Prediction of Women's Sexual Well-Being Based on Spouses' Autistic Personality Traits, Alexithymia, and Empathy: The Mediating Role of Loneliness

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The sentence "The sample size was determined according to structural equation modeling criteria, requiring a minimum of 250 participants for each group" lacks specification of which SEM guideline was used (e.g., 10 cases per parameter, minimum power criteria). Add citation and rationale to strengthen methodological transparency.

In the AQ description paragraph, the authors state "Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale… Scoring follows a binary method…". Because Likert-response binary scoring is a unique feature of AQ, please justify why the binary scoring was used instead of continuous scoring, and whether this affects variance and SEM assumptions.

There is no mention of whether the AQ, TAS-20, UCLA Loneliness Scale, and Sexual Well-Being Scale were translated into Persian, adapted culturally, or validated for the Iranian student population. Please insert details on translation method (e.g., forward–backward), reliability in local samples, and potential linguistic biases.

The discussion contains causal wording, such as "alexithymia… exerted one of the strongest negative effects" and "empathy… facilitates fulfilling sexual interactions." Given the cross-sectional design, revise wording to reflect associations rather than causal direction.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2.   Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The paragraph states that the IRI consists of "Perspective Taking, Empathic Concern, Fantasy, and Personal Distress." However, later in the PLS model, empathy is treated as a single latent variable without subscale explanation. Please clarify whether all subscales were used, whether any were removed, and justify modeling empathy as unidimensional.

Table 1 lists unexpected constructs such as "Pragmatic language," "Rigid and inflexible personality," "Introverted personality," "Peer relations," "Family relations," which were never defined in the Measures section. Please clarify whether these represent subdimensions derived from AQ, UCLA, or exploratory factor analysis. Without definitions, readers cannot interpret these constructs.

The AVE values for the subscales of sexual well-being range from 0.909 to 0.964, which is unusually high for psychological constructs. Please examine whether item redundancy inflated AVE, or whether PLS algorithm constraints contributed to overestimation.

In the paragraph beginning "The results further indicated that alexithymia in men exerted one of the strongest negative effects…", the authors do not distinguish between the effects of alexithymia versus autistic traits, even though the manuscript itself highlights conceptual overlap. Please add nuance explaining unique versus shared variance.

The manuscript only tests a model where loneliness mediates effects of emotional traits on sexual well-being. However, no competing models (e.g., empathy moderating loneliness, or sexual well-being predicting loneliness) were tested. Presenting model comparison would strengthen causal interpretability.

In the paragraph starting with "Sexual well-being is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional construct…", several claims—such as "considered a fundamental dimension of human flourishing"—lack citations. Since many citations follow later, consider supporting claims in this opening paragraph for coherence.

The sentence "These traits may impair empathy, increase interpersonal misunderstandings, and reduce emotional availability…" assumes direct causality. Please soften the wording or cite empirical longitudinal evidence showing directionality, especially as ASD-related romantic functioning varies widely.

The claim "Emotional disconnection and suppressed affect can compromise sexual responsiveness and diminish subjective satisfaction" is theoretically plausible but not directly supported in the cited lines. Add citations or revise the claim to avoid overextension.

The authors specify using SmartPLS but do not justify why PLS-SEM was preferable to CB-SEM, especially given high measurement reliability and theoretical grounding. Please add justification (non-normality, sample size constraints, formative indicators, or exploratory nature).

The manuscript states "Considering that the R^2 values for most variables fall within 0.50 to 0.75, the structural model demonstrates acceptable fit…" However, several R^2 values exceed 0.90, which is suspiciously high for human behavior constructs. Discuss potential multicollinearity or model overspecification that could cause artificially inflated R^2.

The study concludes that loneliness mediates emotional predictors, but no mediation analysis procedures (e.g., bootstrapping, indirect effect confidence intervals) are reported. Please include the indirect effect estimates and significance values to support the claim.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

2.   Revised

Editor's decision: Accepted.
Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.