

From family-of-origin trauma to a *sakinah* marriage: Emotional transformation and identity reconstruction among adults from dysfunctional families of origin

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Abstract: This study aimed to understand how adults with a history of dysfunctional families of origin transform family-of-origin wounds into a happy and meaningful *sakinah* marriage through emotional transformation and identity reconstruction. This study used a qualitatively driven embedded mixed-methods design. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis served as the primary qualitative approach, while a descriptive quantitative strand was embedded as contextual support. Three participants were selected purposively; all came from dysfunctional families of origin, had been married for at least ten years, and reported happy and stable marriages. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, reflective notes, and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, Experiences in Close Relationships–Short Form, Posttraumatic Growth Inventory–Short Form, Meaning in Life Questionnaire, and Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. The findings showed that family-of-origin wounds functioned as a relational legacy that shaped early vulnerabilities, but did not determine marital failure. Emotional transformation occurred consciously and relationally, self-identity was reconstructed within married life, and *sakinah* marriage was understood as an adaptive process built through communication, emotion regulation, healthy boundaries, meaning-making, a shared sense of security, and the ability to recover after conflict. Cognitive reappraisal increased across all participants, whereas expressive suppression varied. Meaning in life was relatively strong, and marital satisfaction remained high across all participants in the study. These findings support premarital guidance, trauma-informed couples counseling, psychoeducation on attachment and emotion regulation, and support from religious communities.

Keywords: adult attachment; emotional transformation; family-of-origin trauma; identity reconstruction; *sakinah* marriage



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Introduction

The family of origin constitutes the earliest developmental context shaping how individuals understand emotional security, trust, and interpersonal closeness. Bowlby (1969) asserted that early attachment experiences serve as the foundation for the formation of internal working models, namely mental schemas that guide individuals' expectations of themselves and others in relationships. When the family of origin is marked by divorce, chronic conflict, violence, emotional neglect, or inconsistency in caregiving, these experiences may leave psychological traces that persist into adulthood. In a similar vein, Erikson (1968) viewed identity development as an ongoing process of negotiation between past experiences and subsequent developmental demands. Accordingly, dysfunction in the family of origin cannot be understood merely as a social background, but rather as a relational context that shapes how individuals manage emotions, interpret closeness, and respond to commitment in intimate relationships. In adulthood, these traces of experience may re-emerge in married life through fears of abandonment, difficulty trusting one's spouse, tendencies to withdraw, or an excessive need for validation when facing conflict (Fraley & Roisman, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The urgency of this issue becomes even more pronounced when marriage is understood not only as a social and religious institution, but also as a psychological space in which family-of-origin experiences are renegotiated. Individuals who grow up in dysfunctional families often enter marriage carrying relational vulnerabilities formed early in life, such that marital happiness cannot always be explained solely by the quality of current interactions. Research has shown that conflict-ridden family experiences are associated with communication difficulties, heightened sensitivity to rejection, and lower relational security in adult romantic relationships (Cao et al., 2022; D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019; Li et al., 2023). A meta-analysis by Candell and Turliuc (2019) also demonstrated that insecure attachment is consistently associated with lower marital satisfaction. These findings indicate that the issue is real, relevant, and has long-term consequences. In the Indonesian context, this issue is particularly important because married life is still often framed by norms of harmony, self-restraint, and the obligation to preserve the family's image, such that emotional vulnerabilities are easily concealed beneath relationships that appear stable (Marwan, 2024; Montolalu et al., 2023).

Although the literature on broken-home families or dysfunctional families of origin has grown considerably, most studies still position children, adolescents, or young adults as their primary focus. These studies generally highlight the effects of parental divorce on mental health, behavioral problems, or social adjustment during the early phases of development (Johnsen et al., 2018; Sands et al., 2017; Tullius et al., 2022). Roper et al. (2020) showed that parental divorce may exert intergenerational effects on the quality of adult relationships, whereas River et al. (2022) emphasized that the quality of parent-child relationships in the family of origin is associated with the functioning of later romantic relationships. However, our knowledge remains limited when the question shifts from "what risks are left by dysfunctional families?" to "how are some individuals actually able to build stable and happy marriages?" In other words, the current state of the art is stronger in explaining vulnerability than in explaining transformation. This gap becomes increasingly apparent because few studies have specifically examined adults with a history of family-of-origin dysfunction who have maintained happy marriages over a relatively long period.

Another limitation of previous studies concerns cultural context and population focus. Most research on divorce, stepfamilies, or broken homes has developed in Western contexts that emphasize individual autonomy, self-fulfillment, and personal choice as key indicators of relationship quality (Hogendoorn et al., 2020; Raley & Sweeney, 2020). Although this perspective is important, it is not entirely sufficient for understanding married life in collectivistic societies, including Indonesia, where harmony, family connectedness, and social responsibility are highly salient values (Hofstede et al., 2010). Local studies have begun to highlight the roles of culture, emotional maturity, and social pressure in marital dynamics, yet few have linked these aspects to adult attachment, identity reconstruction, and the meaning of marriage in an integrated manner (Marwan, 2024; Montolalu et al., 2023; Putri & Adri, 2024). As a result, a clear empirical gap remains: the experiences of Indonesian adults from dysfunctional families of origin who nonetheless succeed in building stable marital relationships have not been widely explored in depth through a perspective that is sensitive to cultural context and subjective experience.

From a theoretical perspective, studies on family-of-origin trauma, adult attachment, emotion regulation, and identity formation in marriage still tend to develop in isolation from one another. Attachment theory explains how caregiving experiences shape feelings of security and relational patterns in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Whereas emotion regulation theory emphasizes the processes through which affective experiences are monitored and modified so that individuals' responses remain adaptive (Gross, 2002, 2015). Meanwhile, the narrative identity approach holds that individuals construct self-meaning through life stories that organize past, present, and future experiences into a coherent whole (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) further demonstrated that traumatic experiences do not always culminate in psychological damage, but may also give rise to posttraumatic growth through reflection and meaning reconstruction. When these four frameworks are read together, it becomes evident that family-of-origin wounds affect not only emotions or relationships, but also the ways individuals narrate themselves, evaluate their spouses, and form new identities within marriage. It is precisely at this integrative point that the theoretical gap addressed by this study is located.

The need for an integrative approach becomes even more important when marriage is understood as a developmental arena in which psychological change occurs relationally. Individuals with a history of family-of-origin dysfunction are not always trapped in the reproduction of trauma. Several studies have shown that supportive adult relationships can foster the development of earned-secure attachment, namely a more secure attachment pattern even when individuals did not grow up in a secure family environment (Li et al., 2023; Roisman et al., 2002). Bonanno (2004) described emotional flexibility as the capacity to adapt responses to pressure in an adaptive manner, whereas Masten (2001) emphasized that resilience often grows through ordinary yet meaningful adaptive processes. In the context of couple relationships, dyadic coping has been shown to strengthen emotional collaboration, communication quality, and long-term relationship satisfaction (Landolt et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2025). These findings are consistent with Hou et al. (2025), who found that dyadic coping helps couples share emotional burdens and strengthens relational stability when facing stress together. Thus, marriage may be understood as a space in which family-of-origin wounds are renegotiated through emotion co-regulation, experiences of feeling safe with one's spouse, and the construction of a more integrative self-narrative. This perspective

allows research to shift from a focus on deficits toward a focus on transformation that can be verified psychologically and relationally.

In the Indonesian context, such transformation needs to be understood by considering both collectivistic culture and the perspective of Islamic psychology. In a society that regards harmony as the ideal of family life, individuals often learn to restrain the expression of negative emotions in order to preserve relationships and social image, even though excessive emotion suppression may in fact hinder psychological closeness (Marwan, 2024; Montolalu et al., 2023; Putri & Adri, 2024). It is here that the concept of *sakinah* marriage becomes important, positioned not as a normative slogan, but as an interpretive lens for relationships that are secure, loving, and tranquility-giving. Al-Ghazali viewed emotion management as part of safeguarding the *qalb* through reason and faith, whereas Badri (1979) emphasized that intact mental health cannot be separated from spiritual balance. Within the framework of marital relationships, *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* may be understood as forms of emotional order, mutual support, and moral orientation that sustain relationship quality. Thus, Islamic psychology in this study functions to enrich the understanding of security, meaning in life, self-regulation, and *rahmah*-based relationships after individuals have passed through painful family-of-origin experiences.

Against this background, the novelty of this study is threefold. First, it shifts the focus of inquiry from the risks and negative outcomes of dysfunctional families of origin to the transformative processes through which adults with such backgrounds are able to build stable and happy marriages. Second, the focus on adults who have maintained stable and happy marriages for at least a decade distinguishes this study from previous work, which has largely centered on children, adolescents, young adults, or the phase of short-term negative impacts. Third, by integrating attachment theory, emotion regulation, posttraumatic growth, narrative identity, and Islamic psychology, this study offers an integrative interpretive framework for understanding how marriage can function as a space for recovery and growth, rather than merely a space for the reproduction of family-of-origin trauma (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018; Liebman et al., 2020; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In this sense, the study adds to existing literature not merely by documenting resilience, but by explaining how marital happiness is constructed as a conscious, relational, culturally situated, and spiritually meaningful process after family-of-origin trauma. Based on the foregoing, this study aimed to understand how adults with a history of family-of-origin dysfunction transform family wounds into marital happiness through emotional transformation and identity reconstruction within the context of Indonesian culture and the values of *sakinah* marriage.

Method

Research Design

This study used an embedded mixed-methods phenomenological design, with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as the primary analytic approach and a descriptive quantitative strand as supportive contextual data. This design was chosen because the aim of the study was not to test causal relationships or produce statistical generalizations, but to understand how adults with a history of family-of-origin dysfunction make meaning of emotional wounds, personal change, and the development of

marital happiness. Epistemologically, the study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm that views lived experience as a reality interpreted subjectively by participants. IPA was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to explore how participants reflect on past experiences, make meaning of their marital relationships, and reorganize their identities through an interpretive process. Eatough and Smith (2017) explained that IPA operates through a double hermeneutic, in which participants seek to understand their own experiences, while researchers seek to understand how participants make meaning of those experiences. In this study, the quantitative component was not positioned as a basis for inference, but rather as a layer of reflective data to support the traceability and consistency of the interpretation.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which individuals are chosen based on the fit between their characteristics and the phenomenon under investigation. The sample comprised three participants ($N = 3$), all of whom were adults with a history of dysfunctional or broken-home families of origin, had been married for at least ten years, and reported that their marriages were happy and stable. The small sample size was not intended to support statistical generalization, but was consistent with the idiographic orientation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In IPA, participants are selected because they share a specific, information-rich, and personally meaningful experience, allowing the researcher to examine each case in depth before developing cautious cross-case interpretations (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2022). Therefore, three participants were considered methodologically appropriate because the study focused on a narrowly defined and relatively specific phenomenon: adults from dysfunctional families of origin who had maintained happy and stable marriages for at least a decade. This shared experiential focus enabled a detailed exploration of emotional transformation, attachment-related vulnerabilities, identity reconstruction, and meaning-making within marriage, rather than a broad mapping of population-level patterns.

The marriage-duration criterion was established to ensure that the experiences described did not merely reflect the early phase of marital adjustment, which tends to be more fluctuating. Longitudinal literature indicates that the early years of marriage are vulnerable to honeymoon-effect bias and relatively sharp changes in relationship quality (Huston et al., 2001; Lorber et al., 2015; VanLaningham et al., 2001). Accordingly, the ten-year minimum criterion strengthened the relevance of participants' narratives for understanding sustained marital happiness rather than temporary marital satisfaction. Although the number of participants limits the breadth of transferability, the depth of idiographic analysis, the use of verbatim narratives, reflective questionnaires, and cross-case synthesis provided a sufficient basis for examining the process of emotional transformation and identity reconstruction within the context of marriage.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected from two main sources: semi-structured interviews as the primary data source and reflective psychological questionnaires as supporting data. The interviews were used to explore

experiences within the family of origin, emotional dynamics, marital trajectories, personal change, and the meaning of marital happiness in depth while remaining sufficiently focused. The questions were open-ended so that participants had space to narrate their subjective experiences in their own language and with their own emphases of meaning. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim to preserve traceability between the raw data and the interpretation. In addition, the researcher prepared field notes and a reflexive journal to document the interview context, nonverbal expressions, and reflective responses that emerged during the data collection process. As supporting data, participants also completed five standardized psychological instruments: the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), Experiences in Close Relationships–Short Form (ECR-S), Posttraumatic Growth Inventory–Short Form (PTGI-SF), Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), and Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS). In line with the embedded design, these quantitative data were used to provide context and enrich the interpretation of themes, rather than to test hypotheses inferentially.

The five instruments were selected because they represent the constructs most relevant to the focus of the study. The ERQ developed by Gross and John (2003) was used to assess emotion regulation strategies, particularly cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The ECR-S developed by Wei et al. (2007) was used to assess adult attachment orientation across the dimensions of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. The PTGI-SF developed by Cann et al. (2010) was used to describe posttraumatic growth, the MLQ developed by Steger et al. (2006) to assess meaning in life, and the KMSS developed by Schumm et al. (1986) to assess marital satisfaction. All instruments were translated and adapted into Indonesian through a back-translation procedure and then reviewed through expert judgment to ensure equivalence of meaning, clarity of wording, and linguistic appropriateness before being used in the main study. A pilot test with 30 respondents indicated adequate internal reliability across all instruments, including the ERQ (reappraisal $\alpha = 0.843$; suppression $\alpha = 0.883$), ECR-S (avoidance $\alpha = 0.746$; anxiety $\alpha = 0.820$), PTGI-SF ($\alpha = 0.819$), MLQ (presence $\alpha = 0.758$; search $\alpha = 0.806$), and KMSS ($\alpha = 0.788$). In the context of this study, the ERQ and ECR-S were completed retrospectively for the premarital period and for the current condition, whereas the PTGI-SF, MLQ, and KMSS captured participants' psychological and relational conditions at the time of data collection.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted in accordance with the IPA stages formulated by Smith et al. (2022), namely reading the transcripts repeatedly, conducting initial noting, developing emergent themes, grouping themes into superordinate themes, and then conducting a cross-case synthesis. These stages were chosen to preserve the distinctiveness of each participant's experience before identifying broader patterns across cases. To support data organization and maintain an audit trail, the researcher used NVivo 15 for transcript management, coding, the development of analytic memos, and tracking relationships among themes. All interpretations were developed by maintaining a close connection to participants' verbatim accounts and were then verified through discussion with a co-researcher to reduce individual interpretive bias. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were interpreted descriptively and contextually rather than inferentially. Scores on the ERQ and ECR-S were used to examine participants' perceived changes before and after marriage, whereas scores on the PTGI-SF, MLQ, and KMSS were used to contextualize

participants' psychological and relational conditions at the time the study was conducted. Integration of the two types of data took place at the interpretation stage so that the numerical findings did not stand alone, but were read alongside the experiential narratives.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured using the four criteria proposed by Korstjens and Moser (2018), namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was established through method triangulation between interviews and reflective questionnaires, member checking, and the use of participants' direct quotations to demonstrate the connection between the data and the interpretation. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail that included verbatim transcripts, reflective notes, the coding structure, and documentation of theme development. Confirmability was strengthened through the researcher's critical reflection and cross-checking of the interpretive process, whereas transferability was supported by providing sufficiently thick descriptions of participants' contexts and socio-cultural situations so that readers could assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Ethically, this study received ethical clearance from the International Open University Board of Research and Publications, with reference number ETHIC 86/02-26 dated 23 February 2026. All participants received written information regarding the aims, procedures, benefits, and risks of the study before signing informed consent. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes, participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. The researcher also prepared empathic support and professional referrals should the interview process evoke emotional distress related to past experiences.

Result

Overall, the findings indicate that dysfunctional family-of-origin experiences shaped early relational vulnerabilities but did not lead linearly to relationship failure. Instead, all three participants demonstrated trajectories of change that moved from family-of-origin wounds to more conscious emotion management to the formation of a more reflective spousal identity, and ultimately to marital happiness built through consistent relational work.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Code	Gender	Age	Length of Marriage	Brief Description of Family-of Origin Experience
P1	Female	30 years	10 years	Directly and repeatedly witnessed the father's infidelity until the parents divorced.
P2	Female	38 years	13 years	Parents separated since infancy, the relationship with the mother was severed, and the extended family was marked by conflict.
P3	Male	38 years	13 years	Experienced parental conflict, the father's destructive behavior, the presence of another woman, and domestic violence in the home.

The qualitative–quantitative integration revealed a relatively consistent pattern of increased cognitive reappraisal, high to moderate posttraumatic growth, relatively strong meaning in life, and high marital satisfaction, although changes in expressive suppression were not uniform across participants. Thus, the following findings present marital happiness as an achievement grounded in process rather than merely a state.

Theme 1. Family-of-Origin Wounds as a Relational Legacy

The first finding shows that family-of-origin wounds were present as a relational legacy that shaped the participants' early understanding of security, trust, and closeness. All three participants not only reported family conflict but also described concrete and enduring experiences. P1 directly and repeatedly witnessed the father's infidelity: "I was the one who saw with my own eyes that my father was having sexual relations with another woman we knew." She also recalled that, as a child, she became "the keeper of secrets" because her father repeatedly told her not to tell her mother; P2 grew up with disconnection from the mother figure and conflict within the extended family; and P3 experienced the father's absence, the presence of another woman within the household, and exposure to domestic violence. These narratives formed distinct patterns of early vulnerability. In the cross-case integration matrix, the premarital ECR-S showed that P1 and P2 were more characterized by attachment anxiety, whereas P3 was more characterized by avoidance, indicating that the way each participant "carried" this relational legacy was not identical. At the narrative level, these wounds appeared as vigilance toward closeness, a need for validation, or difficulty trusting one's spouse. One of the most striking quotations came from P1 when she stated that she had "seen with my own eyes" her father having sexual relations with another woman, indicating that the wound she carried was highly concrete rather than merely a family story.

Theme 2. Emotional Transformation as a Conscious and Relational Process

The second theme shows that emotional transformation did not occur as a single moment, but rather as a conscious and relational process unfolding gradually within marriage. All three participants described changes that began with the recognition that family-of-origin patterns, whether suspicion, emotional withdrawal, emotional outbursts, or avoidance, could not be carried uncritically into the marital relationship. In the cross-case synthesis, P1 identified growing openness after the family entered a more established phase, P2 positioned the experience of crisis and "migrating spiritually together (hijrah)" as a turning point when she said "It seemed that this was the time for me to return to Allah, and from there I told my husband that it was time for us to undergo this journey together, hijrah," whereas P3 emphasized that this awareness became stronger after working and learning together with the spouse. This pattern ran parallel to the quantitative indicators: cognitive reappraisal increased in all participants, namely from 6.67 to 7.00 in P1, from 5.67 to 7.00 in P2, and from 6.33 to 6.83 in P3. The PTGI-SF also showed very high posttraumatic growth in P1 (49/50) and P2 (48/50), and moderate growth in P3 (36/50). Thus, these findings indicate that the primary change did not lie in the disappearance of the wounds, but in the ability to reorganize the meaning of experience and choose more reflective emotional responses within the relationship.

Theme 3. Self-Identity Reconstruction Within Marriage

The third finding indicates that the changes that occurred did not stop at emotion regulation, but extended to self-identity reconstruction within marriage. All three participants described marriage as a space in which to reformulate who they were, how they wished to enact their role as spouses, and which patterns from the family of origin they did not want to repeat. In the cross-case integration matrix, P1 described the premarital phase as similar to an “interview,” suggesting that commitment was built through the selection of values and expectations. P2 narrated herself as “a woman worthy of trust” and increasingly aware of her role, whereas P3 emphasized “life principles” and the idea of “our own version of household life.” One of P3’s most telling reflections was: “After marriage, I began to find life principles. It changed my way of thinking, and those principles became my guide.” Descriptively, this direction of change was supported by relatively strong MLQ presence-of-meaning scores, namely 7.00 in P1, 6.40 in P2, and 5.20 in P3. PTGI-SF scores on the personal strength dimension were also high across all three participants, namely 10, 9, and 8, respectively. These two indicators suggest that identity reconstruction in this study was not only a matter of reflective narrative, but was also accompanied by a tangible sense of meaning in life and personal strength in the way participants positioned themselves as adult spouses.

Theme 4. Marital Happiness as an Adaptive and Meaningful Achievement

The fourth theme shows that marital happiness among the three participants was built through concrete adaptive strategies and consistent meaning-making, rather than through the absence of conflict. Open communication, negotiation of needs, taking space during conflict, quality time, emotional support, boundaries with the extended family, and the willingness to apologize and forgive emerged as the primary mechanisms for sustaining the relationship. Idiographically, P1 emphasized quality time and regular reflection; P2 highlighted transparency, introspection, and the courage to apologize. P2 also articulated a strong intergenerational purpose in marriage: “I hope Allah cuts the chain and that it ends with me.”; whereas P3 emphasized pillow talk, physical touch, and a tendency to moderate spontaneous responses so that dialogue remained productive. This pattern aligned with the high KMSS scores across all three participants, namely 20/21 in P1 and 18/21 in both P2 and P3. At the same time, the meaning of marital happiness was not uniform: for P1, it was related to worship and responsibility; for P2, the spouse was positioned as “a place to return” and “a remedy”; whereas for P3, happiness was associated with religious commitment and household life conducted according to shared principles. These findings show that happiness was produced through relational work that was continually maintained.

Table 2
Matrix of Qualitative–Quantitative Findings Integration

Findings Theme	Representative Qualitative Evidence	Relevant Quantitative Indicators	Integrative Meaning
Family of origin wounds as a relational legacy	P1 described family of origin wounds through the experience of “seeing with [her] own eyes” her father’s infidelity.	Pre-marital ECR-S: P1 (anxiety 4.83; avoidance 4.00), P2 (anxiety 4.67; avoidance 3.33), P3 (anxiety 2.00; avoidance 4.17).	Dysfunctional family of origin experiences formed the basis of distinct attachment-related vulnerabilities in each participant.

Findings Theme	Representative Qualitative Evidence	Relevant Quantitative Indicators	Integrative Meaning
	P2 grew up disconnected from her mother figure and amid extended-family conflict. P3 experienced parental conflict, the presence of another woman, and domestic violence. All three showed early traces of vigilance toward closeness, a need for validation, or difficulty trusting relationships.		The wounds did not remain merely past experiences, but functioned as a relational legacy shaping security, trust, and the ways participants approached or distanced themselves in adult relationships.
Emotional transformation as a conscious and relational process	P1 marked openness as gradually growing within family life. P2 positioned the experience of “migrating spiritually together (hijrah)” as a turning point in reinterpreting meaning. P3 emphasized the process of learning with his spouse and adapting within married life. Change emerged through self-reflection, spousal support, and safer relational experiences.	ERQ reappraisal before→after marriage: P1 6.67→7.00; P2 5.67→7.00; P3 6.33→6.83. ERQ suppression before→after marriage: P1 6.75→3.50; P2 4.00→6.25; P3 6.00→5.00. PTGI-SF total: P1 49/50; P2 48/50; P3 36/50.	Emotional transformation moved in line with increased cognitive reappraisal across all participants, but not linearly, because expressive suppression changed differently across cases. These findings suggest that the principal change lay in the ability to reorganize the meaning of experience and choose more reflective emotional responses, rather than in a uniform pattern of emotional expression.
Reconstruction of self-identity in marriage	P1 interpreted the premarital phase as an “interview,” indicating conscious selection of a spouse and marital values. P2 narrated herself as a woman increasingly worthy of trust and more aware of her role. P3 emphasized the importance of “a	MLQ presence of meaning: P1 7.00; P2 6.40; P3 5.20. PTGI-SF personal strength: P1 10; P2 9; P3 8.	Identity reconstruction in marriage was supported by meaning in life and a relatively strong sense of personal strength. Marriage became not only a new attachment space, but also a space for reorganizing self-narrative, self-positioning, and life

Findings Theme	Representative Qualitative Evidence	Relevant Quantitative Indicators	Integrative Meaning
	marriage version built by the two of us" and shared life principles. All three moved from a wounded identity toward a more reflective adult spousal identity.		direction as adult spouses.
Marital happiness as an adaptive and meaningful achievement	P1 emphasized "quality time," regular reflection, and gradual communication. P2 positioned her spouse as a "place to return to" and a "remedy," accompanied by transparency, introspection, and the courage to apologize. P3 highlighted "pillow talk," physical touch, and the tempering of spontaneous responses so that dialogue remained productive. Happiness was understood through security, commitment, and sustained connectedness.	KMSS: P1 20/21; P2 18/21; P3 18/21.	Marital happiness emerged as the outcome of concrete and continuous relational work rather than the absence of conflict. A happy relationship was built through communication, negotiation, emotional support, healthy boundaries, forgiveness, and a shared sense of security, such that happiness appeared as both an adaptive and meaningful achievement.

Overall, the qualitative–quantitative integration revealed the strongest pattern across three areas: emotional transformation, identity reconstruction, and marital happiness as an adaptive achievement. The clearest convergent pattern appeared in the increase in cognitive reappraisal across all participants, which was aligned with narratives of reinterpreting past experiences and learning more reflective emotional responses. Another convergent pattern was evident in the high PTGI-SF scores and the fairly strong presence-of-meaning scores, supporting the interpretation that change occurred not only at the level of relational behavior, but also at the level of identity and meaning in life. By contrast, expressive suppression showed a complementary rather than uniform pattern: it decreased sharply in P1, decreased slightly in P3, and increased after marriage in P2. This finding is important because it indicates that emotional openness in this study did not mean that all participants expressed emotion in the same way. Thus, the findings of this study present marital happiness as the product of emotional work, identity work, and relational work that unfolded gradually following dysfunctional family of origin experiences.

Discussion

From the Determinism of Wounds to Transformation

The findings of this study indicate that growing up in a dysfunctional family of origin does leave a strong relational legacy, but does not automatically determine marital failure in adulthood. This pattern was evident across all three participants, who carried early vulnerabilities in the form of vigilance toward closeness, difficulty trusting, or a need for emotional validation, yet were still able to build marriages they understood as happy and stable. This interpretation is consistent with Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, which explains that early relational experiences shape internal working models of the self and others, but do not render them a fully fixed psychological destiny. Fraley and Roisman (2019) as well as Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) likewise showed that inconsistent caregiving experiences may foster insecure attachment in adulthood. However, the present findings emphasize that this influence operates probabilistically rather than deterministically. In other words, a dysfunctional family-of-origin background is more appropriately understood as a context of early relational risk that may continue to affect adult relationships, yet remains open to renegotiation through experience, reflection, and safer relationships.

This non-deterministic reading is important because it shifts the perspective from a deficit paradigm to a transformation paradigm. Previous literature has indeed shown that parental divorce, family conflict, and relational trauma are associated with lower relationship satisfaction, heightened interpersonal anxiety, and the risk of repeating dysfunctional patterns in marriage (Auersperg et al., 2019; Candel & Turliuc, 2019; D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019; Roper et al., 2020). However, the findings of this study suggest that what matters most is not merely the presence of wounds, but how those wounds are processed, interpreted, and renegotiated within adult relationships. At this point, the findings align more closely with Masten's (2001) concept of ordinary magic and Bonanno's (2004) concept of emotional flexibility, both of which emphasize that adaptive change often emerges from processes that appear ordinary yet unfold consistently. Thus, marriage in this study does not appear as emotional compensation that automatically heals the past, but rather as an arena in which individuals re-examine attachment patterns, learn to trust their spouses, and reorganize the meaning of relationships after painful family-of-origin experiences.

Emotional Transformation Is Not Linear

One of the most important findings of this study is that emotional transformation did not proceed linearly or uniformly. At the quantitative level, all participants showed increases in cognitive reappraisal, yet expressive suppression followed different trajectories: it declined sharply in P1, declined slightly in P3, and instead increased in P2. This pattern indicates that emotional change cannot be reduced to the assumption that all participants became "more open" in the same way after marriage. (Gross, 2002, 2015) indeed positioned reappraisal as a strategy that tends to be more adaptive than suppression, but the present findings emphasize that the functional meaning of any strategy must still be interpreted within the context of each individual's life experience. In P2, for example, the increase in suppression cannot necessarily be read as psychological regression; rather, it may more plausibly reflect a protective form of self-control following experiences of violence and betrayal in previous relationships. Accordingly, emotional transformation in this study is better understood as an idiographic process closely tied to the nature of the trauma, relational history, and each individual's need for psychological safety.

These findings enrich the study of emotion regulation by showing that adaptive emotional responses in individuals with a history of dysfunctional families of origin do not always take the form of increasingly open emotional expression. For some individuals, openness may appear in the courage to seek help, discuss needs, or acknowledge fear. For others, change may instead be reflected in the ability to restrain impulses, slow down reactions, and choose a safer moment to express feelings. This interpretation is consistent with Bonanno (2004), who rejected the assumption that recovery must follow a single emotional pathway, and with Putri and Adri (2024), who showed that individuals with a history of parental divorce may develop high emotional control alongside inner tension. The findings of this study also support the view that spouses can function as a secure base that facilitates gradual emotional change, particularly when the relationship provides validation, calm, and a safe space for reflection (Li et al., 2023; River et al., 2022). Therefore, emotional transformation in this study was not a process of “becoming the same,” but a process of becoming more adaptive in accordance with each individual’s life context.

Identity Reconstruction as the Core of Marital Happiness

The findings of this study also indicate that marital happiness cannot be explained solely by changes in emotion regulation; rather, the core of the process lies in the reconstruction of self-identity. The three participants did not merely learn to respond to conflict more calmly, but also reformulated who they were as spouses, how they wished to live out married life, and which patterns from the family of origin they did not want to repeat. This interpretation extends Erikson’s (1968) developmental theory, particularly the link between identity formation and the capacity to build healthy intimacy. In the context of this study, marriage was not merely a space for enacting an already mature identity, but an arena for the formation of a more integrated and reflective spousal identity. This view is consistent with Marcia’s elaboration of identity achievement, which emphasizes the importance of exploration and commitment in identity formation (Bryner, 2001; Rollins et al., 2018; Sagone et al., 2023). Thus, the relational change identified in this study concerns not only becoming calmer or more trusting, but also becoming a person with a clearer sense of self-position, greater value awareness, and a more directed orientation in enacting the marital role.

The narrative identity approach of McAdams (2006) and McAdams and McLean (2013) is particularly helpful in explaining this pattern. They argue that identity is formed through life stories that organize past experiences into a coherent narrative. In all three participants, the narrative of the self no longer remained fixed in the position of victim of family-of-origin experiences, but shifted toward a narrative of growth, conscious choice, and the building of a healthier household. This finding is also reinforced by the quantitative indicators: presence of meaning scores on the MLQ were relatively strong, and the personal strength dimension of the PTGI-SF was also high across all participants. This means that identity reconstruction in this study was not merely reflective rhetoric, but was accompanied by a real sense of meaning in life and personal strength. In this context, marriage may be understood as a space for re-authoring the self, that is, a place where individuals rewrite their life stories by integrating past wounds into an identity that is more mature, more meaningful, and more capable of engaging in healthy relationships (McLean & Syed, 2015; Pals, 2006).

Sakinah Marriage as a Process, Not a Label

The findings of this study allow the concept of *sakinah* marriage to be interpreted more operationally and psychologically. In this study, *sakinah* did not appear as an ideal condition free from conflict, but rather as a relational process marked by security, more mature emotion regulation, mutual support, shared meaning in life, and the ability to recover after tension. This pattern is consistent with Gottman's (2011) model, which shows that stable relationships are determined not by the absence of conflict, but by couples' ability to engage in repair attempts and rebuild emotional connection after negative interactions. In the findings of this study, this pattern was evident in open communication, negotiation of needs, quality time, taking pauses during conflict, pillow talk, affective touch, and forgiveness. These findings also resonate with studies by DeLongis and Zwicker (2017), Herawati and Farradinna (2017), and Aurellia and Arjadi (2023), which position empathy, forgiveness, and the ability to take the spouse's perspective as foundations of marital satisfaction. Thus, *sakinah* in this article is not treated as a moral label imposed from outside, but as an interpretive lens for understanding the quality of relational processes emerging from the data. This interpretation is also supported by Quan et al. (2025), who showed that social support from a spouse acts as an important mediator between childhood trauma and romantic relationship satisfaction, so that the quality of mutual support in these findings strengthens the meaning of *sakinah* as a relational process of recovery.

This interpretation becomes stronger when placed within the context of Indonesian culture and Islamic psychology. In collectivistic societies, marital happiness is often associated with harmony, stability, and shared responsibility (Hofstede et al., 2010; Marwan, 2024; Montolalu et al., 2023). However, the findings of this study show that healthy harmony is not identical to emotional repression or the absence of differences, but rather to the couple's ability to maintain connectedness while managing conflict safely. At this point, the concept of *sakinah* in QS Ar-Rum: 21 becomes relevant not as a normative slogan, but as a framework for understanding how relational tranquility is built through *rahmah*, *mawaddah*, and emotional order. From the perspective of Islamic psychology, Al-Ghazali positioned emotion management as part of safeguarding the *qalb* through reason and faith, Al-Balkhi emphasized cognitive restructuring as a pathway for managing anxiety, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah identified patience, gratitude, and acceptance (*ridha*) as pathways toward tranquility of the soul. The findings of this study indicate that these psychological and spiritual dimensions are not contradictory, but instead mutually reinforcing in the formation of a marriage that is calm, secure, and meaningful.

Practical Implications

Practically, the findings of this study support the need for premarital counseling that is more sensitive to experiences of dysfunctional families of origin. Premarital guidance is insufficient if it focuses only on administrative readiness, legal matters, or surface-level communication, because relational vulnerabilities are often formed long before marital conflict emerges. Based on the findings of this study, premarital counseling needs to help prospective couples map their attachment patterns, conflict triggers, ways of managing emotions, and relational expectations inherited from their families of origin. In this way, exploration of family-of-origin experiences is undertaken not to assign risk labels, but to understand the context in which needs for psychological safety and relationship patterns may be carried into marriage.

At the same time, these findings also support the need for trauma-informed couples counseling, particularly for couples who show high suspicion, excessive need for validation, tendencies to withdraw, or difficulty repairing the relationship after conflict. Such interventions may be directed toward strengthening the couple as a secure base, training in emotion co-regulation, and reinforcing safe communication.

The findings of this study also provide a basis for developing psychoeducation on attachment and emotion regulation, as well as community- and religion-based support programs. Psychoeducation may focus on understanding attachment styles, recognizing emotional triggers, distinguishing between reappraisal and suppression, and appreciating the importance of emotional validation in intimate relationships. For community and religious institutions, the findings of this study indicate that family support is insufficient if it merely emphasizes harmony as a norm; rather, it needs to provide a safe space for reflecting on family-of-origin experiences, learning communication skills, and developing spiritual meaning in relationships. In this context, Islamic psychology may be used applicatively, not to judge past wounds, but to help individuals cultivate patience, gratitude, responsibility, and *rahmah* as resources for self-regulation and relational recovery. Thus, the practical implication of this study lies in strengthening support systems that view marriage as a process of emotional and spiritual learning that must be nurtured, rather than as a status that automatically produces tranquility.

Overall, this discussion underscores that the principal contribution of the study does not lie in the claim that adults with a history of dysfunctional families of origin “eventually recover,” but rather in the explanation that their marital happiness is built through the reconstruction of emotion and identity in ways that are gradual, relational, and meaningful. The findings show that family-of-origin wounds do indeed form a basis of vulnerability, but that safe, supportive, and reflective marital experiences make possible the development of reappraisal, posttraumatic growth, meaning in life, and a more mature spousal identity. Using more consistent terminology, this study shows that dysfunctional family-of-origin experiences are better understood as a context for the formation of both vulnerability and transformation, rather than as a label that freezes an individual’s relational future. At the same time, the concept of *sakinah* marriage in this article is more appropriately understood as a process of sustaining security, *rahmah*, and shared meaning in life, rather than as static harmony without conflict. Accordingly, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how past wounds may be renegotiated into adult relationships that are healthier, more stable, and more sustainable.

Limitations and Future Research

This study nevertheless has limitations that need to be acknowledged openly. The small number of participants, while appropriate to the idiographic character of IPA and supportive of depth of analysis, also limited the range of experiences that could be captured. Some of the data, particularly those concerning the premarital period, relied on retrospective reporting and therefore were not free from the possibility of recall bias. In addition, although this study used several standardized psychological instruments, including the ERQ, ECR-S, PTGI-SF, MLQ, and KMSS, the quantitative strand was analyzed descriptively and used only as contextual support for interpreting the qualitative findings. This reflects the study’s primary qualitative focus, while suggesting opportunities for future research to further develop

mixed-methods integration. Because the study explored marital happiness, family wounds, and religiously meaningful marital values, participants' narratives may also have been influenced by social desirability, particularly the tendency to present their marriages, coping strategies, or spiritual interpretations in a more favorable light. The religious framing of *sakinah* marriage may also have introduced religiosity bias, as participants' accounts of happiness, patience, forgiveness, and marital commitment may have been shaped by Islamic values and moral expectations.

Another limitation concerns survivor bias, because this study included only adults from dysfunctional families of origin who had maintained happy and stable marriages for at least ten years; therefore, it does not represent individuals with similar family-of-origin backgrounds whose marriages ended, remained highly distressed, or did not develop into stable relationships. The findings also emerged from a religious and collectivistic cultural context, such that the meanings of marital happiness, relationships with the extended family, and the spiritual orientations identified here may not be fully comparable across other social contexts. The online format of the interviews may also have limited the observation of nonverbal cues in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more diverse participants, including individuals with different marital outcomes, consider longitudinal or dyadic designs, use source triangulation, and employ a more fully developed mixed-methods approach with larger samples and appropriate statistical procedures. Future studies may also examine the dynamics of transformation from dysfunctional families of origin to *sakinah* marriage across different cultural, religious, and relational contexts.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that, for adults with a history of family-of-origin dysfunction, the path toward a *sakinah* marriage is not achieved through the disappearance of past wounds, but through emotional transformation and the reconstruction of self-identity that unfold gradually, consciously, and relationally. Dysfunctional family-of-origin experiences do indeed shape early vulnerabilities in attachment, emotion regulation, and the way closeness is understood, but these vulnerabilities are not final. In this study, marital happiness emerged when participants were able to reorganize traumatic experiences, develop more reflective ways of managing emotions, and build a shared sense of security with their spouses. Thus, *sakinah* marriage does not appear as a condition free from the traces of past wounds, but rather as a relational achievement built through psychological work, meaning in life, and shared commitment. This conclusion is consistent with the integrated findings showing increased cognitive reappraisal, high to moderate posttraumatic growth, relatively strong meaning in life, and persistently high marital satisfaction, even though patterns of expressive suppression did not change uniformly.

Conceptually, this study affirms that the relationship between family-of-origin trauma and marital happiness needs to be understood through an integrative approach. The findings extend scholarship on dysfunctional families of origin by showing that change in adulthood involves not only shifts in attachment patterns and emotion regulation, but also the formation of a more integrated, reflective, and meaningful spousal identity. Within the collectivistic and religious context of Indonesia, *sakinah* marriage in this study is understood not as a normative label, but as a process of building security, mutual support, shared

meaning in life, and the capacity to restore the relationship after conflict. Accordingly, the principal contribution of this article lies in its explanation that, in the movement from family-of-origin wounds to a *sakinah* marriage, the most decisive change is not merely behavioral adaptation, but the reconstruction of emotion and identity that enables individuals to live marriage as a space of recovery as well as growth. In this sense, the study is relevant to the development of family psychology, couples counseling, and trauma-informed interventions within the framework of local culture and Islamic psychology.

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