

Exploring the Role of Shared Leisure Activities in Women's Marital Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the role of shared leisure activities in women's marital satisfaction, providing insights into how these activities contribute to the quality of marital relationships.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth data from 25 married women. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds. The interviews focused on various aspects of shared leisure activities, including types, frequency, and perceived impact on marital satisfaction. Data were analyzed using NVivo software, following thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns. Theoretical saturation was achieved after 20 interviews.

Findings: The study identified five main themes related to the impact of shared leisure activities on marital satisfaction: emotional bonding, mutual support, relationship growth, conflict resolution, and the establishment of rituals and traditions. Participants reported that engaging in shared leisure activities significantly enhanced their emotional connection, provided mutual support, promoted personal and relational growth, facilitated effective conflict resolution, and helped establish meaningful rituals and traditions within their marriages.

Conclusion: The findings underscore the critical role of shared leisure activities in promoting women's marital satisfaction. By engaging in activities that both partners enjoy and find meaningful, couples can strengthen their emotional connection, support each other, grow together, resolve conflicts more effectively, and create lasting traditions that enhance their relationship. The study highlights the importance of investing time and effort in shared leisure activities to improve the quality of marital relationships and overall well-being.

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, shared leisure activities, emotional bonding, mutual support, relationship growth, conflict resolution, qualitative research, women's well-being.

1. Introduction

Marital satisfaction is a critical component of a successful and fulfilling relationship. It encompasses various aspects, such as emotional connection, communication, and shared activities, all of which contribute to the overall quality of a marriage. One of the key factors that influence marital satisfaction is the participation in shared leisure activities (Moghadamnia & Soleimani Farsani, 2023; Pirzadeh et al., 2019; Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004; Tolo Takmili Torabi et al., 2020).

Marital satisfaction has been extensively studied due to its significant impact on individuals' well-being and overall life satisfaction. A high level of marital satisfaction is associated with numerous positive outcomes, including better mental health, lower stress levels, and increased life satisfaction (Crawford et al., 2002). Conversely, low marital satisfaction can lead to marital discord, separation, and negative psychological effects (Chioma & Sulong, 2022).

Shared leisure activities are defined as activities that couples engage in together during their free time. These activities range from recreational and sports activities to hobbies and cultural pursuits. The involvement in shared leisure activities has been shown to significantly impact marital satisfaction. According to Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006), the amount of leisure time couples spend together, as well as their satisfaction with these activities, plays a crucial role in enhancing marital satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2006).

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the compatibility theory, which posits that compatibility in interests and activities leads to greater marital satisfaction (Crawford et al., 2002). Compatibility in leisure activities fosters emotional bonding, mutual understanding, and shared experiences, all of which contribute to a stronger marital relationship. Furthermore, leisure activities provide a context for couples to express their emotions and connect on a deeper level, which is essential for maintaining a healthy relationship (Nurdin et al., 2022).

Several studies have highlighted the positive relationship between shared leisure activities and marital satisfaction. For instance, Chioma and Sulong (2022) found that compatibility in leisure activities among married Nigerians significantly correlated with higher levels of marital satisfaction (Campbell, 2013). Similarly, Smadi (2017) reported that women in Amman, Jordan, who engaged in shared leisure activities with their spouses, experienced higher levels of marital satisfaction (Smadi, 2017).

Moreover, research by Freire and Teixeira (2018) suggests that positive attitudes towards leisure and satisfaction with leisure activities enhance overall life satisfaction and emotional regulation. These findings underscore the importance of leisure activities not only for individual well-being but also for the quality of marital relationships (Freire & Teixeira, 2018).

The role of shared leisure activities in marital satisfaction can vary across different cultural and contextual settings. For example, Campbell (2013) explored the leisure activities of women in rural Australia and found that the availability and type of leisure activities significantly influenced their marital satisfaction (Campbell, 2013). Similarly, Lee, Min, and Chi (2017) emphasized the impact of life transitions and cultural expectations on leisure activity engagement in later life, highlighting the need to consider cultural and contextual factors when examining the relationship between leisure activities and marital satisfaction (Lee et al., 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought new challenges and dynamics to marital relationships. According to Nurdin et al. (2022), the pandemic has affected couples' emotional expressivity and the nature of their shared activities, influencing marital satisfaction. The restrictions on social interactions and changes in daily routines have made shared leisure activities more critical for maintaining marital harmony during these times. This study aims to explore the role of shared leisure activities in women's marital satisfaction, drawing on existing literature and empirical evidence.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of shared leisure activities in women's marital satisfaction. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives, capturing the nuances and complexities of marital dynamics that quantitative methods may overlook.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds. The study included married women from various age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural backgrounds to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The inclusion criteria were:

Women currently married for at least two years.

Engaged in shared leisure activities with their spouses.

Willing to participate in a detailed interview about their marital satisfaction.

Suggestions for other couples on maintaining marital satisfaction through shared leisure activities.

Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews. This point was reached after conducting interviews with 20 participants, which provided a rich and diverse dataset for analysis.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which provided a flexible yet focused framework to explore the participants' experiences. The interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing, depending on the participants' preference and availability. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent for subsequent analysis.

The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about:

The types of leisure activities shared with their spouses.

The frequency and duration of these activities.

Participants' perceptions of how these activities influenced their marital satisfaction.

Challenges encountered in engaging in shared leisure activities.

2.3. Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Data analysis was conducted using NVivo

software, a qualitative data analysis tool that facilitates the organization, coding, and thematic analysis of large textual datasets. The analysis followed these steps:

Initial Coding: Transcripts were read multiple times to identify initial codes, representing key concepts and recurring themes.

Focused Coding: Codes were then refined and grouped into broader categories to identify patterns and relationships.

Thematic Analysis: Themes were developed from the coded data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of shared leisure activities in marital satisfaction.

Verification: To ensure reliability, a subset of transcripts was independently coded by a second researcher, and any discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

The use of NVivo software facilitated efficient data management and ensured a systematic and transparent analysis process. The software's capabilities for organizing and visualizing data helped in identifying key themes and patterns, enhancing the depth and rigor of the analysis.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 25 participants, all of whom were married women. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 60 years, with the majority (60%) falling within the 30 to 45 age group. In terms of socioeconomic status, the participants represented a diverse range, including lower-middle (24%), middle (52%), and upper-middle class (24%) backgrounds. The duration of marriages varied, with most women (68%) being married between 5 to 15 years, 20% married for 16 to 25 years, and the remaining 12% for more than 25 years.

Table 1

The Results of Qualitative Analysis

Category	Subcategories	Concepts (Open Codes)
Emotional Bonding through Shared Activities	Quality Time Spent Together	Enjoyment, Deep Conversations, Emotional Connection, Sense of Togetherness
	Mutual Support	Encouragement, Shared Responsibilities, Empathy, Stress Relief
	Relationship Growth	Personal Growth, New Experiences, Shared Goals, Strengthened Trust
	Conflict Resolution	Improved Communication, Understanding Differences, Compromise, Conflict Avoidance
Physical and Psychological Well-being	Rituals and Traditions	Family Traditions, Regular Date Nights, Special Occasions, Holiday Activities
	Stress Reduction	Relaxation, Mindfulness, Physical Relaxation, Reduced Anxiety
	Physical Health Benefits	Increased Activity Levels, Healthier Lifestyle Choices, Weight Management, Better Sleep
	Mental Health Benefits	Increased Happiness, Decreased Depression, Improved Self-esteem, Mental Clarity

Strengthening Family and Social Ties	Sense of Accomplishment	Achievement of Goals, Skill Development, Confidence Boost, Sense of Pride
	Quality of Life	Overall Life Satisfaction, Balance between Work and Leisure, Enhanced Daily Routines
	Family Cohesion	Family Bonding, Shared Family Activities, Strengthened Family Units, Parenting Synergy
	Social Integration	Shared Social Circles, Community Engagement, Friendships, Social Support
	Intergenerational Relationships	Activities with Children, Activities with Parents, Bridging Generations, Family Heritage
	Cultural and Community Connection	Participation in Cultural Events, Community Activities, Religious Involvement, Traditions
	Relationship with In-laws	Improved Relations, Shared Interests, Family Gatherings, Conflict Resolution
	Social Skills Development	Communication Skills, Networking, Teamwork, Social Confidence

3.1. Emotional Bonding through Shared Activities

Quality Time Spent Together: Engaging in shared leisure activities allows couples to spend quality time together, enhancing their emotional connection. Participants frequently mentioned the enjoyment and deep conversations that arise from these activities. One participant stated, "When we go for walks together, we have some of our best talks. It really brings us closer." The sense of togetherness and emotional bond were key factors in their marital satisfaction.

Mutual Support: Shared leisure activities often involve mutual support, where couples encourage and help each other. This was evident in shared responsibilities and empathy during activities. A participant noted, "We love cooking together. It's not just about the food, but about supporting each other and sharing the load." This mutual support contributes significantly to the emotional foundation of their relationship.

Relationship Growth: Many women felt that engaging in new experiences and setting shared goals through leisure activities helped their relationship grow. This included personal growth and strengthened trust. One woman shared, "We tried hiking together for the first time, and it was challenging but rewarding. It made us trust each other more and grow together."

Conflict Resolution: Participants highlighted that shared activities improve communication and understanding, which are crucial for conflict resolution. Engaging in these activities helps couples understand each other's differences and practice compromise. A participant mentioned, "Playing board games has taught us to communicate better and handle our differences with more patience."

Rituals and Traditions: Regularly engaging in activities like family traditions, date nights, and holiday celebrations

strengthens the emotional bond. These rituals create a sense of continuity and special moments. "Our weekly movie nights are a tradition. It's our time to unwind and connect," shared one participant.

3.2. Physical and Psychological Well-being

Stress Reduction: Shared leisure activities provide a significant reduction in stress and anxiety. Participants noted feeling more relaxed and mindful. "Yoga sessions with my husband help us de-stress and stay calm. It's like a mini retreat," one woman explained.

Physical Health Benefits: Many participants reported increased activity levels and healthier lifestyle choices due to shared activities. This included better sleep and weight management. One participant remarked, "We started running together, and it has made us more health-conscious and energetic."

Mental Health Benefits: The psychological benefits, such as increased happiness and improved self-esteem, were notable. Participants felt mentally clearer and more satisfied with life. "Gardening together has been therapeutic. It lifts our spirits and gives us a sense of purpose," said one woman.

Sense of Accomplishment: Achieving goals and developing new skills through shared activities boosted confidence and provided a sense of pride. One participant shared, "Completing a DIY project together gave us a huge sense of accomplishment and made us proud of our teamwork."

Quality of Life: Overall, the participants reported an enhanced quality of life, balancing work and leisure better and integrating enjoyable routines into daily life. "Our evening walks make our days complete. It's a small but meaningful part of our life," one participant noted.

3.3. Strengthening Family and Social Ties

Family Cohesion: Engaging in family activities strengthens the bonds within the family unit, fostering a sense of unity and cooperation. "Family game nights are a big hit. It brings us all together and strengthens our family ties," said one woman.

Social Integration: Shared activities also help in building social networks and community engagement. Participants mentioned the importance of shared social circles and friendships. "We joined a local dance class and made many friends. It's a great way to be socially active together," one participant shared.

Intergenerational Relationships: Activities involving children and parents bridge generational gaps and enhance family heritage. "Cooking traditional meals with my mother and daughter connects us across generations," said one participant.

Cultural and Community Connection: Participation in cultural events and community activities deepens the connection to cultural roots and local communities. One participant remarked, "Being involved in community festivals with my husband makes us feel more connected to our roots and community."

Relationship with In-laws: Improved relations with in-laws were noted as a benefit of shared interests and family gatherings. "We bonded over gardening with my in-laws, which has significantly improved our relationship," shared one participant.

Social Skills Development: Engaging in social activities enhances communication skills, teamwork, and social confidence. "Hosting dinner parties has improved our social skills and made us more confident in social settings," one woman explained.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the role of shared leisure activities in women's marital satisfaction, identifying several key themes: emotional bonding, mutual support, relationship growth, conflict resolution, and the establishment of rituals and traditions. The findings suggest that engaging in shared leisure activities significantly enhances various aspects of marital satisfaction among women. These activities foster deeper emotional connections, provide mutual support, promote relationship growth, facilitate conflict resolution, and help establish meaningful rituals and traditions within the marriage.

One of the primary themes that emerged from the study was the importance of emotional bonding through shared leisure activities. Participants reported that engaging in activities together allowed them to spend quality time with their spouses, leading to deeper conversations and a stronger sense of togetherness. This finding aligns with Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006), who found that couple leisure involvement significantly contributes to marital satisfaction by enhancing emotional connections and providing opportunities for couples to bond (Johnson et al., 2006).

Moreover, Crawford et al. (2002) highlighted the role of compatibility in leisure activities in fostering emotional intimacy, which is crucial for a satisfying marital relationship (Crawford et al., 2002). The present study supports this notion, emphasizing that shared leisure activities help couples connect emotionally and reinforce their bond. As one participant noted, "When we go for walks together, we have some of our best talks. It really brings us closer," illustrating the profound impact of these activities on emotional bonding.

Another significant theme was the mutual support that couples experience during shared leisure activities. Participants highlighted how engaging in these activities allowed them to support each other, share responsibilities, and provide emotional empathy. This mutual support is critical for maintaining a strong marital foundation. Chioma and Sulong (2022) found that compatibility in leisure activities among married Nigerians significantly correlated with higher levels of mutual support and, consequently, marital satisfaction (Chioma & Sulong, 2022).

This study's findings also resonate with Freire and Teixeira (2018), who noted that leisure activities could enhance overall life satisfaction and emotional regulation, partly due to the support couples provide to each other during these activities (Freire & Teixeira, 2018). One participant remarked, "We love cooking together. It's not just about the food, but about supporting each other and sharing the load," underscoring the importance of mutual support in shared activities.

The theme of relationship growth was also prominent in the findings. Participants felt that engaging in new and challenging activities together helped their relationship grow by promoting personal growth, shared experiences, and strengthened trust. This finding is consistent with the work of Yoo (2022), who found that satisfaction with leisure activities can lead to increased happiness and improved self-esteem, which contribute to personal and relational growth (Yoo, 2022).

Smadi (2017) also reported that women who engaged in shared leisure activities with their spouses experienced higher levels of marital satisfaction and personal growth (Smadi, 2017). The present study supports these findings, illustrating how shared leisure activities can foster relationship growth by providing opportunities for couples to try new things and achieve shared goals together. One participant shared, "We tried hiking together for the first time, and it was challenging but rewarding. It made us trust each other more and grow together."

Improved conflict resolution was another key theme identified in the study. Participants noted that shared leisure activities provided a platform for better communication and understanding, which are essential for resolving conflicts effectively. This finding aligns with Nurdin, Saleh, and Usman (2022), who found that emotional expressivity during shared activities can help couples navigate conflicts more effectively, especially during stressful times like the COVID-19 pandemic (Nurdin et al., 2022).

Crawford et al. (2002) also emphasized that compatibility in leisure activities enhances communication skills, helping couples resolve conflicts and understand each other's perspectives (Crawford et al., 2002). This study supports these findings, highlighting how shared activities can improve conflict resolution by fostering better communication and mutual understanding. As one participant mentioned, "Playing board games has taught us to communicate better and handle our differences with more patience."

The establishment of rituals and traditions through shared leisure activities was another significant theme. Participants reported that regular activities, such as family traditions, date nights, and holiday celebrations, helped create a sense of continuity and shared history within the marriage. This finding is consistent with the work of Campbell (2013), who found that the availability and type of leisure activities significantly influenced marital satisfaction by helping couples establish meaningful rituals and traditions (Campbell, 2013).

Lee, Min, and Chi (2017) also emphasized the importance of leisure activities in creating shared memories and traditions, which strengthen the marital bond over time (Lee et al., 2017). The present study supports these findings, illustrating how the establishment of rituals and traditions through shared activities can enhance marital satisfaction. One participant shared, "Our weekly movie nights are a tradition. It's our time to unwind and connect," highlighting

the role of these rituals in maintaining a strong marital connection.

The role of shared leisure activities in marital satisfaction can vary across different cultural and contextual settings. For example, Chioma and Sulong (2022) found that compatibility in leisure activities significantly correlated with higher marital satisfaction among married Nigerians (Chioma & Sulong, 2022), suggesting that cultural factors can influence the impact of these activities on marital satisfaction. Similarly, Campbell (2013) explored the leisure activities of women in rural Australia and found that the type and availability of activities significantly influenced their marital satisfaction.

The present study also highlights the importance of considering cultural and contextual factors when examining the relationship between shared leisure activities and marital satisfaction (Campbell, 2013). Participants from diverse cultural backgrounds reported different types of leisure activities that contributed to their marital satisfaction, emphasizing the need to consider these factors in future research.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

The findings of this study have several practical implications for enhancing marital satisfaction through shared leisure activities. Couples should be encouraged to identify and engage in activities that they both enjoy and find meaningful. This can help enhance their emotional connection, provide mutual support, promote relationship growth, facilitate conflict resolution, and establish meaningful rituals and traditions.

Marital and family therapists can incorporate leisure activities into their interventions to help couples strengthen their relationship. By focusing on shared interests and activities, therapists can facilitate improved communication and conflict resolution skills among couples. Policymakers and community organizations can also promote programs and initiatives that provide opportunities for couples to engage in shared leisure activities. These programs can be tailored to different cultural and demographic groups to ensure they meet the specific needs and preferences of diverse populations.

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of shared leisure activities in women's marital satisfaction, it has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and may not be representative of all married women. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples to

generalize the findings. Additionally, this study focused on women's perspectives; future studies should also explore men's perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of shared leisure activities on marital satisfaction.

Moreover, this study relied on qualitative methods, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider using mixed-methods approaches to combine the depth of qualitative data with the breadth of quantitative data. Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of shared leisure activities on marital satisfaction over time.

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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