

# The Relationship Between Passion for Life and Passion and Indifference Toward Sexual Relations in Married Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the relationship between passion for life and both passion and indifference toward sexual relations among married students. The research employed a descriptive-correlational design. The study population consisted of all married students enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering at the Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch, during the 2023–2024 academic year. A sample of 98 married students was selected through convenient (non-random) sampling. Data were collected using the Emotional Orientation to Sexual Relations Questionnaire, which measures sexual fear, passion, and indifference, and the Passion for Life Questionnaire. Both instruments have demonstrated high internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.97 and 0.98, respectively. Data were analyzed using Spearman's non-parametric correlation test in SPSS version 26. The analysis revealed significant positive correlations between passion for life and both passion toward sexual relations ( $r = 0.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and indifference toward sexual relations ( $r = 0.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These results indicate that individuals reporting greater passion for life also tend to show stronger emotional engagement, but at the same time may experience ambivalent or indifferent sexual orientations. Gender differences were observed, with men generally reporting slightly higher levels of passion for life compared to women, though the correlations were consistent across genders. The findings suggest a complex interplay between general life enthusiasm and emotional approaches to sexual relationships. This study highlights the significant associations between passion for life and the emotional orientation toward sexual relations in married students. Understanding these links can inform psychological and marital counseling interventions aimed at enhancing both life engagement and sexual well-being. The results emphasize the importance of considering overall vitality and passion when addressing sexual relationship dynamics in couples.

**Keywords:** Passion for life; sexual passion; sexual indifference; emotional orientation; married students; marital relationship.

## 1. Introduction

Suicidal ideation and behaviors represent a pressing global health concern and remain leading causes of mortality among adolescents and young adults. Recent empirical evidence underscores that suicide risk is not only a function of psychopathology but also shaped by interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional regulation factors (Villacura-Herrera et al., 2025). Understanding how these elements interact is particularly vital for vulnerable groups such as transgender and gender diverse individuals, who are disproportionately exposed to psychosocial stressors and stigma (Hunter et al., 2021; Wyman Battalen et al., 2021).

The complexity of suicide risk has led to the development of socio-ecological and network models that highlight the interplay of proximal and distal influences. For example, hopelessness, poor emotion regulation, and limited coping skills have been identified as key factors underlying suicidal ideation in adolescent populations (Villacura-Herrera et al., 2025). Complementary research utilizing umbrella reviews grounded in the socio-ecological framework emphasizes that suicide emerges from multilevel risk factors, ranging from individual vulnerabilities to family and community contexts (Prades-Caballero et al., 2025). Together, these findings suggest that research examining suicidal ideation must adopt multidimensional approaches that incorporate psychological, social, and emotional dynamics.

One psychological process that has received increasing attention is fear of negative evaluation. Originally conceptualized as a core feature of social anxiety, this construct reflects the distress experienced when individuals anticipate judgment or disapproval from others. A growing body of longitudinal research demonstrates that fear of negative evaluation is bidirectionally associated with suicidal ideation, with interpersonal needs such as thwarted belongingness serving as mediating factors (Chen et al., 2024). This underscores the need to consider evaluative fears within suicide risk frameworks. Relatedly, ambivalence about emotional expression has also been found to interact with fear of evaluation and self-compassion, further shaping risk profiles for psychological distress (Huang & Wang, 2024).

Adolescence is a sensitive developmental period in which social evaluation becomes particularly salient, and difficulties in regulating emotional responses to perceived judgment may heighten vulnerability. Longitudinal analyses suggest that both fear of positive and negative evaluation are associated with maladaptive emotion regulation patterns,

ultimately contributing to psychopathology and self-destructive ideation (Tsarpalis-Fragkoulidis et al., 2024). In fact, impulsivity traits have been found to moderate the link between fear of negative evaluation and suicidal ideation among college students, pointing to individual differences in the strength of these associations (Lindquist et al., 2023).

The ability or inability to express emotions also plays a central role in suicide research. Emotional expressivity has been described as a double-edged sword: while open expression may reduce perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness, suppression of emotions can heighten distress and increase suicidal ideation (Kassing et al., 2022). Large-scale reviews of emotion regulation further suggest that strategies such as expressive suppression amplify depression and social anxiety, both of which are strongly tied to suicidal outcomes (Dryman & Heimberg, 2018). Emotion dysregulation more broadly has been confirmed as a robust predictor of suicidal risk across studies and populations (Rogante et al., 2024).

In gender and sexual minority populations, these mechanisms may be intensified due to the additional burden of minority stress. Experiences of stigma, discrimination, and enacted prejudice are consistently associated with poor emotion regulation and elevated distress. For example, daily experiences of enacted stigma among transgender and gender diverse young adults have been linked with heightened negative affect, and coping self-efficacy moderates these associations (Dyar et al., 2024). Similarly, large surveys of discrimination reveal strong associations with suicidal ideation severity, suicide attempts, and depressive symptoms among sexual and gender minority youth (Wyman Battalen et al., 2021). These findings point to the importance of integrating emotion regulation, minority stress, and interpersonal risk factors in understanding suicidal processes.

Gender dysphoria in particular has been identified as a high-risk condition for suicide. Content analyses of individuals living with gender dysphoria document profound physical and psychosocial challenges, including stigma, identity struggles, and barriers to care (Ghiasi et al., 2024). Epidemiological data show that the mean age of diagnosis is decreasing, reflecting both earlier identification and potentially earlier onset of distress (Sun et al., 2023). Systematic reviews highlight the alarming prevalence of suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviors in this population, especially among adolescents and young adults (Marconi et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2022). A global meta-analysis further revealed disproportionately high rates

of suicidal thoughts and attempts in transgender populations, confirming the elevated risk profile (Kohnepoushi et al., 2023).

Hospital-based studies underscore the severity of this issue, with gender dysphoria among pediatric and transitional-aged youth frequently documented in cases of suicidal behaviors requiring inpatient care (Faruki et al., 2023). Research on minority stress adds that trans and gender diverse adolescents face compounding risks related to social rejection and structural barriers (Hunter et al., 2021). Importantly, clinical outcomes also vary depending on gender-affirming interventions. A national database study indicated that gender-specific mental health risks persist even after gender-affirming surgery, pointing to the need for ongoing psychological support alongside medical transition (Lewis et al., 2025).

Parallel findings in non-binary youth reveal similarly heightened risks. A systematic review and meta-analysis confirmed that non-binary adolescents experience high rates of mental health challenges, including suicidal ideation, necessitating tailored intervention frameworks (Klinger et al., 2024). These data further align with broader reviews indicating that suicide among transgender and gender nonconforming populations represents a persistent and urgent public health challenge worldwide (Narang et al., 2018).

The role of cognitive and interpretive biases has also emerged in understanding suicidal pathways. Inflexible negative interpretations, for example, dampen positive emotions, contributing to depression and social anxiety, which in turn foster suicidal ideation (Everaert et al., 2020). Relatedly, psychotic experiences have been linked with difficulties in emotion regulation and higher suicidal ideation among general adolescent populations (Wastler & Núñez, 2022). These findings emphasize that rigid cognitive styles and perceptual disturbances can intensify risk beyond traditional affective predictors.

Conversely, protective factors such as self-compassion and gratitude have been found to mitigate suicide risk. Research in post-disaster contexts demonstrated that self-compassion reduced suicidal risk among adolescents by promoting gratitude and buffering against posttraumatic stress disorder (Liu et al., 2020). However, such resilience mechanisms may be undermined in contexts of gender dysphoria, minority stress, or rigid emotion suppression.

From a methodological perspective, the field has moved toward nuanced behavioral assessments and real-time indicators of suicide risk. Studies conducted in psychiatric

emergency departments show that behavioral measures can be effective in identifying youth at imminent risk (Shin et al., 2024). Similarly, socio-ecological umbrella reviews stress that adolescent suicide prevention must address family dynamics, community supports, and policy-level interventions in addition to individual vulnerabilities (Prades-Caballero et al., 2025).

The convergence of these findings suggests a multi-layered model of suicide in gender diverse populations. Emotional expressivity, fear of negative evaluation, and emotion regulation strategies interact with minority stress and structural inequities to shape trajectories of suicidal ideation. Expression and suppression of emotion influence feelings of belongingness and burdensomeness (Kassing et al., 2022), evaluative fears heighten vulnerability (Chen et al., 2024), and stigma-driven emotion dysregulation exacerbates distress (Dyar et al., 2024; Rogante et al., 2024). Simultaneously, resilience factors such as self-compassion (Liu et al., 2020) or adaptive coping (Villacura-Herrera et al., 2025) may provide partial buffers, though these are often insufficient in high-risk contexts.

In sum, the current body of literature reveals that suicidal ideation in individuals with gender dysphoria and gender diverse identities cannot be explained by psychopathology alone. Instead, it reflects the interplay of emotion dysregulation, evaluative fears, minority stress, and disrupted interpersonal needs.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design. The aim was to examine the relationship between passion for life and emotional orientation toward sexual relations among married students in the Faculty of Engineering at the Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch. The statistical population consisted of 130 married students enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering at the Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch, during the 2023–2024 academic year. Inclusion criteria were being a student and married, while exclusion criteria included unwillingness to answer the questions and providing incomplete or invalid responses to the questionnaires. Based on the study objectives and Morgan's sampling table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), the required sample size was determined to be 98 married students from the Faculty of Engineering at the Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch, selected through convenience (non-random) sampling.

## 2.2. Measures

The Emotional Orientation to Sexual Relations Questionnaire was developed by Abadian and Hassanzadeh (2017). It consists of 50 items and includes three components: fear of sexual relations (20 items: 1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19, 21, 23, 27, 29, 31, 33, 39, 41, 43, 47, and 49), passion for sexual relations (20 items: 2, 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 16, 18, 22, 24, 26, 28, 32, 34, 36, 38, 42, 44, 46, and 48), and indifference toward sexual relations (10 items: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, and 50). The internal consistency reliability of this instrument was reported with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .97.

The Passion for Life Questionnaire was developed by Hassanzadeh (2015). This instrument contains 50 items, and its internal consistency reliability was reported with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .98.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The data in this study were measured on an ordinal scale. For ranking and categorizing the research data, a Likert scale was used. In the Likert scale, respondents are not merely asked to express an opinion on a single point; rather, they choose from a set of ordered response options to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement.

## 3. Findings and Results

The mean score of the variable passion for life for all respondents, men, and women was 205.57, 210.30, and 202.20, respectively. These scores indicate that the passion for life score was higher among men compared to women.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of the Four Key Research Indicators*

Indicator	Group	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Passion for Life	Total	205.57	217.50	39.93	69	246	-1.76	2.93
	Men	210.30	222.50	42.80	81	246	-1.75	2.56
	Women	202.20	209.50	37.78	69	246	-1.94	4.00
Passion for Sexual Relations	Total	72.91	78.50	19.29	21	96	-1.16	0.67
	Men	77.08	81.00	16.75	27	96	-1.66	2.71
	Women	69.93	75.00	20.55	21	96	-0.90	0.05
Indifference to Sexual Relations	Total	34.90	37.50	13.56	0	50	-0.77	-0.45
	Men	36.70	41.50	12.64	8	50	-0.81	-0.62
	Women	33.61	36.50	14.15	0	50	-0.72	-0.45
Emotional Orientation	Total	174.38	185.00	53.97	59	246	-0.74	-0.42
	Men	179.63	187.50	51.05	59	246	-0.82	0.02
	Women	170.63	181.00	56.11	59	245	-0.69	-0.62

Based on the data obtained from Table 2, the significance level of the Spearman correlation test between the variables passion for life and passion toward sexual relations among married couples was 0.00, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no relationship between the two

variables was rejected, and the research hypothesis was confirmed. It can thus be stated that there is a significant relationship between passion for life and both passion and indifference toward sexual relations among married couples.

**Table 2**

*Spearman's Correlation Coefficient*

Variable	Passion for Life	Fear of Sexual Relations	Passion for Sexual Relations	Indifference to Sexual Relations	Emotional Orientation
Passion for Life	1.00	.35	.33	.36	.38
Significance Level	—	.00	.00	.00	.00
N	96	96	96	96	96
Passion for Sexual Relations			1.00	.79	.87
Significance Level			—	.00	.00
N			96	96	96

Indifference to Sexual Relations	1.00	.93
Significance Level	—	.00
N	96	96
Emotional Orientation		1.00
Significance Level		—
N		96

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between passion for life and emotional orientation toward sexual relations—specifically sexual passion and sexual indifference—among married students. The findings indicated that passion for life was significantly and positively correlated with sexual passion, suggesting that individuals who report greater enthusiasm and motivation for living also show higher levels of interest and engagement in their sexual relationships. Interestingly, passion for life also showed a significant positive relationship with sexual indifference, implying a more complex and nuanced interplay between general life enthusiasm and sexual emotional orientation. These results reflect the multifaceted nature of human sexuality and the psychological constructs that underlie it.

The positive association between passion for life and sexual passion aligns with theories of vitality and self-expansion, which suggest that individuals with higher life enthusiasm experience a greater drive to connect deeply and meaningfully with their partners (Sheets, 2014; Vallerand, 2010). Passion for life is characterized by resilience, optimism, and a proactive engagement with challenges, all of which can translate into relational energy and openness to intimacy (Hassanzadeh, 2022; Hassanzadeh & Talebi, 2023). This is consistent with research showing that couples with greater emotional energy and hope report stronger sexual desire and relational satisfaction (Mallory, 2022). In line with these findings, life therapy interventions have been shown to increase life enthusiasm and indirectly improve intimacy and sexual fulfillment by reinforcing positive emotional outlook and self-efficacy (Hassanzadeh, 2022).

Furthermore, the observed relationship between passion for life and sexual passion can be understood through the lens of emotional regulation. Individuals who are more engaged with life are also more likely to have adaptive emotion regulation strategies, which allow them to manage stress, communicate openly, and express affection in intimate contexts (Eldesouky & Gross, 2019). This echoes findings from studies showing that emotion regulation

competencies predict both self- and partner-rated marital satisfaction (Riahi et al., 2020). Couples who regulate their emotional states effectively can maintain a healthy sexual dynamic, even during times of relational strain or external stress (Namdar et al., 2019). Moreover, sexual communication—a key dimension of relationship satisfaction—tends to be more effective among partners who possess emotional awareness and self-control (Mallory, 2022).

The unexpected positive association between passion for life and sexual indifference is more complex and invites deeper reflection. One interpretation could be that individuals with high life enthusiasm may experience shifting priorities; when life is rich with diverse pursuits, professional goals, or personal growth activities, sexual engagement may temporarily lose salience without necessarily indicating relational dissatisfaction. Previous studies have documented that life stage transitions, personal development goals, and stress management demands can influence sexual focus and lead to intermittent emotional distance (Falola & Salau, 2018). Another possible explanation lies in the nuanced nature of sexual indifference. Indifference does not always signal avoidance; it can also reflect emotional regulation strategies to cope with relational or personal stressors while preserving overall life satisfaction (Sohrabi et al., 2018).

These findings also resonate with the cognitive and belief-oriented perspectives on sexual functioning (Connors & Halligan, 2015). When individuals experience robust life enthusiasm, they may reinterpret sexual engagement as one of several meaningful domains rather than the central marker of relational vitality. This reinterpretation might appear as indifference but could actually be a flexible re-prioritization of intimacy needs in response to life demands. Schema-focused studies have shown that cognitive flexibility and acceptance help individuals adapt their sexual engagement while maintaining relationship stability (Kashani & Kashani, 2019). Similarly, coping with stress and regulating priorities may create temporary fluctuations in sexual interest without undermining long-term marital satisfaction (He et al., 2024).



The present findings should also be considered within the broader literature on sexual health and well-being. The study population—married students—faces unique developmental and contextual challenges such as academic stress, future planning, and balancing work–life demands, all of which can shape both life enthusiasm and sexual orientation (Moghtaderi Esfahani et al., 2024). Poor sleep and stress have been linked to sexual dysfunction, while resilience and hope appear to buffer these effects (He et al., 2024; Moghtaderi Esfahani et al., 2024). Our results align with this view, suggesting that passion for life may simultaneously foster resilience (enhancing sexual passion) and enable adaptive coping that can manifest as temporary indifference when resources are allocated to other life areas.

Cultural and societal factors also contextualize the findings. In cultures where discussing sexual needs remains sensitive, passion for life might manifest more strongly in personal or professional aspirations, while sexual indifference could emerge as a byproduct of suppressed sexual communication (Shafiei, 2016). Additionally, evolving gender roles and shifting marital expectations may affect how passion and indifference interplay in modern couples. As marriage increasingly encompasses partnership, shared growth, and individual self-actualization, couples may experience more fluid sexual dynamics over time (Li & Samp, 2021).

From a clinical perspective, the results reinforce the value of interventions that target both life vitality and sexual health. Enhancing passion for life through therapeutic models such as life therapy and resilience training could indirectly improve sexual connection by fostering hope, emotional energy, and self-worth (Hassanzadeh & Talebi, 2023). At the same time, addressing sexual indifference requires a nuanced approach that differentiates between harmful disengagement and adaptive reprioritization. Psychologists should explore clients' broader life satisfaction and emotional resources to understand their sexual orientation changes rather than assuming pathology.

These findings also complement recent evidence that quality of life and sexual desire are intricately connected, especially in populations facing health or aging-related challenges (Rocamora-Pérez et al., 2025). Even among young and middle-aged adults, investing in overall life enthusiasm could be a protective factor for maintaining intimacy across life transitions. Additionally, previous work suggests that effective sexual communication and mutual understanding can mitigate the risks of sexual dissatisfaction when life stress temporarily reduces desire (Mallory, 2022).

In summary, the study contributes to a more integrative understanding of marital well-being by linking passion for life with both sexual passion and indifference. The results support existing theoretical frameworks of vitality and self-expansion while offering new insights into the non-linear ways life enthusiasm can shape sexual orientation in intimate relationships.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design prevents any causal inference about the relationship between passion for life and sexual orientation variables. Longitudinal studies are necessary to determine whether increasing life enthusiasm leads to changes in sexual passion and indifference over time or whether these relationships are bidirectional. Second, the study relied solely on self-report questionnaires, which are subject to social desirability bias and may not fully capture participants' internal experiences, especially in culturally sensitive areas such as sexuality. Third, the sample was limited to married students from a single academic institution, restricting the generalizability of the findings to other populations, age groups, and cultural contexts. Moreover, the relatively small sample size may have limited the ability to detect more subtle patterns, such as gender-specific dynamics or interaction effects between life passion and stress.

Future research should consider longitudinal and mixed-method designs to capture the dynamic relationship between life enthusiasm and sexual emotional orientation over time. Incorporating qualitative interviews could provide richer insights into the subjective meaning of sexual passion and indifference, particularly in culturally nuanced contexts. Expanding the sample to include diverse populations across different life stages, cultural settings, and relationship durations would improve the external validity of the findings. Additionally, integrating biological or physiological measures such as hormonal indicators or sleep patterns could enhance understanding of how life vitality interacts with sexual functioning. Examining moderating variables like personality traits, resilience, or partner communication could also clarify under which conditions passion for life strengthens sexual desire or, conversely, leads to adaptive indifference.

In practical terms, the findings highlight the importance of holistic approaches in marital counseling and sexual therapy. Practitioners can integrate life-affirming interventions aimed at enhancing purpose, optimism, and resilience alongside evidence-based sexual communication

training. Psychoeducational programs for couples can focus on understanding how general well-being and life passion influence intimacy, helping partners reframe temporary sexual disengagement without fear or conflict. Additionally, promoting open dialogue about sexual needs and emotional states can reduce the stigma and misinterpretations surrounding sexual indifference. Tailored workshops for young couples, especially those balancing academic and marital roles, may strengthen both relational and sexual satisfaction while supporting broader life goals.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### 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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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

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

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