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Choosing with mind or heart: dyadic pathways from decision-making styles to spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality among parents

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Abstract
Parenthood represents one of the most critical roles in adulthood, shaping family functioning, relational dynamics, and the psychosocial well-being of both parents and children. Grounded in the Family Systems Approach, this study examined the dyadic associations between parents' decision-making styles, spiritual fortitude, and intrinsic spirituality in a collectivist cultural context. Participants were 478 Turkish heterosexual parenting couples (N=956). The Actor–partner interdependence mediation model (APIMeM) was employed to test actor and partner effects as well as the mediating role of spiritual fortitude. Results indicated that intuitive decision-making was significantly related to both parents' spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality at the actor and partner levels, whereas rational decision-making was significantly associated only at the actor level. In both models, statistically reliable indirect associations involving spiritual fortitude were observed between decision-making styles and intrinsic spirituality within the proposed theoretical model. These findings suggest that, among Turkish heterosexual parenting couples, parents' decision-making patterns and spiritual processes are not only individual but also interactive and interdependent, consistent with the principles of mutual interdependence described in Family Systems Theory. The study extends the Family Systems Approach by underscoring the role of dyadic spiritual resources in parental relationships and provides implications for family and couple counseling practices.

Keywords Parenting · Decision-making styles · Spiritual fortitude · Intrinsic spirituality

Introduction

Families are considered one of the most fundamental determinants in individuals' psychosocial, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as in their socialization processes (Cameron et al., 2023). In this context, the family systems approach argues that individuals' behaviors and psychological symptoms can be understood not only at the individual level but also through the dynamics of family relationships (Eads, 2023). Since the family is a platform where critical life experiences and developmental processes take place for each individual, the quality of family relationships plays a central role in individual well-being. In fact, research shows that a healthy family structure is an important protective factor for mental health (Norton & Cuskelly, 2021). These findings have paved the way for the development of theoretical approaches that examine the relationship between family dynamics and mental health. One such approach is the family systems approach. This approach views the family as a multi-layered structure composed of intertwined subsystems. Within this framework, it is accepted that a change or problem experienced by one family member affects the other members as well. There are generally three basic subsystems within the family system: the spouse subsystem, the parent subsystem, and the child subsystem (Calatrava et al., 2022).

According to the family systems approach, the main function of the family is based on the parenting subsystem; therefore, parents play a significant role in maintaining the family's functionality and balance (Ncayiyane & Nel, 2023). According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (2025), the vast majority of parents describe their families

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as a source of happiness. The same study also shows that married women and men have higher levels of happiness compared to single individuals. These findings indicate that starting a family and parenting can be an important source of happiness for individuals. It is well known that parents' emotional states, behavioral patterns, and relationships with each other affect not only themselves but the entire family system (Rusli, 2025). During times of crisis and in everyday life, parents are not merely individuals who fulfill children's physical needs; they are also the most critical actors in shaping children's emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development (Qiu et al., 2021). This process emerges within a multi-layered and dynamic structure rather than through simple interactions. In particular, parents' decision-making styles, communication styles, and value systems play a decisive role in a wide range of areas, from children's identity development to psychological adjustment (Chung et al., 2023). From the perspective of the family life cycle, constant change over time is inevitable in the processes of child care and education. In this context, parents are expected to make decisions on fundamental issues such as establishing rules within the family, defining roles, setting boundaries, economic planning, education, and health (Pustulka & Sikorska, 2025). These decisions directly affect the system's adaptability and functionality at every stage of the family life cycle (Gaspar et al., 2021).

Decision-making, as one of the most critical processes in adulthood and parenthood, plays a decisive role in both individuals' daily choices and important decisions that directly shape family life (Possey-Maddox et al., 2021). The decision-making styles adopted by parents have multidimensional consequences that affect not only their own individual adaptation and psychological well-being but also the psychosocial development of their spouses and children (Labrie et al., 2025). In the literature, decision-making processes are generally examined under two main categories: rational and intuitive (Hamilton et al., 2016; İme et al., 2020). Rational decision-making is defined by an individual carefully weighing alternatives, anticipating long-term consequences, and adopting a more planned approach, while intuitive decision-making enables quick and spontaneous choices based on emotions, intuition, and instant judgments. Therefore, decision-making processes represent a holistic structure that includes not only cognitive processes but also emotional and spiritual resources (Raharjanti et al., 2022). Research shows that rational decision-making styles can strengthen problem-solving skills and psychological adjustment (Bhui et al., 2021), while intuitive decision-making styles provide individuals with flexibility and quick coping strategies, especially in conditions of uncertainty and stress, and help them internalize new learning (Sicora et al., 2021). In this context, decision-making styles are viewed not merely as situational choices, but as stable cognitive frameworks that determine how individuals process information and interpret life events (Crivelli et al., 2024). The focus specifically on rational and intuitive styles is grounded in Dual-Process Theory, which identifies these two as the primary, active systems for information processing. Unlike other styles that may reflect social dependence or decision-avoidance, rational and intuitive patterns function as the proactive 'cognitive infrastructure' through which parents mobilize their internal resources (Bellini-Leite, 2022). Therefore, understanding the implications of different decision-making styles in the family context presents a critical area of research for explaining parenting experiences, family functionality, and relational dynamics.

Although spiritual constructs have deep developmental roots, cognitive styles are posited to function as the proximal mechanisms through which these resources are activated (Wright et al., 2018). Specifically, parents' decision-making patterns may be associated with how they utilize spiritual fortitude during stressful parenting experiences (Vasiou et al., 2023). It has been suggested that whether decision-making processes are based on rational or intuitive foundations may be decisive not only for family functioning but also for parents' spiritual strength and fortitude (Malcolm et al., 2021). Especially in collectivist cultures, parenting is seen as a role that is attributed with sacredness, gives meaning to individuals' lives, and provides emotional fulfillment (He et al., 2021). In this context, parents who are satisfied with the decisions they make on behalf of their families may not only develop cognitive competence but also experience a deeper sense of well-being spiritually. Spiritual fortitude refers to the capacity for resistance and adaptation that individuals develop by drawing on their systems of belief, values, and meaning in the face of life's inevitable challenges (Zhang et al., 2021). This concept, which is increasingly discussed in positive psychology literature, is positioned as a spiritual extension of psychological resilience and coping processes (Captari et al., 2023). From this perspective, spiritual fortitude may enable individuals to reframe stressful life events to make them more manageable, maintain their hope for the future, and strengthen solidarity within the family context. Research findings indicate that individuals with high levels of spiritual fortitude are better able to cope constructively with family conflicts, exhibit more collaborative attitudes in problem-solving processes, and experience higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships (Lucafò et al., 2025; Kent et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is emphasized that spiritual fortitude is not limited to protecting individual mental health; it also serves as an important

protective factor that supports the relational functioning of parents and couples and nurtures balance and harmony in the family system during difficult times (Coppola et al., 2021). Therefore, this concept constitutes a critical psychosocial resource that contributes to families developing holistic resilience in stressful living conditions.

Individuals who develop spiritual fortitude tend to internalize spiritual processes in a deeper and more holistic way. From the perspective of Family Systems Theory, parents' spiritual fortitude not only increases individual well-being but also strengthens the overall functionality of the family system (Janes et al., 2023). Intrinsic spirituality refers to individuals internalizing their search for faith, values, and meaning at a personal level, but this process is reproduced at the systemic level through mutual interactions within the family (Allen et al., 2023). Similarly, parents gaining spiritual fortitude can increase their chances of leading a more balanced and peaceful life (Sari, 2023). In this context, intrinsic spirituality is a concept that refers to individuals internalizing their search for faith, values, and meaning on a personal level. It has been observed that individuals with high levels of intrinsic spirituality exhibit more consistent behavior in decision-making processes and have a stronger capacity to generate meaning in the face of life's challenges (Himes et al., 2023). Furthermore, this concept is closely related not only to parents' adherence to religious rituals but also to the transcendent bonds they establish with inner peace, existential meaning, and personal values (Julaieha et al., 2021). Along with the role of parenthood, the effort and labor expended for the family has been shown to support spiritual well-being, and research has demonstrated that intrinsic spirituality is associated with positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, hope, and psychological adjustment (Yaden et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be said that intrinsic spirituality can be shaped through spiritual fortitude in relation to parents' decision-making styles and can interact with spouses' spiritual processes.

The present study

The present study examines the dyadic relationships between parents' rational and intuitive decision-making styles and spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality within the framework of the family systems approach. Regarding the structural framework, we propose a theoretical sequence that moves from foundational cognitive traits to functional spiritual resources. Decision-making styles are conceptualized as stable, dispositional tendencies that reflect how individuals process information and approach uncertainty (Kaufmann et al., 2014). Within this structured ordering, these styles are theoretically conceptualized as antecedents providing the cognitive basis for the mobilization of spiritual fortitude, which is a functional capacity to maintain faith and psychological endurance under pressure (Van Tongeren et al., 2019). Furthermore, the consistent utilization of spiritual fortitude is theoretically expected to be associated with intrinsic spirituality, an identity-level construct representing deeply internalized values.

Although these concepts have mostly been researched at the individual level in the literature, examining how parents' decision-making styles and spiritual resources are connected to the reciprocal processes of spouses fills an important gap. In collectivist cultures such as Türkiye, the family plays a central role in the psychosocial adjustment of individuals and is considered one of the fundamental sources of happiness and life satisfaction. In this context, the study examines how parents' decision-making styles relate to spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality and how these processes are mutually reflected between spouses at the dyadic level. In particular, testing how rational and intuitive decision-making styles are connected to parents' spiritual fortitude and capacity to interiorize spiritual processes within the APIMeM framework is considered important for the functionality of families and parents. Furthermore, the separate evaluation of rational and intuitive decision-making styles aims to make an original contribution to the literature by revealing the cognitive and emotional processes through which parents' relationships with spiritual resources are shaped. In this regard, the study predicts that rational decision-making styles will be associated with consistent and long-term assessments, while intuitive decision-making styles will be associated with more spontaneous and emotional processes related to spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality. Considering that parenthood in Türkiye is culturally viewed as both sacred and a source of happiness, this study offers a unique conceptual contribution to the subsystem of parenthood. To address this, the current study aims to investigate the dyadic interactions between decision-making styles and spiritual resources using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM). By treating rational and intuitive styles as distinct cognitive heuristics, this research seeks to clarify how individual and shared spiritual resources are mobilized in the family context. Based on these theoretical foundations, the following hypotheses were tested:

H1 (Actor Effect): Both intuitive and rational decision-making styles will be positively associated with parents' own spiritual fortitude, which in turn will relate to their intrinsic spirituality.

H2 (Partner Effect): One parent's decision-making style will be significantly associated with their partner's spiritual fortitude.

H3 (Mediation): Spiritual fortitude will significantly mediate the relationship between decision-making styles and intrinsic spirituality for both mothers and fathers.

Method

Participants and procedure

The study consisted of 956 individuals, including 478 Turkish heterosexual couples. According to Ledermann et al. (2022), a sample of approximately 100 couples is sufficient for testing the actor–partner interdependence mediation model. Thus, the present dyadic sample substantially exceeds this recommendation, providing strong statistical power. Male participants had a mean age of 30.28 years (SD = 6.47), whereas female participants had a mean age of 27.49 years (SD = 4.95). With respect to educational attainment, the majority of female participants had completed high school (53.6%, $n = 256$), followed by 34.7% ($n = 118$) with an undergraduate degree, 10.0% ($n = 48$) with a postgraduate degree, 9.2% ($n = 44$) with elementary school, and 2.5% ($n = 12$) with middle school education. Regarding employment status, 7.9% ($n = 38$) were unemployed, 46.4% ($n = 222$) were employed in the private sector, and 45.6% ($n = 218$) in the public sector. Concerning parental marital status, 81.6% ($n = 390$) reported that their parents were married, while 18.4% ($n = 88$) indicated that their parents were divorced. Among male participants, 40.6% ($n = 194$) had completed high school, 31.3% ($n = 148$) undergraduate education, 18.4% ($n = 88$) postgraduate education, 6.7% ($n = 32$) elementary school, and 3.3% ($n = 16$) middle school. In terms of employment, 3.8% ($n = 18$) were unemployed, 42.7% ($n = 204$) were employed in the private sector, and 53.6% ($n = 256$) in the public sector. Regarding parental marital status, 81.2% ($n = 388$) reported that their parents remained together, while 18.8% ($n = 90$) indicated that their parents were divorced. Detailed information is given in Table 1.

Research data were obtained through an online survey. Prior to participation, all parents provided informed consent. Both partners received identical questionnaires and were instructed to complete them independently. At the beginning of the survey, couples were asked to select a shared nickname (a word or phrase meaningful to their relationship), which was used to match responses between

Table 1 Reliabilities, descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables

Variable	Reliabilities and Descriptive Statistics						Correlations							
	α	ω	λ6	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. RDM (Female)	0.864	0.865	0.845	20.297	3.497	−0.579	0.380	–							
2. RDM (Male)	0.885	0.886	0.863	20.769	3.881	−0.1.231	1.954	0.097*	–						
3. IDM (Female)	0.844	0.851	0.827	16.891	4.133	0.028	−0.646	0.000	0.077	–					
4. IDM (Male)	0.874	0.878	0.859	15.749	4.501	0.147	−0.336	0.124**	−0.143**	0.126**	–				
5. SF (Female)	0.838	0.836	0.864	36.305	5.614	−0.336	−0.555	0.117**	0.121**	0.223**	0.120**	–			
6. SF (Male)	0.866	0.861	0.895	36.393	6.673	−0.937	1.035	0.126**	0.405**	0.141**	0.190**	0.129**	–		
7. IS (Female)	0.899	0.904	0.895	44.974	11.22	−0.541	−0.393	0.140**	0.059	0.119**	0.010	0.347**	0.156**	–	
8. IS (Male)	0.918	0.917	0.906	42.305	12.418	−0.594	0.047	0.041	0.082	−0.033	0.216**	0.069	0.493**	0.199**	–

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$/RDM: Rational decision making, *IDM* Intuitive decision making, *SF* Spiritual fortitude, *IS* Intrinsic spirituality

mother and father partners. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no financial compensation was offered.

Measures

Rational and intuitive decision making styles scale This scale was originally developed by Hamilton et al. (2016) consists of 10 items and 2 sub-dimensions. The scale can't be used with a total score. The first subscale of the scale, rational decision-making, consists of the first five items (e.g. "I prefer to gather all the necessary information before making a decision."), while intuitive decision-making consists of the next five items (e.g. "I usually act on my intuition when making decisions."). The scale consists of a 5-point Likert structure. The scale was adapted into Turkish by İme et al. (2020). In the adaptation study, reliability coefficient for the rational decision-making was determined as 0.90 and for the intuitive decision-making was determined as 0.85.

Spiritual fortitude scale The scale was originally developed by Van Tongeren et al. (2019). The scale consists of 9 items (e.g. "My faith helps me stand up for what is right during challenging times") and has 3 sub-dimensions (spiritual fortitude, spiritual initiative, redemptive purpose). The scale can be used with a total score. The scale was developed to measure the degree to which individuals turn to their spiritual resources when faced with difficulties. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Cantaş (2024). The scale items are 5-point Likert type. In the adaptation study, the reliability coefficient for the whole scale was determined as 0.81.

Intrinsic spirituality scale The scale was originally developed by Hodge (2003) consists of 6 items (e.g. "My spirituality is the fundamental motivation in my life.") and one dimension and also it can be used with a total score. The scale was developed to measure individuals' degree of being motivated by their spirituality defined as their relationship with God. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Bahçecioğlu-Turan et al. (2022). In the adaptation study, it was determined that the reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.91.

Data analysis

In this study, the relationships between variables and parents were examined using the actor-partner interdependence mediation model. Bond & Kenny (2002) state that this model is a useful method for understanding the nature of family and couple dynamics. One widely used technique in this field is the Actor–Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM), which facilitates the simultaneous examination of both direct and indirect effects at both the actor and partner levels. In recent years, APIMeM has become increasingly popular in family and couple research (Bond & Kenny, 2002; Brinberg et al., 2022). The actor-partner interdependence mediation model explains the direct and indirect effects that fathers and mothers have on themselves and each other in parenting couples. In this context, firstly, matching was achieved using nicknames taken from mother and father participants. Then, preliminary analyses were carried out to calculate the descriptive statistics of the participants, normality distributions of the variables, and reliability values. Furthermore, the relationships between variables were examined by performing correlation analysis. Lastly, the hypotheses of the study were tested using the structural model. Before constructing the parcels, confirmatory factor analyses were performed to verify the dimensional structure of each measurement instrument. Parceling was applied only to the unidimensional measures after their hypothesized factor structures were supported. Following the recommendation of Little et al. (2022), the one-factor measures were represented using two item parcels created by grouping odd- and even-numbered items. Because the Spiritual Fortitude Scale comprises three theoretically distinct subdimensions, the latent construct was represented by its three observed subdimensions rather than by item parcels. In this model, both the significance of the path coefficients and the fit index values such as CFI, TLI, GFI, NFI, IFI, SRMR, and RMSEA were taken into account. Among these fit index values, CFI, TLI, GFI, NFI, and IFI should be greater than 0.90, and SRMR and RMSEA should be less than 0.08 (Ximénez et al., 2022). Lastly, the indirect effects of the relationships between the variables were examined using the bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure in 5000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval. As a robustness check, an exploratory multi-group APIMeM analysis was additionally conducted across educational subgroups (lower vs. higher education). IBM SPSS 27 and AMOS Graphics 24 statistical package programs were used in all analyses. Because all study variables were measured using self-report questionnaires administered to the same participants at a single time point, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess the potential influence of common method variance (CMV). Following the conventional criterion, CMV was considered unlikely to pose a substantial concern if the first unrotated factor accounted for less than 50% of the total variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Results

Preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics, normality values, reliability findings, and correlation analysis results are all presented in Table 1. The skewness values of the variables vary between −1.231 and −0.594 and the kurtosis values vary between −0.646 and 1.954. This finding indicates that normality was achieved in all variables for father and mothers. When reliability values were examined, Cronbach's alpha value for all variables for females and males varied between 0.838 and 0.917, McDonald's omega value varied between 0.836 and 0.917, and Guttman's lambda value varied between 0.827 and 0.906. These results indicated that the variables are reliable enough. Lastly, the correlation analysis revealed that majority of variables were significantly related to each other. According to the correlation results, female rational decision-making was positively correlated with male intuitive decision-making (r =.124, p <.001) and female intrinsic spirituality (r =.140, p <.001), and positively correlated with both female spiritual fortitude (r =.117, p <.001) and male spiritual fortitude (r =.126, p <.001). Male rational decision-making was negatively correlated with male intuitive decision-making (r = –.143, p <.001) and positively correlated with female spiritual fortitude (r =.121, p <.001) as well as male spiritual fortitude (r =.405, p <.001). Female intuitive decision-making was positively correlated with male intuitive decision-making (r =.126, p <.001), female spiritual fortitude (r =.223, p <.001), male spiritual fortitude (r =.141, p <.001), and female intrinsic spirituality (r =.119, p <.001). Furthermore, female spiritual fortitude was positively correlated with male spiritual fortitude (r =.129, p <.001) and female intrinsic spirituality (r =.347, p <.001). Lastly, male spiritual fortitude showed positive correlations with female intrinsic spirituality (r =.156, p <.001) and male intrinsic spirituality (r =.493, p <.001). Detailed information is given in Table 1.

Prior to constructing item parcels, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted to examine the dimensional structure of the study measures. The Intuitive Decision-Making Scale demonstrated excellent fit to the data (χ^2/df = 1.50, CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.032), with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.497 to 0.884. The Rational Decision-Making Scale also demonstrated satisfactory fit (χ^2/df = 3.96, CFI = 0.986, TLI = 0.973, RMSEA = 0.079), with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.650 to 0.843. The Intrinsic Spirituality Scale demonstrated good fit (χ^2/df = 2.63, CFI = 0.994, TLI = 0.986, RMSEA = 0.058), with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.567 to 0.835. Finally, the original three-factor structure of the Spiritual Fortitude Scale demonstrated acceptable fit (χ^2/df = 5.11, CFI = 0.954, TLI = 0.913, RMSEA = 0.093), with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.394 to 0.888. All freely estimated factor loadings were statistically significant (p <.001). Overall, these findings supported the proposed measurement structures and provided empirical justification for the item-parceling procedure used in the subsequent APIMeM analyses.

To further examine the potential influence of common method variance, Harman's single-factor test was performed using all measurement items. The first unrotated factor accounted for 21.06% of the total variance, which is well below the commonly recommended threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, common method variance is unlikely to represent a substantial source of bias in the present study.

Actor-partner interdependence mediation model

After completion of preliminary analyses, the mediating role of spiritual fortitude in the relationship between decision-making styles and intrinsic spirituality among parenting couples was tested using the actor – partner interdependence mediation model (APIMeM). Separate models were examined for rational and intuitive decision-making styles. In the first model, the mediating effect of spiritual fortitude on the link between intuitive decision-making and intrinsic spirituality was tested.

The first model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data: χ^2/df = 2.26, p <.01; CFI = 0.978; TLI = 0.970; GFI = 0.969; IFI = 0.978; SRMR = 0.045; RMSEA = 0.051. Actor effects were statistically significant for both genders, indicating that intuitive decision-making was positively associated with spiritual fortitude and, in turn, intrinsic spirituality (for males: β = 0.216, p <.01 and β = 0.527, p <.01; for females: β = 0.245, p <.01 and β = 0.453, p <.01, respectively; see Fig. 1). Regarding partner effects, female intuitive decision-making was significantly associated with male spiritual fortitude (β = 0.116, p <.05), and male intuitive decision-making was significantly associated with female spiritual fortitude (β = 0.107, p <.05). Moreover, male spiritual fortitude was positively associated with female intrinsic spirituality (β = 0.121, p <.05), and female spiritual fortitude was positively associated with male intrinsic spirituality (β = 0.142, p <.05).

Results are given in Fig. 1.

In the second model, the mediating role of spiritual fortitude in the association between rational decision-making and intrinsic spirituality among parenting couples was examined. The model demonstrated an acceptable fit: χ^2/df = 3.40, p <.01; CFI = 0.959; TLI = 0.954; GFI = 0.937; IFI = 0.959; SRMR = 0.057; RMSEA = 0.071.

Actor effects were statistically significant for both genders, indicating that rational decision-making positively

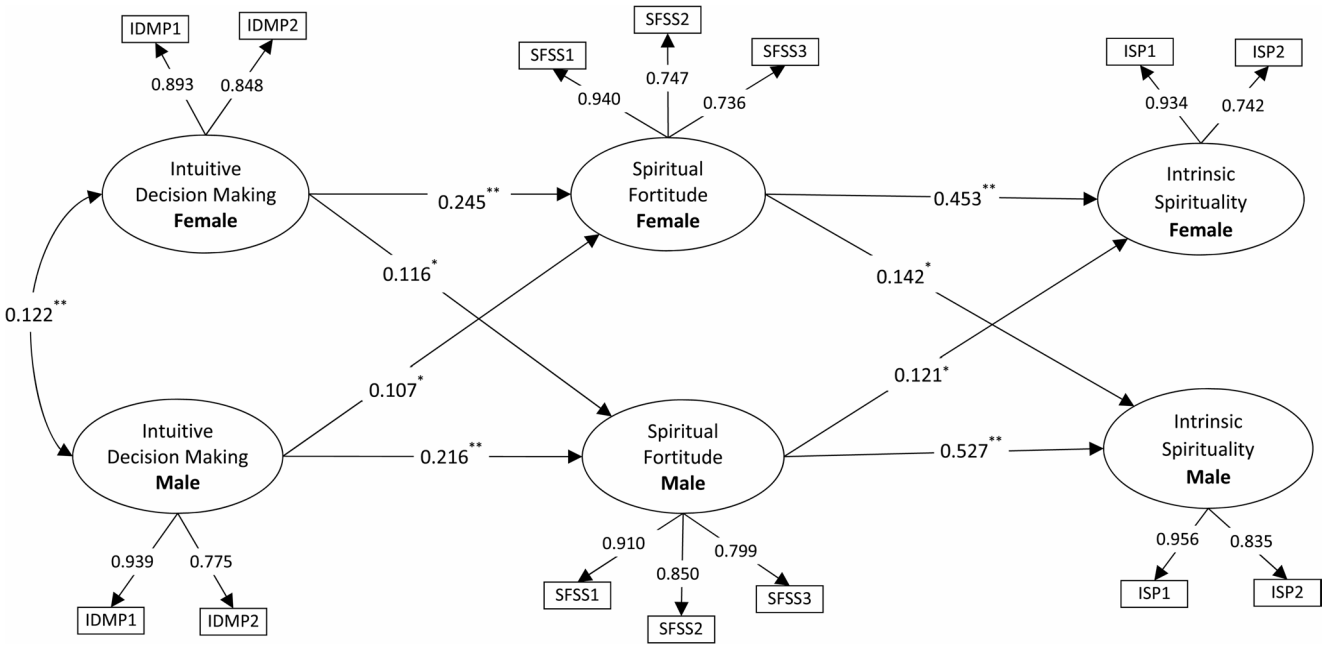


Fig. 1 Actor-partner interdependence mediation model of first model *Note*. Values shown are standardized coefficients IDMP: Parcels of intuitive decision making; SFSS: Sub dimensions of spiritual fortitude; ISP: Parcels of intrinsic spirituality $^{*}p<.05$, $^{**}p<.01$

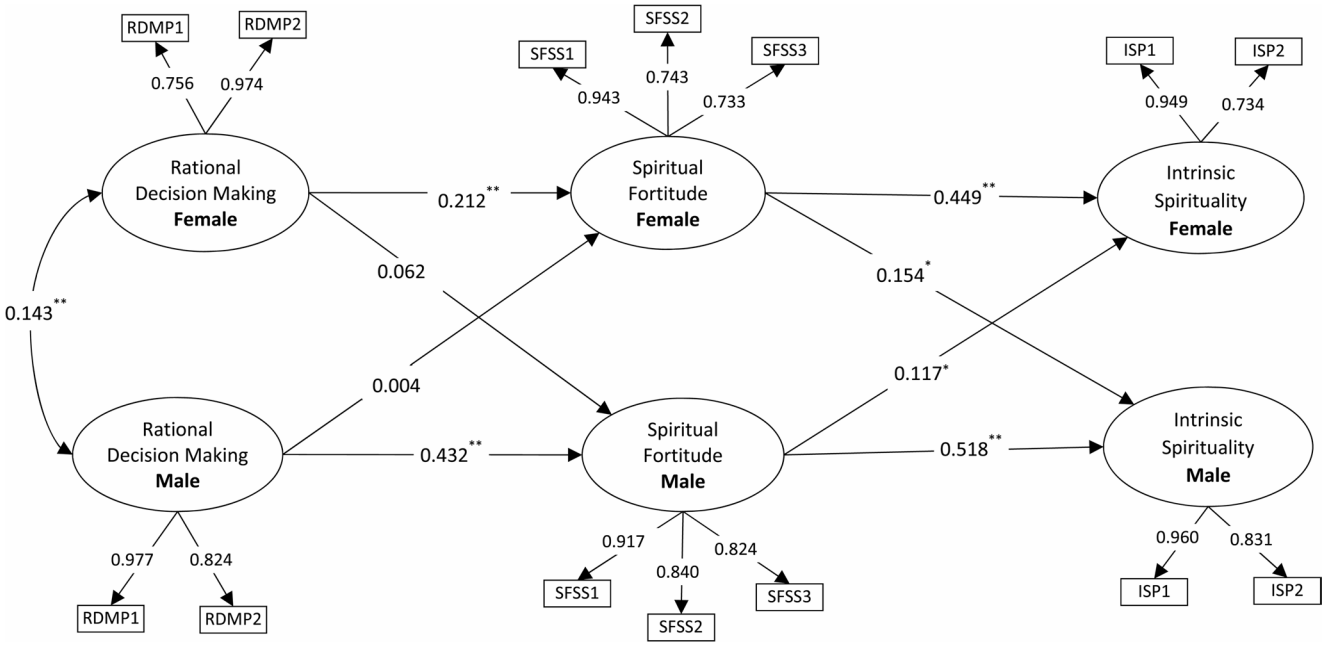


Fig. 2 Actor-partner interdependence mediation model of second model *Note*. Values shown are standardized coefficients RDMP: Parcels of rational decision making; SFSS: Sub dimensions of spiritual fortitude; ISP: Parcels of intrinsic spirituality $^{*}p<.05$, $^{**}p<.01$

predicted spiritual fortitude and, in turn, intrinsic spirituality (for males: $\beta=0.432$, $p<.01$ and $\beta=0.518$, $p<.01$; for females: $\beta=0.212$, $p<.01$ and $\beta=0.449$, $p<.01$, respectively; see Fig. 2). With respect to partner effects, female rational decision-making did not significantly predict male spiritual fortitude ($\beta=0.062$, $p>.05$), and male rational decision-making did not significantly predict female spiritual fortitude ($\beta=0.004$, $p>.05$). However, cross-partner associations were found at the mediation stage: male spiritual fortitude was significantly associated with female intrinsic spirituality ($\beta=0.154$, $p<.05$), and female spiritual fortitude was significantly associated with male intrinsic spirituality ($\beta=0.117$, $p<.05$). Results are given in Fig. 2.

To examine the robustness of the findings across educational subgroups, multi-group APIMeM models with progressively increasing equality constraints were compared. The negligible changes in model fit ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 0.18–0.74, ΔCFI = 0.002–0.005, ΔRMSEA = − 0.003 to − 0.007) indicated that the overall pattern of actor and partner effects was stable across educational levels. To evaluate an alternative theoretical explanation, an alternative reverse-order APIMeM was estimated in which intrinsic spirituality and spiritual fortitude were specified as predictors of decision-making styles. The alternative model demonstrated acceptable overall fit to the data (χ^2/df = 3.42, CFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.946, GFI = 0.937, IFI = 0.961, SRMR = 0.059, RMSEA = 0.070). In comparison, the hypothesized model demonstrated superior fit (χ^2/df = 2.26, CFI = 0.978, TLI = 0.970, GFI = 0.969, IFI = 0.978, SRMR = 0.045, RMSEA = 0.051). Furthermore, actor effects from intrinsic spirituality to decision-making style for both mothers (β = 0.085, p =.109) and fathers (β = 0.064, p =.384), as well as partner effects from mothers to fathers (β = 0.045, p =.107) and fathers to mothers (β = 0.038, p =.313), were not statistically significant. An alternative partial-mediation APIMeM was also estimated by freely estimating the direct paths from decision-making styles to intrinsic spirituality. Although the partial-mediation model demonstrated acceptable overall fit, it did not provide a meaningful improvement over the hypothesized full-mediation model. Specifically, the full-mediation model showed lower information criterion values (AIC = 227.27 vs. 232.58; BIC = 391.74 vs. 399.36), favoring the more parsimonious full-mediation model. Therefore, the hypothesized full-mediation model was retained. Taken together, these findings support the robustness and parsimony of the hypothesized APIMeM relative to both the reverse-order and the partial-mediation alternative models. In addition, to evaluate an alternative theoretical explanation, an alternative reverse-order APIMeM was estimated in which intrinsic spirituality and spiritual fortitude were specified as predictors of decision-making styles. The alternative model also demonstrated acceptable overall fit to the data (χ^2/df = 3.42, CFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.946, GFI = 0.937, IFI = 0.961, SRMR = 0.059, RMSEA = 0.070). However, unlike the hypothesized model, the actor effects from intrinsic spirituality to decision-making style for both mothers (β = 0.085, p =.109) and fathers (β = 0.064, p =.384), as well as the partner effects from mothers to fathers (β = 0.045, p =.107) and fathers to mothers (β = 0.038, p =.313), were not statistically significant. Thus, although the reverse-order model demonstrated acceptable overall fit, fewer structural paths reached statistical significance than in the hypothesized model, providing less consistent support for the alternative directional specification.

Cross-validation using a holdout sample

To further evaluate the stability and reproducibility of the proposed APIMeM, the full sample was randomly divided into a training sample (335 couples) and an independent holdout validation sample (143 couples). The hypothesized models were estimated separately in both samples. For the intuitive decision-making model, acceptable model fit was observed in both the training sample (χ^2/df = 1.69, CFI = 0.983, RMSEA = 0.045) and the validation sample (χ^2/df = 1.26, CFI = 0.984, RMSEA = 0.042). Similarly, the rational decision-making model demonstrated acceptable fit in the training sample (χ^2/df = 2.49, CFI = 0.964, RMSEA = 0.067) and the validation sample (χ^2/df = 1.52, CFI = 0.969, RMSEA = 0.060). Although several partner effects and one actor effect in the rational decision-making model became statistically non-significant in the validation sample, the direction and magnitude of the estimated coefficients remained generally consistent with those observed in the training and full samples.

Finally, a bootstrapping analysis was conducted to examine the indirect associations related to the actor and partner pathways. Consistent with common SEM reporting practices, the structural path coefficients are presented as standardized estimates (β), whereas the bootstrapped indirect effects are reported as unstandardized estimates with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals. Since all paths were statistically significant in the first model, the bootstrap analysis was performed based on this model. At the actor level, two significant indirect effects emerged. First, female intuitive decision-making was indirectly associated with female intrinsic spirituality through female spiritual fortitude (bootstrap = 0.150, 95% CI [0.014, 0.318]). Second, male intuitive decision-making was indirectly associated with male intrinsic spirituality via male spiritual fortitude (bootstrap = 0.344, 95% CI [0.117, 0.610]). At the partner level, several indirect effects were also observed. Female intuitive decision-making was indirectly associated with male intrinsic spirituality through male spiritual fortitude (bootstrap = 0.150, 95% CI [0.027, 0.329]) and indirectly associated with female intrinsic spirituality through male spiritual fortitude (bootstrap = 0.141, 95% CI [0.002, 0.395]). Moreover, male intuitive decision-making indirectly associated with female intrinsic spirituality through male spiritual fortitude (bootstrap = 0.231, 95% CI [0.106, 0.401]). Finally, female intuitive decision-making indirectly associated with male intrinsic spirituality through female spiritual fortitude (bootstrap = 0.032, 95% CI [0.007, 0.099]). Taken together, these findings indicate statistically reliable actor and partner indirect associations, consistent with the proposed mediation

model. However, because the data were cross-sectional, these bootstrap results should be interpreted as evidence of indirect associations rather than confirmation of the temporal or causal sequencing implied by the mediation model.

Discussion

According to the family systems approach, parents form the core subsystem at the center of the family system and are responsible for making critical decisions on behalf of the family. Decisions made on issues such as education, health, and financial planning directly shape not only the functioning of the family but also the psychosocial adjustment of family members. In this context, parents' decision-making styles are an important starting point for understanding the functionality of the family system. Especially in collectivist cultures, parents' decision-making processes are closely related to spiritual resources and value systems. This is because parenting is not only seen as a functional role culturally, but also as a responsibility attributed with sacredness and providing spiritual fulfillment (He et al., 2021). In the present study, dyadic relationships between parents' decision-making styles and spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality were examined in the context of Türkiye. Among Turkish heterosexual parenting couples, the findings revealed that both intuitive and rational decision-making styles were significantly related to spiritual processes in both mothers and fathers. Within the present sample of Turkish heterosexual parenting couples, the results of the actor–partner interdependence mediation model showed that intuitive decision-making styles are significantly related at both the actor and partner levels, whereas rational decision-making styles are only significantly related at the actor level. In both models, the observed indirect associations involving spiritual fortitude are consistent with the proposed theoretical framework linking decision-making processes and spiritual resources. Although a potential reciprocal process between intrinsic spirituality, spiritual fortitude, and decision-making patterns is acknowledged, the current findings are consistent with the hypothesized sequence where cognitive styles serve as a framework for spiritual mobilization. Beyond the observed statistical associations, these findings are consistent with a theoretical systemic cognitive-spiritual framework among Turkish heterosexual parenting couples. Decision-making styles may be conceptualized as the primary cognitive heuristics through which parents navigate and interpret environmental stressors (Bellini-Leite, 2022). Within this framework, rational or intuitive modalities are seen as integral to the process of meaning-making; this cognitive appraisal is theoretically linked to the mobilization of spiritual fortitude. As a theoretical manifestation of resilience, spiritual fortitude may represent one pathway through which belief systems are associated with adaptive behaviors. These findings are consistent with the possibility that spiritual resources are associated with intrinsic spirituality. From a theoretical perspective, spiritual identity may also be related to subsequent decision-making processes; however, the cross-sectional nature of the present study does not allow conclusions regarding the directionality of these associations. In the Turkish cultural milieu, this integration is especially pronounced, as the parental role is traditionally imbued with a sense of sacred duty, necessitating a convergence of cognitive strategies and spiritual resources to sustain family equilibrium. These findings are discussed in detail below within the framework of the family systems approach.

First, when considering the correlation findings obtained from the study, it is seen that there are meaningful relationships between decision-making styles and spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality. In particular, the positive relationship between intuitive decision-making and intrinsic spirituality in both women and men suggests that as individuals develop more intuitive and intrinsically oriented decision-making processes, they are able to use their spiritual resources more effectively. Consistent with other studies, the strong positive relationships between spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality reveal that spiritual fortitude serves as a fundamental bridge supporting an individual's intrinsic spirituality (Dalcolmo et al., 2025; de Diego-Cordero et al., 2022). The positive relationship between intuitive decision-making and inner spirituality reveals that individuals with high intuitive tendencies also report stronger spiritual orientations. When viewed from a relational perspective, relationships obtained at the partner level show that there are mutual connections between individuals' decision-making styles and their spouses' spiritual processes. Mothers' intuitive decision-making tendencies have been found to be related to fathers' spiritual fortitude and inner spirituality. Similarly, fathers' decision-making tendencies are also significantly related to mothers' spiritual indicators. Also, the results indicate that decision-making and spiritual processes in parent relationships can be understood not only at an individual level but also at an interactive and interdependent level. These patterns observed among Turkish heterosexual parenting couples are consistent with the view that couples' decision-making tendencies may be situated within a holistic system, in line with the Family Systems Approach and its emphasis on mutual interdependence among family members (Larsson et al., 2022).

Correlation findings show that the relationships between variables exhibit a meaningful pattern at both the individual and couple levels. However, in order to understand these

relationships more comprehensively, it is important to test the mediating processes. Therefore, in this study, the mediating role of spiritual fortitude in the relationship between decision-making styles and intrinsic spirituality was examined through structural models that simultaneously considered actor and partner effects. Thus, not only the dyadic relationships between variables but also how these relationships are shaped and how they form a reciprocal structure in the couple context were evaluated. In the first model, intuitive decision-making was considered as an independent variable, while in the second model, rational decision-making styles were considered as independent variables.

Actor effects will be addressed first in the structural model. Actor effects emerging in Model 1 show that there are meaningful relationships between individuals' intuitive decision-making tendencies and their own spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality. The findings are consistent with an indirect association between intuitive decision-making and intrinsic spirituality through spiritual fortitude in both mothers and fathers. Among Turkish mothers and fathers, this finding suggests that individuals with high intuitive decision-making tendencies also perceive their spiritual fortitude as stronger, and that this is reported alongside higher levels of intrinsic spirituality. Research also shows that this process encompasses not only adherence to religious practices but also transcendent connections established with inner peace, meaning, and moral values (de Diego-Cordero et al., 2021; Torabi et al., 2024). This suggests that intuitive decision-making is not merely a decision-making style but also a tendency that supports an individual's connection to spiritual resources (Ghorbani et al., 2024). Intuitive processes may facilitate an individual's turn toward their inner world of meaning in situations of uncertainty and complexity; this may accompany the strengthening of spiritual fortitude and the establishment of a closer connection with spirituality (Boutros et al., 2024). Therefore, within the present Turkish parenting sample, actor-level relationships shed light on how individuals integrate their own cognitive styles with their spiritual resources, and show that spiritual fortitude can serve as an important psychological resource that bridges intuitive decision-making and intrinsic spirituality.

The actor effects obtained in Model 2 show that there are significant relationships between rational decision-making and spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality in both females and males. The findings are consistent with an indirect association between rational decision-making and intrinsic spirituality through spiritual fortitude in both mothers and fathers. These results are consistent with the literature and suggest that Turkish parents in the present sample who tend to make more rational decisions also perceive their spiritual fortitude to be higher, and that this fortitude is associated with stronger intrinsic spirituality (Aggarwal et al., 2023). Rational decision-making can provide individuals with cognitive clarity in problem-solving and evaluating life events along with this, parents may accompany more consistent planning to protect spiritual processes from uncertainty and maintain a more stable spiritual orientation (Rosmarin et al., 2022). Therefore, actor-level relationships show that rational decision-making does not conflict with parents' spiritual lives; rather, it can emerge alongside a function that supports spiritual resources at the individual level.

Following the actor effects, partner effects were examined. Separate structural models were estimated for the intuitive and rational decision-making models, revealing different results. First, the presence of significant paths at the partner level in Model 1 indicates that parents' intuitive decision-making tendencies are related not only to their own spiritual processes but also to those of their spouses. According to various studies in the literature, the efforts expended for the family alongside the parenting role strengthen spiritual well-being, and research has shown that internal spirituality is associated with positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, hope, and psychological adjustment (Brown et al., 2022). The findings are consistent with the literature, showing that intuitive decision-making styles are related to the mutual spiritual processes of spouses and parents (Shaw et al., 2025). Although the partner effects reached statistical significance, their standardized coefficients were generally small in magnitude (βs = 0.107–0.142), whereas the actor effects ranged from small to large (βs = 0.216–0.527). Within the present Turkish parenting sample, this pattern suggests that parents' decision-making styles are more strongly associated with their own spiritual processes than with those of their partners. Nevertheless, even these modest partner effects are theoretically meaningful within the family systems framework, as they indicate that one partner's cognitive style may extend beyond the individual and contribute to the couple's shared spiritual functioning. Furthermore, the fact that women's spiritual fortitude is linked to men's inner spirituality, and men's spiritual fortitude is linked to women's inner spirituality, suggests that spiritual processes in couple relationships are mutually interconnected. These findings suggest that, among Turkish heterosexual parenting couples, spirituality may function as a shared resource at the couple level (Izgu et al., 2024). From a systemic perspective, this interdependence is consistent with the principle of 'circularity,' where one parent's intuitive cognitive style is positively associated with the spiritual climate of the dyad. Specifically, an intuitive approach may be linked to a more permeable boundary for spiritual sharing within the parental subsystem. In the Turkish cultural context, intuitive decision-making and spiritual fortitude appear to be mutually reinforcing elements that coexist within the family's

emotional homeostasis, rather than one strictly causing the other.

In the second model, no significant partner effects of rational decision-making on the spouse's spiritual fortitude were observed. Unlike the actor effects, parents' rational decision-making was not significantly associated with their partner's spiritual fortitude in either direction. At this point, parents may be making their evaluations more individually based on rationality rather than intuitive and emotional assessments (Hormazábal-Salgado et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the cross-relationships between spiritual resilience and inner spirituality are meaningful. The fact that both mothers' spiritual fortitude is related to fathers' intrinsic spirituality and fathers' spiritual fortitude is related to mothers' intrinsic spirituality shows that spiritual fortitude emerges as a process shared with one's partner's spirituality, even if not through rational decision-making. This finding among Turkish heterosexual parenting couples suggests, although rational decision-making tendencies in parents operate more at the individual level (Korpinen & Pösö, 2020). In light of Family Systems Theory, the lack of partner effects for rational decision-making might point toward a functional differentiation within the couple. While intuitive styles show a relational resonance, rational evaluations appear to be more idiosyncratic to the individual parent. This suggests that rational cognitive processes and the partner's spiritual resources may function as relatively independent domains within the broader family system, maintaining individual boundaries while still contributing to the overall systemic equilibrium. An additional strength of the present study is that the hypothesized APIMeM demonstrated comparable overall fit in independent training and validation samples. Although several structural paths became non-significant in the smaller validation sample, the overall pattern of findings remained stable, providing additional evidence for the reproducibility of the proposed dyadic framework.

Limitations and implications

Even though the present study makes an important contribution by examining actor and partner effects within a dyadic framework among parents, it has some limitations. First, because the study is based on cross-sectional data, it does not permit definitive causal inferences or the establishment of temporal precedence among the variables. Although the hypothesized model received more consistent support than the reverse-order model, cross-sectional data cannot statistically distinguish between theoretically plausible alternative models. Therefore, the observed indirect effects should be interpreted as patterned associations rather than confirmed causal pathways, and the direction of the proposed mediation model reflects a theoretical specification rather than empirical superiority. Accordingly, the bootstrap confidence intervals reported in the present study provide evidence for the statistical reliability of the observed indirect associations but should not be interpreted as establishing temporal precedence or causal mediation. Longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to determine the temporal ordering of these associations and to evaluate competing directional models. Furthermore, while our framework positions cognitive styles as antecedents, the recursive nature of Family Systems Theory suggests that spiritual values could also inform decision-making processes over time.

Therefore, future studies should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to clarify the temporal associations between parents' decision-making styles, spiritual fortitude, and intrinsic spirituality. A second limitation is that all variables were assessed through self-report measures, which may have introduced social desirability and response biases. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating qualitative methods or behavioral observations. Third, because the sample consisted exclusively of Turkish parents from a collectivist culture, the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts remains limited. Cross-cultural studies involving individualistic and other collectivist societies would help clarify the role of cultural values in these associations. Finally, because the study focused only on parenting couples, future research should examine couples across different stages of the family life cycle to evaluate the developmental stability of these relationships.

Within the context of Turkish heterosexual parenting couples, these findings provide practical implications for family and couple counseling. First, the fact that intuitive decision-making style is associated with spirituality at both the actor and partner levels suggests that strengthening the intuitive-emotional awareness of Turkish parents in similar collectivist contexts in counseling processes may support spiritual fortitude and shared spiritual life. Therefore, mutual practices such as conscious awareness and body awareness exercises can be implemented between couples. On the other hand, the tendency toward rational decision-making functioning more at the individual level suggests that rational approaches may nurture individual resilience but may be limited at the couple level. Therefore, family counselors working with Turkish parenting couples or similar collectivist populations may consider using techniques that specifically develop intuitive orientations, such as intuitive awareness exercises, focusing on inner experiences, and emotion-based decision-making exercises, in family and couple therapy to more effectively activate parents' spiritual resources.

Beyond clinical settings, these findings may have implications for preventive parenting education programs designed for Turkish heterosexual parenting couples and

similar collectivist populations. The observed link between intuitive styles and dyadic spiritual fortitude suggests that parenting curricula developed for similar collectivist cultural settings may benefit from moving beyond behavioral management to include training in emotional and spiritual resonance. For instance, interventions targeting Turkish parenting couples could focus on helping parents recognize how their individual cognitive heuristics, whether rational or intuitive, impact their partner's internal spiritual fortitude. In collectivist cultures like Türkiye, framing the parental bond as a shared spiritual resource rather than an individual burden may serve as a critical protective factor against parental burnout. By cultivating a 'co-spiritual' parenting identity, Turkish parenting couples may benefit from learning to utilize their spiritual fortitude as a collective shield, reinforcing the family's stability against environmental stressors. From a systemic intervention perspective, these findings suggest that family counselors working with Turkish parenting couples may consider viewing decision-making not merely as a cognitive task, but as a gateway to mobilizing the family's spiritual subsystem. By fostering intuitive-emotional resonance, counselors can help couples transition from 'isolated deciders' to a 'synergistic spiritual unit,' thereby potentially enhancing resilience and family homeostasis within similar collectivist family contexts.

Conclusion

Families and parents play a fundamental role in the psychological and spiritual development of individuals. Parents, as the executive element of the family system, shape not only their own individual adaptation but also the overall functionality of the family system through their decision-making styles and spiritual processes. In this study, the mediating role of spiritual fortitude in the relationship between decision-making styles and intrinsic spirituality in parents was examined using the actor-partner interdependence mediation model. The findings show that intuitive decision-making styles in parents are significantly related to spiritual fortitude and intrinsic spirituality at both the actor and partner levels, while rational decision-making styles are more closely linked at the actor level. In both models, spiritual fortitude emerged as an important component of the observed indirect associations at the center of the relationship between decision-making styles and intrinsic spirituality. In conclusion, among Turkish heterosexual parenting couples, decision-making styles appear to be an important correlate of couples' spiritual life. The findings obtained from Turkish heterosexual parenting couples are consistent with Family Systems Theory, which suggests that couples' spiritual processes are shaped by mutual interdependence. From a practical perspective, interventions aimed at increasing emotional-intuitive awareness, strengthening spiritual resilience, and supporting spiritual endurance in couple counseling and family therapy processes offered to parents can enhance couples' capacity for shared meaning-making. Additionally, intuitive decision-making exercises, emotion-based awareness practices, or sessions focused on spiritual resilience can provide functional tools for enhancing both individual and relational well-being in parents.

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Author contributions Seydi Ahmet Satici was the academic advisors and general supervisors of the study. Ali Berke Körün carried out the data analyses and interpreted the findings. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the study and reached a consensus on the version to be published.

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Data availability Data will be available on request.

Declarations

Ethics This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1975 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. Ethical approval was obtained from the Xxxxxx University Institute of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

Ethical approval This research was ethically approved by Yıldız Technical University Institute of Social Sciences Ethics Committee with document number E- 20251005899.

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Consent to participate Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants that were included in the study.

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