



## Qualitative Investigation of Factors Affecting Marital Quality in Newlyweds: A Phenomenological Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Marital quality encompasses a subjective assessment of couples' agreement on key issues, including participation in marital activities and expressions of love. It reflects essential aspects such as compatibility, satisfaction, happiness, unity, and commitment within a marriage. This study aimed to qualitatively explore the factors influencing marital quality among newlyweds.

**Method:** The research utilized a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach, guided by Colaizzi's seven-step method. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, with recruitment continuing until data saturation was achieved. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 participants.

**Results:** The findings identified seven influential categories: Expanding the experiential treasury, flexibility gaining insights from behavioral consequences, preconditions for self-determination before marriage, developing awareness, actively nurturing spouse's affection and spirituality. These factors contribute to enhancing relationship quality among newlyweds.

**Conclusions:** Based on these findings, this research provides insights and training for newlyweds and informs counseling interventions aimed at improving marital quality.

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## **Introduction**

Marriage marks the initial and most critical phase of the family life cycle, where the selection of a life partner profoundly influences one's success in subsequent stages of life. It is considered one of the most pivotal milestones, providing emotional and social support while significantly impacting the physical, spiritual, and social health of both partners (Nurfachriyah & Yusiyaka, 2022). Research on couples and marital satisfaction indicates that marital issues often affect other life areas; in essence, marital satisfaction contributes to overall life quality both directly and indirectly (Kasapoglu & Yabanigul, 2018). The significance of a high-quality marriage, especially during the early years, is underscored by civil registration data from 2019, which reported approximately twelve thousand divorces occurring within the first one to five years of marriage (Rastgoftar & Khodadadi, 2023). Research has also shown that divorce is on the rise, and according to the latest statistics, the ratio of divorces to marriages that took place in 2022 is 2/1 (Statistical Center of Iran, 2022.)

Healthy marital and family relationships are vital for societal well-being, as the quality of these relationships directly influences marital satisfaction and life contentment (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). Marital quality serves as a core component of couple relationships, as it reflects a subjective evaluation of factors like compatibility, happiness, satisfaction, unity, and commitment (Tahan et al., 2020). This quality depends on elements such as affection, positive communication, patience, and communication skills, all of which help form a foundation for marital stability (Troxel, Matthews & Gallo, 2019). As couples progress through married life, their shared understanding, mutual respect, and adaptability contribute to the development of harmonious relationship patterns (Linnett & Kibowski, 2018). Various studies have linked marital quality to multiple aspects of married life. For example, research by Barzegari, Hosseinian, and Abdollahi (2024) found that self-compassion and self-oriented romantic perfectionism positively correlate with marital quality, while romantic perfectionism correlates negatively. In another study, Yovani and Rumondor (2021) showed that perfectionism may negatively impact marital quality. Research by Sahin (2021) highlighted that higher self-compassion among student couples enhances emotional bonds and marital quality, while Wang et al. (2020) noted that marital quality is influenced by how couples interact and handle both pleasant and challenging events in married life.

Newlyweds with higher marital quality tend to share greater harmony and satisfaction in various life domains (Yovani & Rumandor, 2021). Given the high rates of divorce within the first five years of marriage, it is clear that challenges faced by young and inexperienced couples can escalate conflicts, diminishing marital quality and potentially leading to separation or divorce (Volodina et al., 2019). For example, the findings of Dadmehr et al (2015) study showed that there is a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence of young newlywed Iranian couples and the level of marital satisfaction and the quality of their relationship. This means that couples with higher emotional intelligence are more prepared at the beginning of marriage to use more rational solutions to resolve marital

disputes when faced with problems and are able to improve the quality of their marriage. Therefore, understanding the factors that promote growth and enrichment in marital quality among newlyweds is essential. While quantitative studies have deeply examined these factors, qualitative research can offer a more nuanced understanding. Thus, this study aims to qualitatively investigate the factors that influence marital quality in newlyweds.

### **Method**

This study aimed to qualitatively investigate factors affecting marital quality in newlyweds. A qualitative descriptive phenomenology approach was employed, following the seven-step Colaizzi method. Participants were purposefully sampled from among newly married individuals attending premarital counseling and couple therapy clinics in Yazd city, meeting the entry criteria of having cohabitated for at least six months and at most two years. Participants were required to be childless and score above the average on Hudson's (1992) 25-item Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire. Exclusion criteria included any psychiatric disorder diagnosed by a psychiatrist or the use of psychiatric medications.

In alignment with qualitative research principles, the sample size was not predetermined. Participants were selected until data saturation was reached—that is, when further interviews no longer contributed additional information necessary for category formation. Saturation was achieved with 11 participants (Bazargan, 2018). The data gathered through interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-stage coding process. Coding, a dynamic and iterative process, is essential to qualitative data analysis, as it involves identifying and categorizing the most relevant content and significant statements in line with the research topic (Strauss, & Corben, 2016).

To ensure validity, both the interview transcripts and research findings were reviewed by the participants to confirm their agreement. Additionally, the coding process and the final report were evaluated by experts in the field, which established the study's validity, akin to the concept of internal validity. Reliability was supported by ongoing checks with subject-matter experts to ensure accuracy and clarity in the research process, fulfilling a standard comparable to reliability (Akbari, 2017).

### **Procedure and Interview**

To collect data, Index of Marital Satisfaction (Hudson, 1992) was initially administered to potential participants, and those who scored above the average in marital satisfaction were selected for interviews. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 50 and 100 minutes. An interview guide, developed with input from knowledgeable experts and faculty, provided a list of questions, but the interviewer was not required to follow a fixed order. Instead, the interviewer could adapt the sequence, delve further into responses, and ask additional questions as needed to gather more in-depth information. This flexible approach allowed interviewees to answer with greater freedom, improving the quality of findings (Hariri, 2015).

In this study, each interview was conducted individually, carefully recorded, and thoroughly reviewed. Content validity was assessed for unstructured interviews using a content validity ratio (CVR), evaluated by eight experts. The CVR exceeded 0.75, indicating satisfactory validity for this sample size.

Sample questions used during the interview sessions included:

- "What personal characteristics help you communicate effectively with your spouse?"
- "What internal factors contribute to the quality of your marital relationship?"
- "How do other people's experiences influence the quality of your marriage?"
- "What actions have you taken to increase mutual affection with your spouse?"
- "How does your spouse's behavior support the relationship and respect your privacy?"
- "Have you encountered challenges in your marriage, and what strategies have you used to address them? What impact did these strategies have on your approach to similar challenges?"
- "When facing a new situation in married life, how do you adapt and address the issue?"
- "What are your boundaries in your marital relationship, and how do you protect them?"

A pilot study with three participants was conducted to refine the interview questions based on their feedback. Given the semi-structured format, the interviewer pursued follow-up questions as necessary for a deeper exploration of each participant's responses. If certain areas were not covered in participants' answers, the interviewer inquired further to address these topics.

**Index of Marital Satisfaction:** The 25-item Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) was developed by Hudson (1992) to assess the extent of marital problems and measure marital satisfaction. The IMS has two cut-off scores: a score of 30 indicates significant clinical issues, and scores above 70 signify severe marital stress. Each item is rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = relatively little, 4 = sometimes, 5 = relatively much, 6 = most of the time, and 7 = always. The reliability of the IMS has been demonstrated, with Cronbach's alpha reported at 0.96 for women and 0.94 for men, and an overall reliability of 0.96 reported by the questionnaire's creator (Sanaei Zaker, 2017). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the IMS was calculated at 0.87.

#### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was conducted using the seven-step method of Colaizzi. First, each interview was re-read multiple times to fully understand the context and perspective of each participant. Both the written transcripts and recorded interviews were reviewed repeatedly to grasp the general content, accompanied by careful listening to key sections of the recordings. In the next step, primary codes and significant phrases from each interview were identified. Relevant sentences and phrases related to the interview questions were extracted and stored in a separate file to ensure that important data was retained without extraneous information. In the third step, the meaning of each phrase was summarized and interpreted. Each significant

sentence was given a brief description of its underlying meaning, with three researchers involved in this process to ensure accuracy and depth. The extracted meanings were then consolidated to create a unified interpretation. In the fourth step, these meanings were organized into categories of codes. In the fifth step, related codes were grouped into broader categories, resulting in clusters from which central concepts emerged. In the sixth step, the findings were discussed and described, leading to a final answer to the study's core research question and an interpretation of the phenomenon's structure.

## Results

Before analyzing the interview data, the demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Newly Married Participants

Code	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Duration of Marriage
1	Male	35	Master's in Electrical Engineering	Engineer	1 year
2	Female	27	Doctor of General Medicine	Physician	1 year, 11 months
3	Female	23	Bachelor's in Accounting	Accountant	1 year
4	Male	29	Bachelor's in Physical Education	Sports Coach	1 year
5	Male	33	Bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering	Engineer	1 year, 4 months
6	Female	28	Bachelor's in Psychology	Kindergarten Teacher	1 year, 4 months
7	Female	32	Master's in Food Industry	Production Manager	1 year, 2 months
8	Female	29	Bachelor's in Financial Management	Bank Employee	1 year, 5 months
9	Female	21	Bachelor's in Psychology	Photographer	1 year, 6 months
10	Female	24	Master's in Counseling Education	Counselor	10 months
11	Male	29	Bachelor's	Date Seller	11 months

Table 1 outlines the variety of backgrounds, ages, and marriage durations among participants, providing context for the subsequent analysis. Based on the analysis of the interview data in this qualitative study of marital quality among newlyweds, seven subcategories and 17 associated concepts were identified, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Concepts and Categories of Marital Quality in Newlyweds

Category	Subcategories	Concepts
Marital Quality	Expanding the experiential treasury	Self-determining communication, Using the experiences of others
	flexibility	Openness to new experiences, Adaptation to new conditions
	Gaining insights from behavioral consequences	Learning from positive outcomes, Growth through adversity
	Preconditions for self-determination before marriage	Marriage counseling, honesty in self-disclosure, alignment with spouse, self-knowledge
	Developing awareness	Developing psychosocial maturity, Acquiring psychological knowledge
	Actively nurturing spouse's affection	Expressing love, Mutual satisfaction of basic needs
	Spirituality	Finding spiritual meaning in present struggles, Connection to religion

### Marital Quality

Marital quality is a multidimensional construct that refers to a subjective evaluation of the degree of alignment between spouses on important marital issues, such as cooperation in shared responsibilities and expressing love. It encompasses aspects like compatibility, satisfaction, happiness, integrity, and marital commitment (Wang et al., 2020).

According to the research findings, multiple factors impact the marital quality of newlyweds, with the primary categories extracted from the interviews detailed above.

#### 3-1. Expansion of the Experiential Treasury

An individual's experiential treasury encompasses the entirety of their past and current experiences shaped by interactions with the environment. Expanding this treasury with diverse and meaningful experiences enables individuals to adopt more mature and conscious behaviors, which, in turn, support effective relationship management, personal growth, and enriched marital quality. In this study, the utilization of others' experiences and the "self-determining communication circle" were identified as essential factors contributing to the experiential expansion of newlyweds.

When newlyweds learn from the positive and negative experiences shared by those around them, they develop insight into which behaviors to adopt or avoid in their own relationships. Couples then generalize these learned behaviors to situations in their lives, supporting a foundation for a successful marriage. Interviewee 5 illustrated this by saying, *"I learned from my parents and elders about what results different actions can yield—whether being strict or lenient, forgiving or not. Knowing what's beneficial in the short term versus what's crucial for the future is invaluable."* Interviewee 8 similarly emphasized the importance of such shared wisdom: *"My mother would share her experiences, and these stories served as life lessons for me."* Echoing this sentiment, interviewee 3 remarked, *"Instead of giving direct advice or interfering, families should simply share their experiences."*

*If they say, 'I did this and it had certain outcomes,' rather than directly advising, it's much more effective."*

The concept of the self-determining communication circle further enhances marital quality in newlyweds by promoting social learning and behavioral modeling. Newlyweds who interact frequently with self-determined individuals observe and internalize positive relationship behaviors. Interviewee 9 highlighted the influence of friends, saying, *"My wife's friends impact our relationship. Those who treat their spouses well have a positive effect on us, and vice versa."* Interviewee 7 supported this view by stating, *"Friends are incredibly important. Most of our circle comprises independent people who stand on their own."* Interviewee 8 added, *"Seeing people around me set and achieve personal goals inspires me to strive for similar success."*

### **3-2. Flexibility**

Psychological flexibility reflects a person's acceptance of various internal and external experiences. In this study, it encompasses adaptation to new conditions and openness to new experiences. Regarding adaptation, Interviewee 3 stated, *"At a certain point, based on our circumstances, I decided to return to work. Being away from the community and not having an income affected my sense of fulfillment and competence. To make up for it, I attended classes, worked on my individual skills, and engaged in some income-generating activities to maintain a high level of competence."* Similarly, Interviewee 5 shared, *"After marriage, I tried hard to work through past issues and be patient with my wife's family. Now, if something doesn't align with my preferences or upbringing, I might have to let go a little. I'm someone who pursues my own goals and isn't easily swayed, but I realized that, at times, compromises are necessary to hold the family together."*

Openness to new experiences represents a willingness to step out of one's comfort zone and embrace new opportunities, even in the face of uncertainty or fear of possible consequences. People with this trait are open to change, ready to embark on new paths despite the risks involved. Interviewee 3 explained, *"I used to avoid working because I was afraid I couldn't handle it, and my confidence in that area was low. But this year, I decided to face my fear and commit to it. Now, I'm very satisfied with my progress."* Interviewee 10 added, *"Before, I was mostly with my own family and friends and wasn't very close to them. But after I got married, since my wife is extroverted, we began to connect with her family, friends, and colleagues."*

### **3-3. Gaining insights from behavioral consequences**

People not only learn from the experiences of others but also from the positive and negative outcomes of their own actions. Since humans are naturally inclined to seek pleasure and avoid pain, they learn to minimize behaviors that do not fulfill their needs and to repeat those that do. In this study, "growth from suffering" and "reward from positive outcomes" are key

concepts underlying the process of learning from behavioral consequences. When couples fail to respond effectively in challenging situations, the resulting difficulties often lead them to grow and work toward improving their marital quality to achieve a sense of satisfaction.

Regarding growth from suffering, Interviewee 7 shared: *“The hardships I endured and the experiences I’ve had influence my life with my wife. Everyone has had uncomfortable experiences in life—they’ve received harsh words or feedback from someone, times when they felt wronged but couldn’t stand up for themselves. I went through these experiences and promised myself that I’d rise above them to prove what I’m capable of.”* Similarly, Interviewee 2 explained: *“My mother-in-law would suggest visiting her cousin or a colleague I didn’t know at all. I would go just to avoid saying no, but I’d end up feeling frustrated and unhappy. Eventually, I stopped going when I felt uncomfortable.”* Interviewee 9 added: *“When you realize that neglecting yourself is causing harm, you start prioritizing yourself and your well-being. At one point, I felt so low that I wanted to harm myself. But now, I regret putting others first in that way, and I’ve come to see the value in focusing on my own needs.”*

As for receiving rewards from positive outcomes, Interviewee 2 said: *“Sometimes I hesitated to go to my mother-in-law’s house because I had work to do, and going would disrupt my plans. So I’d stay home and focus on my work. At first, I felt a bit guilty, but then I felt more in control of my plans and more satisfied with myself. That satisfaction was worth the initial guilt.”* Interviewee 10 added: *“Whenever we saw that our efforts paid off and things went the way we wanted, it gave us the encouragement to keep going. That sense of accomplishment really strengthened us.”*

### **3-4. Preconditions for Self-Determination before Marriage**

Meeting the preconditions for self-determination before marriage can enhance couples' marital quality, both in the early stages and as their relationship progresses with a stronger sense of autonomy. In this study, the key elements associated with pre-marital self-determination include adequate familiarity before marriage, seeking marriage counseling, honesty in self-disclosure, compatibility, and self-awareness.

Adequate familiarity before marriage involves spending enough time together to discuss and understand each other's values and priorities for a shared future. This period allows each person to observe and communicate openly about what matters most to them in a life together. During this time, it is also beneficial for the families to interact and build familiarity with each other. For example, Interviewee 11 noted, *“Talking about various topics, even those we hadn’t initially considered important but were advised to discuss, and the frequent meetings with our families helped us get to know each other better.”* Interviewee 9 similarly shared, *“In our pre-marital meetings, I shared even the smallest details, like my preference for colorful socks or how I dress in front of my family when I travel. It really helped.”*

Marriage counseling before marriage can provide invaluable insights. Interviewee 3 explained, *“We received pre-marriage counseling, which opened our eyes to the reality of*

*marriage and how we'd view it. It changed our perspective entirely and has really helped us get along better now."*

During this period, honesty in self-disclosure is essential. It is crucial for each person to share genuine, accurate information about themselves rather than creating a false image, which may lead to disappointment and conflict once initial romantic feelings wane. Interviewee 4 shared, *"On our first date, he was completely open about his personality. I appreciated his honesty; he wasn't hiding anything or pretending to be someone he's not."* Interviewee 11 also stated, *"I was honest with my wife before marriage. I didn't want to deceive her or make myself look better just to get married. I was myself because if I wasn't, it would have caused problems later."*

Compatibility between spouses, particularly in areas such as religion, values, behavior, and personality, is another important aspect. While absolute similarity isn't necessary, the more commonalities a couple shares, the more likely they are to have a harmonious and fulfilling marriage. Interviewee 6 remarked, *"He, like me, isn't materialistic and values a spiritual life. We have a similar outlook on life."* Interviewee 5 added, *"Religious compatibility is helpful. If one partner is much more religious than the other, it can lead to tension. If this difference isn't acknowledged before marriage, it may become problematic afterward."*

Lastly, self-knowledge is vital. It involves an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, coping and problem-solving styles, goals, values, personality traits, abilities, and interests. Interviewee 10 said, *"I took numerous tests, attended self-discovery courses, and invested in counseling to understand who I am, what I want in life, and the qualities I'd like in a partner."*

### **3-5. Developing Awareness**

Developing awareness is a key component of personal growth and experience, encompassing the acquisition of psychological knowledge and psychosocial maturity. Psychological knowledge refers to the understanding of human behavior and psychological processes, which aids in personal and interpersonal development. This knowledge includes principles essential to a successful marriage, and individuals who are informed and apply these principles often experience higher marital satisfaction. For instance, Interviewee 9 shared, *"I used to listen to fiction podcasts, but now I focus on psychology podcasts to expand my knowledge and positively impact my life."* Similarly, Interviewee 11 noted, *"I read a lot of psychology books, like the marriage book you recommended, Marriage without Failure."*

Psychosocial maturity, on the other hand, refers to a person's developmental readiness to respond appropriately to environmental stimuli across various situations. This maturity involves an awareness of the long-term consequences of one's actions, as well as the ability to balance emotions with reason and logic, leading to wise and responsible behavior. A person

with this level of maturity has reached intellectual, emotional, and social maturity, thereby forming a stable identity. Such maturity enables an individual to navigate the complexities of married life and maintain a high quality of marriage.

For example, Interviewee 3 mentioned, *“I’m only now realizing what’s right and wrong, what I should stand up for, and how to value myself more.”* Interviewee 2 reflected on earlier misunderstandings, saying, *“At the beginning of our marriage, there were things I didn’t understand. Looking back, I regret not understanding them sooner. For example, right after our wedding, I left the bride’s house and went home, not realizing it was customary for the groom to stay. My mother-in-law didn’t say anything, but now I understand more about these customs and what’s expected.”*

### **3-6. Actively nurturing spouse’s affection**

Actively nurturing spouse’s affection is another subcategory of couple bonding behaviors, encompassing the mutual fulfillment of basic needs and expressing love to one’s partner. Mutual satisfaction of basic needs reflects the well-known saying, *“Treat others as you would like them to treat you.”* If couples want their spouse to fulfill their needs for autonomy, competence, and connection, they must be attentive and responsive to their spouse’s needs as well. Interviewee 9 illustrated this, saying, *“The counselor advised that if I don’t let her go out with friends or travel on her own, I can’t expect her to stop me from doing the same. Maybe that’s why my wife doesn’t hold me back, and I let her have her freedom.”* Interviewee 6 also shared, *“When you feel loved, you want to love more, and you grow more attached.”*

Regarding expressing love, Interviewee 8 described, *“When I had COVID and was in quarantine, I told my husband not to come close because he had work and I didn’t want him to get sick. But he still brought me flowers, which brought us even closer.”* Similarly, Interviewee 7 expressed, *“It’s very important to me that my wife shows she values and loves me. She can show it in the gifts she gives me, for example, because I really enjoy receiving gifts.”*

### **3-7. Spirituality**

Spirituality is a transcendent experience that connects individuals with a higher power, the universe, and the deeper meanings and values of life, rekindling hope and peace within. In this study, spiritual experiences such as connecting to religion and finding meaning in present hardships provide couples with the motivation needed to face life’s challenges.

Regarding connection to religion, Interviewee 8 shared, *“Whenever I faced a problem, I took refuge in the Qur’an, and it brought me peace.”* Similarly, Interviewee 5 stated, *“The religious teachings we received from childhood, like being told that supporting a spouse is a form of jihad, motivated me to do things for my wife.”*

On finding meaning in current struggles, Interviewee 11 explained, *“If we don’t have a goal for the future, we won’t grow—we’ll stagnate. I need to look to the future to help me*

*push through difficult times and keep moving forward.” Interviewee 9 added, “If a husband and wife share a common goal, or even if their goals differ but they know where they want to go in life, they’ll navigate the path better. They understand that life has ups and downs and know why they’re working through it.”*

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to investigate the factors influencing marital quality among newlyweds using a phenomenological approach. Marital quality is significant as it profoundly affects couples’ relationships and overall satisfaction with married life (Tahan et al., 2020). It is a multidimensional construct reflecting individuals’ subjective evaluation of their agreement on important aspects of married life, such as cooperation in daily activities, expressions of love, compatibility, satisfaction, happiness, integrity, and marital commitment (Wang et al., 2020). Consequently, marital quality is a key outcome of a successful and effective marriage and is considered a strong predictor of marital stability and continuity (Hou, Jiang & Wang, 2019).

Marital quality develops over the course of a couple’s life together, shaped by mutual adaptation, understanding of each other’s personalities, the establishment of behavioral norms, and the formation of relational patterns. Couples with higher marital quality are generally able to reach agreements on various aspects of life, fostering harmony and understanding (Linnett & Kibowski, 2018). The findings from the interviews and data analysis reveal that several factors contribute to the marital quality of newlyweds. Seven key categories emerged: expanding the experiential treasury, flexibility, gaining insights from behavioral consequences, establishing preconditions for self-determination before marriage, developing awareness, actively nurturing the spouse’s affection, and spirituality.

The findings of this study indicate that expanding the experiential wealth of newlyweds is a key factor in enhancing marital quality. One significant form of human learning is social learning, in which individuals learn by observing others’ behaviors and the consequences of those behaviors. If people observe others being rewarded for a particular behavior, they are more likely to adopt that behavior. Conversely, if they perceive negative consequences, they are less likely to repeat the behavior (Sharf, 2019). By leveraging others’ experiences, couples can better understand their roles in married life in alignment with the needs and expectations of family members. The stability of the family relies on fulfilling these roles effectively. Additionally, accurately perceiving one’s responsibilities in marriage\_using advice and experiences from others\_can enhance couples’ capacity to fulfill their roles, which ultimately contributes to the competence and well-being of the family.

In essence, drawing on others’ experiences and gaining a clear understanding of one’s role in marriage fosters a self-determined relational dynamic in newlyweds. Self-determination, recognized as a fundamental psychological need, comprises three main components: autonomy (the need for self-direction and a sense of choice in initiating, maintaining, and

managing activities), competence (facing challenges and working to master them), and connection (the need to feel secure in relationships, engage in positive interpersonal interactions, and belong to a specific social context as a valued and respected individual). By broadening their experiential knowledge, couples can better meet these self-determination needs, leading to improved marital quality (Forest et al., 2022). These findings align with Mousavi and Gholinasab Ghoje Beigloo (2019), which demonstrated that fulfilling self-determination needs in a marital relationship serves as a foundation for positive interactions, enhances marital quality, and reduces marital conflicts. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2009) found that self-determination plays a vital role in increasing marital satisfaction and improving overall quality of life.

Another key finding of this study is that psychological flexibility can enhance the marital quality of newlyweds. Individuals with high psychological flexibility are more open to diverse experiences and capable of adapting to various situations (Wang, Liu & Feng, 2021). Entering marriage marks a new life phase, distinct from the pre-marital stage, where couples take on emotional, religious, and official commitments to each other. They encounter new relationships, establish shared life principles, and accept certain limitations to build a successful and satisfying marriage. Over time, as couples face different life stages, managing these changes requires an ability to adapt and coordinate with new circumstances. This flexibility allows newlyweds to consider each other's perspectives and preferences as viable options for problem-solving during disagreements. Instead of rigidly adhering to their own views, they can revise their thoughts and adapt to their partner's needs, effectively responding to challenges in a way that strengthens their marital quality (Bloma et al., 2021). Moreover, flexible couples are willing to abandon previously effective behaviors that no longer work and adjust to new social and economic conditions. Openness to new experiences enables them to adapt their behavior, address obstacles to their relationship actively, and make adjustments that ultimately improve marital quality (Wang, Liu & Feng, 2021).

This finding aligns with prior studies, including Hines and Douglas (2018), which demonstrated that enhancing cognitive flexibility improves marital quality and helps manage conflict within couples. It also resonates with Soukandi and Mohammad Baqer (2013) on improving marital satisfaction through increased life meaning and psychological adaptability, and SedaghatKhah and Behzadipoor (2016) on the relationship between marital quality, communication beliefs, mindfulness, and psychological flexibility.

Another factor influencing marital quality in newlyweds, as identified from interview analysis, is learning from consequences. When couples encounter tension in their marriage, the behavioral responses and attitudes they display can lead to different outcomes. Drawing on lessons learned from their parents' experiences, couples may apply effective past strategies to help navigate and resolve conflicts. Solutions that proved beneficial in the past are likely to be helpful again (Unal & Akgon, 2020). This finding aligns with research by Fathi et al.

(2015), which found that applying personal and family experiences contributes to marital compatibility. Additionally, when couples learn to address marital challenges effectively, they experience positive behavioral outcomes as a form of reward. Problem-solving and conflict-resolution techniques, often modeled by parents, are carried forward into a couple's own marriage, promoting constructive behaviors in the face of challenges. This, in turn, enhances intimacy through increased positive interpersonal feedback between partners (Rastegar & Khodadadi, 2023). These findings also echo Unal and Akgon (2020) research, which demonstrated that positive problem-solving styles in spouses lead to beneficial rewards, such as increased marital satisfaction and compatibility.

Another finding of this research highlights the role of self-determination conditions before marriage as a key factor in the marital quality of newlyweds. Self-determination encompasses a set of behaviors and skills shaped by family and social environments, which empower individuals to make independent decisions and solve their own problems (Forest et al., 2022). It satisfies three fundamental psychological needs: connection, competence, and autonomy. Fulfilling these needs leads to improved psychological well-being and quality of life.

For newlyweds to establish a solid foundation for marriage and manage early conflicts effectively, it is essential to gain mutual understanding before marriage, potentially with the support of a counselor for self-discovery. By honestly presenting their true selves to each other, couples can recognize shared and distinct traits, ultimately enhancing marital quality (Guertin et al., 2020). Research suggests that strengthening self-determination positively impacts individuals' mental resilience by influencing psychological aspects such as spontaneous negative thoughts, problem-solving skills, and the perception of emotions. Establishing self-determined foundations before marriage enables couples to practice self-determined behavior throughout their marriage, helping them choose a compatible partner and fostering a foundation for mutual respect and autonomy in their life together (Xiang et al., 2023). In line with these findings, Mousavi and Abooie Mehrizi (2020) demonstrated that couples experiencing marital conflict scored lower in autonomy, competence, communication, self-determined marital commitment, and marital satisfaction compared to those without marital conflict, further supporting the impact of self-determination on marital quality.

Another finding of this research indicates that developing self-awareness is one of the critical factors affecting marital quality among newlyweds. Understanding one's own and others' psychological characteristics, personality styles, and temperaments helps individuals recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses in a marital relationship. This psychological awareness provides insight into how to respond specifically to a spouse, and perhaps more importantly, fosters an appreciation for individual differences in communication (Nall & Aull, 2020).

The study by Yasaei Sekeh and Motthabian (2023) found a significant relationship between personality traits, attitudes toward extramarital relationships, and marital quality,

aligning with the findings of this research. Similarly, Isma and Turnip (2019) demonstrated that temperament and personality traits significantly influence attitudes toward marriage and marital quality. Personality and social factors, which are shaped through learning, deeply impact marital relationships. Each person brings a unique personal and psychological history to marriage, which, depending on the level of psychosocial maturity, can either enhance or diminish marital quality. Individuals with higher psychosocial maturity who employ skills like problem-solving, conflict resolution, and positive interaction tend to experience greater marital satisfaction and quality (Unal & Akgon, 2020). Additionally, research by Rastegar and Khodadadi (2024) identified factors such as socio-cultural teachings, favorable personality traits, inter-generational learning, adaptability, and logical conflict management as important antecedents and outcomes of marital compatibility in couples who are satisfied with their marriages.

Another finding revealed that enhancing a wife's interest in her husband is achieved through mutual satisfaction of basic needs and expressions of love. By fostering a sense of closeness and intimacy, newlyweds can create an atmosphere of respect for each other's inner desires, which helps fulfill their basic psychological needs and, consequently, improves marital quality (Sung, Nam, & Hwang, 2020). From the perspective of family counselors and couples therapists, the quality of couples' relationships is crucial for the psychological health of both partners. These relationships serve as primary sources of empathy, support, positive feelings, and affection, with couples expected to cultivate love, empathy, intimacy, and affection in their interactions. Furthermore, when couples meet each other's needs and receive support from one another, they tend to achieve greater marital satisfaction (SedaghatKhah & BehzadiPoor, 2017). Moreover, individuals who marry for love or out of personal desire, along with the development of mutual affection over time, are likely to treat each other more kindly, thereby enhancing their marital quality (Nietzel & Harris, 2018). This finding aligns with research by Mousavi and Gholinasab Ghoje Beigloo (2019), which indicated that fulfilling self-determination needs within the couple's relationship fosters positive interactions and enhances marital quality while reducing conflicts. Additionally, Randall and Butler (2013) explored the relationship between the quality of emotional connections and marital satisfaction, highlighting the influence of attachment styles.

Among the other findings of this study, spirituality emerged as a significant factor affecting the marital quality of newlyweds. Achieving a successful marriage is a common aspiration for newlyweds, but the transition from the family of origin to a new marital unit often presents unexpected challenges. In the early years together, couples face various stressors and conflicts that can feel overwhelming. Their resolution requires resilience, optimism, and support (AkhlaghiFard et al., 2020). In such circumstances, couples often turn to religion for solace, employing spiritual practices such as trust, prayer, reading the Quran, and supplication to navigate their difficulties. Adhering to religious principles, which

emphasize healthy relationships between spouses and acceptance of each other's differences, fosters peace and supports conflict resolution, thereby meeting their basic psychological needs and enhancing marital quality (El-Mneizel et al., 2022).

Connecting with religion helps couples expand their communication both quantitatively and qualitatively, fosters respect for differing opinions, and increases adaptability in challenging situations. Each problem encountered in the relationship can be viewed as a form of suffering, and finding meaning in these challenges can enhance resilience and coping abilities. Consequently, couples may begin to view current difficulties as temporary, allowing for growth and long-term benefits, ultimately increasing their sense of control and internal motivation, which positively impacts their marital quality (Safara et al., 2019). Additionally, Hussein Dukht et al. (2013) demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between spiritual intelligence, spiritual well-being, quality of life, and marital satisfaction. Saify and Taghavi (2019) similarly found a positive correlation between spiritual well-being and marital satisfaction, which enhances psychological resilience, aligning with the findings of this study. Research by Ghaderi Azarkhavarani et al (2023) also indicated that spiritual therapy can improve marital compatibility and commitment among couples.

## **Conclusion**

In general, newlyweds encounter challenges at the beginning of their life together that were not present during their single years, and these conflicts can significantly impact the quality of their marriage. Therefore, understanding the factors that can enhance marital quality is crucial. This research identified and qualitatively investigated the factors affecting the marital quality of newlyweds. It is recommended that steps be taken to enrich couples' relationships in therapy sessions by training on the factors that contribute to increased marital quality.

## *Limitation and Future Research*

As with any study, the present research has limitations. Due to constraints in sampling, variables such as family background, the religious and cultural tendencies of the couples' families, socio-economic class, and living area were not controlled for, even though each of these factors can influence couples' conflict resolution skills. Additionally, some interviews were conducted via telephone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, there were instances when the call recording software malfunctioned, resulting in lost recordings and the need for re-interviews. Moreover, the zigzag process of data collection to achieve category saturation led to some interviewees feeling fatigued, causing them to decline further participation. This situation could have affected the researcher's time and energy in finding replacement participants, thereby creating further limitations. Given these results, it is suggested that future research be conducted in different cultural contexts to compare findings, as marital quality is influenced by cultural and social factors. Additionally, to validate the current study's findings, the effects of each identified factor on marital quality should be

evaluated using quantitative research methods, such as experimental and correlational approaches.

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### **CRedit authorship contribution statement**

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

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process**

This study employed AI (Open AI GPT-5) in translation of article to native English.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical considerations**

All ethical principles are considered in this article. In order to comply with the ethical principles of research based on the declaration of Helsinki, we can mention such things as conducting research on humans according to accepted scientific standards, using researchers who have sufficient scientific qualifications, prioritizing the interests of the individual over society, protecting the rights of participants, clearly stating the objectives, research methods, and results for the participants, obtaining their consent, the importance of the principle of confidentiality, and obtaining written consent from participants to participate in the research. 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.

### **Data availability statement**

Data available on request from the author.

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