

FACTORS AFFECTING THE OCCURRENCE OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG NEWLY MARRIED COUPLES: A GROUNDED THEORY

SEYED MOHAMMAD EBADIRAD

PhD Candidate of Counseling, Counseling Department, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Kharazmi University of Tehran, Iran.

KIANOUSH ZAHRAKAR *

Professor, Counseling Department, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Kharazmi University of Tehran, Iran. *Corresponding Author Email: dr_zaharakar@khu.ac.ir

FARSHAD MOHSENZADEH

Associate Professor, Counseling Department, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Kharazmi University of Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

Objective: This research was conducted to clarify the factors influencing the occurrence of marital satisfaction among newly married couples. **Method:** The present research method is qualitative and grounded theory. For this purpose, through a purposeful sampling method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 newly married couples who live in Tehran and Karaj. Data analysis started using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) microanalysis method for grounded theory and findings were obtained through three coding steps, open, Axial, and selectively analyzed. **Findings:** Findings showed that two main categories in the participants' description of marital satisfaction were "sexual satisfaction" and "emotional satisfaction". In addition, marital satisfaction was associated with various strategies used to achieve satisfaction. The reasons related to marital satisfaction in newly married couples were summarized in five categories: "personality characteristics", "similarities and differences of couples", "family atmosphere", "environmental and demographic factors" and finally "preservation of privacy". **Conclusion:** In this study, marital satisfaction in the population of newly married couples was investigated in more depth, the results of which showed the significant impact of this structure on the married life of people and emphasized the importance of educational measures in the management of this structure.

Keywords: Marital, Satisfaction, Marital Satisfaction, Newly Married Couples, Grounded Theory.

INTRODUCTION

The family, as the main social institution of society, plays an important role in the health of the members of society [1]. The family protects its members against external pressures [2]. The family also prepares its people to enter society, face problems, and establish stable social interactions [3]. An emotional unit and a network of interwoven relationships among a group of people that emerges through marriage define family [4].

We know marriage as an important social indicator, a complex phenomenon with wide and deep dimensions and many goals [5]. Research pieces of evidence consider a healthy marriage as a predictor of the mental and physical well-being of people [6]. The quality of the couple's relationship forms the basis of the future function of marriage and family, making marital

satisfaction the most important criterion for determining the health of the family [7]. Marital satisfaction is defined as a person's subjective evaluation of the marital relationship [8].

Marital satisfaction is an essential component of well-being that is affected by many factors over time [9]. Research has shown that marital satisfaction reduces the symptoms of depression [8]. Marital satisfaction also plays a significant role in taking care of children and success in career and expands friendships [10]. The importance of marital satisfaction in the health of the individual and society has attracted the attention of many researchers in the last few decades [11].

Also to treatment, research in this field has also expanded in the field of prevention, a field that deals with the investigation of factors affecting marital satisfaction. However, the high social and economic costs of therapeutic research in the field of unsuccessful and failed marriages have caused a large number of recent researches to focus on the knowledge of factors related to the marital satisfaction of couples to prevent marital problems [7]. These researches have introduced several factors as predictors of marital satisfaction.

For example, Tartakovsky (2023) considered how household work is divided as the determining factor of marital satisfaction [9]. Li & Fung (2011) defined intra-personal (personality), interpersonal (communication and understanding of spouse's behavior), and environmental (child presence, parents' marital satisfaction, economic conditions, and government policies) factors of marital satisfaction [12].

Despite many researches in this field, there is still no comprehensive view on the factors influencing marital satisfaction. Thus, to explain the effect of many factors on marital satisfaction, we need complex studies with more fundamental variables. One of the most important variables that has received less attention in studies related to marital satisfaction is the "time" factor. One of the most consistent findings in longitudinal research on marriage is the fact that marital satisfaction declines significantly over time. In the research literature, this phenomenon is called "special honeymoon and then restless years" [13].

The main framework used to explain the role of time in the evolution of marital satisfaction is the "family life cycle". Family life cycle is the term used to describe trends within the family over time [14]. In each stage of this cycle, there are specific tasks, needs, characteristics, and crises that affect marital satisfaction [16].

Ollie Doval (1977) proposed the initial form of "family life cycle" in 1956. However, with the passage of time and the reduction of the influence of traditional families, this model lost some of its explanatory power. As a result, this model gave way to new models that can better explain today's families. One of the new models that has attracted much attention is the healthy family life cycle model [15, 14]. This cycle includes 6 stages, which are: 1) young adults who have left the family, 2) new couple, 3) families with young children, 4) families with teenage children, 5) families with children leaving home, and 6) families who are in their last years of life [16]. Meanwhile, the second stage is very important in the strength of the family foundation. This stage started after marriage and according to the definitions provided, it includes the first 5 years of the couple's life. This stage is also called the adaptation stage and

it is the most important time to achieve marital compatibility. If the family does not adapt during the second stage, family structure is in danger [14]. At this stage, the process of obtaining compatibility is time-consuming and requires a lot of strength. Thus, at this stage of life, due to the inability of people to resolve differences, the possibility of divorce is higher than in all other stages [14].

The present study aims to investigate the factors related to "marital satisfaction" in the second stage of the life cycle of a healthy family. However, the privacy in the family makes people reluctant to share their secrets about their relationships. A problem is more pronounced in Iranian families due to the culture that dominates Iran [17]. This has made quantitative data less authentic. Thus, the need to use qualitative-exploratory methods, whose main purpose is to investigate high-sensitivity phenomena, is evident.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Grounded theory [18] guided the inductive methods of this study that focused on marital satisfaction ideation. The participants were newly married couple. They were selected from those who had referred to Psychological service centers in Karaj and Tehran. We interviewed 16 people who were newly married. The criterion for determining the number of participants was to reach saturation. In the present study, saturation occurred when no new codes or categories emerged from the data analysis. The main criteria for entering the research for the participants were 1- a maximum of 5 years have passed since the person's marriage; 2 - Not having children; 3 - Willingness to participate in research, This criterion was chosen due to the respect of the rights of the research participants. In addition, the criteria for leaving the research was the unwillingness to continue participating in the research. The mean age of the interviewers was 28.56 years including 10 women and 6 men. One of the participants had postgraduate, four had undergraduate students, seven had undergraduates, and one had masters.

The data was collected through unstructured interviews, after obtaining the consent of the participants, in the city of Tehran and Karaj, over a period of about one year. The interview started with this question; *"Tell me about your experience of marital satisfaction. I would like to hear the story of your marital satisfaction in your own words. After you have told your life story completely, if necessary, we will clarify some topics and concepts about your statements. I may ask you some questions, but for now, you should speak very easily and freely"*.

As the study progresses and according to the theoretical sampling process, changes are made in the framework of the interviews. Some new questions extracted from the previous interviews were asked of the participants in the text of the interviews. For example, during the analysis, the researcher realized that one of the most repeated concepts on marital satisfaction was *"premarital perceptions of married life"*. This issue led to the design of the question *"In your opinion, what is the effect of premarital conceptions of married life on marital satisfaction?"*

In the current research, to increase the validity of the findings, a combination of accuracy and precision criteria of the male study was used [19]. The most important of these criteria; are concept production, conceptual systematic relationships, conceptual density and diversity, and the existence of a process. We systematically presented the necessary explanations about how to conceptualize in this way. We presented explanations about how concepts and theorems are related in the theory. We also explained the process steps in the theory as a whole and within each paradigm. These explanations included contextual, causal, and intervening conditions and consequences.

The researchers used the method of Corbin and Strauss (1998) to analyze the data. This method included three stages open, central, and selective coding. We immediately coded each interview after preparing its written file. Before starting the coding and immersing in the data, we used to listen to the interview several times and read the transcript. In open coding, when choosing concepts, also to participants' feelings, "*contextual factors*", "*processes*" and "*consequences*" were also considered. We continuously compared the extracted concepts and placed those with conceptual similarity in a group. This process led to the formation of main categories as well as questions for the subsequent interviews. During the central and selective coding stage, we examined the main categories, their characteristics, dimensions, and their relationship.

RESULTS

After carefully reviewing and rereading the interviews, we extracted 1453 initial codes. These codes came from sentences, phrases, or paragraphs in the interview text. Finally, the data obtained from the interviews led to the revelation of two main categories in describing the experience of marital satisfaction: "*sexual satisfaction*" and "*emotional satisfaction*". This concept simultaneously refers to both emotional and sexual aspects of married life. In other words, this concept states that focusing on each of these dimensions without considering the other is not enough to experience marital satisfaction.

We identified two important categories in the dimension of sexual satisfaction. The first category was giving importance to sexual issues. The participants in the research believed that one of the aspects of satisfaction with married life is giving importance to sexual issues, which means sexual availability and attention to sexual needs. In other words, the participants emphasized that obtaining sexual satisfaction first requires attention to the sexual needs of the spouse. Another concept related to "paying attention to sex" was making time for sex. The participants believed that obtaining sexual satisfaction requires planning and spending time to have sex, according to the needs of the spouse.

On the other hand, satisfaction with the relationship means satisfaction with the non-sexual aspects of the marital relationship. The participants stated that to achieve marital satisfaction, non-sexual satisfaction of the relationship should be the focus of the couple's efforts. Non-sexual satisfaction may be created by being supported, understood, and accompanied, etc. According to the participants, non-sexual satisfaction, along with sexual satisfaction, are the most important elements of a married life. In other words, the most important measure of marital relationship quality is non-sexual satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

Causal Conditions

Personality characteristics: According to the participants, the presence of some personality traits can help or hinder the experience of marital satisfaction. The participants believed that being ethical, conscientious, optimistic, faithful, honest, responsible, truthful, patient, flexible, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-reliance, self-care, and self-esteem could improve marital satisfaction. **Similarities and differences of couples:** The similarity of couples in some aspects of life was another factor affecting the marital satisfaction of couples. According to the research participants, similarity in fundamental issues such as socio-economic-cultural similarity, family similarity, religious, political, intellectual, moral, developmental, worldview, age, and similarity in expectations plays an important role in increasing marital satisfaction. In each of these issues, greater similarity has brought greater satisfaction. These similarities help couples to function better obtaining marital satisfaction.

Family atmosphere: The atmosphere within the families can be like a support factor to support the couple against the pressures of life. According to the participants, the most important influencing feature of the family atmosphere is the real relationships based on the true self of the families. The more families have real behaviors and the less they engage in double-sided behaviors, the more intimate their relationships will be. In such a situation, families will better understand the conditions of couples and their lives and support them if needed. This support can be considered an influential factor in marital satisfaction. **Environmental and demographic factors:** The most important environmental factor identified in the present study was the atmosphere of the living environment. In addition, the most important demographic factors were education level, income, and employment status.

The findings of the research showed that the place where couples live and its characteristics, including its environmental (cleanliness, neatness, open-mindedness) and human characteristics (including the way of socializing, the cultural-social-economic level of life, and some external characteristics), can affect marital satisfaction. According to the participants, a higher level of education can be effective in better understanding the realities of married life. In addition, the husband's income improves marital satisfaction by creating economic well-being. The husband's job situation improves marital satisfaction due to economic performance and economic status. Besides, women's job affects their marital satisfaction by improving self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Privacy: Maintaining personal and marital privacy can also play an important role in obtaining marital satisfaction. After marriage, the personal privacy of each couple becomes more limited than before marriage. After getting married, each couple is expected to focus on marital privacy as a significant part of their life. This removes the privacy of others from married life and at the same time reminds the active participation of the husband and wife in married life. In other words, the major part of personal privacy gives way to marital privacy. However, respect for personal privacy is also important for marital satisfaction. According to the participants, if couples respect each other's privacy, their desire for marital privacy will increase. On the other hand, the precise definition of marital privacy and maintaining it improves marital satisfaction.

Background Conditions

Conscious marriage: Conscious marriage as an important cognitive factor can affect the marital satisfaction of couples. Conscious marriage means gaining knowledge about marriage and marital issues and being aware of individual goals and priorities. Conscious marriage also means marriage in the right period. Understanding marriage and marital issues makes couples ready to face issues and problems. Awareness of individual goals and priorities helps people make better choices; A choice that fits their goals and priorities. Choosing the right time to get married allows the couple to have enough maturity and growth to deal with marital issues. In general, understanding marriage, knowing the goals, and choosing the right time for marriage increase the preparation of couples for marital relations.

Purpose of marriage: The purpose of marriage is a different category from individual goals. The purpose of marriage refers to the couple's intention of deciding to get married. In other words, the purpose of marriage determines what the couple is looking for in marriage. Couples may marry with the hope of achieving different goals. Some couples get married to grow up, others to escape from the problems of their father's family, some to escape from loneliness, etc. This goal can play a very important role in how couples experience marital satisfaction. If the goal of the marriage is to achieve a new position, it is likely to help achieve greatest satisfaction. If the purpose of marriage is to avoid an undesirable situation, it is likely to cause problems in marital satisfaction.

Sexual knowledge and awareness: One of the most important aspects of married life is sexual relations. Sexual knowledge refers to couples' knowledge about sexual issues specific to women and men. The sexual differences between men and women are an important part of this knowledge. Acquiring correct sexual knowledge leads to obtaining sexual awareness. Sexual knowledge and awareness help couples establish proper sexual relations. Correct and successful sexual relations bring sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction itself is one of the most important factors influencing marital satisfaction.

The couple's maturity level: Another background factor involved in marital satisfaction is the growth level of the couple. The growth level refers to the level of intellectual and emotional maturity of the couple at the time of marriage. The growth level is very close to the right time for marriage. The best time to get married is when the boy and girl have reached the desired growth level. The optimal growth level is one of the prerequisites for facing the issues of married life. The optimal level of growth helps the couple to prepare for married life in advance. The optimal level of growth helps the couple to be aware of possible issues and problems in married life. As a result, couples enter married life with more preparation. Prior preparation when facing problems helps couples deal with issues and problems in a healthier way. A rational approach to marital issues and problems leads to better management. Managing issues and problems can also be considered as one of the strategies for obtaining marital satisfaction. The optimal growth level of the couple provides the basis for the optimal management of marital issues and problems.

The couple's prior knowledge of each other: Good knowledge is one of the most important factors in making an informed and intelligent choice. Knowing the unique needs and characteristics of the spouse is one of the aspects of knowing the spouse. If a person forms this knowledge before marriage, they will make a more informed decision about marriage. In such a situation, a person is also more prepared to deal with the needs and unique characteristics of his wife. The right choice and correct knowledge of the spouse are the consequences of knowing before marriage. The right choice and correct knowledge are among the influential factors in marital interactions and as a result, marital satisfaction.

Intervening Conditions

The couple's view of marriage: The couple's point of view refers to their beliefs and the way they look at different issues. Couples' beliefs about marriage shape their expectations about marriage and spouse. When marriage meets the couple's expectations, they experience more marital satisfaction. The spouse's expectations are easier to meet if they are reasonable and realistic. For the couple's expectations to be realistic, their views on marriage should also be realistic. Thus, the couple's view of marriage can help them achieve marital satisfaction.

Fears and worries of couples: The couple's fears may be related to marital relations or individual life. The participants stated that the possible abandonment of the relationship is one of the most important fears related to marital relationships. Because of such fears, couples decide to stay in the relationship at any cost. In such a situation, marital satisfaction is no longer the main priority of the couple, but staying in the relationship is the main priority. This issue causes couples to neglect their satisfaction and focus on maintaining the relationship. According to the participants, individual fears refer to the couple's worry about losing their marital relationship. A couple's dependence on the relationship and fear of losing it makes them endure trying problems instead of solving them. Because they are afraid to lose their relationship if it is not resolved. In such a situation, enduring problems puts a lot of pressure on the couple. This pressure can harm their marital satisfaction.

Pressure factors and marginal issues: These factors are rooted in people's culture and socio-economic conditions. Cultural factors force couples to act in a certain way, despite their desire. Socio-economic conditions also create pressures, including financial pressures, for couples in some cases. Such stressful factors make couples feel doubly tired. A couple's double fatigue prevents them from focusing on marital issues. As a result, they will have less focus to pay for issues related to marital satisfaction.

Couples' families: According to the participants in this research, marriage is a bond between two families. Therefore, couples' families may play a very important role in the quality of their married life. Interaction or interference may cause the effects of families. The interaction of families with couples and with each other can expand the support network of couples. Expanding the social support network of couples makes them more capable of overcoming their issues and problems. Of course, if Families accompany this support with respect for marital privacy and refrain from interference, it is considered positive. If the couple's family does not respect their marital privacy, their interference can threaten the couple's independence.

These interferences are also an obstacle to the growth and maturity of couples. As a result, family involvement can act as a negative factor for marital satisfaction. According to the participants, the difference between support and interference is in suggesting and imposing an opinion. Support, is accompanied by an offer to the couple. Interference is accompanied by imposing the opinion of the families on the couple.

Strategies for Achieving Marital Satisfaction

Life management: Life management means being aware of the factors affecting marital relations and trying to have a favorable effect on those factors. To manage the lives of couples, we must first identify the factors that affect their married life. In the next step, the couple should accept the positive effects. In addition, couples try to find a solution to influence negative factors in a way that prevents their negative effects. In such a situation, couples move towards marital satisfaction in a better way by preventing the negative effects of disturbing factors on their relationships. Using this strategy at every stage of married life can be useful for couples.

Trying to improve sexual relations: Any effort that leads to the improvement of couples' sexual relations can increase their marital satisfaction. Most of these efforts are related to sexual awareness and recognition of sexual differences. Trying to gain sexual knowledge and awareness at every stage of marital relations can improve marital satisfaction by affecting the quality of sexual relations. On the other hand, knowing the spouse's sexual differences through helping his sexual satisfaction can improve the marital satisfaction of the couple.

Healthy conflict resolution strategies: Conflict in marriage is inevitable. Therefore, equipping couples with healthy conflict-resolution strategies can affect marital satisfaction. The most important adaptive conflict resolution strategies from the participant's point of view were acceptance of differences and tolerance. Accepting differences means being aware of your spouse's differences and respecting these differences. In other words, acceptance of differences refers to accepting the spouse as he is, without trying to change him. This act conveys a sense of value to the wife. Strengthening the sense of worth and self-confidence improves marital satisfaction. Tolerance is a concept beyond accepting differences. Intolerance, each couple accepts the differences of the spouse and tries to accompany those differences. In other words, they try to fulfill the unique needs of others by self-sacrifice. This work can lead to the satisfaction of the spouse and as a result, higher marital satisfaction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The researchers obtained data for the present study through interviews with 16 newly married men and women to explore their experience of marital satisfaction. The purpose of the present study was to answer the following questions:

- ✓ What factors contribute to the experience of marital satisfaction?
- ✓ What strategies do people use when experiencing marital satisfaction?
- ✓ In addition, what are the consequences of these strategies?

In this way, two main categories emerged in the description of marital satisfaction, "sexual satisfaction" and "emotional satisfaction". The participants believed that individual, environmental, demographic, and family factors cause marital satisfaction.

The most important individual factor affecting marital satisfaction was the couple's personality traits. In line with these results, neo-social analytical theories have also emphasized the influence of personality traits on the emotional relationships of adults. The followers of these theories believe that mature personality traits such as conscientiousness, honesty, and commitment can lead to more stable emotional relationships [20], Strengthen positive interactions between couples [21]. Günaydin (2022) states that personality traits such as laziness, mental standards, and self-compassion can affect couples' marital satisfaction [22]. In the current research, along with personality traits, couples' similarities and differences were also identified as an influencing factor on marital satisfaction. Differences between couples in the field of basic topics in audio that exceed a limit prevent mutual understanding in couples. This issue can cause many problems for them. Stroud et al. (2010) stated that the personality similarity of couples could ensure their satisfaction largely [23].

Another factor that, according to the findings of the research, plays an important role in the marital satisfaction of couples is the couples' families. The present research findings confirm that marriage cannot be simply considered a relationship between two people, unlike romantic relationships. Marriage is a bond between two families, two families that significantly influence how couples perceive and experience marital satisfaction. For this reason, it is said that the participation and influence of the couple's family in marital compatibility and satisfaction are considered undeniable. The research conducted in these field shows that most of the time couples do not make decisions alone [24]. After marriage, the unfavorable relations of each couple with the spouse's family or closer proximity to the main family can create severe entanglement [25]. Because of such an incident, couples become closer to their family and eventually move away from their spouse's family to compensate for the lack of communication.

Another category identified as the cause of marital satisfaction in the present study was environmental factors. None of the previous research has considered environmental factors. Environmental factors refer to causes that arise from people's living environment. Factors such as what kind of environment couples live in, what kind of people they interact with, what is the cultural-economic and social level of their living environment, and the people around them. When we mention the compatibility of the married life environment with the person's previous family life environment, these factors become more effective. The participants listed various strategies to achieve marital satisfaction. Through these strategies, marital problems will be overcome in the best possible way. Strategies are the same strategies that couples can use to achieve marital satisfaction. Strauss and Corbin (2015) believe that strategies are a set of purposeful and deliberate actions to solve a problem or achieve a specific goal [19]. In the present study, the most important strategies for achieving a specific goal (marital satisfaction) were managing married life, trying to improve sexual relations, and using appropriate conflict resolution strategies. Managing married life means paying attention to all its aspects simultaneously. When each couple pays attention to all the important aspects of married life at

the same time and takes action to optimize those aspects, the other can better understand the effort and attention of the spouse and as a result find more desire to be with him. One of the most important aspects of married life that needs a lot of attention is the economic aspect of joint life. The results of similar studies state that the amount of marital problems and the tendency to divorce among couples who have economic problems is more than couples who have not economic problems [26]. This issue has caused the economic management of married life to be very important in achieving marital satisfaction. On the other hand, the prominent role of sexual issues in marital satisfaction has doubled the importance of paying attention to sexual issues and trying to improve them [27]. If couples try to achieve sexual satisfaction in a good way, they can help their marital satisfaction. These efforts can happen through raising sexual awareness and recognizing other individual differences. In this regard, Attaky Et al. (2021) state in their research that sexual knowledge can lead to the improvement of couples' self-confidence in sexual relations [28]. Torabi & Maleki rad (2022) stated that sexual knowledge could make it possible for couples to perform sexual acts in the correct way and, as a result, increase the sexual satisfaction of couples [29].

Along with all the strategies to obtain satisfaction, the occurrence of conflict in marital relations is inevitable. Therefore, correct handling of marital conflicts is one of the most important strategies for achieving marital satisfaction. This is achieved through healthy conflict resolution strategies. One of these strategies is awareness of individual differences and respect for these differences. Another strategy identified in the present study was selflessness and sacrifice. Selflessness and sacrifice create a sense of gratitude in others. A sense of self-appreciation leads to a joint effort to resolve the conflict.

In examining the consequences of marital satisfaction, it can be enlightening to look at the factors that form the basis of the experience of marital satisfaction. The research found that people learn about relationships through personal growth and knowledge. Fathi and Azadeian (2017) in their research introduce the age of marriage as one of the influencing factors on marital satisfaction [5]. Carlson Et al (2020) states that the effect that age can have on marriage is due to its effect on expectations and attitudes towards marriage [30]. Gurman et al. (1983) state that marriage at a young age can cause problems for couples due to a lack of maturity and awareness [20]. As a result, the marriage of this group of people has become the most unstable marriage. Riahi Et al. (2020) state that the emotional awareness of couples, which results from correct recognition, is a strong predictor of marital satisfaction [31]. Meanwhile, family and social factors can strengthen or suppress individual growth and knowledge. If the family and social conditions provide the opportunity to acquire, appropriate knowledge in the field of sexual and marital issues and help the healthy growth of people.

Assuming other factors remain constant, certain factors may either help or hinder the attainment of marital satisfaction. Intervening conditions introduce these factors. The most important of these conditions are the beliefs and expectations of couples, marginal issues, and the role of families. If these factors are properly managed, it is expected that other factors will properly play their role in achieving marital satisfaction for couples. According to Ellis, hard

and dogmatic beliefs in people contribute to the occurrence of specific psychological problems and symptoms in them [32].

In addition, marginal issues can affect couples' marital satisfaction by causing stress and anxiety. Ghaffari Et al (2011) state that any anxiety in the marital relationship can harm the marital satisfaction of the couple [33]. Ghani-far Et al (2013) stated that the presence of any anxiety-causing factor in marital relationships could negatively affect marital relationships [34]. Finally, another factor that can play a role in experiencing or not experiencing marital satisfaction is family. According to Nichols (2012), in marriage, couples are not the only decision-makers, but the role and influence of families are important factors in the quality of marital relationships [24]. Therefore, families' interactions with each other and couples can have a significant impact on the quality of marital satisfaction experienced by couples [35, 36].

Compliance with Ethical Guidelines

Compliance with ethical guidelines all ethical principles were considered in this article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and were free to leave the study whenever they wished, and if desired, the research results would be available to them.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have participated in the design, implementation, and writing of all sections of the present study.

Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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