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Structural Model of Marital Virtues and Psychological Well-Being in Relation to Marital Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Marital Conflicts

Mohammad Reza Tamannaeifar[1*], Ahmad Mazhabdar[2], Mahboobe Esmikhani[3]

1. Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran.
2. M.A Student in Psychology, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humaniti University of Kashan, Kashan Iran.
3. M.A Student in Psychology, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humaniti University of Kashan, Kashan Iran.

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Abstract

Abstract

Establishing and maintaining a stable and satisfying relationship has always been one of the primary concerns for couples and individuals seeking a successful marriage. The present research aimed to investigate the mediating role of marital conflicts in the relationship between marital virtues, psychological well-being, and marital satisfaction. This descriptive–correlational study was conducted using structural equation modeling. The statistical population included married men and women residing in Qom during spring 2025. A sample of 284 participants was selected through convenience sampling method. Data were collected using the following standardized scales: Psychological Well-Being Scale (Diener, 2009), Marital Virtues Scale (Fawcett et al., 2013), Marital Conflict Scale (Sanai zaker, 2000), and Marital Satisfaction Scale (Enrich, 1993). Data analyses were conducted using SPSS-24 and AMOS-24 software. Statistical analysis showed significant positive correlations between psychological well-being, marital virtues, and marital satisfaction, as well as a significant negative correlation between marital conflict and marital satisfaction ($p < .01$). Additionally, the structural model demonstrated acceptable fit, and the mediating role of marital conflict in the relationship between psychological well-being and marital virtues with marital satisfaction was supported ($p < .05$). In conclusion, the findings demonstrated that marital virtues and psychological well-being might improve couples' satisfaction with their shared life by reducing marital conflicts. Therefore, counselors and couple therapists can play an effective role in decreasing marital conflicts and enhancing marital satisfaction by strengthening these factors.

***Corresponding author**
Email: tamannai@kashanu.ac.ir

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Introduction

The family, as one of the most fundamental social institutions, plays a pivotal role in individuals' psychological well-being, with its stability largely depending on the quality of the marital relationship. Dysfunctional marital interactions not only threaten the psychological health of spouses but also jeopardize the very unity of the family unit (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Therefore, achieving a stable and satisfying marital relationship has become a primary concern for couples and individuals seeking a successful marriage (Dobrowolska et al., 2020).

Marital satisfaction refers to an individual's evaluation of happiness and stability within the marital relationship across all dimensions of shared life (Abreu-Singh Afonso et al., 2022) and is associated with increased well-being (Yang & Wang, 2023) as well as reduced anxiety (Wang et al., 2023) and depression (Shi & Whisman, 2023). Multiple factors, including psychological well-being and marital virtues, influence this satisfaction. Psychological well-being not only affects personal happiness (ShabaniSahd et al., 2024) and academic performance (Delavarpour et al., 2024) but is also positively associated with marital satisfaction (Ali et al., 2024). Additionally, marital virtues, understood as positive personality traits, play a vital role in managing marital challenges and strengthening social relationships (Leavitt et al., 2024; Seligman, 2002). These virtues have been recognized as contributing to enhanced well-being (Mousavi, 2022) and greater marital satisfaction (Rastgoftar & Khodadadi, 2024).

On the other hand, marital conflicts, arising from discrepancies in beliefs, goals, or behaviors (Navabinejad et al., 2023), are recognized as one of the important negative factors affecting marital satisfaction. Various factors, such as self-control, sense of meaning in life (Lotfi Amiri et al., 2023), positive orientation (Aghili et al., 2024), and beliefs about marriage (Wondimu & Andualem, 2024), have been found to play a significant role in reducing such conflicts. Research has also revealed that psychological well-being (Najafi et al., 2024) and marital virtues (Wondimu & Andualem, 2023) can effectively contribute to the reduction of marital conflicts.

On the other hand, research shows that the increased divorce rates are associated with low levels of marital satisfaction (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022), suggesting that reducing divorce rates and strengthening the family institution necessitate enhancing couples' satisfaction with their shared life. In addition, the growing emphasis on self-centeredness in modern society has contributed to a decrease in relational virtues and, consequently, an increase in marital conflicts (Wondimu & Andualem, 2024). Therefore, examining the factors that contribute to the reduction of marital conflicts and improvement of couples' marital satisfaction is of significant importance. Despite existing research, the roles of psychological well-being (conceptualized within Diener's (2009) core theory of functioning) and marital virtues based on the framework proposed by Fawcett et al. (2013) in reducing marital conflicts and increasing marital satisfaction have not yet been sufficiently investigated. Furthermore, the potential mediating role of marital conflicts in the relationship between psychological well-being, marital virtues, and marital satisfaction has not been empirically examined to date. In light of these gaps, the present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of marital conflicts in the relationship between marital virtues, psychological well-being, and marital satisfaction.

Method

The present research was a descriptive-correlational study conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of married men and women residing in Qom during the spring of 2025. A sample of 284 participants was selected through convenience sampling method. Data were collected using the Psychological Well-Being Scale (Diener, 2009), the Marital Virtues Scale (Fawcett et al., 2013), the Marital Conflict Scale (Sanai Zaker, 2000), and the Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993). Data analysis was performed using SPSS (version 24) and AMOS (version 24) statistical software.

Findings

Among the 284 participants in the present study, 168 were women (59.2%) and 116 were men (40.8%). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix of the study variables.

Table 1 *. Descriptive Statistics, Normality Indices, and Correlation Matrix of Research Variables*

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
1. Psychological Well-being	47.12	5.77	-0.926	1.128	1			
2. Marital Virtues	56.37	6.68	-0.288	0.030	.56**	1		
3. Marital Conflicts	78.65	16.43	0.942	1.832	-.57**	-.40**	1	
4. Marital Satisfaction	34.5	6.57	-0.076	-0.313	.42**	.54**	-.29**	1

**p<0/01 ,*p<0/05

The fit indices of the proposed model indicated acceptable model fit. Table 2 represents the direct and indirect effects.

Table 2*. Direct and Indirect Effects of the Model*

Paths	β	SE	p-value	95% CI
Direct Effects				
Marital Virtues → Marital Satisfaction	.475	.070	.001	[.327, .597]
Psychological Well-being → Marital Conflict	-.177	.094	.043	[-.369, -.005]
Marital Virtues → Marital Conflict	-.351	.115	.005	[-.555, -.101]
Marital Conflict → Marital Satisfaction	-.469	.060	.002	[-.580, -.341]
Indirect Effects				
Psy.Well-being → Conflict → Satisfaction	.083	.046	.043	[.002, .189]
Marital Virtues → Conflict → Satisfaction	.164	.059	.004	[.052, .285]

As shown in Table 2, the indirect effects of psychological well-being and marital virtues on marital satisfaction through marital conflicts were statistically significant. Thus, the mediating role of marital conflicts in these relationships was supported.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of marital conflicts in the relationship between marital virtues, psychological well-being, and marital satisfaction. In explaining this relationship, it can be argued that individuals possessing marital virtues are equipped with skills that enable them to manage conflicts more effectively (Wondimu & Andualem, 2024). A forgiving disposition improves their capacity to overlook their spouses' mistakes, allowing them to neglect past errors and prevent the escalation of relational tensions (Zare Mirkabad et al., 2024). The ability to empathize with one's spouse helps preventing the formation of unrealistic expectations, and the alignment of expectations with the spouse's actual circumstances constitutes a key factor in reducing marital conflicts (Akbari et al., 2023). Furthermore, the capacity for appreciation and affirmation strengthens marital bonds by directing attention toward the positive aspects of the spouse's personality and behaviors, fostering more positive emotions within the relationship. This, in turn, enhances emotional compatibility and contributes to a reduction in marital conflicts (Veldorale-Brogan et al., 2010). Additionally, the virtues of generosity and fairness improve the quality of responsiveness to the spouse's emotional and material needs. The resulting perception of need fulfillment within the marital relationship serves as a protective factor against marital discord (Islami, 2017). Marital virtues also enhance intimacy and conjugal happiness (Karami et al., 2024)

and promote higher levels of psychological well-being (Mousavi, 2022). Overall, these factors endow couples with greater resilience and adaptability, enabling them to overcome a wide range of difficulties and effectively reduce marital conflicts (Wondimu & Andualem, 2023).

On the other hand, individuals with higher levels of psychological well-being demonstrate greater capacity for forming positive social relationships, which in turn enables them to establish healthier and more effective interactions with their spouses (Ali et al., 2024). Positive spousal communication further enhances couples' ability to manage marital conflicts more effectively (Girma Shifaw, 2024). Moreover, psychological well-being contributes to increased happiness among spouses, fostering a deeper sense of intimacy within their shared life (ShabaniSahd et al., 2024). Marital intimacy is a well-established factor in reducing marital conflicts (Asadi & Mohammadifar, 2023). Effective and constructive conflict management allows couples to experience fewer negative emotions, improves mutual understanding and adjustment, and ultimately leads to higher levels of satisfaction with their marital relationship (Ünal & Akgün, 2022).

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that future research pay greater attention to the roles of character strengths, personality virtues, and the components of psychological well-being in shaping marital quality. Counselors and marital therapists can also play a valuable role by enhancing marital virtues and promoting psychological well-being in couples, thereby empowering them to more effectively manage and reduce marital conflicts and increase marital satisfaction.

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Conflict of interest
The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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