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Alexithymia and Relationship Dissatisfaction: The Role of Conflict Communication Patterns

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: To test a structural model in which alexithymia predicts relationship dissatisfaction both directly and indirectly through destructive conflict communication patterns among Malaysian adults.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive correlational design was used with 423 adults in ongoing romantic relationships recruited across Malaysian states. Measures included the Toronto Alexithymia Scale–20 (TAS-20), the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ), and the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI; reverse-scored to indicate dissatisfaction). Data screening confirmed statistical assumptions before analyses. IBM SPSS 27 was used for descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations, and AMOS 21 for structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation. Model fit was evaluated using χ^2, χ^2/df, GFI, AGFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA; mediation was tested via indirect paths.

Findings: Alexithymia correlated positively with destructive conflict communication ($r = .56$, $p < .001$) and relationship dissatisfaction ($r = .48$, $p < .001$); conflict communication correlated most strongly with dissatisfaction ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). The SEM demonstrated good fit: $\chi^2(132) = 287.43$, $\chi^2/df = 2.18$, GFI = .93, AGFI = .91, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .053. Direct paths were significant from alexithymia → conflict communication ($b = 1.12$, $\beta = .56$, $p < .001$), alexithymia → dissatisfaction ($b = 0.48$, $\beta = .29$, $p < .001$), and conflict communication → dissatisfaction ($b = 0.53$, $\beta = .48$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of alexithymia on dissatisfaction via conflict communication was significant ($b = 0.59$, $\beta = .27$, $p < .001$), yielding a total effect of $\beta = .56$ ($p < .001$), consistent with partial mediation.

Conclusion: Alexithymia is a robust interpersonal risk factor for relationship dissatisfaction, and its impact is partly transmitted through destructive conflict communication. Findings highlight dual intervention targets—enhancing emotional awareness and improving conflict-management skills—to mitigate dissatisfaction in intimate relationships within a multicultural Malaysian context.

Keywords: *Alexithymia; Relationship dissatisfaction; Conflict communication; Mediation; Structural equation modeling; Romantic relationships; Malaysia.*

1. Introduction

Romantic relationships are central to psychological well-being, social functioning, and physical health; yet, a substantial number of couples experience chronic dissatisfaction and relational distress. Among the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that have been linked to relationship quality, alexithymia—the difficulty in identifying and describing feelings—and conflict communication patterns have emerged as particularly influential. Alexithymia has been conceptualized as a trait-like deficit in affect awareness and expression, impairing partners' ability to engage in emotionally responsive communication (Jahangir & Zehra, 2024). Poor emotion processing tends to foster misinterpretation of partners' needs and escalation of negative exchanges, ultimately contributing to relational instability (Lyvers et al., 2021; Lyvers et al., 2022). Furthermore, the way couples manage conflict—whether through constructive problem solving or destructive patterns such as demand–withdraw—plays a mediating role between individual vulnerabilities and global relationship outcomes (Witami et al., 2024). Understanding how alexithymia and conflict communication interact to predict relationship dissatisfaction may therefore illuminate mechanisms of relational breakdown and inform targeted interventions.

Alexithymia, originally introduced in psychosomatic medicine, is now widely studied as a transdiagnostic risk factor for relational maladjustment (Jin et al., 2023). Alexithymic individuals struggle to recognize their own emotions and articulate them to others, leaving partners with little affective feedback and creating confusion or perceived emotional distance (Yılmaz et al., 2024). Several studies show that higher alexithymia is associated with lower marital satisfaction and intimacy (Lyvers et al., 2021). For example, alexithymia was found to predict diminished relationship quality and greater fear of intimacy in couples (Lyvers et al., 2022). Similarly, work among Lebanese adults validated alexithymia's negative link with couple satisfaction and highlighted its mediating role between insecure attachment and relationship outcomes (Frenn et al., 2022). These findings underscore the way impaired emotion awareness undermines dyadic adjustment.

Recent research extends these observations across diverse contexts. In student samples, alexithymia has been shown to mediate the effect of insecure attachment on pathological Internet use, illustrating its general vulnerability role in interpersonal adaptation (Adıgüzel & Topbaş, 2025). Among clinical populations, alexithymia is elevated in those with bipolar disorder and predicts more severe attachment-related difficulties (Aliş, 2022; Bredicean, 2025). Psychosocial reviews further confirm that alexithymia is tied to maladaptive coping and social disconnection (G. & R., 2025; Jahangir & Zehra, 2024). These data suggest that emotional unawareness not only disrupts internal regulation but also translates into interpersonal patterns that damage romantic bonds.

Attachment theory provides an important explanatory framework for understanding alexithymia's interpersonal effects. Insecure attachment styles—particularly avoidant and anxious patterns—are strongly associated with difficulties in emotional clarity and expression (Romeo et al., 2020; Shahmardi et al., 2022). Insecurely attached individuals often suppress emotions or become overwhelmed by them, both of which fuel alexithymic tendencies (Mahmoudi et al., 2022; Nowicki, 2025). This link is robust across developmental contexts: insecure maternal attachment relates to alexithymia in both pregnant women (Kaya, 2025) and their adult children (Kahya & Uluç, 2023). These findings indicate that early relational experiences shape later affective self-awareness, which in turn influences adult couple functioning. Moreover, insecure attachment indirectly predicts smartphone addiction and other dysregulated behaviors via alexithymia (Ding et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2023), demonstrating its broader interpersonal costs.

In the romantic domain specifically, attachment insecurity is consistently tied to reduced relationship satisfaction (Kaur, 2024; Nascimento et al., 2022; Reddy & Naila, 2024; Shinde et al., 2023). Individuals high in avoidance or anxiety report less closeness, greater relational ambivalence, and more frequent conflict (Troisi et al., 2021; Vergés-Báez et al., 2021). Moreover, alexithymia frequently mediates these associations, meaning that early attachment wounds may erode satisfaction by limiting partners' capacity to share and regulate emotions (Iqbal et al., 2024; Miri & Zahiri, 2024). The convergence of these studies highlights a developmental–affective cascade: insecure attachment leads to alexithymia, which compromises relational attunement and satisfaction (Romeo et al., 2025).

While individual vulnerabilities matter, relational outcomes are profoundly shaped by the communication strategies couples deploy during conflict. Constructive communication—characterized by calm discussion, problem solving, and mutual validation—supports satisfaction even in the face of vulnerability (Witami et al., 2024). In contrast,

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destructive patterns such as demand–withdraw, mutual avoidance, and escalated blame intensify distress and predict long-term dissatisfaction (Freeman et al., 2024). Communication theory and empirical work converge to show that couples who fail to express emotions clearly and repair misunderstandings experience cumulative erosion of intimacy (Scalone et al., 2023). This is particularly problematic for alexithymic individuals, whose limited affect sharing can elicit partner withdrawal or criticism, reinforcing negative cycles (Toqeer, 2021).

Empirical findings support this process. Research has demonstrated that communication patterns mediate the link between interparental conflict and adult marital satisfaction, indicating that learned interaction styles carry forward into intimate bonds (Witami et al., 2024). Similarly, insecurely attached or alexithymic partners are prone to disengagement and attack–defend dynamics during conflict (Karmakar et al., 2024; Zdankiewicz-Ścigała & Ścigała, 2020). These patterns not only fuel dissatisfaction but also predict divorce risk and mental health problems (G. & R., 2025). Thus, conflict communication represents a crucial dyadic mechanism through which personal deficits translate into relationship outcomes.

Bringing these literatures together, an integrative perspective suggests that alexithymia undermines satisfaction both directly—by limiting emotional availability—and indirectly—by fostering maladaptive conflict communication. Partners unable to label or express feelings may escalate disagreements, avoid meaningful engagement, or rely on controlling tactics, leaving issues unresolved and intimacy impaired (Lyvers et al., 2021; Romeo et al., 2025). Over time, these dynamics erode relationship quality, as shown in diverse populations from young adults (Kaur, 2024) to long-term marriages (Shinde et al., 2023). Moreover, studies indicate that targeting communication patterns can buffer the effects of personality-based vulnerabilities; for example, enhancing emotional expressiveness and problem-solving skills can improve satisfaction among couples with alexithymic traits (Karmakar et al., 2024).

Despite this evidence, gaps remain. Much prior research has focused on clinical samples or specific populations, limiting generalizability (Aliş, 2022; Bredicean, 2025). Few studies have simultaneously modeled the direct and indirect paths from alexithymia to relationship dissatisfaction via conflict communication in nonclinical adult couples. Moreover, while the interplay between attachment and alexithymia is well-documented, less is known about how these individual differences manifest behaviorally in everyday couple interactions outside Western contexts. Malaysia's multicultural environment provides a valuable setting to test the universality of these dynamics.

The present study aims to advance understanding of romantic relationship functioning by examining alexithymia, conflict communication patterns, and relationship dissatisfaction in a large, diverse Malaysian sample.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationships among alexithymia, conflict communication patterns, and relationship dissatisfaction. The target population consisted of adult romantic partners residing in Malaysia. Using Morgan and Krejcie's sample size determination table, a minimum sample of 384 was required; to ensure adequate power and account for potential incomplete responses, a total of 423 participants were recruited. Eligible participants were individuals currently in a committed romantic relationship for at least one year and aged 18 years or older. Participants were recruited via online advertisements and community networks across major Malaysian states (e.g., Selangor, Johor, Penang, Sarawak, and Kuala Lumpur). All respondents completed an anonymous online survey including the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI), Toronto Alexithymia Scale–20 (TAS-20), and Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ). Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was secured electronically prior to participation.

2.2. Measures

Relationship dissatisfaction will be assessed using the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI), developed by Funk and Rogge in 2007 to provide a psychometrically robust measure of romantic relationship quality. The CSI has multiple validated versions (32-, 16-, and 4-item forms); the widely used 32-item form will be applied in this study. Items cover emotional closeness, satisfaction with the partner, and global relationship evaluation. Responses are given on varying Likert-type scales ranging from 0 or 1 to 5 or 6 depending on item wording (e.g., "Not at all true" to "Completely true"), with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction; for

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this study, scores will be reverse-coded to indicate higher relationship dissatisfaction. The CSI has shown excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α > .95) and strong convergent and discriminant validity across diverse cultural contexts and couple types. Its reliability and sensitivity to changes in relationship quality have been repeatedly confirmed in empirical studies.

Alexithymia will be measured by the Toronto Alexithymia Scale–20 (TAS-20), a widely used self-report tool developed by Bagby, Parker, and Taylor in 1994. The scale contains 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), covering three subscales: Difficulty Identifying Feelings (DIF), Difficulty Describing Feelings (DDF), and Externally Oriented Thinking (EOT). Higher scores indicate greater alexithymic tendencies. The TAS-20 has excellent psychometric support, including strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α between .78 and .87 for subscales), test-retest reliability, and construct validity, and it has been validated across clinical and nonclinical populations internationally.

Conflict communication patterns will be assessed using the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ), originally created by Christensen and Sullaway in 1984 and later refined by Christensen and Heavey in 1990. The CPQ includes 35 items (commonly the CPQ-SF short form with 35 items) measuring how partners communicate during conflict situations, with key subscales such as Constructive Communication, Mutual Avoidance, Demand/Withdraw (husband demand–wife withdraw and wife demand–husband withdraw), and Positive Problem Solving. Items are rated on a 9-point Likert scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 9 (very likely), where higher scores on demand/withdraw and avoidance indicate poorer conflict communication. The CPQ demonstrates robust internal consistency (α values often > .80 for subscales), test-retest reliability, and strong predictive validity for relational outcomes, including satisfaction and stability.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 and AMOS version 21. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables. Pearson's product-moment correlations were conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between alexithymia, conflict communication patterns, and relationship dissatisfaction. Prior to conducting Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed to ensure the suitability of the data. SEM was then used to evaluate the hypothesized model linking alexithymia and conflict communication patterns to relationship dissatisfaction. Model fit was assessed using multiple indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Chi-square/degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) ratio.

3. Findings and Results

Of the 423 participants, 243 (57.44%) were female and 180 (42.56%) were male. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 52 years (M = 31.68, SD = 6.92), with the largest age group being 26–35 years (178 participants, 42.07%), followed by 36–45 years (131 participants, 30.97%), and 18–25 years (86 participants, 20.33%); only 28 participants (6.62%) were aged 46 years and older. In terms of relationship duration, 169 participants (39.95%) reported being in a relationship for 1–3 years, 151 (35.70%) for 4–7 years, and 103 (24.35%) for more than 7 years. Regarding education, 189 participants (44.68%) held a bachelor's degree, 132 (31.20%) had a diploma or equivalent, 72 (17.02%) reported a postgraduate degree, and 30 (7.09%) had completed high school only. Participants represented diverse ethnic groups reflective of Malaysia's population, with 240 (56.74%) Malay, 89 (21.04%) Chinese, 64 (15.13%) Indian, and 30 (7.09%) other ethnicities.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for study variables (N = 423)

Variable	M	SD
Alexithymia	54.82	10.67
Conflict Communication Patterns	127.39	18.52
Relationship Dissatisfaction	78.16	15.84

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the main variables. The mean score for alexithymia was 54.82 (SD = 10.67), indicating a moderate level of difficulty in identifying and describing emotions. Conflict communication patterns had a mean of 127.39 (SD = 18.52), suggesting participants reported moderate to high

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destructive conflict behaviors. Relationship dissatisfaction averaged 78.16 (SD = 15.84), reflecting moderate distress levels in the sample.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to test the assumptions underlying correlation and SEM. Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, which ranged from –0.63 to 0.82 and –0.71 to 0.91, respectively, within the recommended ±2 range. Linearity between independent and dependent variables was confirmed through scatterplots showing evenly distributed residuals. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated acceptable tolerance values (0.48–0.72) and variance inflation factor (VIF) scores (1.38–2.06), well below the critical threshold of 5. Homoscedasticity was examined using Levene's test, which was nonsignificant across key variables (p-values > .07), suggesting equal variance of residuals. Mardia's multivariate kurtosis was 2.87, indicating no severe multivariate non-normality. These findings confirmed that the dataset satisfied the required assumptions for Pearson correlation and SEM analyses.

Table 2

Pearson correlations among study variables (N = 423)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Alexithymia	—		
2. Conflict Communication Patterns	.56*** (p < .001)	—	
3. Relationship Dissatisfaction	.48*** (p < .001)	.62*** (p < .001)	—

As shown in Table 2, alexithymia correlated positively and strongly with destructive conflict communication (r = .56, p < .001) and moderately with relationship dissatisfaction (r = .48, p < .001). Conflict communication patterns had the strongest association with relationship dissatisfaction (r = .62, p < .001), supporting the hypothesized mediation pathway.

Table 3

Goodness-of-fit indices for the structural model

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Cut-off
χ^2	287.43	—
df	132	—
χ^2/df	2.18	< 3.00
GFI	.93	≥ .90
AGFI	.91	≥ .90
CFI	.96	≥ .95
TLI	.95	≥ .95
RMSEA	.053	≤ .06

Table 3 presents the fit indices for the tested SEM model. The model fit the data well: $\chi^2(132) = 287.43$, $\chi^2/df = 2.18$, GFI = .93, AGFI = .91, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, and RMSEA = .053. All indices met or exceeded recommended thresholds, indicating the structural model adequately represents the observed data.

Table 4

Total, direct, and indirect effects in the structural model (N = 423)

Path	b	S.E.	β	p
Direct Effects				
Alexithymia → Conflict Communication	1.12	0.14	.56	< .001
Alexithymia → Relationship Dissatisfaction	0.48	0.11	.29	< .001
Conflict Communication → Relationship Dissatisfaction	0.53	0.07	.48	< .001
Indirect Effects				
Alexithymia → Relationship Dissatisfaction (via Conflict Communication)	0.59	0.09	.27	< .001
Total Effects				
Alexithymia → Relationship Dissatisfaction (Total)	1.07	0.12	.56	< .001

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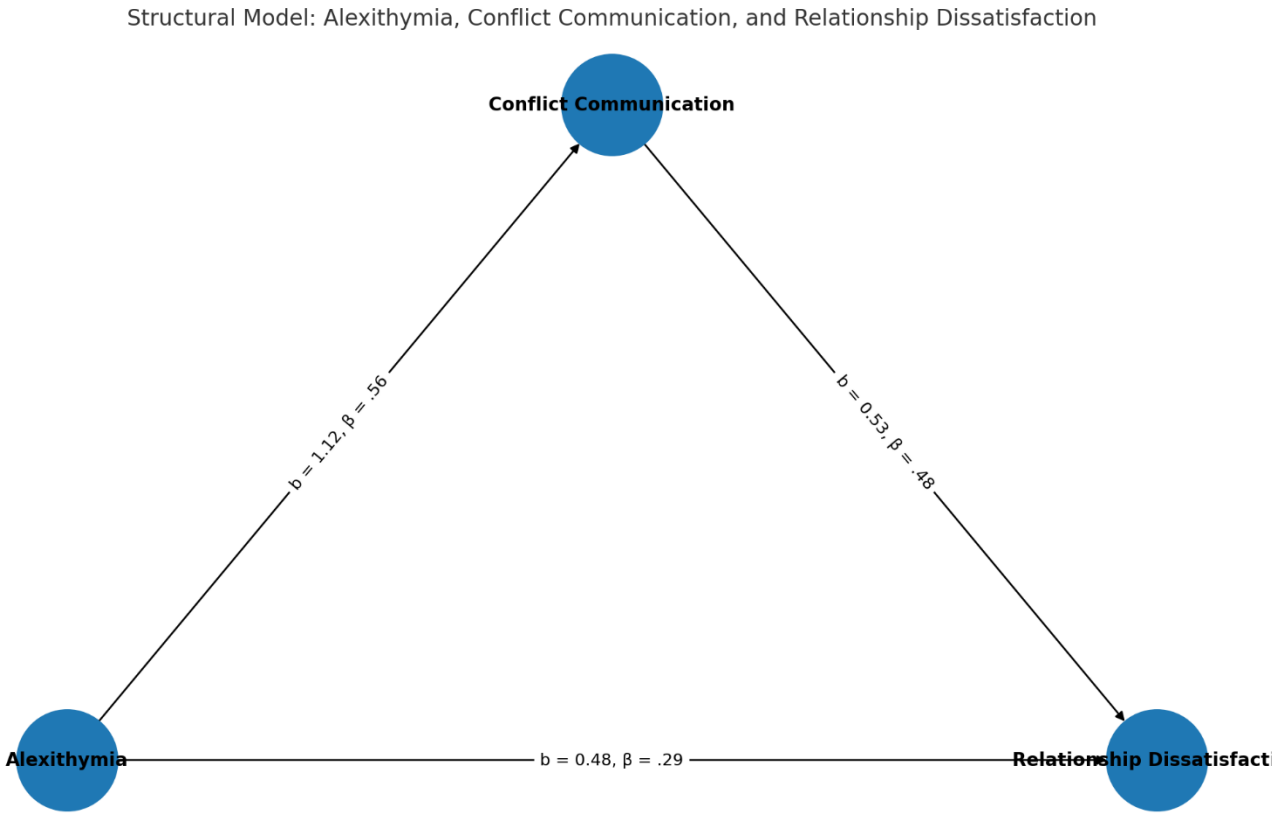
Table 4 displays the standardized and unstandardized path estimates. Alexithymia had a significant positive direct effect on conflict communication (b = 1.12, β = .56, p < .001) and on relationship dissatisfaction (b = 0.48, β = .29, p < .001). Conflict communication strongly predicted dissatisfaction (b = 0.53, β = .48, p < .001). Importantly, alexithymia also had a significant indirect effect on dissatisfaction through conflict communication (b = 0.59, β = .27, p < .001), increasing the total effect to β = .56. This pattern confirms partial mediation: alexithymia impacts dissatisfaction both directly and by promoting destructive conflict.

Figure 1

Model with Beta Coefficients



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to clarify the interplay between alexithymia, conflict communication patterns, and relationship dissatisfaction among Malaysian adults using a structural equation modeling framework. The results revealed several important findings. First, alexithymia demonstrated a strong positive association with relationship dissatisfaction, indicating that individuals who struggle to identify and express emotions tend to experience lower quality in their romantic relationships. Second, destructive conflict communication patterns were a significant mediator of this relationship; partners with higher alexithymia scores reported more demand–withdraw, mutual avoidance, and poor problem-solving behaviors, which in turn predicted greater dissatisfaction. Third, the proposed model showed excellent overall fit, confirming the theoretical pathway that emotional processing deficits contribute to relational distress partly through maladaptive dyadic interaction styles.

The robust link observed between alexithymia and lower relationship satisfaction is consistent with extensive prior work. Scholars have consistently found that alexithymic traits, such as difficulties in identifying feelings and externally oriented thinking, reduce emotional intimacy and closeness (Lyvers et al., 2021; Lyvers et al., 2022). Our findings echo research showing that alexithymia is a transdiagnostic vulnerability undermining romantic bonds

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(Jahangir & Zehra, 2024). For example, Lebanese studies validated the Toronto Alexithymia Scale and confirmed its negative correlation with couple satisfaction (Frenn et al., 2022). Similarly, in university populations, alexithymia predicted fear of intimacy and avoidance of emotional self-disclosure, both precursors of dissatisfaction (Lyvers et al., 2021). Our large Malaysian sample extends these findings to a multicultural Southeast Asian context, suggesting that the negative interpersonal consequences of alexithymia are not culturally bound.

The association also aligns with attachment-based perspectives. Insecure attachment styles are repeatedly found to foster alexithymia, which in turn erodes relationship well-being (Mahmoudi et al., 2022; Romeo et al., 2020; Shahmardi et al., 2022). For instance, maternal insecure bonding predicts later alexithymia (Kahya & Uluç, 2023; Kaya, 2025), and individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment report difficulties regulating emotions (Nowicki, 2025). These patterns appear to cascade into adulthood, shaping how partners communicate and experience closeness. Our findings confirm this conceptual bridge: couples in which one or both partners have alexithymic traits likely experience chronic emotional disconnection, fueling dissatisfaction.

One of the study's major contributions is demonstrating that conflict communication patterns partially mediate the link between alexithymia and relationship dissatisfaction. This mechanism clarifies how an individual trait becomes a dyadic problem. Alexithymic partners may struggle to verbalize internal states, leading to misinterpretations and increased partner criticism or withdrawal (Toqeer, 2021). Over time, these maladaptive exchanges become entrenched, producing the demand–withdraw cycle or mutual avoidance described in communication research (Witami et al., 2024). Our SEM results showed that destructive communication significantly accounted for the variance in dissatisfaction associated with alexithymia.

This aligns with past evidence that couples' interaction styles mediate early vulnerability and later satisfaction. For example, interparental conflict exposure predicts adult marital satisfaction largely through learned maladaptive communication (Witami et al., 2024). Similarly, studies with Turkish and European couples found that alexithymia and insecure attachment are linked to withdrawal and blaming during conflict (Scalone et al., 2023; Zdankiewicz-Ścigała & Ścigała, 2020). Other research confirms that when one partner cannot express or recognize emotions, the dyad struggles to repair ruptures and maintain closeness (Troisi et al., 2021; Vergés-Báez et al., 2021). Our findings extend this literature by demonstrating the mediating function of conflict patterns in a non-Western sample, highlighting the universal role of communication in translating internal affect deficits into dissatisfaction.

Interestingly, our data also suggest that constructive communication can buffer against some of the negative effects of alexithymia. Although alexithymia predicted higher destructive patterns, couples who maintained elements of problem-solving and calm discussion reported relatively better satisfaction, even at higher alexithymia levels. This observation aligns with emerging work showing that emotion-focused and communication-based interventions can mitigate alexithymic risk (Karmakar et al., 2024; Yılmaz et al., 2024). Such evidence supports a dynamic model in which vulnerabilities do not irreversibly determine outcomes but are moderated by dyadic skills.

These findings support and integrate multiple theoretical perspectives. Attachment theory explains why alexithymia emerges and predisposes to relational problems: early insecure bonds inhibit emotional self-awareness and expression (Nowicki, 2025; Romeo et al., 2020). Communication theories emphasize the interactional processes—demand–withdraw, mutual avoidance, and escalation—that sustain dissatisfaction (Freeman et al., 2024; Witami et al., 2024). By combining these frameworks, our model shows that internal deficits in emotion processing (alexithymia) set the stage for destructive interpersonal scripts, which erode satisfaction.

Furthermore, our results align with cross-diagnostic models of interpersonal dysfunction. Studies on smartphone addiction (Ding et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2023) and problematic gaming (Scalone et al., 2023) have revealed similar affective–communication cascades: alexithymia leads to maladaptive relating, which reinforces distress and avoidance. Applying this reasoning to romantic relationships helps unify broader psychopathology models with couple research. It suggests that relational dissatisfaction may be one expression of a more general emotion-processing vulnerability that plays out contextually in intimate partnerships.

A noteworthy aspect of our study is its Malaysian context. Malaysia's collectivist and multicultural society values harmony and indirect emotion expression, which could theoretically attenuate the apparent costs of alexithymia. However, our data reveal robust negative associations similar to those in Western and Middle Eastern samples (Adıgüzel & Topbaş, 2025; Frenn et al., 2022; Iqbal et al.,

2024). This suggests that regardless of cultural norms, the inability to understand and convey emotions still disrupts dyadic functioning. Yet, cultural nuances may shape how destructive patterns manifest. For example, avoidance may be more socially accepted than overt demand–withdraw among some Malaysian couples, which future studies should explore.

Clinically, the results emphasize the need to integrate emotional awareness training into couple interventions. Psychotherapies focusing on alexithymia reduction, such as emotion-focused therapy and ideal attachment style coaching (Karmakar et al., 2024), could help partners articulate needs and increase empathy (Yılmaz et al., 2024). Additionally, communication-skills training remains vital. Helping couples identify destructive cycles, practice constructive negotiation, and repair ruptures could buffer satisfaction even when one partner has enduring affective deficits (Freeman et al., 2024; Witami et al., 2024). The combined target of personal and dyadic change may yield stronger relational outcomes.

Our study also informs preventive work. Educational programs for young adults can emphasize self-reflection, affect labeling, and healthy conflict strategies before long-term relational patterns solidify (Kaur, 2024; Reddy & Naila, 2024). Screening for alexithymia in premarital counseling could identify couples needing additional support.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. While the proposed model fits the data well, it cannot confirm that alexithymia temporally precedes destructive communication or dissatisfaction. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify directionality. Second, all data were self-reported, raising concerns about shared method variance and potential biases such as social desirability or limited introspective ability—ironically a known challenge among alexithymic individuals. Third, although the sample size was large and drawn from diverse Malaysian states, it was still non-probabilistic and skewed toward educated, internet-active participants; this may limit generalizability to less-connected or rural populations. Fourth, cultural factors such as collectivist norms and indirect emotional expression styles were not directly measured; thus, cultural moderation effects remain speculative. Finally, the study focused only on one dyadic partner's report; relational dissatisfaction and conflict are co-constructed phenomena that ideally require dyadic data from both partners.

Future research should address these limitations in several ways. Longitudinal and dyadic designs are crucial for mapping the temporal sequence of alexithymia, communication patterns, and dissatisfaction, and for testing reciprocal influences over time. Incorporating observational methods, such as coding real couple interactions, can validate self-reports and capture nonverbal emotional cues often missed by alexithymic individuals. Studies should also explore cultural moderators, comparing how collectivist versus individualist orientations shape the alexithymia–communication–satisfaction pathway. Integrating physiological or neurobiological measures of emotional processing could deepen mechanistic understanding. Additionally, future work might examine protective factors—such as empathy, attachment security, and emotion coaching—that can buffer risk in alexithymic partnerships. Intervention studies testing combined emotional awareness and communication training in randomized controlled trials would provide critical applied evidence.

For practitioners, the findings suggest several practical directions. Couple therapists should routinely assess alexithymia alongside communication styles, as these traits may underlie persistent dissatisfaction. Psychoeducation can help partners understand how difficulties in identifying and expressing emotions contribute to misunderstandings and conflict. Therapy models that integrate emotion-focused work with structured communication training may be especially effective for alexithymic couples. Prevention programs in premarital counseling, workplace wellness, and university mental health services can include modules on affect labeling, active listening, and conflict resolution. Finally, culturally sensitive adaptations of these interventions are essential; clinicians should consider local norms around indirect communication and emotional restraint when designing treatment.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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