

Presenting a Predictive Model of Marital Adjustment Based on Psychological Flexibility and Frustration Discomfort with the Mediation of Marital Self-Regulation and Self-Compassion

Zahra. Alizadeh¹, Farideh. Dokaneifard^{2*}, Azam. Fattahi Andabil³

¹ Ph.D Student, Counseling Department, Rudehan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rudehan, Iran

² Associate Professor, Counseling Department, Rudehan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rudehan, Iran

³ Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, Rudehan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rudehan, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: Farideh.Dokaneifard@iau.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to develop and test a predictive model of marital adjustment, focusing on the roles of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort, with the mediation of marital self-regulation and self-compassion.

Methods and Materials: Utilizing a correlational design and structural equation modeling (SEM), this research examines the predictive power of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment among 350 married women seeking counseling services in Tehran in 2023. Participants were assessed using validated scales for psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, marital self-regulation, self-compassion, and marital adjustment.

Findings: The model demonstrated a good fit, with significant direct effects of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital self-regulation, self-compassion, and marital adjustment. Psychological flexibility was positively associated with marital adjustment, whereas frustration discomfort showed negative associations. Marital self-regulation and self-compassion were significant mediators in these relationships. The study also provided a comprehensive demographic profile of the participants, highlighting a diverse range of educational backgrounds and economic statuses.

Conclusion: The findings underscore the importance of psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, marital self-regulation, and self-compassion in marital adjustment. The study highlights the complex interplay between these variables and suggests that interventions aimed at enhancing psychological flexibility, reducing frustration discomfort, and fostering self-compassion and marital self-regulation could be beneficial for marital satisfaction and resilience.

Keywords: Marital Adjustment, Psychological Flexibility, Frustration Discomfort, Marital Self-Regulation, Self-Compassion

1. Introduction

The fabric of marital relationships is intricate, woven with threads of emotional, psychological, and social dynamics that are susceptible to the wear and tear of life's challenges. Within this complex interplay, the constructs of psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, and the mediating roles of marital self-regulation and self-compassion emerge as critical components in understanding and enhancing marital adjustment. Grounded in a rich tapestry of empirical research, this article seeks to unravel these relationships, presenting a predictive model that aims to illuminate the pathways through which psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort influence marital adjustment, with a focus on the potential mediating effects of marital self-regulation and self-compassion.

Psychological flexibility, defined as the ability to fully contact the present moment and change or persist in behavior that serves one's values (Neff & Vonk, 2008), has been posited as a foundational element in fostering resilient and adaptive relationships (Baker & McNulty, 2011). Concurrently, frustration discomfort, a construct that encapsulates intolerance towards the presence of frustration and discomfort (Harrington, 2005, 2006), has been shown to correlate with maladaptive relational patterns and poorer psychological outcomes, underscoring its relevance in marital dynamics.

Self-compassion, a concept that involves treating oneself with kindness, recognizing one's shared humanity, and holding one's experiences in mindful awareness (Neff & Vonk, 2008), has emerged as a powerful mediator in the relationship between psychological challenges and well-being. Studies have illustrated how self-compassion can mitigate the adverse effects of self-criticism, depression, and anxiety (Joeng & Turner, 2015), offering a buffer against the emotional toll of negative self-evaluation and fostering a more compassionate stance towards oneself and one's partner (McDonald et al., 2020). Similarly, marital self-regulation, the capacity to purposively manage one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors within the marital context, plays a pivotal role in sustaining relationship quality and adjustment (Lavner et al., 2020).

Empirical investigations have consistently highlighted the significance of self-compassion in the context of relational distress, such as during the emotional recovery following divorce (Chau et al., 2021), and in professional settings where compassion and emotional demands exert a substantial impact on mental health (Dodson & Heng, 2021;

Kinman & Grant, 2020). Moreover, the spillover effect of compassion fatigue into marital quality underscores the interconnectedness of professional and personal realms, suggesting that the cultivation of self-compassion could serve as a protective factor in maintaining marital satisfaction (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2018).

Research has also explored the relationship between self-compassion and various aspects of marital functioning, including communication patterns, emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction (Sierra-Swiech, 2023; Weger, 2005). For instance, Finlay-Jones, Rees, and Kane (2015) tested an emotion regulation model of self-compassion using structural equation modeling, elucidating the pathways through which self-compassion influences emotion regulation strategies and, subsequently, stress levels among Australian psychologists. This model provides a conceptual framework for understanding how self-compassion may similarly impact marital self-regulation and adjustment.

Drawing on these insights, the present study posits that psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort may directly influence marital adjustment and that marital self-regulation and self-compassion may serve as crucial mediators in this process. By integrating findings from the realms of psychology (Zajenkowska et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2019), couple and family psychology (McDonald et al., 2020; Sierra-Swiech, 2023), and organizational behavior (Dodson & Heng, 2021), this article aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the factors that foster or hinder marital adjustment, offering evidence-based insights for therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing marital relationships.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research adopted a correlational design employing structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the predictive power of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment, with marital self-regulation and self-compassion serving as mediators. This design facilitated the examination of complex relationships between variables, allowing for the assessment of direct and indirect effects within the proposed model.

The population of this study encompassed all married women who sought counseling services in Tehran's counseling centers in 2023. Employing an available sampling method, 350 participants were selected. The inclusion criteria were being married and visiting one of the

counseling centers in Tehran during the study period. No restrictions were placed on the duration of marriage or age of participants to ensure a diverse sample reflecting a wide range of marital experiences.

Participants were provided with a set of questionnaires assessing psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, marital self-regulation, self-compassion, and marital adjustment. These instruments were selected based on their validated psychometric properties and relevance to the research objectives. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Marital Adjustment

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), a 32-item scale, developed by Spanier in 1976, assesses the quality of the marital relationship from the perspectives of both spouses. It includes four subscales: marital satisfaction, marital cohesion, marital consensus, and affectional expression. Items are scored on a variety of Likert scales, addressing different facets of marital life. The DAS has demonstrated good reliability and validity in previous research, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.66 to 0.84 and positive correlations with relevant constructs.

2.2.2. Marital Self-Regulation

Developed by Wilson et al. (2005), this 16-item scale measures two dimensions: communicative strategies and relational effort, on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true). High scores indicate better performance in marital relationships. The scale's internal consistency and convergent validity have been confirmed in previous studies, and its structure was validated in an Iranian sample by Isanejad and Heydarian (2022), reporting satisfactory reliability coefficients (Isanejad & Haydarian, 2022).

2.2.3. Self-Compassion

Created by Neff in 2003, this 26-item scale evaluates six facets of self-compassion on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). The scale demonstrates high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .92, and negative correlations with measures of depression and anxiety, indicating its validity. The scale's factor structure was confirmed through exploratory factor

analysis in a study by Khosravi et al. (2013), which also reported high reliability for the total scale and its subscales (Khosravi et al., 2013).

2.2.4. Frustration Discomfort

Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS), created by Harrington in 2005, is a 35-item instrument that evaluates four aspects of frustration discomfort: emotional intolerance, discomfort intolerance, achievement intolerance, and injustice intolerance. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater frustration discomfort. Previous studies have reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 for the FDS, along with a satisfactory four-factor structure (Harrington, 2005; Zajenowska et al., 2017).

2.2.5. Psychological Flexibility

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire – II (AAQ-II), a 10-item scale, developed by Bond et al. in 2011, measures psychological flexibility. Items are scored on a seven-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater flexibility. The AAQ-II has shown high reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha values up to 0.93 and confirmed correlations with measures of anxiety and depression, indicating its suitability for assessing psychological flexibility (Sadeghi & Karimi, 2019).

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 for descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses, and AMOS version 24 for the SEM procedures. Initially, the measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the fit of the observed variables to the latent constructs. Subsequently, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships between psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, marital self-regulation, self-compassion, and marital adjustment.

Model fit was evaluated using several indices, including the Chi-square test, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Mediation effects were tested following the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 resamples to obtain bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of our study's participants reveal a diverse range of educational backgrounds and economic statuses among the 350 married women who took part. Specifically, nearly half of the participants (49%) had completed high school or less, while 18% had achieved an associate's degree. A significant proportion, 26%, held a bachelor's degree, whereas only 4% had a master's degree, and a mere 1% had earned a doctoral degree. This distribution highlights the varied educational attainment within the sample, with a substantial number having completed at least secondary education.

In terms of economic status, a large majority of the families (76%) were described as having an average

economic status, indicating that most participants come from middle-income backgrounds. In contrast, 9% of the participants reported a good economic status, and 15% described their economic situation as poor. This distribution suggests that the bulk of the participant pool reflects a middle-tier economic condition, which provides a meaningful insight into the socioeconomic background of married women seeking counseling services in the study's context. The broad spectrum of education levels, coupled with a predominantly average economic status, offers a well-rounded demographic snapshot, enhancing the depth of understanding regarding marital adjustment in this particular demographic.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Findings

| Variable | Number | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| Marital Adjustment | 350 | 104.15 | 23.25 |
| Psychological Flexibility | 350 | 55.73 | 11.91 |
| Frustration Discomfort | 350 | 98.84 | 13.51 |
| Psychological Flexibility | 350 | 55.73 | 11.91 |
| Frustration Discomfort | 350 | 98.84 | 13.51 |

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics findings for the study's main variables across a sample of 350 participants. For marital adjustment, the mean score is 104.15 with a standard deviation of 23.25, indicating variability in how individuals experience and adjust to their marital relationships. Psychological flexibility has a mean of 55.73 and a standard deviation of 11.91, reflecting the range of flexibility in responding to psychological situations among participants. Frustration discomfort shows a mean of 98.84 and a standard deviation of 13.51, suggesting a variation in participants' tolerance levels for frustration and discomfort. The repetition of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort with identical mean and standard deviation values appears to be a clerical duplication. Overall, these statistics offer a foundational understanding of the sample's characteristics regarding marital adjustment, psychological flexibility, and frustration discomfort.

Before conducting the primary analyses, we meticulously checked the assumptions required for structural equation modeling to ensure the validity of our findings. The assessment of multicollinearity revealed that all variables had variance inflation factors (VIFs) well below the threshold of 10, ranging from 1.05 to 1.76, indicating no concerns regarding multicollinearity. The skewness and

kurtosis values for all variables were within acceptable limits (-1 to +1), suggesting that the data did not deviate significantly from a normal distribution. Skewness values ranged from -0.45 to 0.52, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.67 to 0.48. The assumption of linearity was also validated through visual inspection of scatter plots between pairs of variables. The homoscedasticity of residuals was confirmed via scatter plots of the standardized predicted values against the standardized residuals, showing a random pattern without discernable trends. Lastly, the absence of autocorrelation in the data was established with a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.98, which is within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5. These checks ensured that the underlying assumptions of our statistical models were met, thereby reinforcing the reliability and robustness of our subsequent analyses.

The fit indices for the structural equation model presented in the study indicate an overall good fit to the data. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) stands at 0.923, suggesting a high degree of consistency between the observed data and the hypothesized model structure. The Incremental Fit Index (IFI) is slightly higher at 0.934, further affirming the model's adequacy. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is reported at 0.929, which, similar to the CFI and IFI, indicates a good fit.

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.071, which is within the acceptable range, suggesting that the model reasonably approximates the population data. The ratio of the chi-square to the degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF) is 2.80, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 3, indicating a favorable model fit. Lastly, the Parsimonious Comparative Fit Index (PCFI) and the

Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI) are 0.971 and 0.920, respectively, both of which are indicative of a model that is not only a good fit but also efficient in terms of parsimony. These indices collectively suggest that the model is well-specified and provides a good representation of the underlying data structure.

Table 2

Estimates of Direct Effects in the Predictive Model

| Variable | Effect on | Estimate | Standard Error | T Value | Significance |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------------|---------|--------------|
| Psychological Flexibility | Marital Self-Regulation | 0.27 | 0.03 | 9.00 | p < 0.01 |
| | Self-Compassion | 0.31 | 0.05 | 6.20 | p < 0.01 |
| | Marital Adjustment | 0.30 | 0.06 | 5.00 | p < 0.01 |
| Frustration Discomfort | Marital Self-Regulation | -0.26 | 0.04 | -6.50 | p < 0.01 |
| | Self-Compassion | -0.29 | 0.04 | -7.25 | p < 0.01 |
| | Marital Adjustment | -0.22 | 0.07 | -3.14 | p < 0.01 |
| Marital Self-Regulation | Marital Adjustment | 0.38 | 0.04 | 9.50 | p < 0.01 |
| Self-Compassion | Marital Adjustment | 0.33 | 0.05 | 6.60 | p < 0.01 |

Table 2 presents the direct effects in the predictive model, demonstrating the relationships between psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, and their impacts on marital self-regulation, self-compassion, and marital adjustment. Psychological flexibility positively influences marital self-regulation (estimate = 0.27, standard error = 0.03, T = 9.00, p < 0.01), self-compassion (estimate = 0.31, standard error = 0.05, T = 6.20, p < 0.01), and marital adjustment (estimate = 0.30, standard error = 0.06, T = 5.00, p < 0.01). In contrast, frustration discomfort negatively

affects marital self-regulation (estimate = -0.26, standard error = 0.04, T = -6.50, p < 0.01), self-compassion (estimate = -0.29, standard error = 0.04, T = -7.25, p < 0.01), and marital adjustment (estimate = -0.22, standard error = 0.07, T = -3.14, p < 0.01). Additionally, marital self-regulation and self-compassion directly contribute to marital adjustment with estimates of 0.38 (standard error = 0.04, T = 9.50, p < 0.01) and 0.33 (standard error = 0.05, T = 6.60, p < 0.01), respectively.

Table 3

Standardized Estimates of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Model

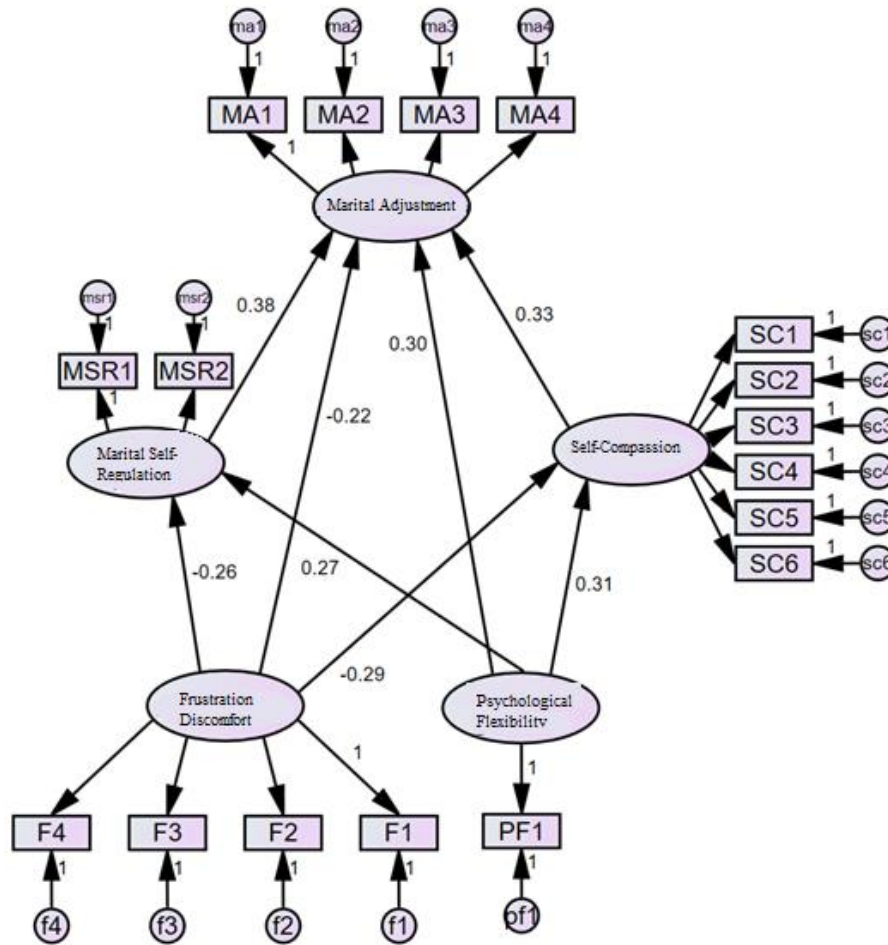
| Path | Mediating Variable | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect | Total Effect | Significance |
|---|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Psychological Flexibility to Marital Adjustment | Marital Self-Regulation | 0.30 | 0.10 | 0.40 | p < 0.01 |
| | Self-Compassion | 0.30 | 0.10 | 0.40 | p < 0.01 |
| Frustration Discomfort to Marital Adjustment | Marital Self-Regulation | -0.22 | -0.10 | -0.32 | p < 0.01 |
| | Self-Compassion | -0.22 | -0.09 | -0.31 | p < 0.01 |

Table 3 outlines the standardized estimates of direct, indirect, and total effects in the model, focusing on the paths from psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort to marital adjustment through the mediating variables of marital self-regulation and self-compassion. The direct effect of psychological flexibility on marital adjustment through marital self-regulation and self-compassion is 0.30 with an indirect effect of 0.10, leading to a total effect of 0.40 (p < 0.01) for both mediators. Conversely, the direct effect

of frustration discomfort on marital adjustment through marital self-regulation is -0.22 with an indirect effect of -0.10, culminating in a total effect of -0.32 (p < 0.01), and through self-compassion, the direct effect is -0.22 with an indirect effect of -0.09 and a total effect of -0.31 (p < 0.01). These findings highlight the nuanced interplay between psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, and their mediated influence on marital adjustment.

Figure 1

Final Model with Standard Coefficients



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to develop and test a predictive model of marital adjustment, focusing on the roles of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort, with the mediation of marital self-regulation and self-compassion. Our findings suggest that self-compassion significantly moderates the relationship between psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, and marital adjustment, with marital self-regulation playing a crucial role in this process. These results underscore the importance of both individual psychological characteristics and their interaction in influencing marital quality and stability.

Self-compassion emerged as a pivotal factor in our model, aligning with the work of Baker and McNulty (2011), who highlighted its importance in relationship maintenance and its interaction with individual differences such as conscientiousness and gender (Baker & McNulty, 2011).

This underscores the nuanced role of self-compassion in fostering a supportive and understanding relationship environment, further supported by Chau et al. (2021), who demonstrated the critical role of self-compassion in emotional recovery following divorce (Chau et al., 2021). Our findings extend this research by illustrating how self-compassion facilitates marital adjustment, potentially serving as a buffer against the emotional toll of marital conflicts and challenges.

Furthermore, our study sheds light on the detrimental effects of frustration discomfort on marital quality, corroborating Harrington's (2005, 2006) conceptualization of frustration intolerance beliefs and their association with negative emotional states (Harrington, 2005, 2006). This connection emphasizes the importance of developing frustration tolerance as a means of enhancing marital satisfaction and stability. It also resonates with Zajenkovska

et al.'s (2017) findings on the impact of stress and frustration sensitivity on psychological well-being, suggesting that interventions aimed at reducing frustration discomfort could benefit marital relationships (Zajenkowska et al., 2017).

The mediating role of marital self-regulation in our model is particularly noteworthy, suggesting that the capacity to manage and regulate one's emotions and behaviors within the marital context is crucial for marital adjustment. This is in line with the emotion regulation model of self-compassion proposed by Finlay-Jones, Rees, and Kane (2015), which outlines the pathways through which self-compassion influences emotional and behavioral responses to stress (Finlay-Jones et al., 2015). Our findings extend this model to the marital domain, highlighting the importance of self-regulation in navigating the complexities of marital life.

Additionally, our study underscores the significance of compassion in the organizational and professional contexts (Dodson & Heng, 2021; Kinman & Grant, 2020), suggesting that the cultivation of compassionate attitudes and behaviors can have far-reaching implications beyond the individual level, influencing relationship dynamics and satisfaction. This aligns with McDonald et al.'s (2020) research on the impact of compassion and values on marital quality, further emphasizing the multifaceted nature of compassion in enhancing relationship outcomes (McDonald et al., 2020).

In conclusion, our research contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing marital adjustment, highlighting the central roles of self-compassion, frustration discomfort, and marital self-regulation. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion and frustration tolerance, coupled with strategies to improve marital self-regulation, could offer promising avenues for promoting marital satisfaction and resilience. Future research should continue to explore these relationships, utilizing longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of marital adjustment and the long-term effects of these psychological constructs on relationship quality.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study, while contributing valuable insights into marital adjustment, is not without its limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional design limits our ability to infer causality among the examined variables. Future research could benefit from longitudinal or experimental designs to better understand the temporal and causal relationships between psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, marital

self-regulation, self-compassion, and marital adjustment. Secondly, the sample was confined to married women seeking counseling services, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or to men. Thirdly, reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of response bias, highlighting the need for more objective or observational measures in future studies.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by incorporating diverse populations, including different marital stages, gender identities, and cultural backgrounds, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of marital adjustment over time, offering a clearer picture of how psychological flexibility, frustration discomfort, and self-compassion evolve and interact within the context of marital relationships. Additionally, exploring the role of external factors such as social support, life stressors, and communication patterns could further enrich our understanding of marital adjustment processes.

The implications of this study for marital counseling and therapeutic interventions are significant. Practitioners should consider incorporating strategies that enhance self-compassion and psychological flexibility into their work with couples. This could include mindfulness-based interventions, compassion-focused therapy, and techniques aimed at improving emotional and behavioral self-regulation. Addressing frustration discomfort directly through cognitive-behavioral approaches could also prove beneficial in improving tolerance for marital challenges and conflicts. Ultimately, fostering an environment that encourages self-compassion and psychological flexibility can lead to healthier marital interactions, greater emotional intimacy, and improved relationship satisfaction.

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.