Research Summary

An Analysis of Marital Quality Indicators in Thai Families : Antecedents and
Consequences *

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A prominent family study in Thailand examined the negative consequences of a family at-risk based on the psychological and behavioral characteristics of 4,590 adolescent students in Bangkok. The study showed that 33% of the total adolescent samples(1,509 students) came from families with broken-homes. For the remaining 3,081 students of intact families it was found that 13% of them(400 students) were classified as living under highly stressful family situations (obtained the lowest score range of perceived parental relations). The results of the study revealed that adolescents from stressful-intact families possessed the least amount of desirable characteristics (mental health, belief in internal locus of control, future orientation, non-aggressiveness and appropriate friendship activities) in comparison with those adolescents from broken-homes and those from good-intact families.

The previous research findings pointed out that the lowest score range of perceived parental-relation variable played a significant role to identify a group of at-risk students. Thus the students' perception of their parents' marital quality should be a target variable for developing to a central indicator. This empirical study attempts to further investigate the significance between antecedent and consequential factors of parents' marital quality. It then attempts to develop a system of marital quality indicators for Thai families. The present study is conducted with the following major objectives :

First, to find significant antecedent factors of Thai spouses' marital quality. The proposed factors included internal and external family situations, psychological characteristics and religiousness. Secondly, to find significant consequential factors of parents' marital quality that relate directly to their children's psychological and behavioral characteristics, and indirectly through the children's perception of their parents' characteristics. Thirdly, based on the present research findings, to construct 3 types of marital quality indicators, namely: (1) multiple antecedent indicators of marital quality ; (2) multiple consequential indicators of marital quality ; and (3) central indicators of marital quality.

The concept of marital quality can be defined as the qualitative and quantitative aspects of marital interactions and marital functions. Marital relationship and dyadic adjustment both represent the marital quality concept and are therefore the main variables of this study. **Marital relationship** is defined as the amounts of positive and negative interactions between husbands and wives such as emotional support and sympathy, and helpfulness, in contrast to misunderstanding, being distant, or conflicting. The measure of marital relationships was developed by a group of Thai psychologists, and consists of 15 items, each of which is accompanied by a six-point rating scale. This measure of marital relationships, which was constructed in the Thai cultural context, is referred to as "perceived parental relations" and was administered to adolescents of families who participated in the study. Its development is targeted at being the central indicator of marital quality. The power of this measurement, however, needed to be verified by a universal instrument. In this case dyadic adjustment was paralleled variable. **Dyadic adjustment scales** were designed to measure four components of dyadic adjustment, namely: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic consensus, dyadic cohesion and expression of affection. These scales were among the most comprehensively used instruments to date that were developed to measure adjustment for dyadic relationships including marriage. The dyadic adjustment measure consisted of 34 items with a 6-point response format ranging from "always" to "never". High scores reflected better dyadic adjustment.

In order to achieve the three research objectives, a dual correlation comparative study was carried out.

Study one : The Analysis of Antecedent Indicators of Marital Quality (husbands or wives from 962 families).

Study one aimed at indentifying significant antecedent factors of marital quality. The paradigm of the interaction model was employed to determine the scope of variables being studied. The dependent variables were two aspects of marital quality, i.e., marital relationship and dyadic adjustment. The independent variables were seven internal and external family situations, seven psychological traits, two psychological states, and three religious characteristics. Each of these variables was assessed by a set of questionnaires containing 10 to 20 items, each accompanied by a six-point rating scales, as is the tradition of the Summated Ratings Method. The α-coefficients of these tests ranged from .81 to .93. The nine bio-social and background characteristics of the respondents were the last group of variables to be collected. A total of thirty variables were analyzed in this study.

Participants included 962 spouses (361 husband and 601 wives) between the ages of 21-49 (average age was 35.05 years) and with a married duration of 2-31 years (average married duration was 10.27 years). The number of years of education ranged from 10 to 21 years with an average of 11.60 years for either or both spouses. Participants bearing only one child consisted of 81.6 percent of the sample.

Three hypotheses were subject to test. The first hypothesized model showed effects of husbands' and wives' family situations, psychological characteristics and religiousness on marital relationship (model I). The second hypothesized model displayed effects of husbands' and wives' family situations, psychological characteristics and religiousness on dyadic adjustment (model II). The validity of these two proposed models was evaluated by using the analysis of linear structural relation (LISREL 8.10 model). The third hypothesis compared the predictive power of seven factors that promote marital quality with seven risk factors. A Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was performed to test the last hypothesis.

Three major findings from Study one are listed as follows:-

First, the analysis of LISREL 8.10 model was performed to test model I. The modified model showed acceptability (NFI .99; GFI .99; AGFI .95; x^2 = 7.22, p = .12, df = 4; SRMR .008) in husbands displayed the following results:

High intimacy scores (stage 6 of Erikson's psychosocial development theory), perceived spouses' family-life values and perceived spouses' Buddhist practices. These three psychological factors directly and indirectly influenced good marital relationships (the total effects of path coefficients were .53, .34, and .18 correspondingly). The amounts of favorable attitudes towards spouse and perceived high family economic status directly influenced good marital relationships (path coefficient of .33 and .07). Furthermore, high marital communication and high Buddhist lifestyle scores indirectly affected good marital relationships via favorable attitudes towards spouse (path coefficient .18 and .14). Mentioned variables together could account for 75% of variation of marital relationship scores in husband model.

The modified model that showed acceptable fit (NFI .99; GFI .99; AGFI .99; x^2 = 2.17, p = .70, df = 4; SRMR .004) in wives displayed the following findings:

High intimacy scores, marital communication, low negative marital conflict management and perceived spouses' family-life values directly and indirectly affected good marital relationships (total effects of path coefficients were .47, .20, -.13 and .09 correspondingly). The amount of favorable attitudes towards spouse and perceived high family economic status directly effected good marital relationships (path coefficients .36 and .07). In addition, high amounts of perceived spouses' Buddhist practices and positive marital conflict management scores indirectly affected good marital relationships via favorable attitudes towards spouse. (path coefficients .21 and .11). The above variables together could account for 77% of variation of marital relationships in the wife model.

When comparing important factors acquired in evaluating husband model with those in the wife model, it was consistently found that amounts of intimacy, perceived spouses' family-life values, favorable attitudes towards spouse and perceived family economic status directly affected the level of marital relationships for both husband and wife models. However, the amount of marital communication and negative marital conflict management was showed to directly affect the level of marital relationship for the wife model, but not for the husband model. Incidentally, the amounts of perceived spouses' Buddhist practices directly affected marital relationship for the husband model but it did not do so for the wife model.

Secondly, the analysis of LISREL 8.10 model was used to test the model II. The modified model that showed acceptable fit (NFI .99; GFI .99; AGFI .95; x^2 = 11.30, p = .19, df = 8; SRMR .01) in husbands displayed the following findings:

High intimacy scores and perceived spouses' family-life values were two psychological factors directly and indirectly affected good dyadic adjustment (the total effects of path coefficients were .46 and .18). High amounts of favorable attitudes towards spouse, positive marital conflict management, negative marital conflict management and perceived family economic status directly affected good dyadic adjustment (path coefficients were .20, .19, -.12 and .12 correspondingly). Furthermore, a high level of perceived spouses' observing Buddhist practices, marital communication, participants' Buddhist lifestyle and Buddhist practices indirectly affected good dyadic adjustment via favorable attitudes towards spouse with small values of path coefficients.

These antecedent factors could account for 65 % of variance for dyadic adjustment scores in husband model.

The modified model that showed acceptable fit (NFI .99; GFI .99; AGFI .99; x^2 = 2.76, p = .60, df = 4; SRMR .005) in wives revealed the following results:

High intimacy scores, positive marital conflict management, marital communication and perceived spouses' family-life values directly and indirectly influenced good dyadic adjustment (The total effects of path coefficients were .41, .21, .15 and .14 correspondingly). High amounts of favorable attitudes towards spouse and perceived family economic status directly affected good dyadic adjustment (path coefficient .19 and .12). In addition high amounts of perceived spouses' Buddhist practices and negative marital conflict management indirectly affected good dyadic adjustment via high amounts of favorable attitudes towards spouse with small values of path coefficients.

Mentioned antecedent factors could account for 65% of variance of dyadic adjustment in wife model.

After comparing important factors obtained from evaluating the husband model against the wife model, consistent findings indicated that the amount of intimacy, favorable attitudes towards spouse, positive marital conflict management, perceived spouses' family-life values, and perceived family economic status directly influenced amount of dyadic adjustment for both husband and wife models. However, the amount of negative marital conflict management scores directly affected the husband model but

it did not affect the wife model. While the amount of marital communication directly affected dyadic adjustment scores for the wife model but it did not for the husband model.

Thirdly, results obtained by performing multiple regression analysis on the data revealed that the promotive factors, which consists of three family situations-family social support, marital communication, and positive marital conflict management; and four psychological characteristics-intimacy, perceived spouses' family-life values, perceived spouses' Buddhist practices, and favorable attitudes towards spouse, altogether accounted for 72% to 81% of the variance of marital relationships in the total sample of husbands and wives and in 26 groups of different backgrounds.

The seven promotive factors together accounted for 57% to 70% of the variance of dyadic adjustment in the total sample of husbands and wives and in 26 groups of different background.

The summation of the significant promotive factors of two aspects of marital quality-marital relationship and dyadic adjustment, appear in the following order: : Amount of intimacy, favorable attitudes towards spouse, positive marital conflict management and marital communication respectively.

In the particular subsamples of 775 husbands or wives with at least one child in the family, the same set of promotive factors mentioned could account for 74% of the variance of marital relationships. The Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis indicated the significant promotive factors of marital relationships in the following order : intimacy, attitudes towards spouse, marital communication, perceived family-life values and perceived spouse's Buddhist practices.

Risk factors which consisted of five family situations (perceived spouses' economic status differences, age differences, educational level differences, negative marital conflict management and numbers of bedroom functions) and two psychological characteristics (feeling of home crowding and work stress). Seven risk factors together with seven promotive factors (all fourteen factors) gained more powerful prediction to marital relationships than the seven promotive factors alone. However, these increasing predictive powers accounted for lest than 5% predictive difference criterion in all sample types. A similar circumstance applied to prediction of dyadic adjustment. Therefore, it might be concluded that seven promotive factors alone could predict levels of marital

relationship and dyadic adjustment as much as the promotive and risk factors put together.

Study two: The Analysis of Consequent Indicators of Marital Quality (parents and an adolescent from the same family)

Study two aimed at responding to the second and the third research objectives. The initial task in Study two was to search for significant effects of parents' marital quality on their children's psychological and behavioral characteristics. The second task was to find the most appropriate cutting points of the perceived parental relationship scores, which mostly differentiated psychological and behavioral characteristics of the adolescents.

The sample consisted of parents and a teen-age child from 1,089 intact families. Six hundred and two teenagers were male and four hundred eighty-seven were female. Their ages ranged from 9 to 18 years (average age was 13.14 years). Of the total sample, 382 were in the fifth and sixth grade or elementary school, 338 were in the seventh grade or middle school, and 369 were in the ninth and tenth grades or high school. This sample group had an average grade point average (GPA) of 2.44.

In addition to the teenagers, 390 fathers and 762 mothers participated. Their ages ranged from 22 to 66 years of age (average age was 39.90 years), each having attended formal education for 10 to 21 years (average years of education was 8.02 years). Participants' marriage duration were ranged from 2 to 48 years (average marriage duration was 16.15 years).

In Study two, two variables relating to marital quality became antecedent factors (independent variables). Evidences from previous research indicated that adolescents' perception of parental relations and parent-child relations were directly related to five psychological consequences, (dependent variables) namely: mental health, psychosocial development (stage 1 to 4 of Erikson's theory), ego identity (stage 5 of Erikson's theory), future orientation and internal locus of control of reinforcement; and two behavioral consequences namely, appropriate friendship activities, and aggressiveness. Moreover, adolescents' perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations might indirectly be related to the seven psychological and behavioral consequences via adolescents' six perceptions of family functions and attitudinal variables (perceived love and reasoning oriented child-rearing practices, attitudes towards father, attitudes towards

mother, estimated frequency of parental conflict, and perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict).

Each of these variables was measured by a set of questionnaires containing 10 – 20 items using a six-point rating scale. The α-coefficients of these tests ranged from .66 to .93.

The first hypothesized model (model III) showed paths of influences of adolescents' (total sample perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations) on four psychological characteristics-mental health, psychosocial development, future orientation internal locus of control of reinforcement, and six adolescent variables of family function perceptions and attitudes towards father and mother.

The second hypothesized model (model IV) showed influences of a specific group of 9th to 10th graders that perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations on five psychological characteristics (similar psychological characteristics to those being studied in the first hypothesis, including ego identity) and on six variables of family functioning perceptions and attitudes towards father and mother.

The third hypothesized model (model V) showed the total sample of influences of adolescents' perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations on two behavioral characteristics (appropriate friendship activities and aggressiveness), and on six variables of family functional perceptions and attitudes towards father and mother.

Models III, IV and V, each contained the same, three-latent variables: (1) perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, (2) attitude towards parents and (3) perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict. The three initial models of causal relationship between adolescents' psychological and behavioral characteristics were evaluated using the LISREL 8.10 model and DOS-PRELIS 1.20.

Three major findings from Study two can be summarized as follows:

First, the analysis of LISREL 8.10 and DOS-PRELIS 1.20 models were performed to test the initial model III and IV and proved appropriate results (in model III: NFI 1.00; GFT AGFI .98; x^2 = 36.35, p-value = .09, df = 26; SRMR .01) with a total of 1,063 adolescents (in model IV: NFI .99; GFI .98; AGFI .95; x^2 = 52.50 p-value = .09, df = .40; SRMR .04), with the specific group of 368 9th to 10th graders. These two models displayed more or less similar results.

In model III, adolescents' good mental health was a direct consequential factor of perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations (path coefficients were .23 and .40). High amounts of adolescents' psychological characteristics (internal locus of control, psychosocial development and future orientation) were indirect consequential factors of perceived good parental relation via perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict, perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, and good mental health. (path coefficients were .26, .20 and .13 correspondingly). Furthermore, high amounts of adolescents' psychological characteristics (future orientation, psychosocial development and internal locus of control) were indirect consequential factors of perceived good parent-child relations via perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, attitudes towards parents, perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict, and good mental health (path coefficients were .49, .44 and .37 respectively).

In model IV, adolescents' good mental health was directly consequential to factors of perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations (path coefficients were .27 and .42 respectively).

High amounts of adolescents' psychological characteristics (psychosocial development, internal locus of control, future orientation and ego identity) were indirect consequential factors of perceived good parental relations via perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict, perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, and good mental health (path coefficients were 26, .23, 21 and .11 respectively).

High amounts of adolescents' psychological characteristics (future orientation psychosocial characteristic internal locus of control and ego identity) were indirect consequential factors of perceived good parent-child relations via perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict and good mental health (path coefficients were .49, .49 .44 and .20 respectively).

Results of model III (the total sample) and model IV (9th and 10th grader sample) revealed that adolescents' good mental health was directly depended upon perceived good parental relations and perceived good parent-child relations. Adolescents' high future orientation, high internal locus of control, appropriate psychosocial development and appropriate ego identity (obvious in the 9th and 10th graders) depended directly on favorable attitudes towards parents, more perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, and more perceived personal ability to manage

parental conflict. Thus, these three consequential factors depend on the adolescents' perception of good parental relations and good parent-child relations. Moreover, it was found that adolescents who possessed appropriate psychosocial development also gained appropriate ego identity. Those who obtained good mental health also gained high levels of internal locus of control and high levels of future orientation.

Secondly, the analysis of LISREL model indicated that the initial model V was appropriate (NFI 1.00; GFI 1.00; AGFI .99; X^2 = 18.77, p-value = .13, df = 13; SRMR = .01). It was found that adolescents' appropriate friendship activities and non-aggressiveness were indirect consequential factors of their perceptions on parental relations via perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict (path coefficients were .04 and .19 respectively). Also, adolescents' appropriate friendship activities and non-aggressiveness were indirect consequential factors of perceived parent-child relations via attitudes towards parents, and perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices (path coefficients were .44 and .29 correspondingly).

It was obvious in Model V that adolescents' non-aggressiveness and appropriate friendship activities depended directly on perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict and favorable attitudes towards parents. Thus, these three consequential factors resulted in dependence on perceived good parental relations and perceived good parent-child relations. In addition, it was found that adolescents' non-aggressiveness was significantly related to appropriate friendship activities and vice versa.

Thirdly, it was found that the best cutting point for score distributions of two variables (perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations), was the criteria of average score plus or minus one – half of the standard deviation. ($\bar{x} \pm \frac{1}{2}$SD).

This cutting point divided each score distribution into 3 levels, i.e., high, medium and low. The results of the one-way analysis of variance indicated that the three score levels of each variable could significantly differentiate scores of consequential variables concerning adolescents' psychological and behavioral characteristics as well as adolescents' perceptions of family functions and attitudes towards parents. For instance, an adolescent who scores low in his level of perception on parental relations is also known to score low for both psychological and behavioral variables. Such findings occurred for the total sample as well as for every subgroup of different backgrounds.

Thus, high, medium, and low levels of perceived parental relation scores and perceived parent-child relation scores could well reflect inner family relationship situations. High levels of perceived parental relation scores were expected to relate to a happy-intact family status. Medium level scores were expected to relate to a normal family situation with some parental conflicts. Low level scores reflected stressful– intact family situations.

Based on these results of data analysis, two assessments of perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations were confirmed to be paralleled central indicators of parents' marital quality.

The System of Perceived Parental Relation Indicator : Conclusion of the Dual Study

A "system" consists of three components namely input, process, and output. Research findings of this dual study can be integrated in terms of the system of perceived parental relation indicator, which reflects many aspects of marital quality (see Figure 1)

In Study one, the data of husbands or wives from 775 families with at least one teenage child which were analyzed using Multiple Regression Correlation, revealed that five factors were significant namely: 1) intimacy scores, 2) favorable attitudes towards spouse, 3) marital communication, 4) perceived family-life values, and 5) perceived spouse's Buddhist practices. Together, these factors can account for 74% of variance of marital relation scores. Thus, these important variables have been identified as the multiple antecedent indicators of marital quality.

In Study two involved parents and teenage children from 1,089 families. By performing path analysis on the data, it was found that multiple consequential indicators of perceived parental relations (or parents' marital quality) were the children's good mental health (with direct effects) and six indirect consequential indicators. Four of these indicators were psychological (psycho-social development of the child ego identity achievement, future orientation and belief in internal locus of control of reinforcement) and two were behavioral (appropriate friendship activities and non-aggressiveness) via perceived love and reasoning child-rearing practices, favorable attitudes towards parents, and perceived personal ability to manage parental conflict. These multiple

consequential indicators accounted for 55% of the variance of marital quality reported by the child. The central indicator consisted of 10 items, each accompanied by a six–point rating scale of the traditional Summated Ratings Method. Three levels of scores (computed from $\bar{x} \pm \frac{1}{2}$ sp) from this assessment are confirmed by the dual research in this study and can therefore be used to classify families and/or children who may need future assistance.

Practical Implications

       This dual study has confirmed important roles of the two assessments-perceived parental relations and perceived parent-child relations. These two assessments are displayed as central indicators that can identify the antecedent and consequential factors of Thai family quality (see Figure 1). The two indicators can be administered to adolescents in schools. Ones who fall at low-level scores can be identified as at-risk adolescents from stressful-intact families. This will provide school guidance counselors with a basis for offering children help in releasing tensions, coping with problems, and preventing negative consequences relating to psychological and behavioral characteristics, as shown in Study Two's research findings. Adolescents, on the other hand, who obtain high-level scores, should be nurtured and encouraged to maintain good family relationships. Their families could be promoted as the model for others to follow.
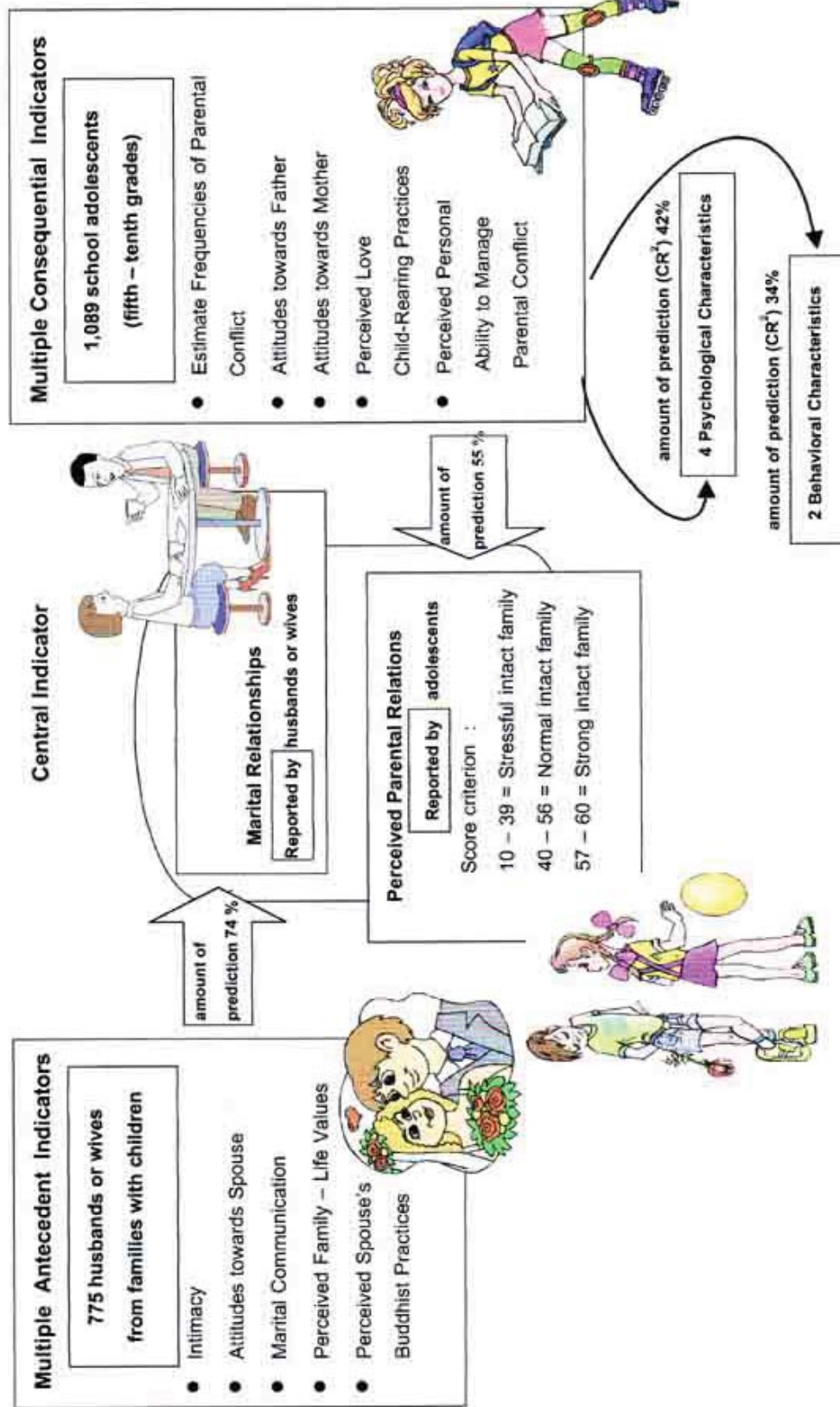
Multiple Consequential Indicators

1,089 school adolescents
(fifth – tenth grades)

- Estimate Frequencies of Parental Conflict
- Attitudes towards Father
- Attitudes towards Mother
- Perceived Love
- Child-Rearing Practices
- Perceived Personal Ability to Manage Parental Conflict

amount of prediction (CR^2) 42%

4 Psychological Characteristics

amount of prediction (CR^2) 34%

2 Behavioral Characteristics

Central Indicator

Marital Relationships

Reported by husbands or wives

amount of prediction 55 %

Perceived Parental Relations

Reported by adolescents

Score criterion :

10 – 39 = Stressful intact family
40 – 56 = Normal intact family
57 – 60 = Strong intact family

amount of prediction 74 %

Multiple Antecedent Indicators

775 husbands or wives
from families with children

- Intimacy
- Attitudes towards Spouse
- Marital Communication
- Perceived Family – Life Values
- Perceived Spouse's Buddhist Practices

Figure 1: The System of Perceived Parental Relations

Research Implications

1. Research Implications for Spouses

Training package for the enhancing of intimacy, formulation of favorable attitudes towards spouse, increasing marital communication skills, and marital conflict management in the family should be developed for use in spouses' training program.

An experimental research can evaluate the practicality of the model and identify the strengths and weakness of the training packages in order to establish an effective program for marital quality. Through the experiment, groups of spouses who are appropriate for the training package should be identified.

2. Research Implications for parents and adolescents

These research findings suggest that a training package on parent–adolescent communication skills and a package on love and reasoning child rearing practices for parents be developed and use for enhancing of family strength.

An experimental research should be under taken to evaluate the practicality of the models and identified the strengths and weakness of the training packages in order to establish an effective program for marital quality. Through the experiment, groups of parents and adolescents who are appropriate to these training packages should be identified.