

Thematic Analysis of the Concept of Marital Jealousy Among High-Conflict Couples

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study was to develop a model of marital jealousy reduction dimensions underlying jealousy regulation among couples.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed a thematic analysis approach to explore the lived experiences of high-conflict couples who reported successful jealousy reduction. Participants were selected through purposive sampling from family counseling centers, and data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using an inductive-deductive coding strategy following Attride-Stirling's thematic network model. MAXQDA software was used to manage and organize data. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, negative case analysis, peer debriefing, member checking, and intercoder reliability assessment using Cohen's kappa coefficient.

Findings: The analysis yielded a four-dimensional model of marital jealousy reduction consisting of individual, dyadic, familial, and social dimensions. Each dimension comprised several principal themes that interacted in a dynamic, circular pattern. Individual factors included emotional self-regulation, optimistic meaning-making, spiritual orientation, personal growth, and mature defense mechanisms. Dyadic processes involved marital satisfaction, intimate communication, compassionate commitment, adaptive stress management, sexual enrichment, and constructive engagement with external relationships. Familial influences encompassed supportive conflict management, emotional and material backing, healthy family-of-origin functioning, and strong endorsement of marital stability. Social determinants included public awareness, access to professional counseling services, and broader socioeconomic conditions.

Conclusion: Marital jealousy reduction emerges as a complex systemic process shaped by reciprocal interactions across personal, relational, familial, and societal levels, underscoring the necessity of integrated, multilevel interventions in both clinical practice and social policy.

Keywords: *Marital jealousy, jealousy reduction, couple relationships, family systems, qualitative research, thematic analysis*

1. Introduction

Marital jealousy is one of the most complex and emotionally charged phenomena within intimate relationships, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that profoundly shape relational stability, satisfaction, and individual well-being. Contemporary psychological research conceptualizes jealousy not merely as an episodic emotional reaction, but as a multifaceted construct embedded in attachment systems, personality traits, socio-cultural norms, and evolutionary mechanisms (Arnocky et al., 2024; Shcherbata & Borets, 2021). While moderate jealousy may serve adaptive functions related to mate retention and relationship protection (Arnocky et al., 2024), excessive or poorly regulated jealousy has been consistently linked to relationship dissatisfaction, psychological distress, and intimate partner violence (Aloyce et al., 2023; Arbinaga et al., 2021; Kyegombe et al., 2022).

From a theoretical standpoint, jealousy emerges from an interplay of evolutionary motives, attachment processes, and socio-cognitive appraisals. Evolutionary psychology proposes that jealousy evolved as a mate-guarding mechanism designed to prevent partner infidelity and resource loss (Arnocky et al., 2024; Khazaei et al., 2022). However, individual differences in jealousy intensity and expression are strongly moderated by attachment patterns, self-differentiation, personality traits, and emotional regulation capacities (Deng et al., 2023; Fallahzadeh et al., 2022; Richter et al., 2022). Insecure attachment styles—particularly anxious and avoidant orientations—predict heightened jealousy, maladaptive coping, and relational conflict (Chursina, 2023; Deng et al., 2023; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2020). These patterns are further exacerbated in digital contexts, where cyber interactions, partner phubbing, and online surveillance amplify suspicion and emotional reactivity (David & Roberts, 2021; Shchukina, 2024; Ventura-León et al., 2025).

Recent empirical evidence highlights the destructive relational consequences of unmanaged jealousy. Studies demonstrate that jealousy predicts lower marital satisfaction, increased relational control, emotional suppression, and reduced stability (Khazaei et al., 2022; Rahimi et al., 2021; Ventura-León et al., 2025). Furthermore, jealousy frequently serves as a pathway toward psychological and physical violence, particularly within socioeconomically strained contexts and patriarchal cultural systems (Aloyce et al., 2023; Arbinaga et al., 2021; Kyegombe et al., 2022). These

findings underscore the urgent need to move beyond descriptive models of jealousy toward comprehensive frameworks that explain not only its causes but also the processes through which jealousy can be reduced and regulated within marital systems.

Most existing research focuses on predictors and consequences of jealousy rather than on mechanisms of jealousy reduction. Although several protective factors have been identified—such as dispositional mindfulness (De Cristofaro et al., 2023), communication skills (Kovan, 2023), self-esteem (Rahimi et al., 2021), and self-differentiation (Deng et al., 2023; Fallahzadeh et al., 2022)—these variables are typically examined in isolation. Consequently, the field lacks an integrated, multilevel model that captures the dynamic interactions among personal capacities, couple processes, family systems, and socio-structural conditions in the context of jealousy reduction.

Emerging evidence suggests that jealousy cannot be adequately understood without considering the relational ecosystem in which couples are embedded. Family-of-origin dynamics, intergenerational modeling of marital behavior, and familial support networks significantly influence how couples manage emotional conflicts and jealousy episodes (Nesterova & Shchukina, 2024a, 2024b). Healthy parental relationships and constructive family communication patterns provide cognitive and emotional templates that buffer against jealousy escalation (Nesterova & Shchukina, 2024b). Conversely, dysfunctional family climates, rigid gender norms, and unresolved interfamily conflicts intensify vulnerability to jealousy and marital distress (Nesterova & Shchukina, 2024a; Shchukina, 2024).

At the societal level, jealousy is shaped by cultural scripts, gendered expectations, economic pressures, and digital transformations of intimacy. Public narratives surrounding fidelity, honor, and gender roles frequently assign disproportionate responsibility to women, intensifying emotional burdens and reinforcing maladaptive jealousy dynamics (Shchukina, 2024; Valentová et al., 2020; Valentová et al., 2020). Economic instability further compounds relational strain by increasing stress exposure, reducing access to mental health services, and limiting couples' capacity to engage in preventive counseling (Khazaei et al., 2022; Kyegombe et al., 2022). Moreover, the digitalization of romantic life—through social media surveillance, online comparison, and constant connectivity—has transformed the experience and triggers of jealousy in contemporary couples (Kovan, 2023; Shchukina, 2024; Ventura-León et al., 2025).

Despite this growing body of knowledge, existing models remain fragmented. Studies often isolate individual predictors such as attachment anxiety (Richter et al., 2022), personality traits (Edlund et al., 2022), or emotional dependency (Arbinaga et al., 2021), while neglecting systemic interactions across relational and contextual levels. Theoretical analyses of jealousy emphasize its multifactorial nature (Shcherbata & Borets, 2021), yet few empirical investigations have operationalized this complexity into coherent explanatory frameworks capable of guiding intervention.

Qualitative scholarship further indicates that jealousy reduction is not achieved solely through symptom control but through broader transformations in meaning-making, emotional awareness, relational communication, family engagement, and social support structures (Aloyce et al., 2023; Kyegombe et al., 2022). Couples who successfully regulate jealousy exhibit higher levels of mutual empathy, emotional competence, shared problem-solving, and constructive engagement with external support systems (De Cristofaro et al., 2023; Kovan, 2023; Ventura-León et al., 2025). These processes reflect complex adaptive systems rather than linear cause–effect mechanisms.

In parallel, psychometric advancements emphasize the importance of modeling jealousy within network structures that capture reciprocal influences among emotions, cognitions, behaviors, and social contexts (Ventura-León et al., 2025). Such perspectives align with systemic family theories and contemporary relational science, which view marital functioning as an emergent property of interacting subsystems—individual, dyadic, familial, and societal.

However, few studies have integrated these multilevel processes into a single explanatory model focused explicitly on jealousy reduction. Research in non-Western contexts further reveals culturally specific configurations of jealousy and its regulation, influenced by religious beliefs, collective family structures, and normative marital expectations (Fallahzadeh et al., 2022; Khazaei et al., 2022; Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020). These contextual dimensions highlight the necessity of culturally grounded qualitative inquiry to capture lived experiences of jealousy management beyond standardized psychometric constructs.

Given these theoretical and empirical gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative thematic approach to investigate jealousy reduction as a four-dimensional construct encompassing individual, dyadic, familial, and social domains. This approach responds to calls for integrative models capable of illuminating how personal capacities,

couple processes, family systems, and societal conditions interact dynamically in shaping jealousy trajectories (Nesterova & Shchukina, 2024b; Shcherbata & Borets, 2021; Ventura-León et al., 2025). By grounding the analysis in the lived experiences of couples, the study seeks to identify core dimensions and mechanisms of jealousy reduction that can inform both theory development and intervention design.

Such a framework is particularly critical in contemporary relational contexts marked by increasing marital instability, digital transformation of intimacy, shifting gender norms, and socioeconomic pressures. Without a coherent, multidimensional model of jealousy reduction, prevention and therapeutic interventions risk remaining fragmented and insufficiently responsive to the complex realities of modern couples (Aloyce et al., 2023; Kyegombe et al., 2022; Ventura-León et al., 2025).

The aim of this study is to develop a comprehensive qualitative model of marital jealousy reduction by identifying and integrating the individual, dyadic, familial, and social dimensions that shape jealousy regulation among couples.

2. Methods and Materials

This study was conducted with the aim of performing a thematic analysis of the reduction of marital jealousy using a qualitative research approach. The thematic analysis method employed in this study was based on the model proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001), which focuses on the inductive identification of themes organized into a network of global, organizing, and basic themes. This strategy enables the researcher to extract a theoretical framework from extensive and diverse textual data and to organize and present the findings in a systematic and meaningful manner.

The field of this study consisted of high-conflict couples who had referred to the Divorce Reduction Center of the State Welfare Organization in the city of Isfahan. This selection was made in order to gain direct access to the target population of the study, namely couples experiencing marital conflict.

Fifteen high-conflict couples who had referred to the Divorce Reduction Center of the State Welfare Organization in Isfahan were selected as participants in the qualitative phase of the study. Sampling was conducted using a purposive sampling method, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Theoretical saturation was reached when participants no longer provided

new information and when the relationships between the main and subcategories were clearly and sufficiently established.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via telephone and email. Field notes were taken to record the data, and in some cases (with the consent of the interviewees), audio recordings were made. After completion of the interviews, the data were transcribed verbatim and prepared for analysis.

Qualitative data analysis was performed using the thematic analysis method. This process included the following stages:

1. **Initial coding:** Salient and recurrent concepts were identified from the extracted list of codes. This identification was conducted based on the relationships among codes and concepts and through processes of repetition, comparison, and the recognition of similarities and differences.
2. **Code analysis and integration:** After the initial coding was completed, the codes were analyzed and integrated to form a set of main and sub-themes.
3. **Coding approaches:** In this study, coding and theme identification were conducted using two approaches: an inductive approach (in which themes were derived directly from the collected data) and a theoretical-deductive approach (in which the data were analyzed based on the researcher's theoretical interests, the research literature, and the professional context).
4. **Analytical software:** To enhance the efficiency and accuracy of the thematic analysis process, MAXQDA version 11 software was used, which provides features such as text coding, assignment of codes to themes, linkage of memos, and advanced search functions.

Table 1

Dimensions and Core Themes Related to the Reduction of Marital Jealousy

Core Themes of Marital Jealousy Reduction	Dimensions of Marital Jealousy Reduction
Conscious and optimistic living; religious-spiritual worldview; development of personal capacities; use of defense mechanisms; responsible confrontation with and acceptance of life problems	Individual
Creating and maintaining a happy and healthy marriage; loving and intimate communication; compassionate acceptance and commitment toward the spouse; stress management and prudent marital stability; efforts to enrich sexual relationship despite life challenges; weaknesses in improving sexual relationship quality; healthy communication with the external relational world beyond marriage	Dyadic

Conscious and prudent family coping with life problems; comprehensive family support; health and positive relationships in families of origin; role of families in couple adjustment and marital stability	Familial
Awareness of life problems and social relationships; access to family-counseling services and socially responsible response; societal economic resources	Social

This section examines the **individual dimension** influencing the reduction of marital jealousy among couples. Qualitative analysis of the interviews identified five principal themes in this dimension: *conscious and optimistic living, religious-spiritual worldview, development of personal capacities, use of mature defense mechanisms, and responsible confrontation with and acceptance of life events.*

1. Conscious and Optimistic Living

This principal theme consists of two subthemes: *optimism toward life* and *conscious living*, reflecting couples' positive and realistic approach to life.

Optimism toward life. Couples emphasized positive thinking and hope for the future. They attempted to avoid despair and focused on their life assets rather than deficiencies. As Participant 1 stated: "Life flows like river water and is very simple, but some people make it difficult... Happiness requires a warm and hopeful heart, which I have... If one does not compare oneself with others and does not pay attention to negative people's words, life becomes easier..."

These couples perceived the future as unpredictable and, with flexibility and realistic expectations, avoided regret over unattained desires.

Conscious living. This subtheme includes *living in the present moment, mortality awareness, and responsible living*. Couples endeavored to fully experience the present, believing that life is short and each day may be the last. Participant 10 stated: "We prioritized living. We enjoyed our life. We feel that we have truly lived. We love our life... We spent what we earned, enjoyed it, and tried to live—that is all."

This awareness fostered responsibility and conscious life choices.

2. Religious-Spiritual Worldview

This principal theme reflects the profound role of religious and spiritual beliefs in reducing jealousy and comprises four subthemes: *acceptance of divine will, patience in divine trials, adaptive and growth-enhancing role of religion, and personal spiritual value system.*

Acceptance of divine will. Couples believed in God's compassion, divine destiny, and divine wisdom. They perceived life as dependent on God's will and maintained heartfelt connection through prayer and gratitude. Participant 1 stated: "I strongly believe that God is kinder to

His servants than anyone else... I trust God completely... God knows what is in my heart better than anyone."

Patience in divine trials. Life difficulties were viewed as divine tests and were confronted with patience and reliance on God. Participant 11 explained: "When my wife becomes upset, I tell her God knows whom to test... We console ourselves this way. Our trust is in God."

Adaptive and growth-enhancing role of religion. Religion provided peace, and couples drew guidance from the Qur'an and religious figures. Religious beliefs facilitated marital adjustment and conflict resolution. Participant 12 stated: "Our faith gives us special peace... Thinking about the Imams and asking them calms us... It has helped us greatly."

Personal spiritual value system. Beyond formal religion, some couples adhered to personal moral and spiritual values. They emphasized honesty, kindness, and ethical commitment as sources of tranquility and optimism. Participant 9 noted: "I have values that may not be strictly religious, but I am committed to them... like being honest with my spouse and being kind."

3. Development of Personal Capacities

This theme focuses on personal growth and self-awareness and includes *high differentiation and secure attachment, social interest, self-esteem, and responsibility.*

High differentiation and secure attachment. Couples maintained emotional independence while sustaining secure attachment. They regulated emotions and made independent decisions. Participant 6 said: "At first I wanted to move with him, but then I realized it was too hard... So I stayed. It was difficult, but the best choice."

Social interest. Couples demonstrated concern for others and social responsibility, offering help without expectation of reward. Participant 5 stated: "I help others because it is my human duty, not so that God will solve my problems."

Self-esteem. Couples avoided social comparison, maintained confidence during economic hardships, and asserted their needs. Participant 3 remarked: "I keep my spirit up... I must plan for myself and keep myself happy."

Responsibility. Couples acknowledged weaknesses and worked toward improvement. Participant 9 described their early marital struggles and subsequent growth in communication.

4. Use of Mature Defense Mechanisms

This theme emphasizes the utilization of mature defenses such as anticipation, humor, identification, suppression, affiliation, compensation, and goal inhibition. Couples anticipated jealousy's consequences, used humor, modeled parental resilience, suppressed negative thoughts, sought support, and strengthened marital bonds. Participant 6 stated: "Even after hearing the worst things, I maintained the relationship and did not cut ties."

5. Responsible Confrontation with Life Events

This theme reflects couples' active and accountable approach to challenges and includes *meaning-making from jealousy-related conflicts, acceptance of hardships, hope and responsibility in life, conscious selection of conflict-resolution paths, and healthy perspective on the role of children*.

Meaning-making from jealousy-related conflicts. Couples viewed jealousy as an opportunity for growth. Participant 5 stated: "Reducing jealousy opens many paths... When you see it as a blessing, it benefits you."

Acceptance of hardships. Couples accepted life difficulties as challenges rather than shameful failures. Participant 4 explained: "We accepted each other's differences... Love and affection greatly reduce jealousy."

Hope and responsibility in life. Couples used positive self-talk and perseverance and demonstrated commitment to resolving conflicts. Participant 2 described encouraging mutual decision-making.

Conscious selection of conflict-resolution paths. Couples sought valid knowledge, avoided superstition, and pursued scientific solutions. Participant 5 criticized unqualified advice and superstitious practices.

Healthy perspective on the role of children. Couples acknowledged both the value and challenges of parenting. Participant 9 observed: "After twenty years, couples are alone again... They must continue their life together."

This realistic perspective reduced pressure and consequently reduced jealousy.

In the dyadic dimension of jealousy reduction among the couples participating in this study, seven principal themes were identified: "creating a happy and healthy marriage and maintaining it," "loving and intimate communication with each other," "acceptance of the spouse accompanied by compassion and commitment," "stress management and prudent maintenance of marital stability," "efforts to enrich the sexual relationship," "weaknesses in improving and enhancing the quality of the sexual relationship," and "healthy engagement with the world of relationships outside the marital system." In total, the analysis yielded 23 subthemes, 47 categories, and 136 initial (raw) concepts. A summary of the qualitative findings for the dyadic dimension of jealousy reduction is presented in the table below. It should be noted that in interviews with some couples reporting low levels of marital jealousy, themes indicating weaknesses in their marriage and spousal relationship were also extracted (e.g., "poor quality of healthy sexual functioning," "weakness in treating sexual dysfunction," etc.); however, due to their inconsistency with the aim of this section and because they were repeated in interviews with couples demonstrating high jealousy reduction, these themes were excluded.

Table 2

Principal Themes and Subthemes in the Dyadic Dimension of Marital Jealousy Reduction

Subthemes	Principal Themes
Formation of a successful couple identity; adherence to principles of marital life; marital happiness; marital satisfaction and maintaining it; healthy fulfillment of needs within marriage	Creating a happy and healthy marriage and maintaining it
Calmness alongside each other; healthy and effective communication; intimacy; love accompanied by empathy; emotional competence in expressing affection	Loving and intimate communication with each other
Mutual respect; compassion and emotional reassurance; responsible and reciprocal commitment in marriage; acceptance of each other; providing emotional support and reassurance	Acceptance of the spouse accompanied by compassion and commitment
Conscious maintenance of marriage; dyadic stress management and resilience; occupational-financial adjustment and management; management and resolution of marital disagreements	Stress management and prudent maintenance of marital stability
Healthy attitudes toward sexual relations; sexual enrichment; managing the impact of jealousy on sexual satisfaction	Efforts to enrich the sexual relationship
Managing relationships with others; maintaining an appropriate relationship with families; empathic and awareness-enhancing communication with jealous couples; smart and appropriate use of therapeutic-counseling services	Healthy engagement with the world of relationships outside the marital system

This section examines the qualitative findings related to the dyadic dimension of jealousy reduction in couples.

Analysis of the interview data identified five principal themes in this dimension: "creating a happy and healthy

marriage and maintaining it," "loving and intimate communication with each other," "acceptance of the spouse accompanied by compassion and commitment," "stress management and prudent maintenance of marital stability," and "efforts to enrich the sexual relationship."

1) Creating a Happy and Healthy Marriage and Maintaining It

This principal theme reflects couples' efforts to build and sustain a successful relationship and includes five subthemes: "successful couple identity," "adherence to principles of marital life," "marital happiness," "marital satisfaction and maintaining it," and "healthy fulfillment of marital needs."

Successful couple identity. Couples were unified in pursuing shared goals and strengthened a sense of "we-ness" in the relationship. Throughout the marriage, they learned from one another and supported each other's growth and advancement, including in education and employment. As Couple 4 stated: "The financial changes in our life have also been good and progressive... My wife went to university and continued her education because she wanted to... Overall, ethically and financially and so on, we changed 100 percent; in these ten years we became better... Life problems are our problem, not my wife's problem alone."

Adherence to principles of marital life. These couples emphasized treating one's spouse well, cooperating in daily tasks, and maintaining realistic expectations of married life. They did not view marriage merely as a transaction and engaged in joint participation in decision-making. Couple 2 provided an example of this cooperation: "I feel if I don't help, that bread becomes unlawful for me. For example, she clears the tablecloth, and I pick up the water pitcher. I do whatever I can..."

Marital happiness. Couples tried to keep their marriage joyful and, through humor and the infusion of positive affect into the relationship, laughed together. They approached life simply and maintained active social engagement with friends and family.

Marital satisfaction and maintaining it. Couples expressed satisfaction with what their marriage offered and focused on its strengths. They accepted fluctuations in satisfaction and invested time to preserve relational vitality and quality. Couple 10 said: "We truly love our life; we have love and affection for each other; we have a happy life that we are proud of and satisfied with... We enjoyed our life. We feel that we have lived more. We love our life."

Healthy fulfillment of marital needs. Couples respected each other's needs and took responsibility for meeting them.

They spoke openly about needs and did not consider expressing them to be shameful. Couple 8 stated: "I think there is no problem if someone needs affection and tells their spouse. They shouldn't assume the spouse definitely knows or must know what I need."

2) Loving and Intimate Communication with Each Other

This principal theme focuses on the importance of deep emotional connection and constructive dialogue among couples and includes five subthemes: "calmness alongside each other," "healthy and effective communication," "intimacy," "love accompanied by empathy," and "emotional competence in expressing affection."

Calmness alongside each other. Couples attempted to comfort one another during distress and achieved tranquility through talking. They experienced a sense of security together and did not fear the future. Couple 3 stated: "For me, my marriage is more important than anything—one in which there is also peace. If I didn't have that peace, maybe I would make a different decision..."

Healthy and effective communication. Couples listened to each other and resolved misunderstandings through satisfying dialogue. They attended to the spouse's nonverbal communication and used virtual communication tools to improve the relationship. Couple 9 stated: "We talk a lot and comfortably. When we are calm, we talk, and we talk a lot... I also listen very well, and it's very important that a man listens a lot."

Intimacy. Couples valued each other's feelings and expressed them freely. Their intimacy encompassed emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, and recreational aspects. They engaged in religious practices together, went on pilgrimages, and attended to each other's physical needs. Couple 2 said: "Always and every day we talk about problems together... We also say loving words to each other. Sometimes we cry together... In short, I'm very comfortable with my spouse."

Love accompanied by empathy. Couples described genuine love and efforts toward mutual understanding. They placed themselves in each other's position and understood each other's needs and distress. Couple 10 said: "Our love and affection, the way it was in the beginning, is the same. Maybe its form has changed. But we love each other; we loved each other from the start. We say it out loud..."

Emotional competence in expressing affection. Couples expressed affection freely through verbal and nonverbal means. They enjoyed showing affection and increased intimacy through touch and loving expressions.

Couple 7 stated: "My spouse's behavior is very good. For example, they show me affection and, somehow and whenever possible, at least send me a message, and they don't withhold their affection from me, and that makes me very happy..."

3) Acceptance of the Spouse Accompanied by Compassion and Commitment

This principal theme emphasizes respectful, caring, and committed behavior toward one another and includes five subthemes: "mutual respect," "compassion and emotional reassurance," "responsible and reciprocal commitment in marriage," "acceptance of each other," and "providing emotional support and reassurance."

Mutual respect. Couples valued good temper and appreciation of the spouse's efforts. They respected the spouse's personhood and role and fostered a sense of worth in each other. Couple 7 said: "Our attention to each other has become more and better. I mean myself—I tried to meet the things my spouse expects from me. I reduced my bad temper and increased my respect."

Compassion and emotional reassurance. Couples tried to comfort the spouse and expressed concern for each other's health and well-being, even after one's death. They served as each other's emotional anchor and understood life pressures. Couple 2 said: "I don't want my wife to suffer after my death. We ask God that such a thing doesn't happen. We try to keep both of us healthy."

Responsible and reciprocal commitment in marriage. Couples emphasized loyalty, trust, and honesty. They did not withdraw during difficulties and felt responsible for maintaining the relationship. Couple 9 stated: "Commitment and loyalty are very important. When we are loyal to each other, a kind of sense of security develops in us and we live more comfortably."

Acceptance of each other. Couples felt confident about their choice of spouse and accepted each other unconditionally. They respected individual differences and, through mutual understanding, achieved coordination and flexibility. Couple 11 stated: "That understanding gradually developed... little by little, we gave each other time... our temperaments, so to speak, became clear to us..."

Providing emotional support and reassurance. Couples tried to give each other hope and morale and supported one another. They created positive shared memories and praised each other's strengths. Couple 13 said: "...When the doctor said your problem is not resolved yet, I got up... I cried from there all the way home. When I

called my husband, he told me: 'It's nothing, don't worry!'... and then I became much calmer."

4) Stress Management and Prudent Maintenance of Marital Stability

This principal theme refers to couples' capacity to confront challenges and maintain relational solidity and includes four subthemes: "conscious maintenance of marriage," "dyadic stress management and resilience," "occupational–financial adjustment and management," and "management and resolution of marital disagreements."

Conscious maintenance of marriage. Couples considered preserving the marriage important despite difficulties and shared a collective determination to do so. They regarded remarriage or divorce as undesirable. Couple 3 stated: "Honestly, I haven't thought much about divorce... It hasn't been in my mind that I should separate and be happy with someone else... So no, I've never thought about it."

Dyadic stress management and resilience. Couples adopted collaborative stress management and helped each other regulate emotions. Through consultation and joint problem solving, they remained alongside one another in hardship. Couple 10 stated: "We don't have a problem. We support each other and help each other. Problems don't really change things at home for us. It follows its normal course."

Occupational–financial adjustment and management. Couples accepted the strain of a spouse's unpredictable work hours and prioritized marital stability over material concerns. They consulted each other about finances and did not blame one another for expenses. Couple 10 said: "We cut back on other things and added family counseling because of our life... Our financial situation has even become very bad at times, but it hasn't affected our relationship or our satisfaction with each other."

Management and resolution of marital disagreements. Couples had learned conflict resolution skills and used constructive criticism and preventive strategies such as avoiding prolonged silent treatment. They viewed disagreements as natural and sought solutions rather than blame. Couple 9 stated: "When resolving disagreements, we still maintain respect and we don't involve our families... Now our understanding is greater; for example, I know when I should talk to her and when she is upset I should leave her be..."

5) Efforts to Enrich the Sexual Relationship

This principal theme focuses on the importance and quality of the sexual relationship and includes three subthemes: "healthy attitude toward sexual relations,"

“sexual enrichment,” and “management of sexual satisfaction.”

Healthy attitude toward sexual relations. Couples valued their sexual relationship and considered it an important component of love and intimacy. They attended to personal hygiene and expressed sexual needs openly. Couple 5 said: “When I feel the need, I suggest it myself. We have no limitations in talking in bed; whatever is on our mind, we tell each other... I think a *الزوج*’s sexual relationship should be very open.”

Sexual enrichment. Couples did not compare themselves or their spouse with others and tried to create mutual sexual satisfaction. They enhanced sexual quality through caressing, kissing, and sexual humor. Couple 6 explained: “It has mostly been more caressing and hugging and kissing and often sending sexual messages to each other. Sometimes my spouse tells me sexual jokes and we laugh together.”

Management of sexual satisfaction. Couples emphasized psychological satisfaction in sexual relations and did not engage in sexual activity without the spouse’s consent. They sought to increase knowledge about healthy sexuality and used foreplay and variety in sexual relations.

6) Healthy Engagement with the World of Relationships Outside Marriage

This principal theme emphasizes couples’ capacity to interact constructively with individuals and groups outside the marital relationship without undermining their own relational quality.

Managing relationships with others. Couples recognized that they could not expect empathy from everyone and avoided social comparison. They dealt prudently with others’ provocative remarks and valued their own life rather than public opinion. They set boundaries regarding disclosure of their problems to others and coordinated with the spouse. Couple 8 stated: “My husband doesn’t care about people’s talk at all. He doesn’t even listen to find out what others say... But if we want to live because of what people say, we won’t have a life. People say something new every day, and if a person wants to change their life every day, that is not good.”

Maintaining an appropriate relationship with families. Couples tried to maintain balanced relationships with both their own families of origin and the spouse’s family, without prioritizing one over the other. They believed in respecting the spouse’s family and avoiding interference in the spouse’s family relationships. When

problems arose with families, they resolved them amicably and face-to-face. Couple 14 said: “If I have a problem with my wife’s family, I myself talk to her family face to face, because in a way I’m friends with them... I don’t tell my wife; I don’t put her in the middle. I go and speak respectfully.”

Empathic and awareness-enhancing engagement with other couples. Couples were aware of other couples’ difficulties and, by observing others’ suffering, strengthened their own resilience and hope. They also consulted happy couples and modeled their practices. They shared experiences and advised confused couples to consult specialists and read credible books. Couple 5 stated: “When I came and saw someone who had lived together for 20 years and separated over the smallest issues... it made us much calmer (because I saw that there are many like us, even worse than us).”

Smart and appropriate use of counseling services. Couples trusted specialist psychologists’ recommendations and used counseling services to resolve problems and improve marital quality of life. They acknowledged counseling’s positive impact and attended training classes to learn necessary skills. Couple 11 described: “In counseling, I learned about our relationship that you shouldn’t try to change your spouse... Accept your spouse as they are, with all their weaknesses and strengths. Don’t try to change them, because you will only hurt yourself.”

In the familial dimension of jealousy reduction among the couples participating in this study, four principal themes were identified: “families’ conscious and prudent coping with problems,” “comprehensive family support and assistance,” “health and positive relationships within families of origin,” and “the role of families in couple adjustment and marital stability.” In total, the analysis yielded 9 subthemes, 22 categories, and 89 initial (raw) concepts. A summary of the qualitative findings for the familial dimension of jealousy reduction is presented in the table below. It should be noted that in interviews with some couples reporting low levels of jealousy, themes reflecting weaknesses in their families’ functioning or attitudes were also extracted (e.g., “family weaknesses in coping with the couple’s problems,” “transmission of superstitious beliefs to the couple,” etc.); however, due to their inconsistency with the aim of this section and because they were repeated in interviews with couples reporting high jealousy, these themes were excluded.

Table 3*Principal Themes and Subthemes in the Familial Dimension of Marital Jealousy Reduction*

Subthemes	Principal Themes
Families' prudent responses to conflicts; families' positive and effective functioning in the process of problem resolution; respectful treatment and preservation of the couple's self-esteem	Families' conscious and prudent coping with conflicts
Family support and encouragement; families' material and spiritual backing	Comprehensive family support and assistance
Positive relationships between families of origin; health of the family of origin	Health and positive relationships within families of origin
Families' firm support for marital stability; helping the couple achieve healthy adjustment	The role of families in couple adjustment and marital stability

This section examines the qualitative findings related to the familial dimension of jealousy reduction in couples. Analysis of the interview data identified four principal themes in this dimension: "families' conscious and prudent coping with conflicts," "comprehensive family support and assistance," "health and positive relationships within families of origin," and "the role of families in couple adjustment and marital stability."

1) Families' Conscious and Prudent Coping With Conflicts

This principal theme refers to families' constructive and positive responses to dyadic disagreements and includes three subthemes: "families' prudent responses to conflicts," "families' positive and effective functioning in the process of conflict resolution," and "respectful treatment and preservation of the couple's self-esteem."

Families' prudent responses to conflicts. Despite being concerned about marital conflicts, families did not perceive them as catastrophic and trusted the couple's autonomy in decision-making. They attempted to provide space for open dialogue through reasonable and patient conduct and avoided framing one partner as the culprit. As Couple 5 stated: "Our families truly cooperate with us... It has perhaps never happened that they told us, 'Why are you like this or like that?' Overall, we felt comfortable."

Families' positive and effective functioning. Families did not interfere in the couple's decisions; rather, they supported them through caring guidance, fostering optimism, and encouraging active pursuit of conflict resolution. When needed, they also provided financial or practical assistance. Couple 2 referred to such support: "Whenever a problem comes up that requires medicine or a doctor, one person sends money, another helps by bringing fruit and food... My sisters-in-law often come to help me. They won't even let me move a glass. My own sisters help me the same way... In short, they don't leave us alone."

Respectful treatment and preservation of the couple's self-esteem. Families did not blame or humiliate the couple for their problems and actively preserved their self-esteem. They did not differentiate between their own child and the child's spouse, nor between a daughter-in-law/son-in-law with difficulties and other family members, and they accepted them unconditionally. Couple 12 provided an example about the mother-in-law: "My mother-in-law is like my own mother... It's not at all as if she wants to bring it up and say, 'You have a physical problem'... Not at all. Even though she is also an old-fashioned person."

2) Comprehensive Family Support and Assistance

This principal theme focuses on families' emotional, financial, and spiritual support for couples and includes two subthemes: "family support and encouragement" and "families' material and spiritual backing."

Family support and encouragement. Families provided psychological and emotional support and strengthened the couple's morale by offering reassurance and hope. They prioritized the couple's mental and physical well-being. Couple 4 stated: "My family says, 'God willing your problems will be solved; many people were like this and had conflicts, but with family counselors and psychologists they got better.' This has a positive effect on us."

Families' material and spiritual backing. When needed, families provided financial support without expectation while preserving the couple's dignity. They also offered spiritual support through prayer and belief in divine wisdom. Couple 9 stated: "They know there is a problem, but they never said anything... In a way, they support us... They also pray for us."

3) Health and Positive Relationships Within Families of Origin

This principal theme concerns how the quality of relationships and overall health within the families of origin contributes to reducing marital jealousy, and it includes two

subthemes: “positive relationships between families of origin” and “health of the family of origin.”

Positive relationships between families of origin. The couples’ families of origin maintained friendly and respectful relationships with one another and strengthened family bonds. These positive interfamily relations were perceived as contributing to reduced marital jealousy. Couple 3 stated: “I think the fact that our families get along with each other has definitely had a positive effect on our relationship.”

Health of the family of origin. Families of origin exhibited healthy functioning in dealing with challenges and reflected a healthy relationship between father and mother. Parents provided a positive model of marital life, and openness to feedback and willingness to change were evident. Couple 9 highlighted: “Our parents had a good relationship with each other, and this has had a good effect on us, because they were our model.”

4) The Role of Families in Couple Adjustment and Marital Stability

This principal theme emphasizes families’ support for maintaining the marriage and facilitating the couple’s adjustment and includes two subthemes: “families’ firm support for marital stability” and “helping the couple achieve healthy adjustment.”

Families’ firm support for marital stability. Families were not inclined toward divorce and viewed it as undesirable and fraught with problems. To the extent possible, they discouraged separation and considered marital stability a highly valued family norm. Couple 9 stated: “Divorce is the last resort, and our families also don’t approve of divorce; society doesn’t approve of divorce either. For our families, tolerating conflicts is easier than divorce...”

Helping the couple achieve healthy adjustment. Families helped couples adapt to cultural differences and avoided making divisive remarks between them. They also reduced the couple’s susceptibility to others’ comments by downplaying trivial public talk. Couple 3 stated: “It has never happened that my family created a fight or stirred up arguments over our problems... No one says anything special, and they don’t even ask questions...”

In the social dimension of jealousy reduction among the couples participating in this study, three principal themes were identified: “public awareness and social relationships,” “access to counseling services and responsible engagement,” and “societal economic resources.” In total, the analysis yielded 6 subthemes, 17 categories, and 92 initial (raw) concepts. A summary of the qualitative findings for the social dimension of jealousy reduction is presented in the table below.

Table 4

Principal Themes and Subthemes in the Social Dimension of Marital Jealousy Reduction

Subthemes	Principal Themes
Public awareness and societal pressure borne by women; effects of social and occupational relationships	Public awareness and social relationships
Availability of access to counseling services; responsible and compassionate engagement	Access to counseling services and responsible engagement
Societal economic conditions; facilitating the use of governmental subsidies for social-therapeutic costs	Societal economic resources

This section examines the qualitative findings related to the social dimension of jealousy reduction among high-conflict couples. Analysis of the interview data identified three principal themes in this dimension: “public awareness and social relationships,” “access to counseling services and responsible engagement,” and “societal economic resources.”

1) Public Awareness and Social Relationships

This principal theme focuses on the role of society and social interactions in the formation and management of marital jealousy and includes two subthemes: “public

awareness and societal pressure borne by women” and “effects of social and occupational relationships.”

Public awareness and societal pressure borne by women. Couples referred to the generally low level of public awareness regarding marital issues and to unjustified social judgments. They believed that the burden of jealousy is heavier on women and that society tends to hold women responsible for conflicts. Couple 9 noted: “Because the jealousy problem is with my husband, it makes a big difference. If I had the problem, there might have been conflict because I am a sensitive person... The pressure of jealousy is also greater on women.” They also pointed to the

role of superstition and labeling in intensifying these pressures.

Effects of social and occupational relationships.

Couples emphasized the role of surrounding others (extended family and workplace networks) in either minimizing or magnifying problems, as well as the positive or negative influence of others' comments on the relationship. They described the workplace as sometimes a source of stress and sometimes a source of motivation, and they highlighted the importance of coworker empathy and fairness in the occupational environment. They also considered the opportunity to connect with similar couples and mutually strengthen morale to be effective in reducing jealousy. Couple 15 described occupational challenges: "I'm a daily laborer. I don't have a stable job. Every day somewhere else. Insurance and these things—people trick you... I do my work; I don't know flattery. I'm straightforward. I'm not a liar either; I work conscientiously."

2) Access to Counseling Services and Responsible Engagement

This principal theme addresses the importance of access to specialized counselors and their role in improving relationships, and includes two subthemes: "availability of access to counseling services" and "responsible and compassionate engagement."

Availability of access to counseling services. Couples emphasized the need to facilitate access to counseling services by reducing costs and increasing availability. They believed that psychoeducation about marriage and sexual relationships—even prior to marriage—could prevent many problems and reduce wasted time and energy. Couple 5 highlighted the importance of awareness-raising: "Sometimes when we talk with people who have marital jealousy, I realize that many of them don't even know the core issue or their problem; they don't know the cause of jealousy or what strategies exist. These can be taught to couples. When they have awareness, it helps a lot."

3) Societal Economic Resources

This principal theme focuses on the impact of broader societal economic conditions on marital relationship health

and jealousy and includes two subthemes: "societal economic conditions" and "facilitating the use of governmental subsidies."

Societal economic conditions. Couples referred to the effects of economic stability or instability on motivation to improve marital life, as well as rising counseling costs. They believed financial pressures can negatively affect couple functioning and undermine the ability to cover living and treatment expenses. Couple 2 referred to financial hardship: "I calculated that our monthly expenses in these years are close to 40 million tomans. We borrow from others and then pay it back little by little."

Based on the findings of this study, marital jealousy is a four-dimensional variable encompassing individual, dyadic, familial, and social dimensions.

- **Individual dimension:** includes "conscious and optimistic living," "religious-spiritual worldview," "development of personal capacities," "use of healthy defense mechanisms," and "responsible confrontation with and acceptance."

- **Dyadic dimension:** includes "creating a happy and healthy marriage and maintaining it," "loving and intimate communication with each other," "acceptance of the spouse accompanied by compassion and commitment," "stress management and prudent maintenance of marital stability," "sexual enrichment," and "healthy engagement with the world of relationships outside the marital system."

- **Familial dimension:** includes "families' conscious and prudent coping with conflicts," "comprehensive family support and assistance," "health and positive relationships within families of origin," and "the role of families in couple adjustment and marital stability."

- **Social dimension:** includes "public awareness and social relationships," "access to counseling services and responsible engagement by family counselors," and "societal economic resources."

These four dimensions, within a circular causality-based perspective, exert reciprocal influences on one another and on the reduction of marital jealousy.

Figure 1

Relational Network of Dimensions and Themes Associated With the Reduction of Marital Jealousy Among High-Conflict Couples



4. Discussion

The present study developed a comprehensive four-dimensional model of marital jealousy reduction encompassing individual, dyadic, familial, and social domains. The findings demonstrate that jealousy reduction is not the product of isolated psychological change but rather emerges from a complex system of mutually reinforcing processes operating across multiple relational levels. This integrative structure is consistent with contemporary theoretical analyses that conceptualize jealousy as a multifactorial and systemic phenomenon rather than a unidimensional emotional reaction (Shcherbata & Borets, 2021; Ventura-León et al., 2025).

At the individual level, the results highlighted the central roles of conscious and optimistic living, religious-spiritual

worldview, personal capacity development, healthy defense mechanisms, and responsible acceptance of life events. These findings align strongly with empirical evidence demonstrating that emotional self-regulation, self-differentiation, self-esteem, and adaptive coping are critical protective factors against maladaptive jealousy (Deng et al., 2023; Fallahzadeh et al., 2022; Rahimi et al., 2021). Participants' emphasis on conscious awareness and optimistic meaning-making parallels the protective effects of dispositional mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal in jealousy regulation (De Cristofaro et al., 2023). Moreover, the role of spiritual and moral frameworks observed in this study complements cross-cultural findings indicating that belief systems provide emotional stability, enhance resilience, and facilitate relational commitment in the face of

jealousy-provoking stressors (Khazaei et al., 2022; Nesterova & Shchukina, 2024b).

The study further confirms that individual emotional resources directly influence relational outcomes. Participants with stronger emotional competence, secure attachment patterns, and mature defense mechanisms reported greater success in regulating jealousy. This result corroborates attachment-based models that identify insecure attachment—particularly anxious attachment—as a primary vulnerability factor for jealousy and relational distress (Chursina, 2023; Richter et al., 2022). In addition, the importance of self-differentiation observed in the present findings directly supports prior research demonstrating that poorly differentiated individuals experience heightened jealousy and impaired relational functioning (Deng et al., 2023; Fallahzadeh et al., 2022).

At the dyadic level, the findings reveal that jealousy reduction is deeply embedded in the quality of couple processes, including marital happiness, intimate communication, compassionate acceptance, stress management, sexual enrichment, and healthy engagement with external relationships. This strongly supports empirical studies showing that communication skills, emotional expression, and conflict management are fundamental to relationship satisfaction and jealousy regulation (Khazaei et al., 2022; Kovan, 2023). The present findings further extend this literature by demonstrating how these processes operate simultaneously and reciprocally rather than independently.

Participants' accounts of loving communication and emotional intimacy resonate with evidence that partner responsiveness and empathic engagement reduce insecurity and jealousy reactivity (David & Roberts, 2021; De Cristofaro et al., 2023). The centrality of compassionate acceptance and commitment reflects prior findings that emotional security and perceived partner reliability buffer against jealousy escalation (Arnocky et al., 2024; Richter et al., 2022). Moreover, the role of sexual enrichment observed in this study corresponds with evolutionary and relational perspectives linking sexual satisfaction with mate retention, emotional bonding, and reduced jealousy vulnerability (Edlund et al., 2022; Khazaei et al., 2022).

Importantly, the findings also demonstrate that couples who successfully reduced jealousy actively managed their engagement with external relational systems, particularly extended family, coworkers, and peers. This confirms that jealousy is not confined within the couple but is socially situated and responsive to external social inputs (Shchukina, 2024; Ventura-León et al., 2025). Prior research on cyber

jealousy and social media dynamics similarly illustrates how external stimuli can amplify or mitigate jealousy depending on relational coping resources (Kovan, 2023; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2020).

At the familial level, the results highlight that families of origin exert substantial influence on couples' jealousy regulation through constructive conflict responses, emotional and material support, healthy parental modeling, and firm commitment to marital stability. These findings are consistent with socio-psychological models emphasizing intergenerational transmission of relational patterns and emotional regulation strategies (Nesterova & Shchukina, 2024a, 2024b). Families that modeled respectful communication and cooperative problem-solving provided couples with cognitive-emotional templates that facilitated adaptive jealousy management, reinforcing earlier evidence linking parental relationship quality to adult attachment security and relational competence (Chursina, 2023; Richter et al., 2022).

The strong emphasis on family support observed in the present study also aligns with qualitative investigations demonstrating that social support networks mitigate relational stress and reduce the risk of jealousy-related violence (Aloyce et al., 2023; Kyegombe et al., 2022). When families actively encouraged marital perseverance and provided emotional reassurance, couples reported greater resilience in navigating jealousy-related tensions. Conversely, previous research shows that dysfunctional family climates and rigid cultural scripts intensify jealousy and relational instability (Nesterova & Shchukina, 2024a; Shchukina, 2024). The present findings thus offer empirical support for family-system interventions in jealousy reduction.

At the social level, the study identifies public awareness, access to counseling services, and socioeconomic conditions as decisive contextual factors shaping jealousy trajectories. Participants consistently described how societal judgments, gendered expectations, and economic pressures intensified jealousy and undermined emotional security. These findings correspond with large-scale cross-cultural research demonstrating that jealousy is strongly conditioned by social norms, gender ideologies, and structural inequalities (Shchukina, 2024; Valentova et al., 2020; Valentová et al., 2020). Economic instability, in particular, emerged as a powerful stressor limiting couples' access to mental health resources and increasing relational vulnerability, echoing prior evidence on the link between financial strain, relational

conflict, and emotional dysregulation (Khazaei et al., 2022; Kyegombe et al., 2022).

Access to affordable counseling and psychoeducational services was perceived as a key mechanism of jealousy reduction, supporting research demonstrating that targeted interventions can significantly improve communication, emotional awareness, and jealousy management (De Cristofaro et al., 2023; Kovan, 2023). The present study further reveals that when social structures facilitate help-seeking and normalize relational education, couples are better equipped to regulate jealousy adaptively. This systemic perspective mirrors contemporary network models of relational functioning, which emphasize the reciprocal interplay between individual, relational, familial, and societal influences (Ventura-León et al., 2025).

5. Conclusion

Collectively, these findings confirm that marital jealousy reduction is a circular and dynamic process, consistent with models of complex relational systems (Shcherbata & Borets, 2021; Ventura-León et al., 2025). Changes at one level—such as improved emotional regulation—generate positive feedback loops that strengthen couple communication, enhance family support, and promote healthier social engagement. Conversely, disruptions at any level may cascade across the system, reinforcing jealousy vulnerability. This integrative model provides a more accurate and clinically useful framework than traditional linear approaches that isolate individual predictors of jealousy (Arnocky et al., 2024; Richter et al., 2022).

6. Limitations & Suggestions

The present study relied on qualitative self-report data, which may be subject to recall bias and social desirability effects. The sample size and cultural context limit generalizability, and the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. In addition, participants' retrospective accounts may not fully capture the dynamic temporal evolution of jealousy regulation processes.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to examine causal pathways and temporal changes in jealousy reduction. Cross-cultural replications are necessary to test the universality of the four-dimensional model. Quantitative validation of the proposed framework using structural equation modeling or network analysis would further strengthen theoretical development.

Practitioners should adopt systemic intervention models that simultaneously address individual emotional skills, couple communication, family involvement, and social support structures. Psychoeducational programs on jealousy regulation should be integrated into premarital and marital counseling. Policy efforts should expand access to affordable relationship counseling services and promote public awareness campaigns that challenge stigmatizing narratives surrounding jealousy and marital conflict.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

H.S. conceptualized the study, designed the qualitative framework, and supervised the research process. M.G. conducted the interviews, managed data transcription, and coordinated the coding procedures. O.M. performed the thematic analysis, organized and interpreted the qualitative findings, and prepared the initial manuscript draft. All authors contributed to refining the theoretical model, critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version, and take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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