


# Marital Satisfaction of Pastors in Long-distance Marriage: The Role of Self-compassion and Spousal Social Support

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## INTRODUCTION

Every individual carry hope, needs, and even dreams while entering married life. They desire a happy and fulfilling married life (Nihayah et al., 2013). Hurlock (2017) stated that marital satisfaction is closely related to the ability of husband and wife to adjust to each other emotionally, sexually, financially, and socially within their marriage. Marital satisfaction may have a positive impact on a relationship, in the form of individual welfare, life satisfaction and self-esteem as a measurement (Al-Darmaki et al., 2017).

In fact, marital dissatisfaction occurred in some marriages. Soraiya et al. (2016) stated that marital satisfaction is not always achieved by married couples. Marital dissatisfaction often occurred with long-distance marriage couples. Long-distance marriage occurred where couples live in different areas during the workday, for long periods of time, for professional reasons (McBride & Bergen, 2014). Pistole et al. (2010) described long-distance marriage as situations where individuals are physically separated for certain interests, while their spouses remain in their hometowns. It happened due to work, economic, and educational reasons (Rubyasih, 2016). Recent studies showed problems that arise in long-distance marriage (Larasati et al., 2020), including less time and communication (Hartini & Setiawan, 2023; Kurniawan et al., 2023), unbalanced parenting patterns (Pertiwi et al., 2023; Sukmawati et al., 2023), loneliness (Hendra & Kusumiati, 2020), and lack of warmth in the marriage relationship (Sawai et al., 2023). Another problem that arises is lack of resolution and decision-making between husband and wife (Priastuty et al., 2023; Rosyadi et al.,

2023). These lead to declining marital satisfaction, which results in instability and disharmonious relationships, and even lead to divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Widyanisa et al., 2018).

The issue of marital dissatisfaction due to long-distance marriage is also experienced by pastors. Fundamentally, all pastors honour the foundations of marriage: monogamy, inseparable and equality. This means pastors do not merely carry the responsibility to lead their congregation, provide spiritual, moral, and mental guidance, but also become a role model, including regarding their marriage life (Rupa', 2016; Tomatala, 1997). On the other side, in terms of marital satisfaction, pastors often receive judgment or criticism due to their work pressures (Emusugut et al., 2023b). Therefore, according to Poon (2019), marital satisfaction is an essential value for pastors. Marital satisfaction may lead couples to happiness and harmonious life, as well as resolve the conflicts, thus reducing the risk of divorce (Ariana & Pertiwi, 2024; Shoba et al., 2023).

According to Fowers and Olson (1993), marital satisfaction is couples' subjective evaluation on happiness, satisfaction, and joy in their marriage. Marital satisfaction brings the sense of contentment and happiness in marriage, which is reflected in their ability to fulfill physical, economic, emotional, and psychological needs, as well as overcome household problems (Olson et al., 2013). Pinsof and Lebow (2005) stated that marital satisfaction is a subjective feeling and attitudes which influence the quality and interactions in marriage. This occurs when the dreams and goals to be achieved in marriage are fulfilled, either partially or completely (Pujiastuti & Retnowati, 2004). Therefore, discussing marital satisfaction means understanding the various dimensions that influence marital satisfaction, thus creating harmony and stability in a healthy marriage.

Fowers and Olson (1993) describe the dimensions of marital satisfaction, including communication, leisure activities, conflict resolution, financial management, sexual orientation, family and friends, children and parenting, personality issues, and equalitarian role. Couple's ability to navigate and handle problems in their marriage affect their marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction affects couples' point of view, environment, mental and physical health (Pujiastuti & Retnowati, 2004). Conversely, couples with dissatisfaction in their married life easily become frustrated and seek satisfaction somewhere else (Handayani, 2016).

Marital satisfaction is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors, namely commitment influences marital satisfaction due to a sense of responsibility to maintain harmony in marriage (Huwae, 2025). Marriage expectations determine marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction due to the future prediction (Ramadhani et al., 2024). Self-compassion contributes to a positive and supportive marriage environment in order to achieve happiness and stability (Sierra-Swiech et al., 2024). Furthermore, external factors, such as spousal social support, may improve marital satisfaction (Juniarly et al., 2022).

Self-compassion, as one of internal factors of marital satisfaction, is a person's ability to think positively toward themselves, which is reflected by an attitude of caring, self-understanding, and lack of critical judgment concerning some problems or events (Lim & Kartasasmita, 2019). Self-compassion is the ability to remain calm in times of undesirable situations, be kind to themselves and others (Neff, 2011). Self-compassion refers to how individuals perceive themselves when experiencing failure, inability or personal suffering (Yarnell et al., 2019). Self-compassion encourages people to understand themselves, recognizing their weaknesses and finding the best solutions to their problems (Neff, 2003). Individuals with self-compassion demonstrate concern for others (Neff & Pommier, 2013). Self-compassion has several dimensions: self-kindness, self-criticism, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness and over-identification (Neff, 2011).

Social support is an important factor in an individual's life. People determine who will receive social support based on their specific situation and intention (Taylor et al., 2009). This leads to a sense of comfort, concern, and appreciation for one another, which are meaningful for both parties (Sarafino & Smith, 2014). The source of social support in marriage is the spouse. Spousal social support is the perception of the availability or adequacy of support provided by a spouse (Dehle et

al., 2001). Dorio (2009) defines Spousal Social Support as the assistance, advice, and understanding provided by an individual to their spouse. Dimensions of Spousal Social Support include emotional, instrumental, informational support, and appreciation (Dorio, 2009).

In a previous research self-compassion and spousal social support to marital satisfaction has been discussed. Fahimdanesh et al. (2020) stated that self-compassion has a significant role in marital satisfaction. Couples who demonstrate self-compassion tend to experience greater marital satisfaction. Fung et al. (2022) stated that self-compassion is a protective factor against issues to increase marital satisfaction. Maryanto et al. (2024) found that self-compassion has a significant role in increasing marital satisfaction by enhancing individual welfare and life satisfaction, and also better emotional management. Nugraha and Malueka (2023) stated that spousal social support has a significant role in increasing marital satisfaction, particularly among husbands. Furthermore, Nihayah et al. (2023) found that spousal social support significantly impacts marital satisfaction among career women. Günaydın and Kayral (2024) also found that spousal social support is an important factor in marriage, significantly determining overall marital satisfaction. The emotional and practical support provided by a spouse is fundamental in maintaining a happy and stable marriage.

Based on previous research on self-compassion and spousal social support, research on pastors' marital satisfaction has not been found. This is an urgent matter for research considering that the married life of a pastor is also a role model for the congregation. Therefore, the role of self-compassion and spousal social support leads to a positive influence on the marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriage, which is the topic of this study. This study is in line with research by Yoshany et al. (2017) that couples who enjoy a satisfying marriage relationship may reap many benefits. Among these benefits are improved psychological health and greater flexibility in dealing with various life pressures.

### Study Aim and Hypothesis

This study aims to examine self-compassion and spousal social support as predictors of marital satisfaction. The hypothesis is that self-compassion and spousal social support are simultaneously predictors of marital satisfaction.

## METHODS

### Design

The design used in this study is a correlational quantitative research design. This research design was conducted to simultaneously determine self-compassion and spousal social support as predictors of marital satisfaction among pastors in Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB).

### Participants

Participants in this research were GPIB pastors around 19 Provinces in Indonesia. Participants were obtained using a saturated sampling technique, a sampling technique that uses the entire population as a sample. This research involved 100 pastors who have been in long distance marriage for 1-25 years. Participants consisted of 32 male pastors and 68 female pastors, with an age range of 30-63 years. Apart from that, 25% of participants do not have children yet. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. Number and Percentage by Age and Gender

Age Interval	Male	Female	Total
Early Adulthood (20-39 years)	12 (37.5%)	30 (44.1%)	42 (42%)
Middle Adulthood (40-60 years)	18 (56.25%)	38 (55.9%)	56 (56%)
Late Adulthood (> 60 years)	2 (6.25%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Total	32 (32%)	68 (68%)	100 (100%)

Table 1. shows that out of 100 pastors undergoing long-distance marriage, females (68%) are the majority based on gender. Meanwhile, middle adulthood dominates based on age, with a percentage of 56%.

Table 2. Number and Percentage by Location

Province	Number	Percentage
Special Region of Yogyakarta	2	2%
East Kalimantan	9	9%
West Kalimantan	17	17%
North Kalimantan	4	4%
South Kalimantan	2	2%
East Java	13	13%
Central Java	4	4%
West Java	6	6%
Jakarta	16	16%
Riau	4	4%
Riau Islands	3	3%
Jambi	1	1%
Banten	2	2%
Bali	5	5%
South Sulawesi	5	5%
Southeast Sulawesi	1	1%
Bangka-Belitung	1	1%
West Nusa Tenggara	1	1%
North Sumatera	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Table 2. shows that out of 100 pastors undergoing long-distance marriage, the majority were pastors from West Kalimantan (17%) and the rest were spread across 18 other provinces.

Table 3. Number and Percentage by Period of Long-distance Marriage

Period	Male	Female	Total
1-5 Years	16 (50%)	30 (44.1%)	46 (46%)
5-10 Years	10 (31.25%)	20 (29.4%)	30 (30%)
11-15 Years	4 (12.5%)	8 (11.8%)	12 (12%)
15-20 Years	1 (3.125%)	2 (2.94%)	3 (3%)
20-25 Years	1 (3.125%)	8 (11.76%)	9 (9%)
Total	32 (32%)	68 (68%)	100 (100%)

Table 3. shows that out of 100 pastors undergoing long-distance marriage are dominated by couples who have been in long-distance marriage for 1 to 5 years (46%).

Table 4. Number and Percentage of Children

Category	Number and Percentage
No Children Yet	25 (25%)
1	31 (31%)
2	37 (37%)
3	5 (5%)
4	2 (2%)
Total	100 (100%)

Table 4. shows that out of 100 pastors undergoing long-distance marriage are dominated by couples with 2 children (37%), followed by 1 child, no children yet, 3 children and 4 children.

### Instruments

Data collection techniques are carried out using some instrument. Before use, a reliability test was carried out on all scales to be used. The reliability test uses Cronbach's alpha and if correlation results are closer to 1 then this can be interpreted as reliable (Azwar, 2021).

**ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMSS)** by Fowers and Olson (1993) reveals communication, leisure activity, religious orientation, conflict resolution, financial management, sexual orientation, family and friends, children and parenting, personality issues, equalitarian role. This scale has been tested by 'Izzah et al. (2023) and used in this study. This scale consists of 15 items, with marital satisfaction dimension for example statement was: "I am very happy with the way we carry out our responsibilities in marriage", and idealistic distortion for example statement was: "We understand each other perfectly". The reliability coefficient of EMSS is 0.865, this means that the EMSS meets the reliability requirements. The validity values range from 0.426 to 0.847. The scale uses a questionnaire method which is arranged in the form of a Likert scale.

**The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)** by Neff (2003) reveals self-kindness, self-judgement, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, overidentification. This scale has been tested by Giyati and Whibowo (2023) and used in this study. This scale consists of 13 favorable and 13 unfavorable items. Some examples of statements on SCS were: "I try to keep my emotions stable when something upsetting happens" and "I reject my weaknesses and shortcomings". The reliability coefficient of SCS is 0.927, this means that the SCS meets the reliability requirements. The validity values range from 0.612 to 0.833. The scale uses a questionnaire method which is arranged in the form of a Likert scale.

**The Receipt of Spousal Support Scale (RSSS)** by Dorio (2009) reveals emotional concern, instrumental assistance, informational support and appraisal support. This scale has been tested by Nugraha (2018) and used in this study. This scale consists of 12 favorable and 8 unfavorable items. Some examples of statements on RSSS were: "My partner always asks about my daily life" and "My partner sometimes doesn't want to listen to my problems". The reliability coefficient of RSSS is 0.864, this means that the RSSS meets the reliability requirements. The validity values range from 0.359 to 0.769. The scale uses a questionnaire method which is arranged in the form of a Likert scale.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis for hypothesis testing was conducted using quantitative methods and multiple linear regression analysis. Classical assumption tests were conducted earlier, including normality test, linearity, heteroscedasticity, and multicollinearity as prerequisites. The scale used has been tested for validity and reliability using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 for Windows software.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The classical test results as a prerequisite for multiple linear regression show that the normality of residual test shows  $K-SZ=.065$  and  $n.sign=.200$  ( $p>.05$ ). This means that the data is normally distributed. The linearity test showed a self-compassion deviation value of  $.978$  ( $p>.05$ ) and spousal social support of  $.393$  ( $p>.05$ ), which means there is a significant relationship between the two variables and marital satisfaction. While the results of the multicollinearity test show the tolerance value of the two variables are  $.725$  ( $Tol>.10$ ) and the VIF value  $1.38$  ( $VIF<10.00$ ), so it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity. There is also no heteroscedasticity observed, as

indicated by the points scattering randomly around the diagonal line and spreading both above and below zero on the Y-axis.

### Hypothetical testing

Table 5. The Anova test results showed that  $F=90.193$  and a significance value of  $.000$  ( $p<.05$ ). This means that self-compassion and spousal social support are predictors of marital satisfaction of pastors in long distance marriage.

Table 5. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2407.540	2	1203.770	90.193	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	1294.620	97	13.347		
Total	3702.160	99			

Table 6. Summary of Research Hypotheses Testing Result

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. F Change
1	.06	.650	.643	3.653	.000

Table 6. shows that simultaneously self-compassion and spousal social support are predictors and contribute to marital satisfaction by 65%, the rest is influenced by other variables not examined in this study.

### Discussion

The statistical analysis results showed an F-value of 90.193 with a significance level of 0.000 ( $p<0.05$ ). This means that self-compassion and spousal social support simultaneously predict marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriage. Based on these results, the research hypothesis is accepted. This means that self-compassion influences the marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriages. This is in line with Janjani et al. (2023) that self-compassion can influence marital satisfaction. However, if accompanied by spousal social support, the marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriage can increase significantly. According to the results of research by Işık and Kaya (2022) that spousal social support can have a strong influence on marital satisfaction. This is because spousal social support can increase enthusiasm, feelings of calm, a sense of being cared for, loved, and having someone who can be relied upon by individuals in carrying out their responsibilities. This is evident through expressions of love and affection from partners, the quality of time and attention given, sharing tasks and roles, thus minimizing conflict (Utami & Wijaya, 2018).

Partially, the regression analysis results showed that self-compassion had a significant positive effect on marital satisfaction. It means that each increase in self-compassion led to an increase in marital satisfaction. This is in line with the research findings of Sierra-Swiech et al. (2024) that self-compassion is an important factor in predicting marital satisfaction because the dimensions of self-compassion can contribute to a more positive marital environment and support marital happiness and stability. In addition, Çolakkadioğlu (2023) complemented the results of his research that self-compassion has a positive correlation with marital satisfaction because it can improve emotional well-being, the ability to manage conflict, and foster a supportive and good environment in marital relationships. Fahimdanesh et al. (2020) and Maryanto et al. (2024) also emphasized the important role of self-compassion in increasing marital satisfaction through increased individual well-being and better emotional management. Self-compassion, which includes a positive attitude towards oneself, reduced anxiety, and the ability to manage internal conflict, has been shown to support the emotional stability of couples, thus contributing to marital satisfaction. Neff (2003) also explained that self-compassion helps individuals accept their shortcomings and facilitates interpersonal

relationships, including in the context of long-distance marriage that are vulnerable to emotional stress.

The effect of spousal social support on marital satisfaction is also positive. This indicates that the higher spousal social support, the higher marital satisfaction also. This is in line with research by Utami and Wijaya (2018), which found that spousal social support helps individuals cope with stress and reduces the impact of the stress they face. This support can take the form of emotional support, appraisal, instrumental support, or even information that helps individuals respond to the stress they experience. As found in research by Nugraha and Malueka (2023) and Juniary et al. (2022), emotional, practical, and informational support from partners is essential for maintaining marital harmony and satisfaction. Günaydin and Kayral (2024) also found that spousal social support is an important factor in marriage that significantly determines overall marital satisfaction. The emotional and practical support provided by partners is crucial for maintaining a happy and stable marriage.

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) test result was 0.650, which means that the variables of self-compassion and spousal social support provide an effective contribution of 65% to the marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriage, and the remaining 35% is influenced by other variables not measured in this study. The effective contribution provided by each independent variable to the dependent variable is the variable of self-compassion of 8% and spousal social support of 57%. This indicates the dominance of spousal social support as a supporter of marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriage.

Pastors, as spiritual leaders and moral role models, generally have a high awareness of the importance of values and support in marriage, making the influence of self-compassion and spousal social support more pronounced. Work pressures and high expectations for pastors' marital lives can encourage them to rely more on self-compassion and social support as sources of strength in maintaining marital satisfaction (Emusugut et al., 2023a). However, results indicate that the strength of self-compassion in pastors in long-distance marriage is still limited, despite its positive contribution, when compared to spousal social support. Dayanti and Yanto (2024) explained that in the context of long-distance marriage, self-compassion helps pastors accept their circumstances and manage conflicts that arise due to the greater challenges of communication and physical interaction. Research by Fung et al. (2022) identified the causes of burnout, marital problems, and life dissatisfaction, particularly in pastors, by examining factors such as self-criticism, self-compassion, and bicultural identification. According to the reviewed studies, pastors face specific challenges and pressures, including self-criticism, which is harmful to their marriage and happiness. Therefore, self-compassion appears to be a protective factor.

Spousal social support has a strong influence on increasing marital satisfaction for pastors in long-distance marriage. In the context of pastors in long-distance marriage, spousal social support presents a unique challenge due to limitations in physical interaction due to distance. Couples in long-distance marriage face various obstacles and sacrifices because they cannot practice the same habits as married couples living in the same house (Lisaniyah et al., 2021). Therefore, although research shows that pastors in long-distance marriage have high spousal social support, the dynamics of marital life, under certain conditions, can lead to low marital satisfaction. On the other hand, high spousal social support for pastors in long-distance marriage serves as a primary source of emotional reinforcement and a sense of security in the marital relationship. This support encompasses emotional aspects, information, and instrumental support provided by the spouse, which are crucial in long-distance marriage to reduce feelings of loneliness and uncertainty. Strong social support through the role of the spouse helps pastors feel valued and cared for, which in turn increases marital satisfaction (Emusugut et al., 2023b). Spousal social support is a key source of social support that can be relied upon to improve individual well-being and the quality of marital relationships (Beach et al. in Dorio, 2009; Chen, 2014). Fuller (in Wakhidah et al., 2020) explains that

the absence of regular and ongoing involvement of the husband or wife in their functions and roles, as well as emotional support, can potentially lead to more conflict. Therefore, husbands and wives who receive support from their partners are more likely to experience marital satisfaction.

Thus, self-compassion and spousal social support complement each other in predicting marital satisfaction. Married individuals with limited self-compassion can maximize their spousal social support to maintain marital harmony and achieve marital satisfaction, in the context of a long-distance marriage. Conversely, strong spousal social support from a husband or wife can increase self-compassion, because through this support, there is a sense of security and emotional empowerment that allows individuals to accept and love themselves amidst the challenges of a long-distance marriage. As found in the results of research by Golmakani et al. (2020) , Chi et al. (2023) , and Rofiqah (2023) , self-compassion and social support can improve individual well-being and mental health. Similarly, the results of research by Safitri and Munawaroh (2022) stated that the greater influence of self-compassion and the higher spousal social support, the better the individual's resilience. Thus, it can be concluded that self-compassion and spousal social support simultaneously influence the marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriage.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study for pastor couples in long distance marriage are expected to emphasize the importance of partners in providing social support to achieve marital satisfaction. This is important because spousal social support plays a powerful role in increasing marital satisfaction. Social support from a partner can provide physical and psychological comfort, strengthen the marital relationship, and reduce various stressors. Conversely, a lack of spousal social support can lead to low marital satisfaction and potentially lead to marital problems for pastors in long-distance marriages. Therefore, spousal social support is essential for building and maintaining a healthy and harmonious marital relationship.

### **Limitation and Further Research**

The limitation is particularly in the research method used. The results were obtained through statistical analysis, which could have been further explored through more in-depth interviews, specifically through a qualitative approach, to gain insights and experiences that could not have been achieved through a quantitative approach. Furthermore, this study only examined self-compassion and spousal social support on marital satisfaction. Other variables that may influence marital satisfaction, such as commitment, conflict resolution, and others, were not examined in this study. In addition, the analysis of marital satisfaction was only viewed from a single perspective, not *dyadic*, thus missing the roles and perceptions of the husband and wife in building interactions, coping with stress, and solving problems together. Suggestions for future researchers are to conduct research using different variables and methods or with broader or different research subjects, such as men or women, for comparison.

### **CONCLUSION**

The results of the study indicate that self-compassion combined with spousal social support can predict marital satisfaction in pastors in long-distance marriage. If self-compassion is separated from spousal social support, it can be a predictor of marital satisfaction. If accompanied by high spousal social support, it will further increase the marital satisfaction of pastors in long-distance marriage. The strength of the influence of the self-compassion variable is still limited, while spousal social support has a high influence.



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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

IF, MGA and CHS agree to the final version of this article.

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