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NCFR Lightning Paper

Actor-Partner Effects of Positive and Negative Conflict in Marriage and Relationship Education Programming

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Theoretical Background and Literature

- **Family Systems Theory** (Bateson et al., 1956)
 - Emphasis on interdependence between members of the system
- Relationship conflict can be maladaptive or adaptive depending on how it is managed and resolved.
 - **Positive Conflict:** Goal of coming to a resolution; improves relationship quality and greater dyadic coping (Gottman, 1994; Johnson et al., 2018; Kanter, et al., 2022; Kuster et al., 2017)
 - **Negative Conflict:** Conflict behaviors that are harmful and often result in making the situation worse than when it was before the conflict started (Gottman, 1994; Kanter, et al., 2022)
- Gendered expectations can lead to differing reactions to negativity and conflict (Pasley et al., 2001).



Study Goal & Research Question

- **Study Goal:** The current study investigated how individual baseline levels of positive and negative conflict management skills influenced their positive and negative relationship conflict tactics during and after the intervention of the marital education program.
- **Research Question:** Do husbands/wives demonstrate an actor/partner effect of positive/negative conflict at T1 on positive/negative conflict at T2?

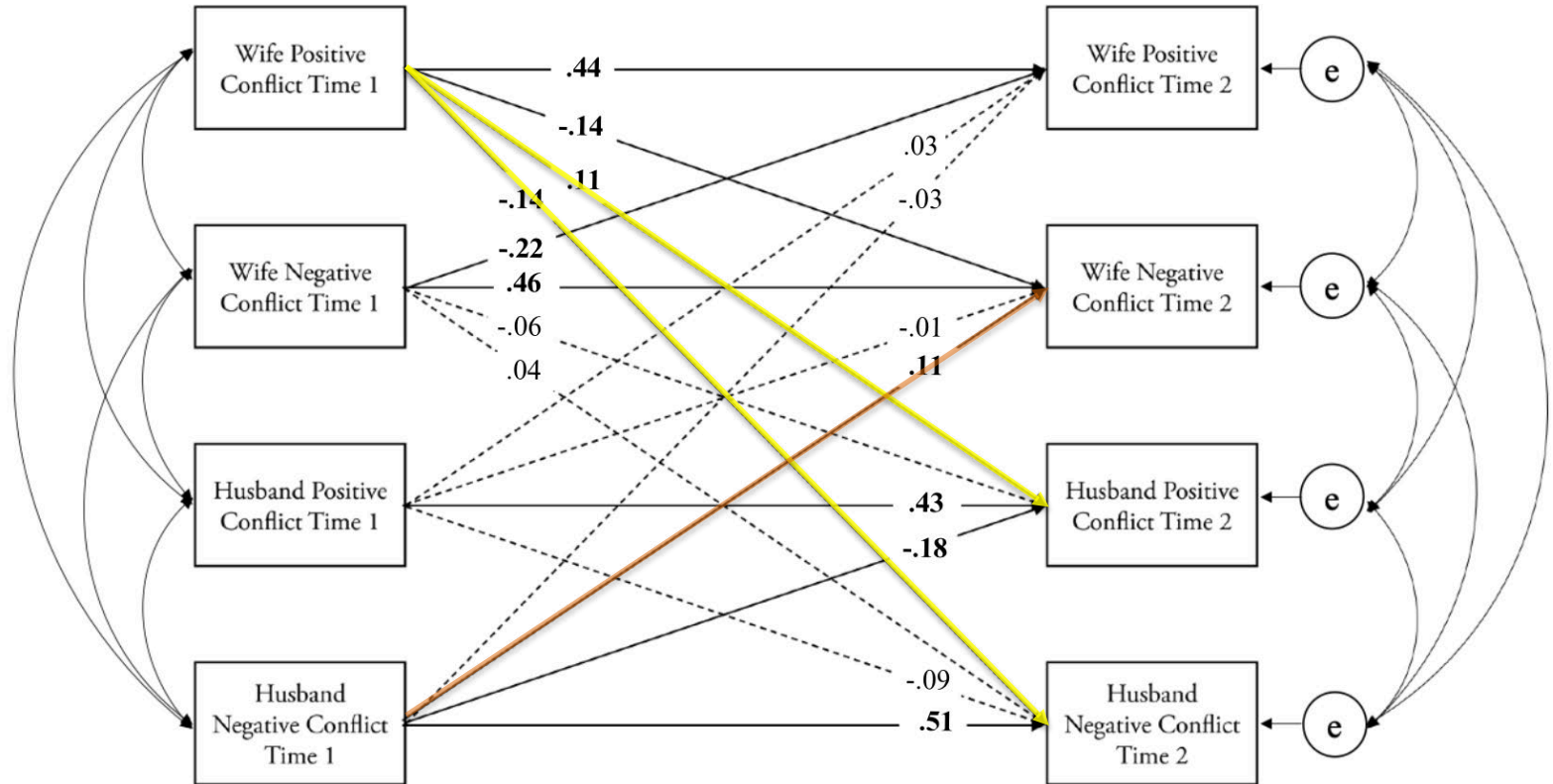


Method

- Data collected through FCPR in partnership with local non-profit serving the state of Florida using federal HMRE funding. **Grant #:** HHS-2020-ACF-OFA-ZB-1817 **IRB:** STUDY00001675
- **Measures:**
 - **Positive Conflict Management** (ACF, 2021): e.g.: “When my partner/spouse and I had a serious disagreement, we worked on it together to find a resolution.”
 - **Negative Conflict Management** (ACF, 2021): e.g.: “Small issues suddenly became big arguments.”
- 774 different-sex married couples
 - Age: Women $M= 44.7$ years; Men $M= 46.7$ years
- Analytical Strategy: **Actor-Partner Interdependence Model**



Positive and Negative Conflict Actor-Partner Interdependence Model



Note: Solid lines indicate significant paths ($p < .05$).



Discussion

- Overall, both husbands and wives had unique actor and partner effects on conflict outcomes after the intervention of the marital education program.
- This study provided evidence for the interdependent effect of positive and negative conflict management during marriage and relationship education programming.



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Discussion

- The results have important implications for relationship education programming and improving conflict management skills for couples.
- This research can be applied to Family Life Education programs by targeting treatment based on conflict levels by gender.



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Discussion Questions:

Why might men and women react differently to conflict behaviors?

How can these findings be applied to FLE programs?