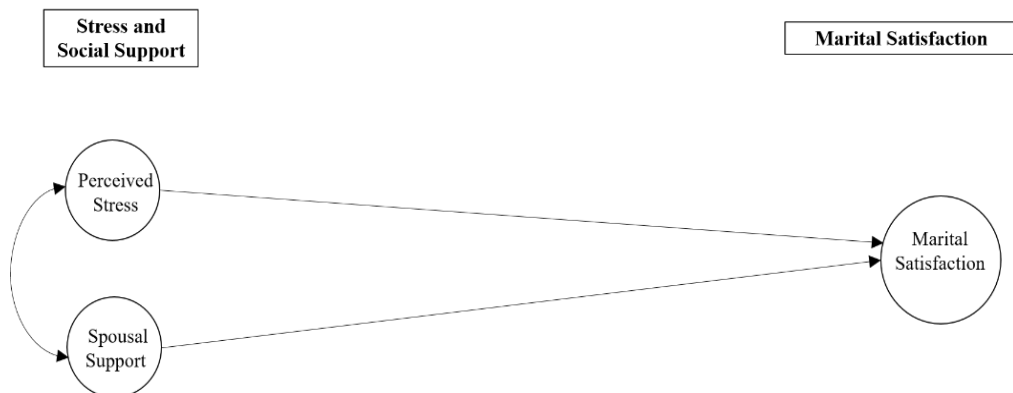


Figure 1: Model 1 Shows the Hypothesized Direct Impact of Perceived Stress and Spousal Support on Marital Satisfaction.

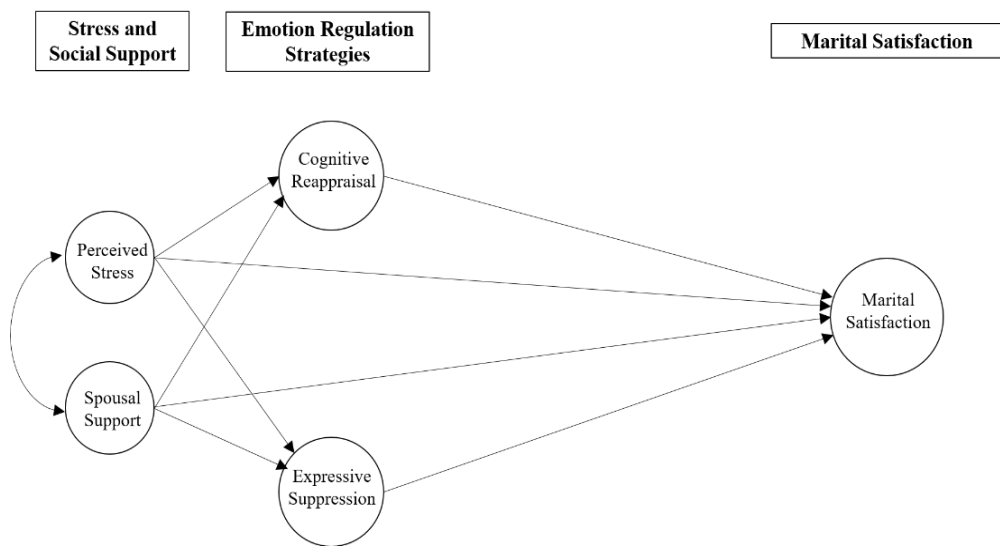


Figure 2: Model 2 Shows the Hypothesized Direct and Indirect Impact of Perceived Stress and Spousal Support on Marital Satisfaction, Being Mediated by the Emotion Regulation Strategies of Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression.

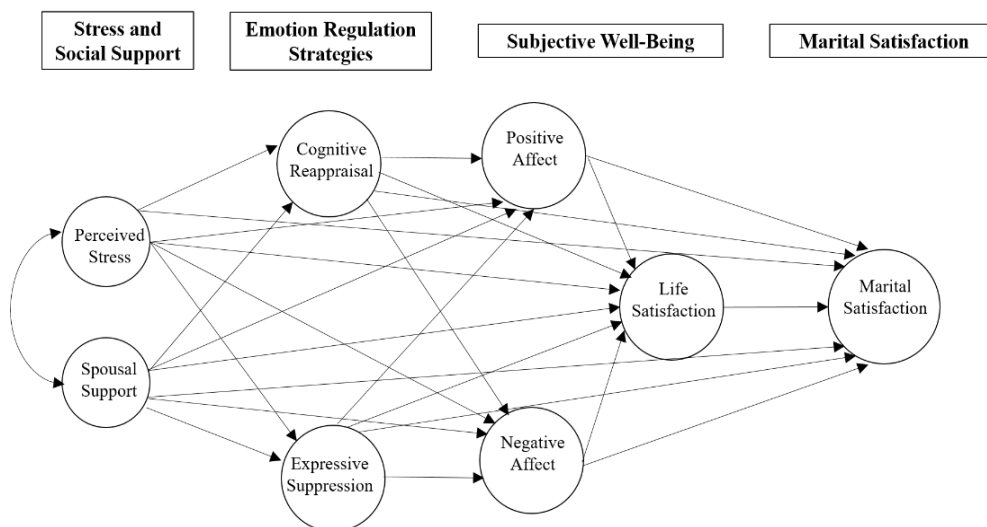


Figure 3: Model 3 Shows the Hypothesized Direct and Indirect Impact of Perceived Stress and Spousal Support on Marital Satisfaction, Being Mediated by (1) the Emotion Regulation Strategies of Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression, (2) the Subjective Well-Being Components of Positive Affect, Negative Affect, and Life Satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of 599 Thai first-time parents (fathers: $n=170$, 30.4%; mothers: $n=389$, 69.6%) living in Bangkok and suburbs, aged between 18 and 51 years, with a mean age of 32.97 years. The majority of the participants were married (93.9%), with 5.4% separated or divorced, and 0.7% widowed. More than half (54.3%) of participants' children were aged from birth to one year, and 45.7% were aged between more than one year to two years. The inclusion criteria were that the participants (1) had a first child/child aged not older than two years; (2) must be a heterosexual parent in either a marital or co-habitation relationship; (3) must be aged between 18 and 60 years;

Materials

The study employed a seven-part self-administered survey questionnaire in Thai.

Part 1. Personal Information. A researcher-constructed demographic questionnaire was utilized to ask participants about demographic information such as gender, age, education, marital status, occupation, income, and so on.

Part 2. Perceived Stress Scale – Short Form (PSS-10). The original PSS, developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein in 1983, is a widely accepted 14-

item instrument used to measure the degree to which events in one's life are perceived as stressful (Cohen et al., 1983). The questions ask how often each situation happened in the last month, using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 = Never to 4 = Very often. In this study, the Thai version of PSS-10 (T-PSS-10; Wongpakaran & Wongpakaran, 2010) was used.

Part 3. Spousal Support Scale. This scale is the subscale of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The original MSPSS, developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley in 1988, is a 12-item scale used to measure perceived emotional and instrumental support and the perceived adequacy of the support received across three factors: family, friends, and significant other. For the purpose of this study, only four items from the 'significant others' subscale was utilized to measure spousal support and re-labeled as 'your spouse'. Each item in the MSPSS is rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = Very strongly disagree to 7 = Very strongly agree. Participants are asked to indicate how they feel about each statement. In this present study, the revised Thai version of MSPSS (Wongpakaran & Wongpakaran, 2012) was used.

Part 4. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). The ERQ, developed by Gross and John in 2003, measures individual differences in the use of two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. This measure consists of 10 items focusing on how participants control their emotions, using a scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. The questions ask about emotional experience and emotional expression. The Thai translation of ERQ by Dr. Saovane Noppaprach (Noppaprach, Blauw, & Tuicomepee, 2015) was used in the present study.

Part 5. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). The PANAS, developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen in 1988, is a 20-item measure of mood states, including both positive affect and negative affect. It is used to measure the extent to which participants have experienced each feeling and emotion during a specified timeframe. Participants are asked to respond to a number of words that describe feelings and emotions. The PANAS is measured on a scale ranging from 1 = Not at all to 5 = Extremely.

Part 6. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The SWLS, developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin in 1985, is widely used to measure global life satisfaction. Participants are asked to indicate how much they agree with the test items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha was .87 and test-retest correlation coefficient was .82. The SWLS was translated by Dr. Itsara Boonyarit of Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

Part 7. Couples Satisfaction Index – Short Form (CSI-16). The original CSI, developed by Funk and Rogge in 2007, is a 32-item scale that aims to measure relationship satisfaction. The scale has various types of question formats and response scales. One global item on a 7-point Likert scale is, "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship..." with a scale ranging from 0 = Extremely unhappy to 6 = Perfect. The CSI-16 has good internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .98 (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

Procedure

The data collection procedure was basically conducted via the convenience sampling method with first-time parents living in greater Bangkok and suburbs, using a set of self-report structured questionnaires, in which four of those scales had already been translated into the Thai language by previous researchers. Only the PANAS and the CSI-16 were translated into Thai in the present study. The two measures underwent forward and back translation procedures and their psychometric properties were investigated in order to ensure their cross-cultural reliability and construct validity. Informed consent and the confidentiality clause were clarified to participants before data collection. Upon the completion of data collection, every completed questionnaire was audited and screened; only valid ones were subjected to data analysis.

Design and Analysis

The multi-model path analysis to evaluate and compare the efficacy of the aforementioned three models (see Figures 1-3) in order to identify the best-fit model that can best explain the pattern of structural relationships hypothesized among perceived stress, spousal support, and marital satisfaction. Preliminary analyses involved descriptive statistics and scale reliability analysis. In testing the best-fit of the causal model, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed. Subsequently, further analysis was conducted using the multi-group path analysis (vis SEM) to evaluate and compare the influence of perceived stress and spousal support on marital satisfaction among Thai first-time mothers and fathers.

Results

In order to investigate the internal consistency of the Thai-translated versions of the PANAS and the CSI-16, as well as the other four scales of the PSS-10, the MSPSS – Significant Others subscale, the ERQ, and the SWLS, the items representing these six scales were item analyzed. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the six scales ranged from .67 to .97. The computed Cronbach's alpha values for each scale were as follows: .81 for 'perceived stress'; .94 for 'spousal support'; .81 for 'cognitive reappraisal'; .67 for 'expressive suppression'; .90 for 'positive affect'; .88 for 'negative affect'; .89 for 'life satisfaction'; and .97 for 'marital satisfaction'. For the test of construct and convergent validity, both PANAS and CSI-16 were proved to be valid. In short, statistical analysis showed that all six Thai-translated instruments were reliable and valid, confirming their sound psychometric properties for subsequent use with the participants of this study.

Regarding the first research objective, three hierarchical models were posited and were evaluated and compared as to their efficacy in explaining the influence of the identified antecedent factors of perceived stress and spousal support on the participants' level of marital satisfaction, both directly and indirectly, being mediated by their reported levels of cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction.

The fit of these three hierarchical path models posited to represent the direct and indirect structural relationships between perceived stress and spousal support with the criterion variable of marital satisfaction among first-time parents, being

mediated by cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction was tested via structural equation modeling. Table 1 presents the goodness-of-fit indices for these three models as well as their comparison fit indices.

Table 1: Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Values, Incremental Fit Indices (NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI), Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Model Comparison

Model	$\chi^2 (N=559)$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	AIC	RMSEA
Model 1									
Direct model	174.552	32	<.001	0.971	0.976	0.966	0.976	220.522	0.089
Model 2									
Indirect model	466.436	95	<.001	0.936	0.949	0.935	0.948	548.436	0.084
Model 3									
Full path	1278.919	301	<.001	0.900	0.918	0.904	0.918	1432.919	0.076
Model Comparison									
Model 1 vs. Model 2	291.884	63	<.001						
Model 1 vs. Model 3	1104.000	269	<.001						
Model 2 vs Model 3	812.483	206	<.001						

Although the overall chi-square goodness-of-fit values for all three models are significant ($p < .01$), the incremental fit indices (NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI) are all at or above 0.90 (range: 0.900 – 0.976). These fit indices indicate that all three models provide a very good fit relative to their null or independence models (i.e., the posited models represented between 90% to 97.6% improvement in fit over their null or independence models), and support the hypothesized structure of the posited direct, indirect, and full path models. The RMSEA value of 0.076 for the full path model is also within the range suggested by Browne and Cudeck (1993) and indicates that the model fits the population covariance matrix well. The RMSEA values of 0.089 and 0.084 for the direct and indirect models, respectively, indicate some errors of approximation when compared to the population covariance matrix. The models also yielded Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) values of 220.522, 548.436, and 1432.919 for the direct, indirect, and full path models, respectively. In evaluating hypothesized models, the AIC (Akaike, 1987) takes into account both model parsimony and model fit. Simple models that fit well receive low scores, whereas poorly fitting models get high scores. Comparing the AIC measure for the three hierarchical models, it is evident that the direct model provided a lower AIC value (220.522) than the indirect model (548.436) and the full path model (1432.919). These parsimony fit indices indicate that the direct model (see Figure 1) is both more parsimonious and better fitting than the indirect and full path models.

With regard to the second research objective, it was decided to employ the most complex model (Model 3) for investigation of gender differences as this model is fully identified.

In determining the consistency of the model across groups, the model was first specified to have the same pattern of path coefficients for both groups, but allowed these coefficients to be estimated separately within each group. For this unconstrained/variant model, $\chi^2 (df=598)=1508.015, p<.001$. The incremental fit indices (NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI) are all close to or above 0.90 (range: 0.880 – 0.923). These fit indices indicated that the posited model provided a good fit relative to the null or independence model, and support the hypothesized structure of the model posited for the male and female participants. In order to test the consistency of the model across groups, the model was respecified to have the path coefficients constrained to be invariant across the two groups of participants. Results from the analysis indicated that this constrained/invariant model fitted the data very well, $\chi^2 (df=641)=1579.289, p<.001$; the incremental fit indices of NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI ranged from 0.875 to 0.921. Results of a chi-square difference test comparing this model with one that simply specified the same pattern of path coefficients indicated significant difference in fit between the variant and invariant models, $\chi^2 (df=43) = 71.273, p<.001$. This suggests that the hypothesized structural path relationships (between the exogenous, mediator, and criterion variables) posited on the basis of the theoretical assumptions underlying the influences of the exogenous factors of perceived stress and spousal support, the mediator variables of cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction on the participants' reported level of marital satisfaction (criterion variable), operated differently for the first-time fathers and first-time mothers. Table 2 presents the goodness-of-fit indices for both these models, together with the model comparison statistics.

Table 2: Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Values, Incremental Fit Indices (NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI), RMSEA, and Model Comparison

Model	$\chi^2 (N=559)$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Null Model	12586.204	702	<.001	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.174
Model A:								
Unconstrained (Variant) Model	1508.015	598	<.001	0.880	0.924	0.910	0.923	0.052
Model B:								
Constrained (Invariant) Model	1579.289	641	<.001	0.875	0.921	0.914	0.921	0.051
Model Comparison								
Model A vs. Model B	71.273	43	<.001	0.005	0.003	0.004	0.002	

The significant standardized path coefficients for the marital satisfaction path model for first-time fathers and first-time mothers are presented in Figure 4.

(See Figure 4 on the next page)

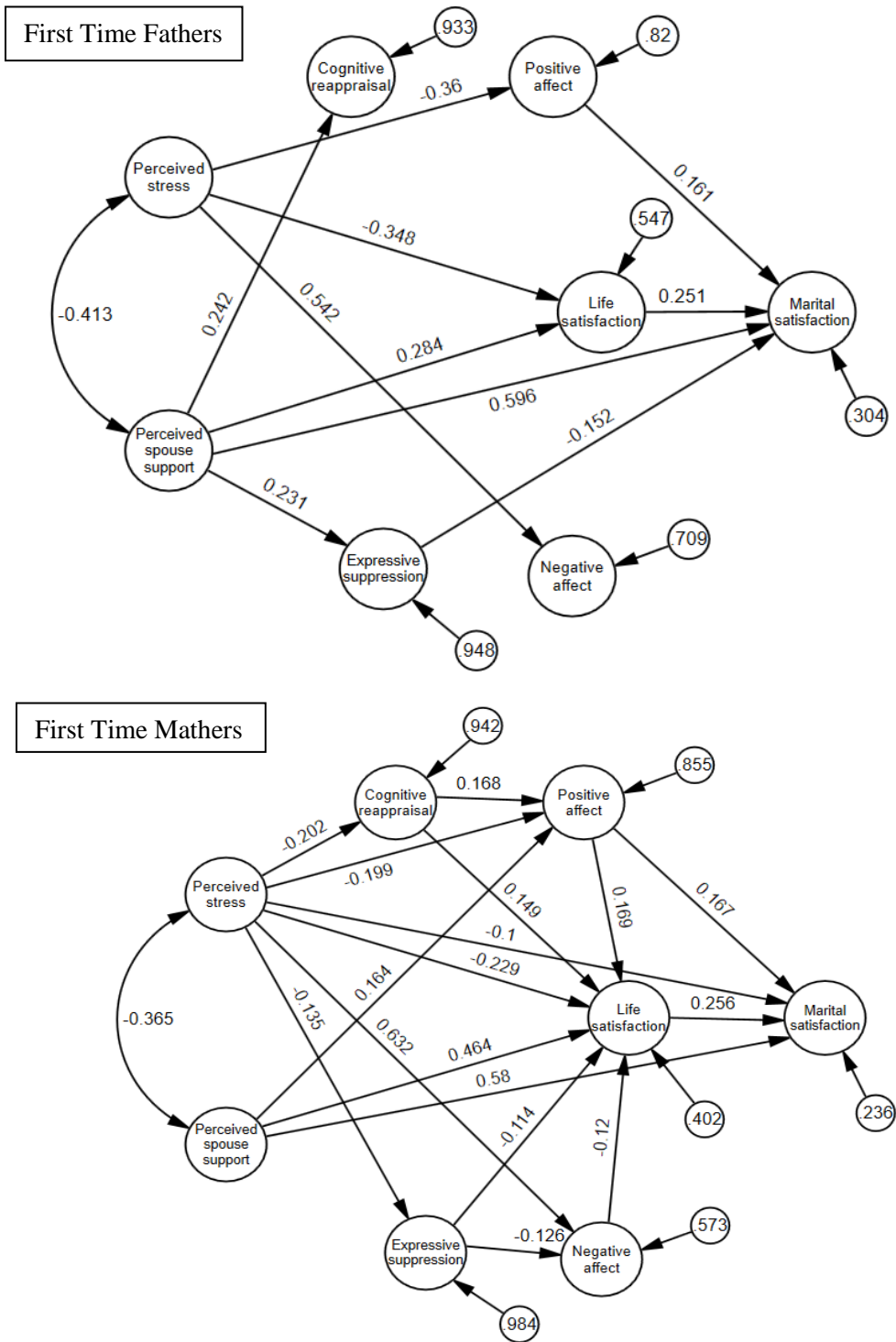


Figure 4: Marital Satisfaction Path Model for First-Time Fathers and First-Time Mothers Together with the Models' Significant Path Coefficients

The patterns of direct and indirect structural relationships posited between the variables of perceived stress, spousal support, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction with the criterion variable of marital satisfaction operated differently for the Thai first-time fathers and mothers. In terms of the specific path coefficients yielded by the male and female path models, it is clear that they are somewhat different and, thus, confirm the conclusion that the patterns of structural relationships posited between the marital satisfaction model factors (exogenous and mediators) and the criterion variable of marital satisfaction operated differently for the Thai first-time fathers and mothers.

Discussion

The findings from Study I showed that all three hierarchical models fitted the data set very well, but that the *direct path model* is both significantly better fitting and more parsimonious than either the indirect or full path model. However, the results from multi-group analysis in Study II suggest that the hypothesized structural relationships among all five variables (perceived stress, spousal support, emotion regulation, subjective well-being, and marital satisfaction) operated differently for first-time fathers and first-time mothers.

First, it was demonstrated that in the case of first-time parents, emotion regulation strategies (cognitive appraisal and suppression) were not so helpful toward their marital satisfaction, on the whole. However, they proved to be significant when looking at each particular group of participants. Previous research found significant gender differences in the use of emotion regulation strategies (Gross & John, 2003). Suppression can mediate the relationship between perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction in first-time fathers (but not mothers), in which using more suppression is associated with decreased marital satisfaction.

The finding is consistent with previous research in that the use of suppression comes with adverse side effects (Gross, 1998a; Gross & John, 2003) such as lower social satisfaction and relationship closeness (Gross, 2002; Gross & John, 2003). The result is also consistent with previous research on the use of suppression in collectivistic cultures like Thailand. Because of cultural values to maintain interpersonal relationship and social harmony (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007; Matsumoto et al., 2008), suppression may be important to these cultures to give individuals time to think about the most appropriate response in a given situation (Matsumoto et al., 2008). On the other hand, emotion regulation strategies were found to mediate the relationship between perceived stress and marital satisfaction in first-time mothers. However, the path model shows that with the low use of reappraisal in times of stress, it may not help change the effect of high stress on lower level of marital satisfaction for Thai first-time mothers. Another indirect association is the path from the perception of high stress and low use of suppression as influencing more negative affect, lower life satisfaction, and subsequently lower marital satisfaction. If first-time mothers experience negative feelings from being expressive, it may lower the levels of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. In the collectivistic context, when individuals try to be expressive about how they feel, this is perceived as contradicting Thai cultural values where being suppressive is seen as being more

congruent with the Asian goals of maintaining harmony and being interdependent with others (Butler et al., 2007; Matsumoto et al., 2008). Incongruence, in this context, may lead to negative emotions such as feelings of guilt or shame which, in turn, reduce life satisfaction and marital satisfaction.

Second, perceived stress was found to have a direct association with marital satisfaction among first-time parents overall, but was not significant with marital satisfaction for first-time fathers. However, it can influence indirectly through positive affect and life satisfaction. In addition, the results demonstrated that subjective well-being components acted as mediators in many relationships for both first-time fathers and mothers in this study. This is consistent to top-down theory of subjective well-being in that being happy with oneself leads to domain satisfaction such as marital relationship.

Finally, negative affect highly correlated with perceived stress which implied that stress, not spousal support, is the only predictor of negative emotion among first-time parents from the result of the path model. When individuals appraise the situation as stressful, they concurrently experience negative emotional responses (Cohen et al., 1995). In addition, having low or high level of spousal support is not associated with negative affect which means that spousal support does not predict negative feelings in both groups of parents. Vinokur and Ryn (1993) suggested that social support alone might not be enough to be accounted for the adverse side of mental health. Social undermining like interpersonal conflict, which was not the opposite pole of spousal support, should also be studied in combination as it reported in a decrease in well-being. This is also supported by DeLongis, Capreol, Holtzman, O'Brien, & Campbell (2004) that the interaction of both social support and social strain predicted negative affect in husbands and wives.

Limitations of This Study

Before discussing the implications of the current study's findings, some limitations should be noted. First, the respondents were required to answer questions related to their marital relationship and support from spouse. In the process of revealing their emotional experiences, they may have presented themselves in a much better light. In addition, response bias can also occur as a result of Thai cultural values relative to the role of parents. According to a review by Deniel Detzner and his colleagues (2010), the primary role of Southeast Asian father is to provide financial support for the family, while mothers have the primary responsibility in child-rearing.

Second, due to time and resource constraints, some important aspects of the survey and the intervention may have been compromised. For example, the survey could have been administered in some other public venues that did not require a long process of granting study permission such as well-baby clinics or hospital departments.

Third, using online information and tests could create a problem in that not all the participants were keen or experienced in using mobile applications. It was observed that some of them did not know how to navigate through each question on their devices; some had problems accessing the tests. Thus, some participants took longer time than expected or felt bored at completing the questionnaires and gave up.

A fourth limitation was the lack of Thai-based theoretical perspectives and related studies on the key variables of this study, all together or independent of each other. Discussion relied heavily on Western perspectives and studies which may not necessarily reflect Thai culture and values.

The findings of the current study should be interpreted with some caution because of some intervening or limiting factors beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, despite some identified limitations, it is anticipated that this study would provide valuable knowledge and database for a number of individuals and groups who are involved or interested in investigating the interrelationships among perceived stress, spousal support, marital satisfaction, emotion regulation strategies, and subjective well-being. Thus, the contribution of this study towards expansion of the literature cannot be overemphasized.

Implications of Findings

As gleaned from the results of this study, the findings from this study would serve as a valuable knowledge resource on the understanding of the relationship between perceived stress, spousal support, emotion regulation strategies, subjective well-being, and marital satisfaction. The significant path models both in first-time fathers and mothers would provide a better understanding on how they should regulate their emotions, especially in times of stress. On a related note, the Thai-translated measures used in this study all yielded sound psychometric properties and, therefore, can be used by other researchers who are interested in the same variables for study purposes within the Thai setting.

Conclusion

The nature of the stress and challenges that may occur as a result of the new roles and responsibilities that first-time parents have to experience during the early stages of their child's life influences how satisfied they are with their life and marriage. Being a parent for the first time can have negative impact on their well-being. It can be concluded that spousal support is an important factor in increasing the level of marital happiness; by the same token, low level of spousal support will likely lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction. Recent research had demonstrated the role of emotion regulation in buffering against stress and in enhancing spousal support and marital satisfaction. Path analysis demonstrated the impact of perceived stress and spousal support on the level of marital satisfaction, mediated by the emotion regulation strategies of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and the subjective well-being components of positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction operated differently among first-time fathers and mothers.

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