

Developing a Mindfulness Model With the Mediating Role of Self-Compassion in the Marital Adjustment of Women and Men in Tehran

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

Section:

Family and Couple Therapy

How to cite this article:

Taghizade Shul, Z., Mirhashemi, M., & Bagheri, N. (2027). Developing a Mindfulness Model With the Mediating Role of Self-Compassion in the Marital Adjustment of Women and Men in Tehran. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 5, 1-14.

<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.psynexus.5846>



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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to model the relationships among psychological capital, mindfulness, self-compassion, and marital adjustment in women and men residing in Tehran. The statistical population consisted of married individuals who attended neighborhood community centers in Tehran during 2024–2026. Based on the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2005) and considering the number of study components, the required sample size was estimated to be 276 participants, who were selected through multistage random sampling. Data were collected using the Psychological Capital Questionnaire developed by Luthans et al. (2007), the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), Neff's Self-Compassion Scale (2003), and Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976). Path analysis was conducted in AMOS to estimate the direct and indirect effects of the variables. Overall, 44% of the variance in marital adjustment and 71% of the variance in self-compassion were explained by the variables included in the model, whereas approximately 56% of the variance in marital adjustment was attributable to variables outside the model. The results indicated that nonjudging, nonreactivity, and describing had direct effects on marital adjustment. In addition, nonreactivity and nonjudging had significant indirect effects on marital adjustment through the mediating variable of self-compassion. Acting with awareness had no significant effect, whereas describing exerted only a direct effect. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the marital adjustment of women and men is not merely a secondary phenomenon resulting from positive life experiences, personal characteristics, or similar factors; rather, it should be examined from a comprehensive and interactional perspective.

Keywords: *psychological capital, mindfulness, self-compassion, marital adjustment, women and men*

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most significant interpersonal relationships in adulthood and provides an important context for emotional security, intimacy, social support, identity development, and psychological well-being. The quality of the marital relationship can influence not only spouses' individual functioning but also the stability

of the family system and the psychological climate in which other family members live. A well-adjusted marital relationship is generally characterized by mutual understanding, emotional closeness, constructive communication, agreement on important matters, effective management of differences, and a satisfactory balance between individual and shared needs. Conversely, persistent tension, unresolved conflict, emotional disengagement, and

ineffective communication may undermine the quality and continuity of the marital bond. Marital adjustment is therefore considered a multidimensional construct that reflects the extent to which spouses experience satisfaction, consensus, cohesion, affection, and functional compatibility within their relationship. Research has consistently shown that marital adjustment is closely associated with psychological health, whereas poor marital adjustment may be accompanied by emotional distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, interpersonal dissatisfaction, and reduced quality of life (Barry et al., 2023).

Marital adjustment should not be regarded as a fixed characteristic that couples either possess or lack. Rather, it is a dynamic and evolving process shaped by the interaction of personal characteristics, cognitive and emotional capacities, communication patterns, environmental pressures, and relational experiences. Spouses continuously interpret each other's behavior, regulate their emotional responses, negotiate needs, and respond to daily stressors. Consequently, even relatively minor cognitive or emotional tendencies can accumulate over time and affect the overall quality of the marital relationship. Contemporary relationship science therefore emphasizes the study of mechanisms through which intrapersonal resources are translated into constructive interpersonal behaviors. This approach has expanded couple research beyond the exclusive examination of conflict and dysfunction toward the identification of psychological strengths that may protect relationships and promote resilience (Fincham & Beach, 2022).

The continuity of marital adjustment is particularly dependent on the psychological functioning of both partners. Mental health problems may impair empathy, emotional availability, communication, and the ability to respond flexibly to a spouse's needs. Longitudinal evidence suggests that the psychological health of partners is not merely an individual matter but may contribute to the maintenance or deterioration of marital adjustment over time. When one or both partners experience persistent emotional distress, they may become more reactive, withdrawn, critical, or unable to engage in collaborative problem-solving. In contrast, psychological stability may facilitate patience, responsiveness, and constructive conflict management. Accordingly, the study of marital adjustment requires attention to psychological processes that enable individuals to remain emotionally balanced and relationally engaged during stressful interpersonal situations (Stasik-O'Brien et al., 2022).

Family interactions also play a central role in the expression and regulation of emotion. Earlier family-based research has demonstrated that psychological education and structured family interventions can modify emotional expression and improve interactional functioning in families facing substantial psychological difficulties. Such findings support the broader proposition that family relationships are responsive to changes in awareness, communication, emotional regulation, and interpersonal understanding (Mollazadeh et al., 2002). Although marital adjustment is influenced by social and contextual factors, spouses' internal psychological capacities may substantially determine how they perceive relational events and how effectively they respond to them. Among the psychological variables that have received increasing attention in this regard are mindfulness and self-compassion.

Mindfulness is commonly defined as the capacity to attend to present-moment experience with openness, awareness, and a nonjudgmental attitude. It involves purposeful attention to internal and external experiences without becoming automatically absorbed in habitual interpretations or impulsive reactions. The contemporary psychological study of mindfulness has evolved from a relatively narrow focus on attentional training to a broader examination of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal processes. Mindfulness is now conceptualized as a multidimensional capacity involving observing experiences, describing internal states, acting with awareness, refraining from judgment, and remaining nonreactive toward thoughts and feelings (Brown et al., 2015). These dimensions may be particularly relevant to marital relationships because intimate interactions frequently activate strong emotions, personal expectations, and automatic interpretations.

Observing refers to noticing internal and external experiences, including thoughts, bodily sensations, emotions, and environmental cues. Describing involves the ability to identify and label internal experiences accurately. Acting with awareness refers to engaging consciously in ongoing activities rather than behaving automatically or without attention. Nonjudging reflects an accepting stance toward one's thoughts and emotions, whereas nonreactivity involves allowing internal experiences to arise and pass without immediately responding to them. Together, these capacities may help individuals pause before reacting, distinguish between immediate emotional impulses and deliberate behavior, and communicate their experiences more clearly. Research conducted in Iran has shown that

components of mindfulness can explain meaningful variation in psychological well-being, suggesting that mindfulness may function as an important psychological resource in emotional and interpersonal adjustment (Ahmadvand et al., 2012).

Within marital relationships, mindfulness may influence adjustment through several complementary mechanisms. First, mindful individuals may be more capable of attending to their spouse's verbal and nonverbal signals. Second, they may recognize their own emotional activation before it develops into criticism, defensiveness, or withdrawal. Third, a nonjudgmental attitude may reduce rigid interpretations of a partner's behavior and create space for more balanced appraisals. Fourth, nonreactivity may help spouses tolerate discomfort during disagreement without escalating the conflict. Finally, acting with awareness may increase intentionality in communication and reduce automatic relational behaviors. These mechanisms indicate that mindfulness is not limited to private awareness but may directly shape interpersonal responsiveness.

Empirical studies have increasingly supported the relationship between mindfulness and the quality of romantic relationships. Mindfulness has been associated with better emotion regulation, greater empathy, and higher romantic relationship quality. Emotion regulation may help partners manage anger, disappointment, jealousy, and anxiety, whereas empathy enables them to understand and respond to each other's emotional experiences more accurately. Thus, mindfulness may improve relationship quality partly because it strengthens emotional and interpersonal competencies that are essential for intimacy and constructive conflict resolution (Lee et al., 2022). Similarly, studies of married couples have found significant relationships between mindfulness and marital satisfaction, indicating that greater awareness and psychological presence may facilitate more satisfying relational experiences (Hamidpour et al., 2024).

The association between mindfulness and marital functioning may also be mediated by the ability to understand another person's mental states. Theory of mind refers to the capacity to infer the intentions, beliefs, emotions, and perspectives of others. In marital relationships, this ability can reduce misunderstandings and help spouses interpret behavior within its emotional and contextual framework rather than relying on hostile or overly personal assumptions. Evidence suggests that theory of mind may mediate the relationship between mindfulness and marital satisfaction, implying that mindful awareness may

support marital functioning by improving the accuracy and flexibility with which spouses understand each other (Hamidpour et al., 2024). Marital empathy has likewise been identified as a mediating mechanism between mindfulness and marital satisfaction. Mindfulness may enable individuals to remain attentive and receptive during interactions, while empathy translates this awareness into compassionate and responsive engagement with the spouse (Rajabi et al., 2022).

Interpersonal mindfulness is especially relevant to the study of marital relationships because it extends mindful awareness into direct interaction with others. Interpersonally mindful individuals may listen more attentively, remain aware of their emotional reactions, and respond with greater acceptance during relational exchanges. Recent findings among Iranian married individuals indicate that interpersonal mindfulness can moderate the association between marital conflict and marital intimacy. In other words, mindfulness may reduce the damaging effect of conflict on emotional closeness by helping spouses respond to disagreement in a less reactive and more constructive manner (Dehghani-Doulatabadi et al., 2025). This evidence is particularly important because conflict itself is not necessarily destructive; rather, the way partners interpret and manage conflict largely determines its consequences. Mindfulness may therefore function as a protective resource that allows couples to experience disagreement without a corresponding collapse in intimacy.

Intervention research also suggests that mindfulness is not merely correlated with marital functioning but may contribute to its improvement. Mindfulness-based interventions have been reported to enhance marital satisfaction by increasing present-moment attention, reducing automatic emotional reactions, and promoting healthier patterns of communication. When couples learn to observe thoughts and emotions without immediately acting on them, they may be better able to interrupt repetitive cycles of blame, criticism, defensiveness, and avoidance. Such interventions may also enhance acceptance of relational differences and help partners remain psychologically engaged during difficult conversations (Travis et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the effect of mindfulness on marital adjustment may not always be direct. Some individuals may possess a degree of present-moment awareness but continue to respond to their own perceived failures with harsh self-criticism. This possibility highlights the importance of self-compassion as a potential mechanism linking mindfulness to marital functioning.

Self-compassion refers to a caring, understanding, and balanced response toward oneself during experiences of failure, inadequacy, suffering, or emotional distress. It comprises three interrelated components: self-kindness rather than self-judgment, common humanity rather than isolation, and mindfulness rather than overidentification. Self-kindness involves responding to personal difficulty with warmth and understanding instead of criticism. Common humanity reflects recognition that suffering and imperfection are universal aspects of human experience. Mindfulness in the context of self-compassion involves maintaining balanced awareness of painful thoughts and emotions without suppressing them or becoming overwhelmed by them (Neff & Beretvas, 2013).

Self-compassion should not be confused with self-pity, passivity, or avoidance of responsibility. A self-compassionate response acknowledges personal errors and painful emotions while reducing destructive shame and excessive self-criticism. This balanced stance may promote emotional stability and make it easier for individuals to reflect on their behavior without becoming defensive. In marital contexts, such capacities are highly relevant. A spouse who can acknowledge mistakes without collapsing into shame may be more willing to apologize, repair relational harm, and remain open to feedback. Similarly, an individual who interprets personal and relational difficulties as part of common human experience may be less likely to experience conflict as evidence of complete personal failure or relational hopelessness.

Self-compassion has been directly associated with healthier romantic relationship functioning. Individuals with higher self-compassion tend to demonstrate greater emotional connectedness, acceptance, autonomy, and constructive behavior in intimate relationships. They may be less controlling and less verbally aggressive and may show a greater capacity to balance their own needs with those of their partner. Self-compassion may also reduce defensiveness because individuals who do not rely exclusively on external validation can respond to criticism with greater emotional security (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). These characteristics suggest that self-compassion may support marital adjustment by improving both intrapersonal regulation and interpersonal conduct.

Meta-analytic findings have further demonstrated a positive relationship between self-compassion and interpersonal functioning. Self-compassion appears to be associated with greater empathy, social connectedness, relationship satisfaction, and adaptive responses to

interpersonal stress. It may reduce emotional overidentification and help individuals avoid transferring internal distress into relational hostility or withdrawal (Zessin et al., 2020). This is important in marriage because unresolved self-directed criticism can become externally expressed through blame, hypersensitivity, demands for reassurance, or avoidance. By reducing these reactions, self-compassion may create a more secure psychological foundation for intimacy.

The relevance of self-compassion to marital conflict is also supported by studies linking it to mental health. Self-compassion may reduce the psychological effects of conflict by protecting individuals against excessive rumination, shame, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Research has proposed mediation models in which self-compassion is associated with better mental health and lower marital conflict, suggesting that the ability to respond compassionately to one's own distress may alter the way relational difficulties are experienced and managed (Zhao et al., 2023). A self-compassionate person may still experience hurt or anger but may be less likely to magnify the event, define the self entirely by the conflict, or react in a manner that intensifies the disagreement.

Self-compassion-based interventions have also shown promise across clinical and nonclinical populations. Structured interventions typically include exercises designed to cultivate self-kindness, balanced awareness, acceptance of imperfection, and a sense of common humanity. Reviews of such interventions indicate that they may reduce self-criticism and psychological distress while increasing emotional resilience, well-being, and adaptive coping (Neff & Germer, 2023). These outcomes have clear implications for marital adjustment because emotionally resilient individuals are generally more capable of tolerating relational frustration, communicating needs, and participating in the repair of interpersonal ruptures.

Mindfulness and self-compassion are theoretically distinct but closely interconnected. Mindfulness provides the awareness necessary to recognize emotional pain, automatic thoughts, and habitual reactions, whereas self-compassion determines the quality of the response to those experiences. Awareness without compassion may leave an individual fully conscious of personal shortcomings but still trapped in harsh self-judgment. Conversely, compassion without sufficient awareness may be difficult to activate because the individual may not clearly recognize emotional needs or maladaptive reactions. Self-compassion may therefore represent a mechanism through which mindfulness is

translated into healthier emotional and relational functioning.

The mindfulness component of self-compassion is especially important in this proposed pathway. When individuals observe painful experiences without overidentifying with them, they may become less reactive and more capable of responding deliberately. Nonjudging may reduce self-criticism, while nonreactivity may provide psychological distance from intense emotions. Describing may enable individuals to identify and communicate their internal experiences accurately. Acting with awareness may reduce automatic behaviors, although its effect may depend on whether mindful attention is accompanied by warmth and acceptance. These theoretical links suggest that different facets of mindfulness may have distinct direct and indirect relationships with marital adjustment.

Psychological capital may provide an additional conceptual context for understanding these relationships. Psychological capital generally refers to positive psychological resources that support adaptation, perseverance, and effective functioning. Although the present model focuses specifically on mindfulness, self-compassion, and marital adjustment, positive psychological capacities may influence how individuals cope with marital stress and maintain hope, flexibility, and relational engagement. Relationship science increasingly recognizes that the quality of marital functioning depends not only on the absence of pathology but also on the presence of strengths that enable couples to recover from conflict and sustain intimacy (Fincham & Beach, 2022). Mindfulness and self-compassion can be viewed as such strengths because they promote awareness, emotional balance, acceptance, and adaptive responding.

The interaction between mindfulness and self-compassion may be particularly important in culturally specific marital contexts. Social expectations, family involvement, gender roles, economic pressure, and cultural norms concerning emotional expression may shape how married women and men experience and manage relational problems. In Iranian families, marriage is often embedded within broader kinship and social networks, and spouses may face multiple interpersonal expectations. Therefore, examining psychological variables among married individuals in Tehran may provide valuable evidence regarding processes that support marital adaptation within a complex urban and cultural environment. Previous Iranian studies have demonstrated associations among mindfulness, empathy, marital satisfaction, intimacy, and psychological

well-being (Ahmadvand et al., 2012; Dehghani-Doulatabadi et al., 2025; Hamidpour et al., 2024; Rajabi et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the simultaneous examination of specific mindfulness facets, self-compassion, and marital adjustment remains limited.

Another important issue concerns the multidimensional nature of mindfulness. Treating mindfulness as a single global score may conceal differences in the roles of its components. Observing may increase awareness of relational cues but may not necessarily improve adjustment unless it is accompanied by nonjudgment and emotional balance. Describing may improve communication by helping spouses articulate needs and feelings. Nonjudging may reduce critical appraisals of the self and partner. Nonreactivity may prevent emotional escalation, and acting with awareness may reduce automatic interpersonal behavior. Examining these facets separately may therefore provide a more precise explanation of how mindfulness is related to marital adjustment.

Similarly, self-compassion should be understood as a multidimensional construct containing both adaptive and maladaptive poles. Self-kindness, common humanity, and mindful awareness may promote emotional stability, whereas self-judgment, isolation, and overidentification may intensify distress. Isolation may be particularly harmful because it can cause individuals to perceive marital difficulties as unique, shameful, or impossible to resolve. Overidentification may lead spouses to become overwhelmed by negative emotions, while self-judgment may increase defensiveness and sensitivity to criticism. The overall level of self-compassion may therefore influence whether awareness of marital problems leads to constructive reflection or emotional escalation.

Although existing studies support associations among mindfulness, self-compassion, mental health, empathy, and relationship quality, several research gaps remain. Many studies have examined mindfulness or self-compassion independently, whereas fewer have tested integrated models that clarify direct and indirect pathways. In addition, much of the available research has focused on marital satisfaction rather than the broader construct of marital adjustment, which includes consensus, cohesion, affectional expression, and satisfaction. Studies have also frequently used overall mindfulness scores and have not differentiated the potential contributions of observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudging, and nonreactivity. A path-analytic model can address these limitations by estimating the direct

effects of mindfulness facets on marital adjustment and their indirect effects through self-compassion.

Clarifying these relationships has practical importance. When self-compassion mediates the effect of a mindfulness facet on marital adjustment, interventions may need to go beyond attentional awareness and explicitly cultivate self-kindness, common humanity, and balanced emotional processing. By contrast, when a mindfulness facet has a direct association with marital adjustment, interventions may benefit from emphasizing the corresponding attentional or behavioral skill. Such distinctions can support the development of more targeted couple counseling and psychological education programs. They may also help clinicians understand why some individuals who demonstrate awareness of their emotions continue to experience relational problems: awareness may not be sufficient when it is accompanied by self-judgment, isolation, or emotional overidentification.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to develop and test a model of the relationships among mindfulness, self-compassion, psychological capital, and marital adjustment, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of self-compassion in the association between mindfulness and marital adjustment among married women and men in Tehran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of its purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of its data-collection method. The statistical population consisted of married individuals who attended neighborhood community centers in Tehran during 2025–2026. Because structural equation modeling methodology is substantially similar to multivariate regression in certain respects, the principles used to determine sample size in multivariate regression analysis may also be applied to structural equation modeling. In the present study, based on the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2005) and considering the number of study components, the required sample size was estimated to be 276 participants. It should be noted that the recommended minimum sample size for structural equation modeling is generally no fewer than 200 participants. Accordingly, 276 individuals were selected from neighborhood community centers in Tehran through multistage random sampling. First, Tehran was geographically divided into four areas: north, south, east, and west. Two municipal districts were

then randomly selected from each area. In the next stage, four districts were randomly selected from the eight selected districts, and ultimately Districts 1 and 4 were included in the study. The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), Neff's Self-Compassion Scale (2003), and Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976) were distributed among the participants. Participants were assured that their information would remain confidential. To examine model fit, three categories of indices—absolute, comparative, and parsimonious fit indices—were calculated. Descriptive statistical indices were initially used for the preliminary analysis of the data, after which the results were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

2.2. Measures

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire is a 39-item self-report measure developed by Baer et al. (2006) through the integration of items from the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory, the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003), and the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (Baer & Smith, 2004). Baer et al. (2006) conducted an exploratory factor analysis using a sample of university students. The resulting factors were labeled Observing, Acting With Awareness, Nonjudging of Inner Experience, Describing, and Nonreactivity to Inner Experience. Respondents indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or very rarely true) to 5 (very often or always true). Total scores range from 39 to 195. The scores for the subscales may be summed to obtain an overall score, with higher scores indicating greater mindfulness. The internal consistency of the factors was reported to be satisfactory, with alpha coefficients ranging from .75 for Nonreactivity to .91 for Describing. In an Iranian validation and reliability study, the test–retest correlations for the FFMQ ranged from $r = .57$ for Nonjudging to $r = .84$ for Observing. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were also acceptable, ranging from $\alpha = .55$ for Nonreactivity to $\alpha = .83$ for Describing (Ahmadvand, 2011).

Neff's Self-Compassion Scale (2003) was used in the present study. The scale consists of 26 items and measures the positive and negative aspects of the three principal dimensions of self-compassion: self-kindness, consisting of five items, versus self-judgment, consisting of four items; common humanity, consisting of four items, versus isolation, consisting of four items; and mindfulness, consisting of four items, versus overidentification, consisting of four items. The items are rated on a 5-point

Likert scale ranging from almost never to almost always. The overall self-compassion score is calculated by averaging the scores of the six components after reverse-scoring the negative subscales. In the study by Khosravi et al. (2013), Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale was .76. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Overidentification subscales were .81, .79, .84, .85, .80, and .83, respectively. The validity of the questionnaire was also reported to be satisfactory.

Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976) was used to collect data on marital adjustment. This 32-item instrument assesses the quality of the marital relationship from the perspective of either spouse or both members of a cohabiting couple. The instrument was developed for two purposes. First, its total score may be used to measure general satisfaction within an intimate relationship. Second, factor analysis has demonstrated that the scale assesses four dimensions of the relationship: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression. The scale uses three different response formats. Higher scores indicate a better and more adjusted marital relationship, and scoring is based on Likert-type response options. The total scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .96. The internal consistency

coefficients of the subscales have ranged from good to excellent (Spanier, 1982). In Iran, the scale was standardized by Amoozgar and Hossein-Nejad in 1995. Its test-retest reliability was evaluated over a 10-day interval in a sample of 120 couples, and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to assess the association between the two administrations. The test-retest correlation coefficient for the total scores was reported to be .86.

2.3. Data Analysis

After data collection, participants' questionnaire responses were analyzed using structural equation modeling in SPSS and AMOS.

3. Findings and Results

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis presented in Table 1 indicated a significant positive relationship between marital adjustment and the Describing facet, $r = .419, p < .005$. In addition, marital adjustment was positively and significantly associated with Acting With Awareness, $r = .480, p < .005$. Marital adjustment was also significantly and positively associated with Nonjudging, $r = .509, p < .005$, and Nonreactivity, $r = .520, p < .005$.

Table 1

Correlation Coefficients Between Mindfulness Facets and Marital Adjustment

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Observing	—					
2. Describing	.112*	—				
3. Acting With Awareness	.168*	.680**	—			
4. Nonjudging	.068	.431**	.623**	—		
5. Nonreactivity	.154*	.554**	.618**	.573**	—	
6. Marital Adjustment	.085	.419**	.480**	.509**	.520**	1.00

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis examining the dimensions of self-compassion and marital adjustment are presented in Table 2. A significant positive relationship was found between marital adjustment and Self-Kindness, $r = .614, p < .005$. In addition, marital adjustment was positively and significantly related to Self-Judgment, $r =$

$.399, p < .005$. Marital adjustment was also positively and significantly associated with Mindfulness, $r = .545, p < .005$; Overidentification, $r = .685, p < .005$; and Common Humanity, $r = .583, p < .005$. A significant negative relationship was found between marital adjustment and Isolation, $r = -.518, p < .005$.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients Between the Dimensions of Self-Compassion and Marital Adjustment

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-Kindness	—						
2. Self-Judgment	.431**	—					
3. Mindfulness	.543*	.347**	—				
4. Overidentification	.575**	.304**	.527**	—			
5. Common Humanity	.607**	.367**	.506**	.548**	—		
6. Isolation	-.429**	-.318**	-.550**	-.472**	-.414**	—	
7. Marital Adjustment	.614**	.399**	.545**	.685**	.583**	-.518**	—

Given the confirmation of significant relationships among the study variables—marital adjustment, mindfulness, psychological capital, and self-compassion—it

was possible to examine the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationships of mindfulness and psychological capital with marital adjustment.

Table 3

Variance Explained by the Model

Dependent Variable	Explained Variance
Marital Adjustment	.441
Self-Compassion	.715

As shown in Table 3, 44% of the variance in marital adjustment and 71% of the variance in self-compassion were explained by the variables included in the model.

Approximately 56% of the variance in marital adjustment was therefore attributable to variables outside the model.

Table 4

Significance of the Direct Unstandardized Coefficients Between the Variables Included in the Model

Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>p</i>	Path Label
Nonreactivity	Marital Adjustment	.150	.048	2.687	.007	D1
Acting With Awareness	Marital Adjustment	.009	.050	.141	.888	D2
Nonjudging	Marital Adjustment	.086	.037	1.968	.048	D3
Describing	Marital Adjustment	.091	.039	1.960	.049	D4
Observing	Marital Adjustment	.031	.006	.763	.446	D5

As shown in Table 4, the direct paths from Nonjudging, Nonreactivity, and Describing to marital adjustment were statistically significant. Therefore, the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationships between these variables and marital adjustment could be examined. Because the direct effects of the remaining variables were not significant, self-

compassion could not be considered a mediator in their relationships with marital adjustment. Nevertheless, their indirect effects could be examined.

Table 5 presents the unstandardized coefficients and the significance of the coefficients in the model.

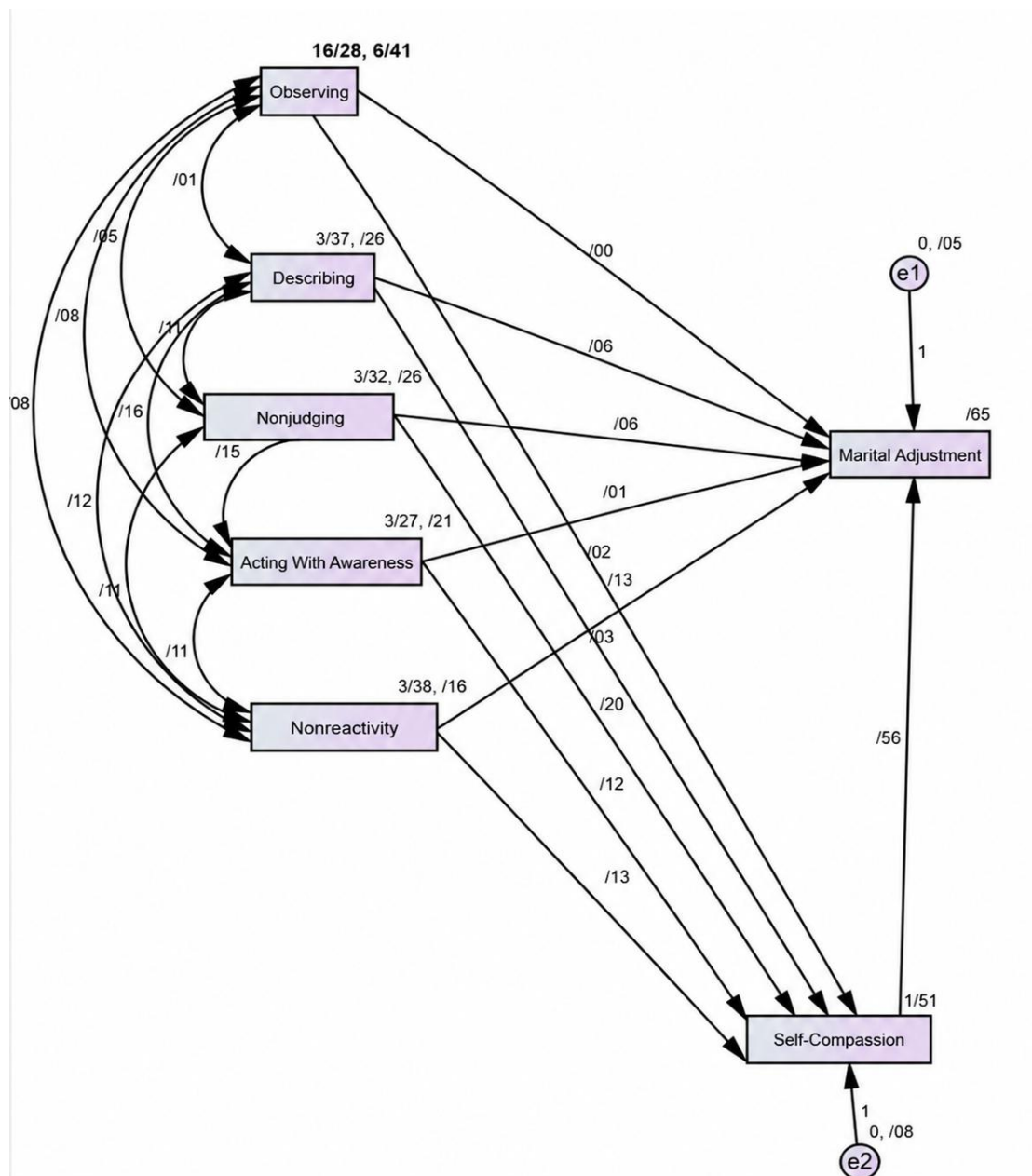
Table 5

Standardized Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of the Principal Study Variables

Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	Direct Effect (<i>c</i>)	Indirect Effect (<i>a</i> × <i>b</i>)	Direct Effect (<i>c'</i>)	Conclusion
Nonreactivity	Marital Adjustment	.150	.150	.074	Partial mediation
Acting With Awareness	Marital Adjustment	.009	.163	.070	No effect
Nonjudging	Marital Adjustment	.086	.299	.114	Partial mediation
Describing	Marital Adjustment	.091	.050	.019	Direct effect
Observing	Marital Adjustment	.031	.122	.009	Indirect effect

Figure 1

Model of the Effect of Mindfulness on Marital Adjustment Through the Mediating Role of Self-Compassion



The results presented in Table 5 indicated that Nonjudging, Nonreactivity, and Describing had direct effects on marital adjustment. However, Nonreactivity and Nonjudging also had significant indirect effects on marital adjustment through the mediating variable of self-compassion. Acting With Awareness had no significant effect, whereas Describing exerted a direct effect.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among mindfulness, self-compassion, psychological capital, and marital adjustment among married women and men in Tehran, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of

self-compassion in the association between mindfulness and marital adjustment. The findings showed that several mindfulness facets were significantly associated with marital adjustment. Specifically, Describing, Acting With Awareness, Nonjudging, and Nonreactivity were positively related to marital adjustment, whereas Observing was not significantly associated with it. The results also showed significant relationships between the dimensions of self-compassion and marital adjustment. Self-Kindness, Mindfulness, Common Humanity, and Overidentification were positively associated with marital adjustment, whereas Isolation was negatively associated with it. In the structural model, 44% of the variance in marital adjustment and 71% of the variance in self-compassion were explained by the

variables included in the model. Furthermore, Nonreactivity, Nonjudging, and Describing had significant direct effects on marital adjustment. Self-compassion partially mediated the effects of Nonreactivity and Nonjudging on marital adjustment. Describing had a direct effect, Observing had an indirect effect, and Acting With Awareness did not show a significant overall effect in the final model.

The positive relationship between mindfulness and marital adjustment is consistent with the broader body of research suggesting that mindful awareness improves the quality of intimate relationships by strengthening emotion regulation, attentional control, empathy, and constructive communication. Mindfulness allows individuals to recognize emotional reactions before they are automatically translated into criticism, withdrawal, defensiveness, or impulsive behavior. In marital interactions, where minor misunderstandings may rapidly intensify, the capacity to remain aware and psychologically present may protect the relationship from repetitive patterns of conflict. Previous research has shown that mindfulness is related to higher marital satisfaction and that this association may operate through improved understanding of the partner's mental and emotional states (Hamidpour et al., 2024). The current results extend these findings by showing that not all facets of mindfulness contribute equally to marital adjustment and that some operate through self-compassion.

The significant direct effect of Nonreactivity on marital adjustment indicates that individuals who are able to experience thoughts and emotions without immediately responding to them may be more capable of maintaining stable and constructive marital interactions. Nonreactivity gives spouses the opportunity to pause, assess the meaning of an interpersonal event, and select a deliberate response rather than reacting automatically. This capacity is especially important during conflict because emotionally charged exchanges often involve rapid escalation. A nonreactive spouse may be less likely to retaliate, generalize a disagreement, or interpret a temporary negative emotion as a sign of complete relational failure. This finding is consistent with research showing that mindfulness-based interventions can improve marital satisfaction by reducing automatic emotional responses and strengthening adaptive interaction patterns (Travis et al., 2021).

The direct effect of Nonreactivity can also be explained through emotion-regulation mechanisms. Mindfulness is associated with the ability to tolerate difficult internal experiences without suppression or overengagement. In romantic relationships, this capacity may allow individuals

to remain emotionally available even when they feel disappointed, angry, or threatened. Lee et al. emphasized that emotion regulation and empathy are important mechanisms linking mindfulness to romantic relationship quality (Lee et al., 2022). From this perspective, Nonreactivity may contribute to marital adjustment because it reduces the likelihood that intense emotions will dominate behavior and allows individuals to remain responsive to their spouse's needs.

The finding that self-compassion partially mediated the relationship between Nonreactivity and marital adjustment further clarifies this process. Nonreactivity may create psychological distance from distressing thoughts and emotions, while self-compassion determines how the individual responds to that distress. When individuals remain aware of emotional pain without reacting impulsively and simultaneously respond to themselves with understanding rather than criticism, they may recover more quickly from marital tension and interact more constructively with their spouse. This interpretation is consistent with the conceptualization of self-compassion as a balanced emotional response that includes mindfulness, self-kindness, and recognition of common humanity (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). It also aligns with evidence showing that self-compassion is associated with better interpersonal functioning, stronger emotional connectedness, and more adaptive responses to relationship stress (Zessin et al., 2020).

Nonjudging also had a significant direct effect on marital adjustment and an additional indirect effect through self-compassion. This result suggests that the tendency to accept internal experiences without labeling them as unacceptable, weak, or shameful may improve marital functioning in two ways. First, a nonjudgmental attitude may directly reduce harsh interpretations of one's own emotions and the partner's behavior. Second, it may encourage a more compassionate response to personal limitations and relational difficulties. Individuals who judge themselves severely may become defensive when criticized, interpret disagreements as personal rejection, or project self-criticism onto their spouse. In contrast, those who adopt a nonjudgmental attitude may be more capable of acknowledging mistakes, listening to feedback, and engaging in repair behaviors.

The mediating role of self-compassion in the relationship between Nonjudging and marital adjustment is theoretically coherent. Nonjudgment is a central foundation of self-compassion because self-kindness cannot develop when individuals habitually evaluate themselves in punitive and

rigid terms. Self-compassionate individuals are more likely to accept imperfection, recognize that relational problems are part of shared human experience, and avoid defining themselves entirely by a single mistake. Neff and Beretvas found that self-compassion is associated with healthier romantic relationship behavior, including greater acceptance, emotional connection, and reduced controlling behavior (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). The present findings suggest that Nonjudging may facilitate these outcomes by increasing self-compassion, which then supports greater marital adjustment.

The current result is also consistent with studies connecting self-compassion to lower marital conflict and better mental health. When marital difficulties occur, self-critical individuals may engage in rumination, shame, hostility, or withdrawal. Self-compassion may interrupt this cycle by helping individuals recognize distress without becoming overwhelmed by it. Zhao et al. proposed a mediation model linking self-compassion, mental health, and marital conflict, indicating that self-compassion may protect relationships by reducing the psychological consequences of conflict (Zhao et al., 2023). The present study supports this explanation by showing that self-compassion serves as a pathway through which nonjudgmental awareness contributes to marital adjustment.

The significant direct effect of Describing on marital adjustment indicates that the ability to identify and verbally label thoughts and feelings may have an immediate interpersonal benefit. Marital adjustment depends heavily on communication, particularly the ability to express emotional needs clearly and accurately. When spouses cannot identify or articulate their internal experiences, they may communicate through indirect criticism, silence, irritability, or ambiguous behavior. In contrast, individuals with stronger describing skills may be more capable of explaining what they feel, distinguishing between primary and secondary emotions, and making specific relational requests. This process can reduce misunderstanding and improve mutual responsiveness.

The direct effect of Describing is compatible with the broader relationship-science perspective that communication and emotional articulation are essential to couple functioning. Contemporary couple research emphasizes the importance of understanding the processes through which internal experiences are translated into relational behavior (Fincham & Beach, 2022). Describing may be one such process because it helps individuals convert vague emotional activation into understandable language. It

may also support empathy by providing the spouse with clearer information about needs, concerns, and intentions. This interpretation is consistent with findings that mindfulness contributes to romantic relationship quality partly through empathy and emotion regulation (Lee et al., 2022).

The absence of a significant mediation effect for Describing suggests that its influence on marital adjustment may be primarily communicative rather than self-compassionate. In other words, being able to label and express internal experiences may improve relationship functioning even when it does not substantially alter the individual's compassionate stance toward the self. This distinction is important because it shows that different mindfulness facets may operate through different psychological mechanisms. Describing may improve marital adjustment by enhancing communication clarity, whereas Nonjudging and Nonreactivity may exert part of their effects by cultivating self-compassion.

Observing did not have a significant direct effect on marital adjustment but showed an indirect effect in the broader model. This finding suggests that simply noticing thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, or environmental cues may not be sufficient to improve marital functioning. Observation without acceptance, nonjudgment, or emotional balance may even increase awareness of distress without improving the way that distress is managed. The psychological benefits of mindfulness therefore appear to depend not merely on attention but on the quality of that attention. Brown et al. emphasized that mindfulness research has evolved from a narrow focus on attention toward a multidimensional understanding involving awareness, acceptance, and behavioral regulation (Brown et al., 2015). The current findings support this view because Observing alone was not directly associated with better marital adjustment.

The indirect role of Observing may indicate that awareness contributes to adjustment only when it is translated into another adaptive process, such as self-compassion. Individuals must first notice emotional pain before they can respond to it with kindness and balanced awareness. Therefore, Observing may function as an initial stage in a broader regulatory process rather than as a sufficient predictor of marital adjustment. This interpretation is supported by intervention research showing that self-compassion-based programs combine mindful awareness with active cultivation of kindness, acceptance, and common humanity (Neff & Germer, 2023). Awareness without these

additional elements may remain psychologically incomplete.

Acting With Awareness was significantly correlated with marital adjustment at the bivariate level but did not show a significant effect in the structural model. This discrepancy suggests that its relationship with marital adjustment may overlap with the effects of other mindfulness facets. Acting With Awareness may initially appear beneficial because attentive and deliberate behavior reduces automatic responding. However, after Nonreactivity, Nonjudging, Describing, and self-compassion are entered into the model, its unique contribution may become limited. This is common in multidimensional psychological models in which correlated predictors share explanatory variance.

Another possible explanation is that acting attentively does not necessarily guarantee emotionally sensitive or compassionate behavior. An individual may be fully attentive to an interaction but still respond critically, rigidly, or defensively. Thus, awareness of action may need to be accompanied by nonjudgment, empathy, and self-compassion to produce a clear improvement in marital adjustment. This interpretation is consistent with Iranian research showing that the effect of mindfulness on marital satisfaction may operate through marital empathy and theory of mind rather than through attention alone (Hamidpour et al., 2024; Rajabi et al., 2022). It also corresponds with evidence that interpersonal mindfulness moderates the relationship between marital conflict and intimacy by changing the way partners engage during conflict (Dehghani-Doulatabadi et al., 2025).

The findings regarding self-compassion dimensions also require attention. Self-Kindness, Common Humanity, and Mindfulness were positively associated with marital adjustment, while Isolation was negatively associated with it. These results are consistent with the theoretical structure of self-compassion. Self-kind individuals may recover more quickly from mistakes and may be less likely to seek constant reassurance or react defensively. A sense of common humanity may help spouses perceive marital difficulties as manageable human experiences rather than unique evidence of failure. Mindful awareness may prevent overidentification with painful emotions, whereas isolation may intensify loneliness and perceived disconnection from the spouse.

The negative association between Isolation and marital adjustment is particularly meaningful. Individuals who feel isolated during relational difficulty may interpret conflict as proof that they are alone, misunderstood, or fundamentally

different from others. This perception may increase withdrawal and reduce help-seeking, emotional disclosure, and willingness to repair the relationship. In contrast, recognizing that all couples face periods of tension may reduce shame and encourage more constructive coping. Meta-analytic findings have shown that self-compassion is positively associated with social connectedness and adaptive interpersonal functioning (Zessin et al., 2020). The present results support the idea that the sense of connection inherent in common humanity may be especially important for marital stability.

The positive relationships of Self-Judgment and Overidentification with marital adjustment reported in the correlation table appear theoretically unexpected because these dimensions are generally considered negative components of self-compassion. This finding should therefore be interpreted cautiously. It may reflect scoring direction, reverse-scoring procedures, wording effects, or the possibility that higher values represented lower self-judgment and lower overidentification after recoding. Another possibility is that these correlations were influenced by shared method variance or multicollinearity among the subscales. Because the structural findings were more consistent with the established theory of self-compassion, the overall pattern should be interpreted in terms of the broader self-compassion construct rather than isolated raw correlations.

The finding that the model explained 44% of the variance in marital adjustment indicates that mindfulness and self-compassion are substantial, although not exclusive, contributors to marital functioning. Marital adjustment is influenced by numerous factors, including communication patterns, attachment styles, personality traits, economic pressures, family interference, sexual satisfaction, parenting demands, mental health, and social support. Barry et al. emphasized that marital adjustment is closely related to a broad range of psychological outcomes and should be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon (Barry et al., 2023). Similarly, longitudinal research has shown that the continuity of marital adjustment is affected by the mental health of both partners over time (Stasik-O'Brien et al., 2022). Therefore, the unexplained variance in the current model is expected and highlights the complexity of marital relationships.

The large proportion of explained variance in self-compassion suggests that mindfulness facets are strongly related to the way individuals respond to their own distress. Nonjudgment and Nonreactivity, in particular, are

conceptually close to self-compassion because they reduce harsh self-evaluation and emotional overidentification. This result is consistent with studies showing that mindfulness is associated with psychological well-being and adaptive emotional functioning (Ahmadvand et al., 2012). It also supports the use of integrated interventions that combine mindfulness skills with explicit self-compassion training rather than treating them as entirely separate therapeutic processes.

The results can also be understood within a family-systems perspective. Changes in an individual's emotional regulation and self-directed attitude may influence the entire relational system. A spouse who becomes less reactive and less self-critical may communicate differently, reduce escalation, and create conditions that encourage more adaptive responses from the partner. Previous family-based psychological education research has shown that structured changes in emotional expression can improve family interaction patterns (Mollazadeh et al., 2002). Thus, improving mindfulness and self-compassion in one or both spouses may have reciprocal effects that extend beyond individual well-being.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings support an interactional model in which mindfulness contributes to marital adjustment through both direct and indirect pathways. Nonreactivity and Nonjudging appear to improve marital adjustment partly because they cultivate self-compassion, while Describing appears to contribute more directly through emotional communication. Observing may require additional regulatory processes before it benefits the relationship, and Acting With Awareness may not provide a unique effect once overlapping mindfulness components are considered. These findings are aligned with contemporary relationship science, which emphasizes identifying specific psychological mechanisms rather than relying solely on broad global constructs (Fincham & Beach, 2022). They also reinforce the view that marital adjustment is not merely the outcome of favorable circumstances but reflects modifiable psychological capacities.

The present study had several limitations. First, its correlational and cross-sectional design prevents definitive conclusions regarding causality and the temporal order of the relationships among mindfulness, self-compassion, and marital adjustment. Second, the data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may have been affected by

social desirability, response bias, inaccurate self-perception, and shared method variance. Third, the participants were married individuals attending selected neighborhood community centers in Tehran, and the results may not be generalizable to couples from other cities, rural areas, cultural groups, or clinical populations. Fourth, the study assessed individuals rather than dyads; therefore, the interdependence of spouses' responses and the reciprocal influence of partners could not be examined. Fifth, some unexpected correlations among the negative self-compassion subscales suggest that scoring direction, translation, or measurement properties should be examined carefully. Finally, several potentially important variables, including attachment style, duration of marriage, conflict frequency, socioeconomic status, sexual satisfaction, and psychological symptoms, were not included in the model.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to determine whether changes in mindfulness and self-compassion precede improvements in marital adjustment. Dyadic research involving both spouses is recommended so that actor and partner effects can be examined through models such as the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model. Researchers should also replicate the model in diverse cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic groups and compare distressed and nondistressed couples. Future studies may include additional mediators and moderators, such as empathy, emotion regulation, attachment security, psychological capital, conflict-management style, and perceived partner responsiveness. It would also be useful to examine the mindfulness facets separately and assess whether their effects differ according to gender, duration of marriage, or level of marital conflict. Further psychometric evaluation of the translated instruments is recommended, particularly for the negative self-compassion subscales.

The findings suggest that couple counselors, family therapists, and psychologists should incorporate mindfulness and self-compassion skills into marital interventions. Programs may place particular emphasis on nonreactivity, nonjudgment, emotional labeling, self-kindness, and recognition of common humanity. Couples may benefit from exercises that teach them to pause during conflict, identify emotions accurately, communicate internal experiences without blame, and respond to personal mistakes with understanding rather than harsh criticism. Structured mindfulness and self-compassion training may also be included in premarital education, family counseling, and community-based relationship programs. Because

different mindfulness facets appear to influence marital adjustment through different mechanisms, interventions should be tailored rather than treating mindfulness as a single undifferentiated skill.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed 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.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

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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