

**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CONFLICT  
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BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY  
AND RELATIONSHIP STABILITY**

PSİKOLOJİK ESNEKLİK İLE İLİŞKİ  
İSTİKRARI ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİDE ÇATIŞMA  
ÇÖZÜM STİLLERİNİN ARACI ROLÜ

Ayşegül CİRİT, Ayşe Hazal DÜNDAR

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## PSİKOLOJİK ESNEKLİK İLE İLİŞKİ İSTİKRARI ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİDE ÇATIŞMA ÇÖZÜM STİLLERİNİN ARACI ROLÜ

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### Keywords:

Romantic Relationships, Relationship Stability, Psychological Flexibility, Conflict Resolution, Mediation Model

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Romantik İlişkiler, İlişki İstikrarı, Psikolojik Esneklik, Çatışma Çözme, Aracı Model

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### ABSTRACT

Romantic relationships play a decisive role not only in terms of fulfilling the need for belonging and closeness, but also in terms of shaping individuals' psychological and physical well-being. Research emphasises the importance of individual characteristics and conflict resolution styles in explaining the stability of romantic relationships. At this point, psychological flexibility, defined as the ability of individuals to adapt to changing circumstances, emerges as a fundamental resource that supports healthy relationship functioning. However, the relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability needs further explanation. This study aims to examine the mediating role of conflict resolution styles in the relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability. The sample for the study consisted of a total of 391 participants aged between 19 and 50. The Relationship Stability Scale, Psychological Flexibility Scale, and Conflict Resolution Style Scale were used as data collection tools. The findings revealed that psychological flexibility positively predicts relationship stability and that conflict resolution styles play a mediating role in this relationship. These results can be discussed within the framework of the Vulnerability Stress Adaptation Model and the Investment Model in explaining romantic relationship dynamics. The research reveals the importance of psychological flexibility in maintaining romantic relationships and shows that conflict resolution styles also play a critical role in this process. The findings contribute to the theoretical literature and point to important variables that should be emphasised in couples therapy in terms of clinical psychology applications.

### ÖZ

Romantik ilişkiler, yalnızca yakınlık ve aidiyet ihtiyacının karşılanması açısından değil, aynı zamanda psikolojik ve fiziksel iyi oluş üzerinde de belirleyici bir rol oynamaktadır. Çalışmalar, romantik ilişkilerin istikrarını açıklamada bireysel özelliklerin ve çatışma çözme biçimlerinin önemli olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Bu noktada, bireylerin değişen koşullara uyum sağlayabilme becerisi olarak tanımlanan psikolojik esneklik, sağlıklı ilişki işleyişini destekleyen temel bir kaynak olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ancak psikolojik esnekliğin ilişki istikrarı ile ilişkisi daha fazla açıklamaya ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Bu araştırma, psikolojik esneklik ile ilişki istikrarı arasındaki ilişkide çatışma çözme tarzlarının aracı rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın örneklemini, 19 ile 50 yaş arası, toplam 391 katılımcı oluşturmuştur. Araştırmanın veri toplama araçları İlişki İstikrarı Ölçeği, Psikolojik Esneklik Ölçeği ve Çatışma Çözüm Stilleri Ölçeğidir. Bulgular, psikolojik esnekliğin ilişki istikrarını pozitif yönde yordadığını, çatışma çözme tarzlarının bu ilişkide aracı rol oynadığını göstermiştir. Bu sonuçlar, romantik ilişki dinamiklerini açıklamada İncinebilirlik Stres Uyum modeli ve Yatırım Modeli çerçevesinde ele alınabilir. Çalışma, psikolojik esnekliğin romantik ilişkilerin sürdürülmesindeki önemini ortaya koyarken, çatışma çözme tarzlarının da bu süreçte kritik işlev gördüğünü göstermektedir. Bulgular, hem kuramsal alanyazına katkı sunmakta hem de klinik psikoloji uygulamaları açısından çift terapilerinde üzerinde durulması gereken önemli değişkenleri işaret etmektedir.

## INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings by nature and spend a significant part of their lives interacting with others and developing relationships. The need to belong and form close relationships is as fundamental a psychological need as physiological needs. Romantic relationships are the strongest bonds that satisfy these emotional and social needs. The quality and continuity of romantic relationships are closely related not only to individuals' personality traits or relationship satisfaction, but also to the adjustment processes they reveal in times of conflict and the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that shape these processes. The Investment Model provides a powerful theoretical framework for explaining commitment and continuity in romantic relationships. This model consists of three main components: relationship satisfaction, the attractiveness of alternatives, and investments made in the relationship. Research has revealed that relationship investments are one of the strongest predictors of commitment (Bokek-Cohen & Halamish-Leshem, 2024). A recent meta-analysis revealed that personality traits, attachment styles, and types of investment play an important role in relationship satisfaction (Bokek-Cohen & Halamish-Leshem, 2024). In this context, individuals' internal psychological resources emerge as an important factor affecting relationship satisfaction and commitment levels. One of these internal resources is psychological flexibility. From the perspective of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), the concept of psychological flexibility can be defined as the ability of individuals to accept the existence of negative situations and respond functionally to problems in line with their values. Individuals with high psychological flexibility can develop more constructive strategies in conflict situations and thereby indirectly support relationship stability (Nar et al., 2022). Individuals with high levels of psychological flexibility tend to maintain relationship satisfaction by developing healthier coping strategies in stressful situations (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). In romantic relationships, psychological flexibility is particularly related to the ability to generate alternative solutions during conflict. It has been revealed that individuals with high psychological flexibility use more constructive strategies in the conflict resolution process,

which positively reflects on relationship stability (Nar et al., 2022).

At this point, conflict resolution styles can be considered a critical intermediate mechanism in understanding the effect of both psychological and cognitive flexibility on relationship stability. Conflict resolution styles encompass all of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural strategies that partners resort to in situations of disagreement. Constructive styles increase relationship satisfaction and commitment (Cramer, 2000), and there is growing evidence that these constructive strategies are more easily adopted by individuals with high levels of flexibility (Özcan & Karagöz, 2023). To explain this dynamism, the Vulnerability Stress Adaptation (VSA) Model states that relationship stability is determined by the interaction of individual vulnerabilities (e.g., low flexibility), stressors, and adaptation processes (e.g., conflict resolution styles). According to this model, individuals' persistent vulnerabilities (e.g., low psychological flexibility), the stressors encountered, and the adaptation processes revealed in response to these stressors (e.g., conflict resolution strategies) are the key components that determine relationship stability. Individuals with high flexibility support long-term stability by preferring constructive conflict resolution methods in stressful situations. Family Systems Theory adds a systemic perspective to this process. According to this theory, individuals' levels of cognitive and psychological flexibility shape not only their own behaviour but also their partners' responses and the couple's interaction cycles. Positive conflict resolution styles strengthen stability by maintaining the relationship's homeostasis.

In summary, psychological flexibility and conflict resolution styles are multidimensional and interrelated variables that determine the stability of romantic relationships. The existing literature reveals that psychological and psychological flexibility are positively associated with couple harmony (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010), marital quality (Daks & Rogge, 2020), and relationship quality (Twiselton et al., 2020). Similarly, it is emphasised that constructive conflict resolution styles strengthen commitment and stability as predicted by the Investment Model. However, within the framework of

the Investment Model and VSA Model, there are only a limited number of studies that holistically examine how psychological flexibility affects relationship stability through conflict resolution styles. This study aims to explain relationship stability in depth by integrating the two important psychological characteristics mentioned above (psychological flexibility, conflict resolution styles) with the Investment Model, VSA, and Family Systems Theory. The research will examine the direct effects of psychological flexibility and its indirect effects through conflict resolution styles; the findings are intended to contribute to intervention strategies in both theoretical and clinical practice, particularly in the areas of couples therapy and counselling. The research hypotheses are listed below.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between psychological flexibility and conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships and relationship stability.

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a mediating role for positive conflict resolution style in the relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability.

H<sub>5</sub>: There is a parallel mediating role for submission, withdrawal, and negative conflict resolution styles in the relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The population of the study consists of individuals aged 18 years and over who have experienced at least one romantic relationship. Accordingly, the sample size was selected considering the structural equation model (SEM) analysis to be used in the study. In order to obtain reliable results in SEM, 5-10 times as many participants as observed variables are generally recommended (Kline, 2023). In this study, since the total number of items was 44, the recommended sample size for SEM should be between

220 and 440. The research was conducted with a total of 391 participants. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 50 years old, with an average age of  $M= 36.21$  ( $SD=6.87$ ). The 391 participants in the study both exceed the minimum requirement and allow for reliable estimation of the model parameters. This approach increases the statistical power of the mediation model and contributes to the stability of the model solution (Wolf et al., 2013).

Sampling was conducted via the convenience sampling method both online and face to face. Participants were reached through visits to workplaces, foundations and associations, public education centres, social media posts, and bulletin board announcements. Concurrently, participants in the research were requested to disseminate it to others within their respective networks. This approach was favoured as it facilitates the timely and effective engagement of individuals within the researcher's reach (Etikan et al., 2016). In the domain of social and behavioural sciences, particularly in cross-sectional studies that investigate psychological processes, convenience sampling is a prevalent data collection method (Bornstein et al., 2013). This approach offers flexibility in the process of data collection. A limitation of the method, however, is that the sample does not directly allow for universal generalisations. However, the combination of online and face-to-face data collection channels, in conjunction with the inclusion of social networks, enabled the sample to encompass participants from diverse demographic and geographic groups, thereby enhancing diversity (Andrade, 2020).

The criteria for inclusion in the study were being over 18 years of age, being able to read and write, having at least one romantic relationship experience, and voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria for the study are not having had any previous romantic relationship experience and not answering at least one of the three control questions added to the study questionnaire incorrectly. Individuals who are not currently in a relationship were asked to answer the questions based on their last relationship. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1 The Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Variables	Groups	N	%
Sex	Female	235	60.10
	Male	156	39.90
Education Level (Graduated School)	Literate	8	2.04
	Primary School	83	21.23
	High School	121	30.94
	University	130	33.24
	Postgraduate	48	12.55
Employment Status	Not working	205	52.43
	Working	186	47.57
Income Level	Lower	47	12.02
	Lower-middle	59	15.09
	Middle	203	51.92
	Middle-upper	67	17.14
	Upper	15	3.83
Relationship Status	No relationship	40	10.23
	In a relationship	195	49.87
	Married	156	39.90
Relationship Duration (The latest romantic relationship)	0-6 months	104	26.5
	6 months- 1 year	52	13.2
	1-3 years	68	17.3
	3-5 years	61	15.6
	5-10 years	45	11.5
	10-20 years	39	10.2
	20 years - more	22	5.7
How Couples Meet	Through friends	94	24.1
	Through social media (Instagram, X, Facebook, etc.)	74	18.9
	Dating apps (Tinder, Happn, etc.)	4	1.1
	School/work life	108	27.6
	Through relatives	31	7.9
	From the area where they live	56	14.3
	Other	24	6.1

**Data Collection Tools***Personal Information Data Form*

This form, which has been prepared by the researcher, comprises personal and demographic information pertaining to the participants, including their age, level of education, gender, occupation, income, and details of their romantic relationships.

*Relationship Stability Scale (RSC)*

RSC, which was developed by Rusbult et al. (1998) and subsequently adapted in Turkish by Büyükşahin et al. (2005), comprises a total of 37 items. A high score on the

scale is indicative of a high level of relationship stability. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the subscales of the Relationship Stability Scale was .90 for relationship satisfaction, .84 for evaluating the quality of options and relationship investment, and .70 for attachment.

*Psychological Flexibility Scale (PFS)*

PFS, developed by Francis et al. (2016) and adapted into Turkish by Karakuş and Akbay (2020), aimed to measure the psychological flexibility levels of individuals. The scale

has a total of 28 items. High scores obtained from the scale items indicate a high level of psychological flexibility. In the adaptation study of the PFS, Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was .79 for the total score, .84 for the sub-dimensions of values and behaviour in line with values, .60 for being in the moment, .72 for acceptance, .73 for contextual self and .59 for dissociation (Karakuş & Akbay, 2020)

#### *Conflict Resolution Style Scale (CRSC)*

CRSC developed by Özen et al. (2016) aimed to determine the conflict resolution styles of partners. The scale, which consists of 4 sub-dimensions as submission, withdrawal, positive and negative conflict resolution style, contains 25 items. When the scale is evaluated, scoring is made only within the scope of the sub-dimensions and a total score cannot be calculated from the scale. The scores obtained from the sub-dimensions show how often the behaviours of that style are performed. A high score in each sub-dimension indicates that the person uses that solution style frequently, while a low score indicates low use. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were .80 for 'positive conflict resolution styles', .82 for 'negative conflict resolution styles', .73 for 'submission' and .74 for 'withdrawal'.

#### **Statistical Analyses**

IBM SPSS programme was used for statistical evaluation of the data. The relationship between the variables was tested by correlation analysis. The analysis of the mediation effect of the variables was analysed using the SPSS PROCESS macro plug-in developed for SPSS.

#### **Research Model**

This study used mediation analysis to test the explanatory role of conflict resolution styles in the relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability. A mediation model is a statistical technique that enables the examination of the processes or mechanisms through which an independent variable affects a dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hayes, 2017). The model was chosen because psychological flexibility is an individual characteristic that affects relationship behaviours (e.g. conflict resolution styles) and these behaviours are related to relationship stability. This approach is therefore compatible with both the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) and the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980), which together form the theoretical framework of the study. The advantage of the model is that it shows the mechanisms through which psychological processes translate into relational outcomes by examining direct and indirect effects between variables simultaneously (Frazier et al., 2004). However, the use of cross-sectional data is limiting with respect to causality in mediating relationships because it does not directly test the direction of processes over time (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Therefore, the findings should be interpreted together with the theoretical underpinning.

#### **RESULTS**

Before the related analyses were applied, preliminary analyses were performed and the normality assumption of the data was checked. Mean, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness values of the variables are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha
Psychological Flexibility	130.64	18.80	.016	-.382	.796
Positive Conflict Resolution	28.42	5.21	-.874	1.029	.769
Negative Conflict Resolution	18.74	6.99	.422	-.140	.735
Submission	22.46	5.78	-.030	-.256	.715
Withdrawal	22.36	6.49	-.304	-.234	.728
Relationship Stability	152.11	29.54	-.875	.417	.895

The assumption of normality was evaluated based on the criteria that the kurtosis and skewness values should fall within the range of -2 to +2. As the skewness and kurtosis values were within the desired range, it was concluded that the assumption of normality was satisfied. The relationship of the variables was analysed using the Pearson correlation test, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

When the values in Table 3 are analysed, it is seen that increased psychological flexibility is significantly associated with increased positive conflict resolution style and relationship stability, while it is significantly associated with decreased negative conflict resolution style, submission and withdrawal style. Increasing relationship stability is associated with increasing positive conflict

resolution style and decreasing submission, withdrawal and negative conflict resolution style. Positive conflict resolution style was found to have a significant negative relationship with submission, withdrawal and negative conflict resolution. Correlation analysis revealed the relationship between variables. It was observed that as the psychological flexibility level of individuals increased, relationship stability increased. In the next step, the mediating effect of individuals' conflict resolution styles between this relationship was analysed. In Model-1, the mediating role of positive conflict resolution style between psychological flexibility and relationship stability was evaluated, and the values of the model are revealed in Figure 1 and Table 4.

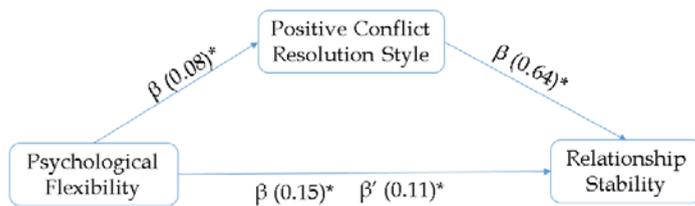
**Table 3 Correlation Values of the Variables**

	Psychological Flexibility	Positive Conflict Resolution	Negative Conflict Resolution	Submission	Withdrawal	Relationship Stability
<b>Psychological Flexibility</b>	1	.276**	-.345**	-.214**	-.156**	.180**
<b>Positive Conflict Resolution</b>		1	-.343**	.122*	-.177**	.428**
<b>Negative Conflict Resolution</b>			1	.128*	.234**	-.307**
<b>Submission</b>				1	.342**	.094
<b>Withdrawal</b>					1	-.162**
<b>Relationship Stability</b>						1

**Table 4 Values for Model 1**

	Positive Conflict Resolution		Relationship Stability	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
<b>Psychological Flexibility (c)</b>			0.15*	0.027
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>				0.09
<b>Psychological Flexibility (a)</b>	0.08*	0.015		
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>		0.08		
<b>Psychological Flexibility (c')</b>			0.11**	0.027
<b>Positive Conflict Resolution (b)</b>			0.64**	0.097
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>				0.21
<b>Indirect effect</b>			0.05* (0.026; 0.08)	

\*p<0.05



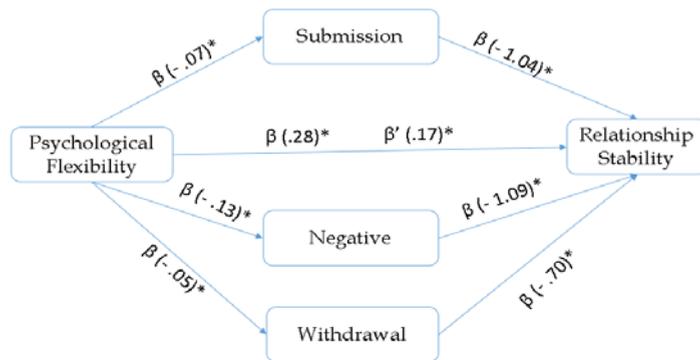
**Figure 1** Model-1(Unstandardized Coefficients)

PROCESS Model 4 with 5000 resampling and 95% confidence interval options was used to analyse the mediating effect of positive conflict resolution style between psychological flexibility level interaction and relationship stability (Hayes, 2022). According to the results of the analysis; positive conflict resolution style has a mediating role between psychological flexibility and relationship stability. Psychological flexibility indirectly affects relationship stability through positive conflict resolution style (Indirect effect= 0.05; Confidence Interval [0.0256, 0.0755]). As a result of the Bootstrap test analysis, since the confidence interval value does not include zero (0), the mediation effect can be mentioned (Hayes, 2022).

The parallel mediation role of submission, withdrawal and negative conflict resolution styles in the relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability was examined with Model-2. The results of the mediation model are shown in Figure 2 and Table 5.

**Table 5 Values for Model 2**

	$\beta$	SE
<b>PE → S (a1)</b>	-.07*	.02
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.05	
<b>PE → N (a2)</b>	-.13*	.02
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.12	
<b>PE → W (a3)</b>	-.05*	.02
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.02	
<b>S → RS (b1)</b>	-1.04*	.30
<b>N → RS (b2)</b>	-1.09*	.25
<b>W → RS (b3)</b>	-.70*	.27
<b>(c')</b>	.17*	.09
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.14	
<b>Indirect Effect (Bootstrap 95% CI)</b>		
<b>(a1.b1)</b>	-.068	(-.1378 ; -.0184)
<b>(a2.b2)</b>	.140	(.0679 ; .2246)
<b>(a3.b3)</b>	.037	(.0036 ; .0851)
<b>Total Indirect Effect</b>	.109	(.0151 ; .2059)
<b>Total Effect</b>	.283	(.1041 ; .4618)
<b>Direct Effect</b>	.173	(.0103 ; .3564)
*p<0.05		
PE: Psychological Flexibility. S: Submission. N: Negative. W: Withdrawal. RS: Relationship Stability.		



**Figure 2** Model-2(Unstandardized Coefficients)

The parallel mediation role of submission, withdrawal and negative conflict resolution styles in the relationship between psychological flexibility level and relationship stability was examined. According to the results obtained with PROCESS Model 4; submission, withdrawal and negative conflict resolution styles mediate the relationship between psychological flexibility level and relationship stability simultaneously. Bootstrap confidence intervals do not contain zero (Hayes, 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The present research study examines relationship stability and related factors in romantic relationships. The objective of the present study is to evaluate the relationship between individuals' level of psychological flexibility and relationship stability, and the mediating role of conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships in this context.

The study's sample population comprises 391 volunteer participants ranging in age from 19 to 50 years. The study encompassed a broad age range, thereby ensuring a comprehensive representation of the demographic. The study's findings reveal a diverse sample in terms of basic sociodemographic variables, including age, gender, education, income level, relationship status, and relationship duration. However, the concentration of certain variables may introduce limitations in terms of the generalisability of the findings. The fact that 60.1% of the participants were women resulted in an overrepresentation of women in terms of psychological flexibility and conflict resolution skills in romantic relationships compared to men. This imbalance in gender distribution necessitates a

cautious approach when interpreting gender differences in relationship processes, as emphasised in some studies (e.g., Overall et al., 2006). With respect to educational attainment, a considerable proportion of the participants have graduated from high school or university. The relatively low proportion of the population that is literate and has received a primary education may limit the generalisability of the research findings to population groups with lower levels of education. However, the inclusion of different educational levels in the sample allows for the comparison of different cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives. With regard to the duration of relationships, the prevalence of short-term and medium-term relationships is noteworthy, whilst the relatively low representation of long-term relationships is of interest. This state of affairs has the potential to impose constraints on the evaluation of developmental aspects of psychological flexibility and conflict resolution skills in long-term relationships. An analysis of the modes of occurrence of romantic partnerships reveals that the predominant percentages were ascertained to be through school/work environments and friends. However, the relatively limited use of online dating applications and social media may create a gap in the representation of modern digital relationship dynamics.

The demographic distribution of the research sample is consistent with the samples in some studies examining similar topics. Studies on the dynamics of romantic relationships in Turkey generally show that the proportion of female participants is higher than that of male participants. This suggests that women may be more willing to participate in relationship-themed research. However, the more balanced gender distribution in international studies (Karney & Bradbury, 2020) reveals that cultural and methodological differences may affect representation. In terms of education and income level distributions, the sample of this study has a higher education level compared to the general population profile in Turkey (TÜİK, 2023). This suggests that the findings may be more valid for highly educated individuals and should be interpreted with caution for groups with low education levels. In terms of meeting patterns, the predominance of offline channels (friends, school/work)

in this study is consistent with findings showing that traditional social networks are still decisive in relationships in the Turkish context. However, it has been reported that online dating rates exceed 30% in Western countries (Rosenfeld et al., 2019).

The first hypothesis of the study tests whether there is a statistically significant relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability. The correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability. This finding rejects the null hypothesis. In other words, as individuals' levels of psychological flexibility increase, the stability of their relationships also increases. This result is consistent with similar studies in the literature. Recent studies have demonstrated that psychological flexibility is positively associated with individual well-being as well as satisfaction and forgiveness in romantic relationships (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Twiselton et al., 2020). In another study, Mosannenzadeh et al. (2024) reported that insecure attachment reduces relationship quality by hindering psychological flexibility and emotion regulation. This supports the conclusion that flexibility plays a protective role in relationship adjustment. The concept of relationship stability is also shaped by multidimensional factors such as relationship investment, commitment, and the perceived quality of alternatives (Rusbult, 1980). In this context, the Investment Model provides an important explanation for our findings by emphasising the decisive role of satisfaction and commitment in maintaining relationships. Psychological flexibility enhances constructive interactions and feelings of trust, making partners' investment in the relationship more visible, which in turn strengthens commitment and stability (Rusbult, 1980). Additionally, within the framework of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), flexibility is known to facilitate cognitive perspective-taking and value-oriented behaviour. Findings revealing that interventions aimed at increasing flexibility have increased relationship satisfaction and stability in recent years provide a framework consistent with the results of our research (Razazan, 2025).

The second hypothesis of the study tests whether there is a statistically significant relationship between

psychological flexibility and conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships. According to the results of the correlation analysis, a positive and statistically significant relationship was found between psychological flexibility and positive conflict resolution; a negative and statistically significant relationship was found between psychological flexibility and negative conflict resolution, submission, and withdrawal styles of conflict resolution. These findings reject the null hypothesis. Research in the literature also supports these findings. Research has reported that individuals with high psychological flexibility are more open to problem solving in relationships, can manage conflicts constructively thanks to their emotional regulation skills, and use avoidance or passive strategies less often (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Twiselton et al., 2020). El-Sayed et al. (2024) reported that high levels of cognitive flexibility in young adults increase collaborative and compromising conflict styles. Similarly, Barraca et al. (2025) revealed that ACT-based interventions in romantic relationships improve communication and relationship functioning by enhancing psychological flexibility, facilitating the transition to more adaptive conflict strategies in the process. In Ong and colleagues' (2024) meta-analysis, it was reported that low psychological flexibility was strongly negatively associated with well-being, and that this was consistent with rigid and avoidant responses to conflict. Similarly, Safa et al. (2024) research found that psychological flexibility significantly predicts marital adjustment and relationship stability through acceptance and commitment. Furthermore, psychological flexibility has been shown to enhance empathy, constructive communication, and conflict resolution skills. This pattern is consistent with the Vulnerability–Stress–Adaptation (VSA) model. The VSA model posits that individuals' personal predispositions, stressors, and adaptation processes shape relationship outcomes (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). Psychological flexibility functions as a protective personal resource in this context, facilitating relational harmony by supporting constructive responses to stress (Safa et al., 2024). Indeed, recent research reveals that flexibility is associated with lower defensiveness and more constructive communication processes. From this perspective, psychological flexibility emerges as a critical factor not only for individual functioning but also for

couples' healthy adjustment in conflict resolution.

The third hypothesis of the study tests whether there is a statistically significant relationship between conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships and relationship stability. According to the correlation analysis, a positive and statistically significant relationship was found between positive conflict resolution styles and relationship stability, while a negative and statistically significant relationship was found between negative, submissive, and withdrawal-style conflict resolution styles and relationship stability. These results reject the null hypothesis of the third hypothesis. In other words, constructive and cooperative conflict resolution styles strengthen relationship stability in romantic relationships, while negative, passive, or avoidant styles weaken stability. These findings are consistent with similar studies in the literature. Bülbul et al. (2024) found that constructive and cooperative conflict resolution styles are associated with higher marital satisfaction, Işık and Kaya (2022) found that positive conflict resolution styles and spousal support increase marital satisfaction. On the other hand, Ali and Saleem (2022) reported that integrative and conciliatory strategies predict marital satisfaction positively, while distributive and verbal aggression styles predict it negatively. Another study found that submissive and withdrawal/avoidance responses are associated with low relationship satisfaction (Aricioğlu & Kaya, 2023). In addition, Abolghasemi et al. (2024) found that positive conflict resolution skills are one of the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction in women. Findings from research with couples indicate that conflict resolution styles are one of the strongest predictors of relationship satisfaction and long-term relationship continuity (Kurdek, 2005; Overall & McNulty, 2017). It has been reported that constructive strategies that focus on problem solving and involve empathy and open communication increase both relationship satisfaction and stability; in contrast, negative strategies such as withdrawal, criticism, and belittlement damage trust in relationships and reduce long-term stability (Gottman, 2017). According to family systems theory, interaction cycles in relationships are one of the key determinants of stability. Demand–withdrawal or negative conflict resolution patterns weaken intimacy and jeopardise the sustainability of the relationship (Caughlin et al., 2010).

Our findings that withdrawal and negative resolution are negatively associated with relationship stability support this theoretical explanation. On the other hand, some studies show that although submission may reduce conflict in the short term, it does not nurture emotional closeness in the long term (Overall & McNulty, 2017). Therefore, the findings reveal that conflict resolution styles are one of the key factors determining not only short-term satisfaction but also long-term relationship stability in romantic relationships.

After examining the correlations between variables, model tests were conducted. This research found that psychological flexibility predicts relationship stability through positive conflict resolution style in romantic relationships. Path analysis findings reveal that psychological flexibility directly increases relationship stability, but this relationship is partially mediated by positive conflict resolution style. This reveals that flexible psychological processes enable individuals to use more functional strategies during moments of conflict, thereby supporting relationship stability. Partial mediation indicates that psychological flexibility contributes to relationship stability not only through conflict resolution but also through other factors such as emotional regulation and attachment based on trust (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2022). Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the Vulnerability Stress Adaptation Model. According to the VSA model, individual characteristics (such as psychological resources such as psychological flexibility) tend to play a decisive role in couples' stress coping processes; adaptation processes (conflict resolution, communication quality) become functional or dysfunctional through these resources and shape relationship satisfaction and stability in the long term (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). Within this framework, individuals with high psychological flexibility use more collaborative and solution-focused conflict resolution strategies in their relationships, strengthening adaptation processes and increasing stability (Schiltz & Van Hecke, 2021). The findings can also be explained by the Investment Model. According to the Investment Model, relationship stability is determined by satisfaction, the quality of alternatives, and the level of investment in the relationship (Rusbult, 1980).

Psychological flexibility can support stability by enabling individuals to manage conflicts in a functional manner that increases their satisfaction levels, invest more in the relationship, and perceive alternatives as less appealing. Studies conducted in recent years support these theoretical connections. It has been reported that an internet-based flexibility training programme increases both individual flexibility and relationship satisfaction in couples. In another study with couples, it was found that psychological flexibility and psychological adjustment processes predict relationship satisfaction at both the actor and partner levels. In recent years, it has also been revealed that mindfulness and flexibility skills strengthen collaborative conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships and contribute to relationship satisfaction (Mandal & Lip, 2022). Additionally, findings indicating that strategies such as ‘accepting differences’ and ‘solution-focused conflict’ play a mediating role in the relationship between personality traits and relationship satisfaction support the central importance of conflict resolution style (Lim, 2024). In clinical practice, interventions aimed at developing flexibility through ACT and similar approaches have been reported to increase intimacy and positive communication in couples (Barraca et al., 2025). These interventions can help maintain relationship stability in the long term by both increasing psychological flexibility and strengthening positive conflict resolution skills. Thus, the findings reveal that psychological flexibility supports positive conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships and thereby strengthens relationship stability, consistent with both the adjustment processes defined in the VSA model and the satisfaction and investment mechanisms predicted in the investment model.

Model 2 results reveal that psychological flexibility predicts relationship stability through three different negative conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships. The model explains 28% of the variance in relationship stability. These results reject hypothesis H50, support H51, and reveal that psychological flexibility affects relationship stability in parallel through submissive, negative conflict resolution, and withdrawal styles. Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the VSA model. According to VSA, individual characteristics shape

couples' adaptation processes (communication and conflict resolution strategies) in interaction with stressors (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). Low psychological flexibility leads individuals to adopt more rigid and dysfunctional coping strategies (submission, withdrawal, negative conflict) in response to relationship stressors. These dysfunctional strategies prevent problems from being resolved, increase emotional distance, and weaken relationship stability in the long term (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2022). Withdrawal, in particular, is one of the strategies most strongly associated with relationship destructiveness in Gottman's four horsemen concept (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). These findings are also meaningful in terms of the Investment Model. According to the investment model, relationship stability is determined by satisfaction, the attractiveness of alternatives, and the magnitude of investments (Rusbult, 1980). Negative conflict strategies reduce satisfaction, lead individuals to perceive alternatives as more attractive, and decrease motivation to invest in the relationship. In contrast, psychological flexibility serves as a resource that can reverse this cycle. When recent research findings are examined, it is seen that the findings support this model. It has been reported that withdrawal and submission styles in close relationships reduce relationship satisfaction, chronicle communication problems, and increase the likelihood of separation (Overall & McNulty, 2017). A study conducted in 2024 found that negative conflict resolution styles play a mediating role in the relationship between attachment anxiety and relationship satisfaction (Lim, 2024). Furthermore, it has been revealed that withdrawal strategies are used more frequently when flexibility and mindfulness-based skills are low, which reduces stability in couples (Mandal & Lip, 2022). Meta-analyses conducted in recent years have revealed that withdrawal and submission strategies are consistently negatively associated with marital satisfaction and commitment. These findings support the parallel mediation pattern observed in the present study. Clinically, these results reveal that it is important not only to increase psychological flexibility but also to raise awareness of dysfunctional conflict resolution styles. ACT and similar interventions should aim to increase flexibility and teach couples collaborative conflict resolution skills based on values rather than avoidance and submission (Basak

& Amanollahi, 2021). This will increase flexibility at the individual level and support long-term stability by reducing dysfunctional cycles in relationship processes. In conclusion, it is understood that dysfunctional strategies such as submission, negative conflict resolution, and withdrawal are more common in individuals with low psychological flexibility; these strategies also negatively affect relationship stability and act as partial mediators. The findings are consistent with both the adaptation processes defined in the VSA model and the satisfaction and investment mechanisms of the Investment Model, thereby supporting Hypothesis H51.

This study contributes to the literature at both theoretical and practical levels by examining the role of psychological flexibility in romantic relationships through multidimensional conflict resolution styles. The findings reveal that psychological flexibility is associated with relationship stability both directly and indirectly (through positive and negative conflict resolution styles). In existing studies, psychological flexibility has mostly been addressed in the context of individuals' mental health indicators or general stress coping skills. Research on conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships has focused more on communication patterns or attachment styles. However, there is limited research evaluating the effect of psychological flexibility on different conflict resolution styles and the mediating role of these styles in relationship stability within the same model. This study tested a comprehensive model that includes the mediating role of conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships in the relationship between psychological flexibility and relationship stability. While these variables are usually examined separately in the literature (flexibility → stability; conflict style → stability), this study combines them within the same model and offers a processual explanation. This serves as a theoretical bridge between ACT and relational process literature.

In addition, the study has a comprehensive data set that evaluates relationship stability, psychological flexibility, and conflict resolution styles in a multidimensional manner. Furthermore, the study is one of the rare research projects that evaluates the two-way effect of psychological flexibility on both constructive and destructive relationship

processes within the same framework. The inclusion of different relationship statuses, durations, and meeting patterns in the sample allows for the examination of interrelationships between variables in a rich context.

The empirical contributions of the research have been evaluated. The results reveal that low psychological flexibility can lead individuals to dysfunctional conflict resolution methods (e.g., submission, withdrawal, negative reactions), while high psychological flexibility can encourage cooperative positive resolution styles. Testing the model with Bootstrap confidence intervals increases the statistical reliability of the indirect effects obtained. Moreover, the significant mediating effect of positive conflict resolution style and the parallel mediation of negative, withdrawal, submission styles provide direct insights for professionals on which processes targeted interventions should change. Thus, interventions should not merely aim for 'less conflict' or 'better communication'; they should target psychological flexibility processes and specific conflict styles. The results suggest that couples therapists and family counsellors should integrate conflict resolution skills, particularly those aimed at breaking cycles of submission and avoidance, with psychological flexibility training. In addition, the design of preventive programmes using digital brief interventions has the potential to increase the accessibility of therapies for romantic relationship problems.

However, there are some limitations. First, the fact that the sample consists of voluntary participants carries the risk of self-selection bias. Significant imbalances in gender, education and income levels limit the generalisation of the findings to the entire population. The use of a cross-sectional design prevents the identification of causal relationships between variables. Due to the use of self-report scales in the study, it should be noted that participants' responses may have been influenced by social desirability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of one of the subscales used is .59, which can be considered low in terms of internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). However, as Hair et al. (2019) point out, values close to .60 can be included in analyses, especially in exploratory or novel contexts in the social sciences, given the conceptual validity of the measure and its widespread use in the

literature. The relevant sub-dimension was included in the analysis because it is important for the theoretical integrity of the model and has been previously reported as a valid construct. Modelling low-reliability variables as latent variables with SEM may be useful to reduce measurement error. However, considering the sample size and the multiple mediator structure of the model in the current study, regression-based mediation analyses (Hayes, 2017) were preferred. The SEM approach is recommended for future studies with larger samples.

Future studies should use stratified sampling methods to increase the representation of gender, low education, and low income groups. In addition, collecting data in different cultural contexts will strengthen the cross-cultural validity of the findings. Longitudinal research can be conducted to examine the mutual effects of psychological flexibility and conflict resolution styles over time. The robustness of the results can be increased by using measurement tools with higher reliability or multiple methods (self-report and partner report).

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#### **Author Contributions**

All the authors have equal contributions.