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# Exploring factors affecting conflict between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law: A qualitative study

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**Abstract**--The aim of this study is to understand the process of conflict between mothers-in-law (MILs) and daughters-in-law (DILs), contributing factors, strategies, and consequences of utilizing these strategies. Using the grounded theory method, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 Iranian mothers-in-law and 18 daughters-in-law parents between 2019 and 2022. Based on the data, a conceptual model of conflict was developed, which explains what causal factors have affected the conflict, in what context and under which intervention conditions did the conflict occur, what strategies were used to manage this conflict, and what are the consequences of this conflict. The coding process revealed that Failure to form a shared family identity-the core phenomenon-was at the heart of this conflict. Implications for prevention programs, as well as detailed findings, are discussed.

**Keywords**---*Mother-in-law, Daughter-in-law, Conflict, Grounded theory.*

**Introduction**

The family is considered the primary source of comfort, closeness, and love (Hajjat and Mehyar, 2003). The most typical social unit in urban settings is the nuclear family, but in rural regions, it is the extended family. Families and their extended

families share a strong psychological connection. However, as the West gradually takes hold and places more emphasis on the nuclear family, some families are torn about how much devotion to the extended family they should make (Jalali, 2005). Members of the extended family, particularly in-laws, have a significant impact on the decision-making processes of the nuclear family in Muslim societies (Daneshpour, 2017, p. 84). Choosing a spouse is frequently supervised by parents and older relatives in traditional families. Even in modern and contemporary families, parental acceptance and agreement with the future spouse are regarded as significant influences in the process of choosing a partner (Hojat & Mehryar, 2003). Issues of boundaries and devotion to the family of origin are prominent in many traditional households, especially as the second generation emphasizes the exclusivity of the husband and wife. Due to differences in cultural codes, the relationship between a MIL and a DIL may be problematic (Falikov, 2016). The competing loyalties of relationships with the spouse's family, which may vie for the couple's time, attention, or love, is a typical dilemma that threatens the attachment of couples. In western civilizations, husbands are supposed to put their wives "first" and secure their attachment in this manner. The family of origins, spouses, and the nuclear family are all deserving of consideration and attention, but occasionally only one of them may and should be prioritized. Forced selection between primary relational commitments results in the splitted loyalty (DeMaria, Weeks, & Twist, 2017).

According to Rittenour (2009), the in-laws have direct and indirect effects on the couple's relationship. Citing studies (Umberson et al., 2005; Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989) indicating that people who had a stressful relationship with their parents prior to marriage have stressful relationships after marriage, he explains that parents have a great deal of influence over couples through their interactions with their children. In addition, parents' direct interaction with their child's spouse has a direct influence on this relationship. The future of a couple's marriage is determined by their parents' opinions about their prospective spouse before the wedding. For instance, Bryant, Conger, and Meehan (2001) discovered that adult children's perceptions of their parents' premarital attitudes about marriage reliably predict the couple's postmarital satisfaction. The relationship between MIL and DIL is the most problematic among family members, and the MIL is seen as the most bothersome person. A simple Google search using the phrases MIL and DIL, whether in Farsi or English, yields websites, articles, and books confirming that the relationship between MIL and DIL is a serious issue; From popular cultures, such as idioms and jokes, media, and films, as well as literature and study, it is possible to infer that this relationship is difficult. Even according to studies conducted in the West, the MIL is the most despised member of the in-law family (Duvall, 1957; cited by Anderson, 2016).

According to Horsley (1997), the common problems of clients who seek therapy for conflict with their spouse's family include parental disapproval of the marriage, blame from the spouse's family, issues related to loyalty, resentment, care, and financial support for elderly parents, life cycle pressures, communication during ceremonies, and undefined roles. In addition to these findings, research has demonstrated that this relationship can be both helpful and emotional (Hung, 2005; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Kurdek, 1999). Significant events that result in intense disagreement between the DIL and the MIL affect not just their

relationship but also the relationships of other family members. For instance, if the DIL decides to limit her children's interaction with the MIL or speaks badly of the MIL in front of her children, this may significantly impact the relationship between her family members and her husband's family (Anderson, 2016). Additionally, the tension between the DIL and MIL might have a negative impact on the daughter-in-marriage. Research demonstrates that a couple's marital satisfaction is influenced by the strength of their relationship with their spouse's family (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008; Mikucki-Enyart, 2011). Also, the conflict between the DIL and the MIL can also affect the relationship between the MIL and her son because the son is expected to take sides, and when the son remains loyal to his wife, he may hurt his mother's feelings (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Despite the fact that popular culture that crystallizes in the media, jokes, serials, and virtual space suggests that the relationship with the in-laws has a significant impact on family life, family researchers have ignored these interactions (Prentice, 2005). According to Chen (1999), the following reasons could account for this dearth of study. First, in the predominant American family culture, the relationship with the spouse's family may be regarded as a secondary and peripheral one. Contrariwise, in certain Asian households, the extended family is the primary form of family life. Consequently, the relationship with the spouse's family members is regarded as an essential aspect of family interactions. Second, it can be inferred from the language used to describe this type of relationship (i.e., the term "in-law") that the background and cultural context of American-European and Asian families are distinct. In American culture, when people marry and become relatives, they do not know how to refer to these relatives (Jergensen, 1994). In Asian culture, each member of the wife's family has a unique title and is expected to play a similar role

The research indicates that, firstly, the MIL/DIL issue is a real issue that exists in all cultures and that dissatisfaction in this regard can have many consequences for the entire family system; secondly, based on a review of the research conducted in this field, no research has been conducted in Iran that examines the nature of the relationship between the DIL and the MIL explicitly; therefore, and therefore it can be said that the research in this field is facing a gap. Thirdly, having a theoretical model of the conflict process and its influencing elements can serve as a guide for the development of treatments that will aid those in the dispute. The purpose of the present study is to answer the question, "What factors affect the conflict between the DIL and the MIL, and what is its process?" In other words, the researchers intend to present a theoretical model of the factors influencing the conflict between the DIL and the MIL, as well as its consequences and resolution strategies, using the ground theory method.

## **Method**

In light of the researcher's desire to formulate a theoretical model that explains the elements that contribute to the conflict between the DIL and the MIL, the grounded theory approach was utilized for this study. The grounded theory method was used since it is suitable for elucidating processes and developing an action plan (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Given that conflict has a dynamic process

and interacts with a variety of contextual circumstances, the grounded theory method can be used to reveal the hidden dimensions of this concept and the current conflict management process. The grounded theory method is rooted in symbolic interaction theory and focuses on how individuals perceive and react to interactions (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). One of the benefits of employing symbolic interactionism in the study of family communication is that it allows us to concentrate on the complexity of reality. According to this perspective, family life is based on the creation of meanings via the use of symbols, and family members' identities emerge through interactions with significant persons (Sabourin, 2006).

Using open coding, the researcher conceptualizes the data into categories and continues sampling based on the need to study the discovered concepts and categories in greater depth (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The researcher examines categories using axial coding by distinguishing a) characteristics and dimensions, b) interactions and actions, and c) consequences (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Additionally, the researcher identifies conditions and processes that impact individuals and events (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Parallel to ongoing data collection and analysis, the researcher continuously writes analytical notes and evaluates the data to identify patterns and conceptual linkages.

### ***Participants and sampling strategies***

Interviews are conducted with DILs and MILs who have experienced conflict as part of a purposive sampling strategy. In the initial step of participant selection, those who had experienced interfamily conflict with the MIL or DIL were considered. After choosing the potential participants, snowball sampling was used to reach more persons who had experienced conflict with the MIL or DIL. Theoretical sampling was then conducted based on the patterns that emerged from the participants' experiences. After theoretical saturation, 32 participants—18 DIL and 14 MILs—were ultimately chosen.

### ***Data collection method:***

Different data gathering strategies are used in grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). After gaining the participants' informed consent, data will be collected through semi-structured interviews in this study.

### ***Trustworthiness***

To achieve the acceptability and reliability of the grounded theory study, eight criteria have been outlined, including long-term engagement and continuous observation in the field, the use of integration, the use of other research colleagues to review the results, the analysis of negative cases, the identification of the researcher's bias, the participants' verification of the findings, a rich and detailed description of the findings, and external observers (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The researcher builds a close relationship with the participants and the research setting, conducts several analyses, and looks for instances of use that are in conflict with one another in order to strengthen the accuracy and robustness of the data. In addition, the assistance of the research group's

supervisors and advisors helps to validate the findings. In the event of any ambiguity during data processing, participants will be referred. Some participants were also given a summary of the interviews and the extracted codes for their approval. For data integrity, the data collection procedure is discussed in detail.

## Findings

The age range of the DILs was between 28 and 61 years old, and the duration of their marriages ranged from 2 to 45 years. Four of the DILs did not have children, while five had one, seven had two, one had three, and one had four. The ages of the MILs ranged from 42 to 72 years old, and the length of the marriages ranged from 27 to 57 years. Four of the MILs had two children, five had three children, two had four, and three had five. The participants' levels of education ranged from elementary to master's degrees.

Analysis of the data obtained from the coding led to the identification of 98 concepts, 29 sub-categories, and ten categories. The study's findings were examined in terms of cause conditions, context and interfering conditions, action and interaction strategies, and consequences. For this purpose, the main categories derived from the open coding of the data were linked. Additionally, axial coding was considered from the start of the initial interview and coding. The most crucial aspect of this coding is identifying the core category. This paradigm's core category is "lack of shared family identity." This category is the core category or phenomenon that is repeated in the majority of interviews, and all other categories can be related to it. In relation to this category, the causal conditions, strategies, intervening conditions, context, and also consequences are studied.

The process of conflict between the DIL and the MIL is influenced by multiple conditions and factors, as depicted in *Fig 1*. First, *causal conditions* specify a phenomenon in terms of the incidents or occurrences that lead to its emergence or evolution. The *context* is the particular set of features in which the phenomenon is situated. Concurrently, the context also characterizes the unique set of settings under which action/interaction strategies to overcome, manage, or react to a particular phenomenon are implemented. Third, *intervening conditions* are the general and expansive factors that affect action/interaction strategies. There is always *activity or engagement* directed at the phenomenon in order to control or conquer it, perform it, or react to it. Lastly, action and interaction that are undertaken or, alternatively, are not conducted as a response to or in order to overcome a phenomenon result in *outcomes* and *consequences* (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Our coding process revealed that the "**faulty marriage process**" and "**idealism**" are the *causal conditions* of this paradigm. The *context* for the conceptual model of the DIL/MIL conflict process is the "**lack of coherence in the husband's family of origins**", "**lack of coherence in the son/DIL system**", and "**intra-psychoic problems**". "**Socio-cultural influences**" are the *intervening conditions*. "**Communication and emotional strategies**" form *action and interaction* in this model. Finally, "**Frustration and disillusionment**" are the *consequences* of applying strategies to deal with conflict. In the following sections, we will go through each component of this conceptual model in depth. It should be mentioned that due to the article's word limit, we will only mention participant accounts when appropriate.

### **Faulty marriage process**

Engagement is a key moment in the lives of many couples. As a couple prepares for their forthcoming marriage, they will likely go through several changes. These can involve a physical move, adjustments in financial management, adaptation to and integration of additional family members (i.e., in-laws), and reassignment of ordinary household chores. In addition, there are emotional shifts during the engagement time, as the couple evaluates their expectations for marriage, separation from close friends and families of origin, and the creation of a new life together (Fincham & Beach, 2010a). Our coding process revealed that there are four sub-categories under the "faulty marriage process" category. *Inability to adapt to role transformation, problems during the engagement phase, discontent with the spouse selection, and MIL rejection of the DILs.* All of these sub-categories represent a faulty marriage process in the sense that the couple has not effectively navigated the marital process, adapted to the new situation, or accomplished the associated tasks. According to the narratives of this study's participants, DILs who were *close friends or relatives* with their MIL prior to marriage encountered difficulties with the perceived strength of their relationship with her after marriage. In other words, friendship or affinity between the DIL and MIL prior to marriage, if it is not adequately transformed into a new role and the DIL does not adjust, may result in a subjective evaluation of the relationship's low quality after marriage (Inability to adapt to role transformation). As a DIL describes:

*"At first, I thought she was a nice and decent person. I didn't expect it to turn out this way. I was madly in love with her. When I observed these actions, I assumed she was a completely authoritarian mother. When I entered their house as a friend, my MIL always greeted me as if she hadn't seen me in six months, but now that I'm a DIL and say hello, it's not the same warmth as before. I can no longer give her the same amount of energy that I do to others."*

One of the culturally-based findings of this research, which differs from previous studies in the West and even Asian cultures, is the problems during the engagement phase, which was consistently observed in the data and appeared to be tied to Iranians' distinctive practices and customs. *Disputes over dowry, disputes over the purchase of marriage accessories, failure to adhere to customs, disruption in the Khastegāri (courtship) ceremony, and not doing Pagoshā\** are examples of these problems experienced by participants. As a MIL recounts:

*"They forced us to buy the big home stuff. We didn't accept wooden furniture, but her uncle was present and urged... it was our custom to buy two or three pieces of household furniture. However, they left us with the refrigerator, washing machine, wood service, and everything else (disagreement in buying wedding accessories)"*

One of the examples highlighted among DILs was *forced marriage and marriage at a young age*, which seems to have contributed to the conflict between the MIL and

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\* It is a ceremony where the newlywed couple goes to the house of their relatives to accept Runamā, which is the name of the gift that's usually given to the bride and groom to celebrate them as "a family".

the DIL. Research shows that forced marriage at a young age can result in early marital conflict (Rezapour Mirsaleh et al., 2022).

*I remember my mom saying about me: "she doesn't know [what is right and what is wrong]. Let's marry her because he is a good boy. let it go". It was not my wish. I even told my aunt several times, I told my mom. Dad even agreed with my opinion, but it was as if the poor man couldn't get his own way, he was saying that because he is a good boy, their life will be good, "look at his morals, how hardworking he is. Their lives will be better." he said. They used to say these things to my father (forced marriage under the discontent with the spouse selection category).*

The perception of non-acceptance by the MIL frequently appears in DILs' stories as well as in accounts from MILs in interviews. For the reasons outlined below, several MILs explicitly said that they did not like their DIL. They had to, however, abide by their son's choice. On the other hand, several of the DILs' own perceptions supported their belief that their MIL did not accept them. One of the key factors that might significantly contribute to MIL and DIL problems is the initial lack of acceptance. The ideas of *disapproval due to poor family background*, *disapproval due to appearance*, *disapproval due to ethnicity*, and *disapproval due to social level* are all included in this sub-category "MIL rejection of the DILs", according to the coding of the interview transcripts. A DIL said:

*Our marriage was a conventional marriage, and we were not friends. They had introduced me because they knew my family, and then they came to know me. Later, I learned what had caused my MIL's hesitation. Later, I discovered that my MIL disliked northerners (disapproval due to ethnicity)*

The adage "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" doesn't appear to apply in this case. It appears that accepting this issue is difficult for MILs. Additionally, this lack of acceptance has happened in various situations like family background and social class.

### **Idealism**

In the current study, both the DIL and the MIL held beliefs and expectations on the nature of their potential relationship with the other party. In their narrative, some of these ideas and expectations were explicit and evident, while others were implicit. The participants in the interviews repeatedly explained that one of the effective factors in the conflict was the failure to fulfill the expectations and beliefs that they had previously imagined for themselves. Because these expectations did not help to improve the relationship, we consider it to be dysfunctional, and because these beliefs and expectations set high standards for the other party, they always act as an unattainable ideal. The coding of the interview transcripts revealed that the category of "idealism" has two categories: *dysfunctional beliefs* and *dysfunctional expectations*. The sub-category of dysfunctional beliefs consisted of 3 concepts: *the DIL as my own daughter*, *the MIL as my own mother*, and *taking my own mother as a good MIL role model*. The sub-category of dysfunctional expectations consisted of 2 concepts: *Expecting financial help from the husband's family* and *expecting the MIL to judge in marital conflicts*. Both DILs

and MILs viewed the other party to be comparable to their own mother or daughter. On the other hand, some DILs had observed their mother in the position of MIL and felt that their own MIL would likewise possess the same qualities. As a MIL said:

*Unfortunately, I mistakenly believed that I had a daughter when, in fact, she was a DIL. But because I didn't have a daughter, I felt as though she should take the place of my daughter. I wanted her to be like my daughter. In my perspective, since the DIL is like a daughter and the MIL has this feeling, I want the DIL to think of me as her mother and treat me as such. They will understand each other much better and lead fulfilling lives if this behavior is reciprocal. She still doesn't have this attitude, although she already had it, whereas I also had it and still do (the DIL as my own daughter).*

We can see clearly how this idea might lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the MIL or the DIL concludes that they cannot have a warm and intimate relationship with the other. It is likely that these ideas and expectations will serve as the foundation for the experience of interference. When the MIL or the DIL holds this belief, she will likely reduce the level of formality in the contact and, as a result of this intimacy and proximity, violate the interpersonal boundaries of the other party. In a mother-daughter relationship, when there are less strict boundaries and more intimacy, it might not be seen as a boundary violation.

A DIL said:

*The MIL is like your own mother, the DIL is like your own daughter; therefore, just as they desire the best for their daughter, they should likewise desire the best for the DIL. The DIL must view her MIL as her own. Since my mother was incapacitated, I viewed my MIL as a substitute. As though I want to visit my second mum. Unfortunately, it was not what I had anticipated...*

Another DIL reveals how she imagined her mother as a good MIL and generalized this view to other MILs:

*Well, because I grew up in a home in which my mother was also the MIL, my mother always loved the DIL and thought of her as one of her own daughters, which is why she was always so sweet...*

On the other hand, one of the causes of conflict was the DIL's unfulfilled expectations from their MIL. Some DILs complained to their MIL about their husbands and expected the MIL to adopt a neutral stance or take their side. They also anticipated that their husband's parents would provide financial support. The MILs deemed these expectations to be improper, and the DILs indicated that their expectations were not met. As a MIL said:

*I advise the DILs to never have material expectations from the parents of the groom, and I advise the MILs to refrain from offering assistance to the working lady because doing so develops a habit. My son-in-wife law's is developing the habit. My son is developing the routine.*

In another case, a DIL recounts:

*My MIL has two qualities that indicate she is extremely prejudiced against her children. She does not want to accept his children's faults, and if somebody comes to recite his children's mistakes in front of her, she will confront them strongly, though she does not intend to treat them poorly at that time. She remains silent, and he eventually confronts her on multiple occasions.*

The implication of this narrative is that my MIL should maintain a neutral stance whenever I complain or criticize her son. This is a very high standard for the MIL, so it is likely that it will not be met in the majority of situations.

### ***Failure to form a shared family identity***

Shared family identity (SFI) indicates the extent to which members of a group can minimize their differences and focus on their shared group identity as the salient identity. In other words, shared family identity represents a shared grouping within a group, or how far family members can focus on the characteristics that give them family identity (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Indeed, in intergroup contexts, accommodative behavior reflects stronger personal links, whereas non-accommodative behavior is related to group salience (i.e., different social identities are evident in interactions). Extending this to the family setting, accommodative behaviors are connected with a shared (more personalized) family identity, whereas non-accommodative behaviors are negatively correlated with a shared family identity (Soliz & Harwood, 2006).

Communication Accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991; cited in Schrodtt & Scruggs, 2020) is a guiding principle in intergroup communication research that emphasizes the connection between communication and group-based categorization. In other words, the psychological distance between relationship participants is negotiated through dialogue. Specifically, accommodative behaviors (e.g., sharing personal thoughts and feelings, addressing topics of interest, taking into account the conversational partner's needs) are more personal [intimate] and, as a result, are generally perceived positively. In contrast, non-accommodative behaviors (such as degrading communication, displaying contempt, not attending to the partner's needs, and talking about uninteresting topics) are typically seen more negatively (Williams & Giles, 1996; cited in Schrodtt et al. Scruggs, 2020).

Due to the non-voluntary nature of the MIL/DIL relationship, similar to that of a step-child with their step-parents in a blended family, the quality of the relationship depends on the efforts of both parties to adapt and get to know one another. Looking at the reports of DILs and MILs through the lens of Communication Accommodation theory, one of the most prevalent themes was the behaviors and interactions that *convey* the perceptions of being "insiders" and "outsiders"; Our axial coding process identified four sub-categories, including *carelessness*, *neglect*, *differential treatment*, and *contempt*. These behaviors prevent the mother-MIL from forming a shared family identity.

The sub-category of **Carelessness** characterizes behaviors that include *making the other feel beholden, talking recklessly, not respecting the elder honor, and not observing social etiquette*. **Differential treatment** characterizes behaviors that include *Keeping the DIL away from family issues, discrimination between DILs, discrimination between grandchildren, and discrimination between children*. **Contempt** characterizes behaviors that include: *Insulting, teasing and sarcasm, comparing and devaluing*. **Neglect** characterizes behaviors that include: *Inattention to the DIL during childbirth, inattention to the DIL during pregnancy, inattention to illness conditions, inattention to occasions, and ingratitude*.

Carelessness refers to activities that are typically unintentional and may be the result of a lack of linguistic skills, age differences, or various social norms. Nonetheless, the results indicate that this issue is a significant contributor to the tension between the DIL and the MIL. For example, repeatedly recounting the positive things done for the other party, talking without reflection, which can be caused by frankness, and interactions between the DIL and the MIL at parties or events, such as not assisting the MIL in serving and hosting the guests can all be considered carelessness.

A DIL said;

*After Rojan was born, I stopped taking her there. She nevertheless insisted on visiting us for Rojan's birthday. She spent ten days with us in our home. She insisted on coming and staying on her own. However, she said something that left me feeling obligated. She claimed that your own mother did not even do to you what I did to you during your delivery (making the other feel beholden).*

In another case, a MIL described a situation we conceptualized as "talking recklessly."

*In other words, she doesn't worry whether what she says won't lead to a disagreement later when she wants to say it. It seems as though she pierced my heart with an arrow.*

Another sub-category revealed in the axial coding was *differential treatment*. It specifically refers to the DILs' perception of the MIL's discriminatory behavior in different dimensions. The DILs often mentioned that their MIL discriminates between other DILs, grandchildren, and children. Discriminatory behaviors can strengthen the perception of the insider and the outsider in DILs, make them feel unaccepted, and unloved by the husband's family, and prevent the formation of a shared family identity.

A DIL says:

*In terms of gift-giving, she continued to differentiate between my daughter and his daughter's child. When she showed me the present she had purchased for her, she had not also purchased one for my daughter. She went out and purchased a baby-appropriate item for my kid. It made me really upset. I was quite irritated.*

A DIL says:

*He does not respect the older, she does not allow the senior to speak, I am asking her a question, I have not spoken yet, and she is prepared to respond. It's horrible for us. If Peyman or my daughter's father beats them, it is true that they are unhappy, but they simply walk to their room, where they calm themselves down or cry, and do not reply. But she resists. She lacks comprehension of the older and younger positions. Her family is like that.*

A MIL said:

*Take at least two dishes and place them in front of our guests when they visit. I visit a lot of locations now, and while their DIL may not have done anything previously, the way she acts in front of the guests wins our respect. Mom, this is your own house, I say.*

The fourth sub-category revealed in the axial coding is *neglecting* each other in the relationship. In any relationship, taking care of each other's needs is one of the most crucial components in enhancing the closeness and durability of any relationship. Both DILs and MILs said that they were neglected by the other party in special circumstances such as pregnancy, childbirth, and illness.

A MIL said:

*This time, even though she was aware that it was my birthday, she made no attempt to congratulate me. She made no congrats at all even though we had invited them, and Saeed had brought a present. Well, one does comprehend. One becomes angry. She wants to exact revenge in some way, I don't know how. Saeed brought the present and gave it to me, and God knows why.*

A DIL said:

*After all, giving birth is associated with a sequence of depression. I was there since my son was suffering from jaundice. I wasn't feeling well on some days. For example, I was experiencing depression, which she also didn't comprehend. When she noticed I was upset, she frowned and said, "Why are you doing this? What's the matter with you? Why are you all so glum?" For example, she used to quarrel with me verbally in this manner.*

### **Boundary ambiguity**

Boundary ambiguity may result if the DIL, her husband, and her MIL are not in communication about their expectations for their relationships and interactions with one another (Turner, Young, & Black, 2006). Research has employed the idea of boundary ambiguity to explain relationships in divorce, remarriage, and stepfamily contexts (Carroll, Olson, & Buckmiller, 2007). Boundary ambiguity refers to not knowing who is in or out of your family or relationship or who is outside of your family, and research has shown that boundary ambiguity predicts family conflict (Bass, 2006; cited in Greif & Woolley, 2019). By comparing the DIL-MIL relationship, which is an involuntary relationship, with similar relationships such as stepfamilies, where children enter a new family relationship based on the

decision of their biological parents and face challenges in terms of boundaries and loyalty, DILs and MILs in the current study also experience the problem of boundary ambiguity. Many MILs lack the norms, models, and protocols necessary to determine the amount of their influence and participation in their child's life. This ambiguity, which translates as interference vs. involvement, has led to conflict between the DIL and MIL. According to the findings of the study, many MILs may comment on their daughter-in-law's performance and that of their children out of a desire to impart wisdom and care for the marital success of their children. Similarly, the DIL discussed some of her marital concerns and problems with her husband's family in an effort to seek advice and assistance, which appears to have generated tension between them.

The axial coding process reveals two sub-categories for boundary ambiguity, which include *interference* and *transferring marital conflicts to another system*. Interference refers to *meddling in marital, parenting, and personal matters*. In the current study, interference was reported exclusively by DILs, and the transmission of marital conflicts was mostly reported by MILs. The DILs said that their MIL gave them unsolicited advice, which hindered their effectiveness and independence. From their point of view, the most important components in considering a comment as interference were obliging and commanding to follow. One of the reasons for the tension was that the DILs complained about her son and raised marital problems with them.

*A DIL said: Once, my wife's mother called and asked, "Where are you?" I was in a taxi on my way to the hair removal salon when she abruptly demanded to know where I had left my daughter, Asma. I stated I had left it at my mother's residence. She asked where I was going, and I responded, "doctor," and she inquired, "what type of doctor?" Why do you spend so much money? Clearly, I must be ill if I'm going to the doctor. I told her, "I'm going to a hair removal salon," after observing her conduct.*

*A MIL said: She came to our house after they fought and said Saeed had a sexual problem. She went and threw all of his underwear in front of Saeed's father, saying, "Look, I bought so many clothes, but your son is cold to me."*

### ***Lack of coherence in the husband's family of origins***

In the context of the present study, the lack of coherence between the MIL marital system involves the participant narratives indicating that the emotional and structural components of the MIL-father-in-law marital connection are incoherent. The axial coding procedure revealed that this category is subdivided into three sub-categories: *lack of unity and we-ness*, the *dysfunctional structure between MIL and father-in-law*, and *anxious preoccupation of mother with her son*. The findings indicate that when the MIL has a conflict with the DIL, the father-in-law's empathy and support have a significant impact on their perception of this relationship. In other words, when the MIL is understood and supported by her husband, and when the MIL feels satisfied in her relationship with her husband regardless of the conflict she may have with her DIL, this sense of satisfaction is a contextual factor that can moderate the intensity of this conflict and the type of strategies used to resolve it. In contrast, when there is a common pattern of the

father being marginalized, the mother being preoccupied and overly involved with the children, and the MIL and son having a triangular relationship with their father, this triangular relationship can be expected to be a factor in the mother-in-law's overinvolvement in the child's life and conflict with the DIL/son marital system.

The sub-category of *lack of unity and we-ness* denotes the father-in-law's lack of *empathy* and *support* for the MIL in dealing with the experienced conflict. In fact, the narratives of MILs show that those behaviors of the father-in-law that indicate ignoring and underestimating the conflict (lack of empathy), or opposing or rejecting the MIL's point of view in the conflict (lack of support) contribute to the MIL perceptions of lack of unity and a strong we-ness in dealing with external stress, including conflict with the DIL.

The sub-category of *dysfunctional structure between MIL and father-in-law* indicates structural problems in family systems that include *father-in-law's addiction*, *father-in-law's marginality in the family*, and *mother's centrality in the family*. The sub-category of *Anxious preoccupation of the mother with son*, *emotional dependence on the son*, and *preoccupation with the son's married life*. According to Minuchin (1974), in overinvolved families, the closeness between family members is intense. Indicators of this overinvolvement include restricted communication, excessive worry and support, mutual expectations of loyalty, loss of individual identity and autonomy, and stillness and immobility during transitional periods when new reactions to the situation are required. Such a family structure is marked by the tight interlocking of its members. The quality of the bond is such that the efforts of one family member to change are met with resistance by other members. On the opposite end of this spectrum, detachment is characterized by the absence of mutual support, the underdevelopment of loving and supportive functions, and an extraordinary tolerance for deviant behavior. Long periods of time are spent by family members in a state where they appear to be in separate orbits and have no connection with one another.

*A MIL said: My husband says that you can't stand the sight of her; you are acting like a bad mother-in-law. That's why we hate each other. When my husband takes her side, I hate him. Because he does not understand what reality is.*

### ***Lack of coherence in the son/DIL system***

A man in a couple's marital system feels loyalty to both his wife and his mother and is expected to respect both, according to Gottman and Silver (2015). Unfortunately, this puts him in the position of being a conciliator or mediator, which always makes things worse. They believe the husband must side with his wife against his mother in order to resolve this dilemma. Although the MIL could be displeased, she will probably accept the reality that her son has a married life of his own.

"We-ness" emphasizes that spouses act as a team. During the marriage, two individuals who may have previously been strangers become emotionally and psychologically closer as they share the rewards and challenges of marriage. Spouses who develop we-ness believe that their partner has their back; they

support one another in difficult situations, meet one another's needs, and give their partnership greater worth and significance. In general, they do not prioritize their relationship with their family of origin over their relationship with their spouse and strive to maintain a strong relationship with their spouse (Cheraghi et al., 2018).

The axial coding process reveals that the sub-category of lack of coherence in the son/DIL system has three sub-categories that include *lack of unity and we-ness*, *insecurity*, and *husband's lack of independence and self-differentiation*. Similar to the preceding category, the absence of unity and we-ness is characterized by the husband's lack of empathy and support. The DIL's perception of her husband's lack of empathy is influenced by acts such as *justifying the mother's behavior* and *minimizing her actions*. In addition, lack of support includes behaviors such as *forcing the DIL to contact her mother*, *fighting back*, *siding with the mother*, and *ignoring the conflict*. The DILs consistently emphasized the importance of the husband's role in conflict resolution tactics. During a dispute situation, the husband's behavior can be categorized into three main approaches: *turning toward his wife*, *turning away from his wife*, and *turning against his wife*. Additionally, insecurity relates to the husband's specific actions that have resulted in a reduced perception of his unreliability. *The absence of the husband during childbirth*, *violence*, and *neglect of the husband during pregnancy* are all indicators of a woman's insecurity in her marital relationship with her husband. In addition, the absence of autonomous performance and self-differentiation of the husband were frequently cited by the DILs. Behaviors such as *financial dependence on the family*, *emotional dependence*, *being affected by the mother*, *obeying the family of origin*, and *emotional reactivity* show the husband's lack of emotional and cognitive independence, which typically prompts the DIL to refer to him as a "mama's boy."

*A DIL said: When I tell my husband these things, he responds, "No, it's not like that." You are a lousy bride. Clearly, other brides are not like this. You disliked my mother from day one. You dislike my mother tremendously. Okay, should my mother pass away so that you can feel at ease?*

### ***Intrapsychic problems***

Personality qualities are among the factors that influence marital satisfaction. According to Karney and Bradbury (1995), personality predicts life satisfaction. Due to the fact that people marry with diverse personality traits, it may be said that marriage is a union between two distinct personalities (Gholizadeh et al., 2009). On the other hand, individuals tend to impose their behavioral and functional traits on their relationships. Therefore, their personality might be a source of tension in their marriages (Sadeghi et al., 2016). Studies showed that marital conflicts are also connected with lower mental and emotional well-being (Stronge et al., 2019). In addition, cross-sectional and longitudinal research has demonstrated that emotion regulation strategies are associated with marital and relational satisfaction (Tani et al., 2015) and conflict resolution (Low et al., 2018). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that psychological factors, such as personality and problems with emotion regulation, play a significant role in the development of interpersonal conflict and its escalation. In the present study,

participants said that a series of individual qualities in themselves and the other party is one of the influential reasons for their disagreements. For example, some MILs said that they could not employ conflict resolution strategies such as direct communication or assertiveness because of their DIL's lack of anger control and aggressiveness. On the other hand, some of the DILs indicated that certain personality qualities prohibited them from having a good relationship not only with their MIL but also with other people. We categorized these intra-psychic problems into two sub-categories: *dysfunction in emotion regulation* and *negative personality traits*. Dysfunction in emotion regulation denotes states such as mood swings, reactivity, stress and anxiety, and obsession. In addition, negative personality traits involved *jealousy, self-centeredness, pessimism, people-pleasing, passivity and irritability*.

*A DIL said: My mother-in-law has a sensitive personality, and the fact that she easily becomes gloomy, which means she takes everything negatively, indicates that she is not an optimistic individual. You must be careful not to look that way and not to say anything that could cause him to have a different opinion; therefore, it is best to remain silent. (pessimism)*

### **Socio-cultural influences**

Socio-cultural aspects are a set of social and cultural factors that influence the MIL and DIL relationship (Rittenour, 2012). Religion, education, economics, and geographical distance are all social influences. Cultural factors are beliefs, conventions, and practices that exist in a population.

In the current study, both the cultural differences between the DIL and the MIL and the prevalent stereotypes about the MIL are visible in the narratives of the DIL and MIL regarding their conflicts. The axial coding process revealed that there are two sub-categories for negative social-cultural influences: *cultural differences* and *negative social stereotypes*. Cultural differences include *religious beliefs, lifestyle, and value disparities*. Also, stereotypes of *MIL-hood, jealousy of the MIL over her love for the son, unwanted interference in the son's life, hostile relationship between the DIL and the MIL, and observing the conflicts of others because of too much intimacy* indicate that the DIL and MIL, while aware of the negative impact of these stereotypes on their behavior, acknowledge the negative impact of these stereotypes on their behavior. Given this "MIL-hood" stereotype, the MIL might, for instance, wish to express her annoyance toward the DIL's behavior or offer her guidance. However, knowing this, she chooses not to do so, which is itself a conflict-resolution strategy. Thus, it is evident how the DIL's and her MIL's strategies have been impacted by these cultural and social factors.

### **Communication and emotional strategies**

According to Strauss and Corbin's systematic methodology, the core category leads to specific strategies, actions, and interactions. This indicates that in order to accomplish the aim, participants will utilize both effective and ineffective communication and emotional strategies in reaction to the lack of the development of a shared family identity. Depending on how successful or unsuccessful their implementation is, conflict resolution techniques can be either

constructive or destructive. Openness to the discussion, acceptance of the other person's perspective, and a commitment to finding a solution are typical characteristics of constructive strategies. Disruptive strategies include aggressive and competitive actions as well as a retreat (Rubenstein and Feldman, 1993; cited in Delatorre and Wagner, 2019). These strategies are connected to how well the relationship is seen by both parties. As a result, constructive behavior is usually linked to greater relationship quality, while destructive behavior is usually linked to lower perceived relationship quality (Sheeran et al., 2014). Depending on the circumstances, reasons, and context in which they were situated, the participants in the current study also used a variety of conflict management strategies.

The axial coding process revealed that the category of communication and emotional strategies is classified into five sub-categories: *approach*, *avoidance*, *internal regulation of negative emotions*, *seeking social support*, and *opposition*. The term 'approach' refers to activities that aim to reestablish communication and involve individuals turning to one another in an effort to resolve the disagreement. In the present study, these behaviors include *assertive encounters*, *boundary setting*, and *ultimatum delivery*. Avoidance refers to conflict management strategies in which individuals physically and psychologically attempt to distance themselves from the other party. In the present study, individuals' avoidance strategies included cutting off relationships, seeking distance, and lowering intimacy. Internal regulation of negative emotions refers to the efforts made by participants to reduce negative emotional responses to conflict stress. The participants utilize *self-control and tolerance*, *forgiveness*, *acceptance*, *prayer*, and *compromise* to alleviate the negative emotions created by the disagreement. Seeking social support is the participants' effort to communicate with and obtain resources from others in order to resolve the disagreement. Participants in the current study sought social support to solve the problem by *consulting a psychologist*, *consulting a fortune teller*, and *confiding in friends*. Lastly, opposition entails retaliatory and hostile efforts to handle the disagreement by employing destructive strategies. Some individuals in this study employed coalition, backbiting, and rumor to manage conflict.

*A DIL said: I told my mother-in-law not to do this again and not to speak behind my back the next time she saw her son. If you continue to speak behind my back, I will know what to do. I will ask your daughter's mother-in-law whether you are doing the same with their daughter. (providing an ultimatum)*

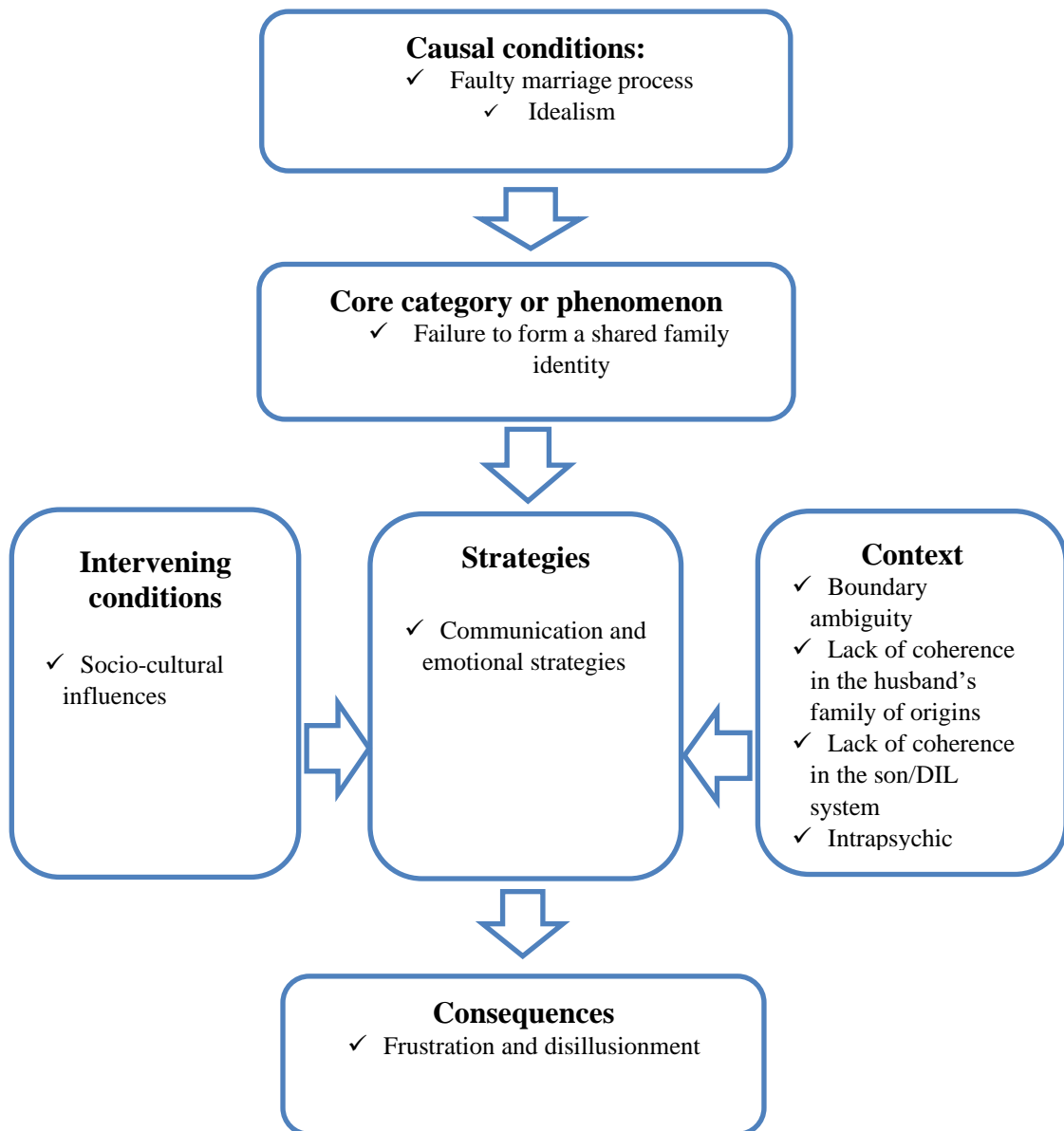
### ***Frustration and disillusionment***

There are repercussions for members of the larger family structure as well as for MILs and DILs when they are unable to create and sustain happy relationships. For instance, according to Bryant et al. (2001), the quality of in-law relationships is linked to both marital happiness and the perceptions of grandchildren's grandparents as being close (Matthews & Sprey, 1985; cited in Anderson, 2016). A high conflict MIL/DIL relationship also affects other family members, such as the MIL's husband, the DIL's husband, siblings-in-law, and other members of the extended family (Song & Zhang, 2012; Turner et al., 2006).

Utilizing their conflict-resolution strategies had various effects on the research participants. The participants' feelings of *disillusionment and frustration* were highlighted during the interview with them. These emotions typically signify negative changes in cognition, emotions, and relationships. The axial coding process showed that *emotional disturbance, relational dissatisfaction, and marital unhappiness* are three sub-categories of frustration and disillusionment. Negative emotional states, including *helplessness, unforgiveness, anger and hatred*, as well as *rumination*, are examples of emotional disturbance. Relational dissatisfaction is characterized by *attitude shifts, remorse about kinship, distrust, and a loss of intimacy*. Finally, marital dissatisfaction, which was only expressed by brides, relates to problems like *regretting being married, coldness, marital arguments, and domestic violence*.

*A MIL said: When she visits our home, I believe we should remain silent so that she does not repeat our statements elsewhere. I wish to establish confidence. I request that she not tell anyone. Do not divulge the information you learn here in order to cause trouble tomorrow (distrust).*

*A MIL said: I am unable to sleep or eat well. I cry constantly. I do not sleep at night until morning. I ask God what I should do. I am at a loss on what to do; I am stuck (helplessness)*



**Fig 1** *Conceptual paradigm of conflict process*

## Discussion

This research has contributed to a deeper knowledge of In-law relationships. This study aimed to investigate the dynamics of conflict between the DIL and the MIL. In other words, the authors sought to uncover the elements that contributed to the emergence of this conflict. The conflict process was researched among DILs and MILs who self-reported a high level of conflict with their MIL or DIL using the qualitative method of grounded theory. Therefore, the sample for the current study should be considered a sample with high levels of conflict. Using the coding

paradigm consisting of causal conditions, the core phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action and interaction strategies, and consequences, we conceptualized and offered a model to help understand this process. This is the first study to examine especially the connection between Iranian DILs and MILs. Our investigation found that the lack of a shared family identity lies at the heart of this conflict.

The shared family identity is a prominent common intragroup identity that family members experience. From this perspective, individuals with a shared family identity perceive themselves as a family, independent of the biological and legal ties of a family. Evaluating shared family identity allows us to measure our view of who is "within" and "outside" our family circle. (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Prior research on shared family identity has demonstrated a correlation between high levels of shared family identity and positive relational outcomes. In the study conducted by Banker and Gaertner (1998), step-children who perceived their family as a cohesive one, as opposed to two discrete units or subgroups within a larger family setting, reported more satisfaction and harmony. Rittenour and Soliz (2009) discovered that shared family identity is connected with positive MIL behaviors, such as emotional support and speaking to or about the DIL as if she were a member of her own family. Shared family identity was also positively related to DILs' intentions to become their MIL law's primary caregiver and to maintain this relationship after separation or death. In addition, the significance of a sense of shared family identity has been explored by Serewicz and Canary (2008), and it has been demonstrated that the perception of this identity by grandchildren is associated with high levels of happiness in their relationship with their grandmother.

In reality, the essence of the conflict between the bride and the MIL in the present study was the parties' perception that they did not belong to the same family. Carelessness, neglect, contempt, and discrimination suggested that for the DIL and MIL to experience a shared family identity in this connection, they must perceive that the other party treats them with respect and fairness. These attentive efforts provide the other party with a sense of importance and value. When the parties feel that the other person uses considered and gentle expressions during the conversation when doing a favor or helping, does it unconditionally, and the bride assists her MIL in the preparation of parties and ceremonies, this feeling is formed that "you and I have a shared identity, you belong to us and you are one of us, and I consider you a member of the same family, so I respect you, I see your needs, I understand your special circumstances, and I care about you."

The analysis of the data revealed that this phenomenon was influenced by two factors: a faulty marital process and idealism. The findings indicate that when the marriage process is not carried out correctly, i.e., when the DIL is not accepted by her husband's family, particularly her MIL, the relationship becomes problematic, regardless of her choice of spouse. This again demonstrates the significance of the in-laws' approval and acceptance of the DIL. Even in today's modern families, parental approval of the future spouse is considered an important factor in the process of choosing a spouse. Choosing a wife is considered a social matter and is governed by customs and traditions unique to Iran (Danshpour, 2017; Hojat and

Mehyar, 2003). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that familial rejection plays a significant part in these conflicts.

One of the distinctive findings of this research, which is based on Iranian culture, is the absence of adaptation during role transformation and the challenges that arise during engagement periods. Findings indicate that brides who had familial contacts or friendships with their MIL prior to marriage face a loss in intimacy when they are unable to adapt to the role change from family or friend to bride.

Moreover, the results demonstrated that having ideal expectations and beliefs can contribute to the perception of a lack of shared family identity. The participants in the study viewed their DIL or MIL as their own mother or daughter, and this perception is in contrast with the other party's future actions, resulting in disillusionment. In the current study, both the DIL and the MIL held views and expectations on the nature of their potential relationship with the other party. In their narrations, some of these ideas and expectations were explicit and evident, while others were implicit. The participants in the interviews repeatedly stated that one of the primary causes of the conflict was the unmet expectations and beliefs that they had previously imagined for themselves. Because these expectations did not help to improve the relationship, we consider them to be dysfunctional, and because these beliefs and expectations set unrealistically high standards for the other party, they represent an unattainable ideal.

Predictions about the future of a relationship are typically influenced by a positive bias (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016). This result is consistent with previous studies on the impact of expectations and beliefs on relationship quality. Many newlyweds prefer to feel that their relationships would be better in the future, despite the fact that the majority of their marriages have declined, according to research (Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2013). For instance, and in the context of the present study, Shih and Pike (2015) discovered that the bride's expectation that the MIL should provide love and intimacy similar to that of a "good mother" creates a difficult-to-attain standard, causing the MIL to fail.

Context is the particular set of characteristics within which a phenomenon is situated. Concurrently, the context also characterizes the unique set of settings under which action/interaction strategies to overcome, manage, or react to a particular phenomenon are implemented (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). The absence of a shared family identity has happened in a situation characterized by the lack of coherence in the marital system for both the bride and the MIL, ambiguity in the borders, and Intrapsychic issues. In accordance with the systemic view of family relationships, the analysis of the findings reveals that the lack of unity and togetherness, the dysfunctional structure between MIL and father-in-law, and the mother's anxious preoccupation with her son are the contextual factors that have influenced the strategies of the MILs. The results indicate that when the MIL has a problem with the bride, the father-in-law's empathy and support play a significant impact on the perception of the quality of the relationship. In other words, when the MIL is understood and supported by her husband, and when the MIL feels satisfied in her relationship with her husband regardless of the conflict she may have with her DIL, this sense of satisfaction is a contextual factor that can moderate the intensity of this conflict and the strategies used to resolve it. In

contrast, when there is a recurring pattern of the father being on the sidelines, the mother being overly involved with the children and preoccupied, and the MIL and the son having a triangular relationship with their father, this triangular relationship can be expected to be a factor in the increased presence of the MIL in the child's life and conflict with the DIL/son marital system.

When in dispute, the brides who participated in this study frequently mentioned the supportive role of their husbands. They regarded the husband's justification of the mother's negative behaviors and minimization of their distress as a lack of empathy and understanding. From the perspective of brides, behaviors such as forcing the bride to communicate with the MIL, confronting and listing the faults of the wife's mother, and taking sides with the mother in an explicit manner (it's your fault, you've always hated my mother), or ignoring the conflict are unsupportive and indicative of a lack of unity in the couple system. According to the participant narratives, however, the level of the bride's marital satisfaction and her sense of security in the marital relationship has a significant impact on the bride's perspective of conflicts with her MIL.

The family's flexibility is determined by the quality of its leadership and organization, as well as how it implements routines, rituals, and rules. When flexibility is extreme, it leads to chaotic performance in which there are no clear roles and boundaries and impulsive, ill-considered decisions are made. In contrast, reducing flexibility results in a rigid performance, which is typically driven by high levels of control and extremely stringent roles and limits (Olson, 2000). When there is a healthy balance between the components of the family system, the family will be more functional throughout its life cycle. When the functioning of the family is disrupted, concerns like emotional distance and diminished emotional involvement between family members develop. When cohesiveness is extremely difficult (very high cohesion), there is an excess of emotional closeness and dependence among members and activities. The majority of an individual's relationships and time are spent within and with the family, leaving little energy and availability for other areas to which they belong (Neto et al., 2020).

In reality, the husband is the link between the bride and the MIL. In conflicts, he is expected to maintain his marriage and family links, and he bears a great deal of psychological weight to maintain the balance between his family of origin and his marital system; On the one hand, his loyalty to his mother, and on the other, his wife's concerns and needs. Additionally, research indicates that in order to have a satisfying marriage, it is vital to pay attention to the needs of the spouse and to support her in conflicts with his family (Bryant, Conger, and Meehan, 2001). When there is a conflict between his wife and mother, the fundamental question that emerges is how the husband may be most constructive and helpful. In a qualitative study of Taiwanese couples, Tsai (2002) found four conflict resolution strategies employed by men. Taking sides from the wife's standpoint (i.e., being supportive), problem-solving (focused on finding effective ways to address the conflict rather than taking sides), ignoring the conflict, and siding with the mother. This researcher evaluated taking a side with the spouse and resolving the problem as conflict resolution supportive approaches. On the other hand, disregarding the conflict and siding with the mother could be interpreted as a lack

of support for the bride's viewpoint. In their research, Wu et al. (2010) examined the conflict between the MIL and the DIL and the role of the husband's support as a mediator. According to the findings of their study, women who reported high levels of marital conflict also reported low levels of marital satisfaction. Regarding the husband's supportive participation in the conflict, women's perceptions that their husbands have taken their side in the conflict have a positive correlation with their marital satisfaction. Problem-solving was another sort of spousal support that was positively associated with marital satisfaction. Moreover, problem-solving was a significant modulator of the relationship between conflict and couples' marital satisfaction. In addition, Bryant et al. (2001) and Labi Ades (2003) confirm the same result.

It may be claimed that personality traits are one of the most significant determinants of the stability or instability of all relationships, including marital, professional, and personal ones. The study conducted by Boertien and Mortelmans (2017) on 16,701 married individuals from the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany revealed that the correlations between divorce and personality traits are reasonably stable over time. Divorce appears to be characterized less by persons who behave in unconventional ways (high openness to experience) and more by those who do not keep up social relationships as much as others (low conscientiousness). Psychologists assert that personality characteristics structure interactions in relationships and influence the capacity to deal with relationship issues (Heaven et al., 2006). According to Donnellan et al. (2004), agreeableness, openness to experience (positive), and neuroticism (negative) are the most significant predictors of marital happiness. Strong evidence demonstrates that neuroticism negatively impacts marital satisfaction due to poor communication patterns (Claxton et al., 2012; Caughlin et al., 2000).

Ritnor and Soliz (2009) discovered that different values or cultural orientations influence the DIL-in-law conflict. Women specifically mentioned differences in culture, religion, race, and ethnicity, as well as values, beliefs, and general views of the world. They concluded that cultural and value orientations not only create possible intergroup barriers, but that these inherent beliefs may be tied to expectations about family identity and, thus, marital relationships. In a qualitative study by Nuner (2004), DILs who reported that their family of origin was very different from their husband's, were more likely to face difficulties in being assimilated into their spouse's family. The differences in their reports were values, communication methods, interests, cultural contexts, boundaries, and the level of conflict. On the other hand, the majority of media accounts of relationships between the MIL and the DIL are overstated or one-sided. In describing this relationship, society, in the form of the media, still, views conflicted relationships to be normal (Choi, 1999). Although women are presented as positive in television shows, they are unable to escape the predetermined framework of conflict in a triangle relationship with men (Kim, 2009). These cultural tools contribute to the stereotype of the MIL as domineering, intrusive, and jealous (Cottrill, 1994) and maintain the "MIL myth." Moreover, the portrayal of MILs in popular culture has been highly overstated. These depictions reduce actual MILs to mere stereotypes. These stereotypical portrayals of MILs establish misleading and unfavorable expectations for relationships with in-law families. Researchers have not yet substantiated these slanderous charges against the

MIL, however, due to the absence of scientific research on the in-law relationship. Consequently, uncertainties and preconceptions regarding the connection between the MIL and the DIL persist. There are numerous negative stereotypes and jokes about MIL. Approximately 66 percent of women in a survey of 49 interracial, heterosexual marriages in the United States and the United Kingdom indicated that their MIL caused lasting distress and stress (Apter, 2009; cited in Dillner, 2011). There are also negative MIL stereotypes in Asian and Asian American societies. Scholars and popular East Asian television depict a bleak future for Taiwanese, Chinese, and Korean brides, particularly those in traditional family arrangements in which the young woman lives with her husband's family and assumes the husband's household responsibilities under the supervision of her MIL, the primary beneficiary (Shih & Pyke, 2010). The conflict between Oshin and her MIL was also one of the film's central themes in well-known Japanese television dramas, such as "Oshin," which were also broadcast in Iran. Or more recently, in the *Once Upon a Time in Iran* series, also known as *Khatoun*, Fakhr al-Nasa is the MIL with profound emotional wounds created by her late husband's betrayal and unlovedness, who cannot bear to share her son's love with an unwanted DIL.

Previous research indicates that there is a relationship between conflict management styles and relationship satisfaction in various contexts. In general, the problem-solving style used by both sides of the conflict and the adaptive style used by one side positively predict relationship satisfaction (Unal and Akgun, 2020). On the other hand, the use of a competitive style by one side of the conflict has a negative relationship with the other side's relationship satisfaction (Ma, 2006). In addition, conflict avoidance negatively predicts relationship satisfaction (Isik and Kaya, 2022). Also, in general, the marital satisfaction of a couple is influenced by the spouses' conflict resolution styles. Specifically, problem-solving styles are positively related, and competitive and avoidant styles are negatively related to marital satisfaction (Unal and Akgun, 2020; Girma Shifaw, 2022).

Although research on relationships with the spouse's family is limited, researchers have found that relationship satisfaction with the spouse's family can have both positive and negative effects on marital satisfaction (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Morre Serewicz & Canary, 2008; Norwood & Webb, 2006).

Bryant, Conger, and Meehan (2001) discovered that for both wives and husbands, the quality of relationships with the spouse's family was connected to marital success. Additionally, the authors discovered that a wife's conflict with her husband's family has a greater negative impact on marital satisfaction than a husband's conflict with his wife's family. In addition, Norwood and Webb (2006) found that as the MIL's interference and intrusion increase, the daughter-in-law's marital satisfaction decreases. Timmer and Veroff (2000) found that conflict with the spouse's family increases the risk of divorce for married couples.

## **Conclusion**

According to the results of the study, the conflict between the DIL and the MIL is a real and significant problem that requires the attention of researchers and mental health specialists. Due to the fact that the current research sample is a

high-conflict sample, the findings on the conflict resolution process cannot be extended to all DILs and MILs who encounter conflict. Due to the qualitative nature of the research, the validity of the research findings is largely based on the perceptions of the DIL and MIL. In addition, the perception of the husband was not addressed in this study. Thus, the conclusions about the husband should be interpreted with caution. In future research, it is advised that husbands' perspectives should also be analyzed in order to uncover the hidden aspects of their lack of empathy and support for their wives, as well as their difficulties in establishing this balance between their wives and their mothers. There are likely DILs and MILs who effectively manage these conflicts. The novel aspect of this study, however, is that it demonstrates that the shared family identity is a significant component in the intensity of the conflict between the DIL and the MIL and that its absence can lead to more extreme conflicts and even disconnection. When the conflict involves carelessness, indifference, contempt, and discrimination, it appears that the DIL and MIL will be unable to manage their relationship. Considering the detrimental effects of these conflicts on the marital system, which are also shown in this study, it is recommended that therapists and mental health professionals be cautious while evaluating and designing therapeutic interventions for couples. Considering the detrimental effects of these conflicts on the marital system, which are also documented in this research, it is recommended that therapists and mental health professionals, both in their evaluations and in the design of their therapeutic interventions with couples, pay particular attention to the issue of shared family identity as a criterion for assessing the intensity of the conflict. On the basis of the findings of this study, it is also suggested that a measurement instrument be developed to assess the quality of the connection between the DIL and the MIL based on the components of the shared family identity. It is also suggested that premarital counselors include the findings of the present study into their awareness and training programs for preventative purposes. In addition, customized educational protocols for newlyweds and their mothers should be developed and validated based on the research findings.

Note: This article is extracted from the second author's Ph.D. dissertation, "Exploring the Effective Factors in the Conflict between the Daughter-in-law and the Mother-in-Law: A Qualitative Study," which was completed with the first author's supervision and the third author's advice.

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