




Modeling Marital Satisfaction Based on Differentiation of Self and Perceived Social Support: The Mediating Role of Psychological Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between differentiation of self and perceived social support with marital satisfaction among married female teachers.

Methods and Materials: The present study employed a descriptive-correlational design using path analysis modeling. The statistical population consisted of married female teachers working in elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools in Shiraz during the 2023–2024 academic year who had at least one child. A total of 378 participants were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, the Differentiation of Self Inventory, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Data analysis was performed using SPSS-26 and AMOS-18 software.

Findings: The findings demonstrated that the proposed structural model had an acceptable fit (CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.04). Differentiation of self had a positive and significant direct effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.108, p < 0.05$) and also an indirect effect through psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.276, p < 0.05$). Perceived social support similarly showed significant direct ($\beta = 0.124, p < 0.05$) and indirect effects ($\beta = 0.180, p < 0.05$) on marital satisfaction through psychological well-being. Psychological well-being had a strong direct effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.557, p < 0.05$). Furthermore, differentiation of self and perceived social support significantly predicted psychological well-being, with coefficients of 0.496 and 0.323, respectively ($p < 0.05$). The model explained 45% of the variance in marital satisfaction and 38% of the variance in psychological well-being.

Conclusion: The results indicated that psychological well-being plays an important mediating role in the relationship between differentiation of self, perceived social support, and marital satisfaction.

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, differentiation of self, perceived social support, psychological well-being, female teachers.

1. Introduction

Marital satisfaction is considered one of the central indicators of family functioning, psychological adjustment, and quality of life in adulthood. In contemporary psychological literature, marital satisfaction is conceptualized as individuals' subjective evaluation of the quality, stability, intimacy, and effectiveness of their marital relationship. Researchers have emphasized that satisfying marital relationships are associated with higher levels of emotional security, life satisfaction, adaptive coping, and mental health, whereas marital dissatisfaction is associated with increased psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, interpersonal conflicts, and reduced well-being (Finkel et al., 2023; Overall & McNulty, 2022). In recent decades, the quality of marital relationships has attracted considerable attention because healthy marital functioning contributes not only to individual mental health but also to family stability and broader social functioning (Van Osch et al., 2023). Studies have further demonstrated that the quality of marital relationships influences emotional regulation, stress management, and interpersonal adjustment, all of which contribute to long-term relational stability (Parker et al., 2023; Rusu et al., 2024). Accordingly, identifying the individual and interpersonal variables associated with marital satisfaction has become a major concern in family psychology and counseling research.

Contemporary perspectives on intimate relationships emphasize that marital satisfaction is not solely determined by external circumstances or relationship duration, but rather emerges through the interaction of emotional, cognitive, social, and contextual factors (Finkel et al., 2023). Psychological resources such as emotional regulation, psychological flexibility, coping strategies, and interpersonal competence have been identified as major predictors of relationship quality and stability (Corbo et al., 2024; Garner & Kleiman, 2025). Relationship functioning is particularly influenced by individuals' capacity to regulate emotions and maintain supportive interactions under stressful conditions (Ledermann et al., 2023). Emotional withdrawal, psychological distress, and chronic stress can gradually undermine intimacy and reduce relationship satisfaction (Yang et al., 2023). Consequently, understanding the mechanisms that promote adaptive interpersonal functioning is essential for improving marital satisfaction.

Among the variables associated with healthy marital functioning, differentiation of self has emerged as an

important intrapersonal construct. Rooted in Bowen's family systems theory, differentiation of self refers to the capacity to maintain emotional autonomy while simultaneously preserving emotional intimacy in close relationships. Individuals with higher differentiation are able to separate thoughts from emotions, regulate emotional reactivity, and preserve their personal identity in stressful relational situations (Kim & Yoon, 2023). In contrast, poorly differentiated individuals often experience emotional fusion, excessive dependence, interpersonal anxiety, and difficulties in emotional regulation (Işık & Işık, 2022). Such individuals may respond impulsively during marital conflicts and experience lower relational stability and satisfaction.

A growing body of empirical evidence supports the relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction. Research has shown that individuals with higher levels of self-differentiation report greater intimacy, more adaptive communication patterns, and higher relationship satisfaction (Kashefi et al., 2023; Yıldırım & Demir, 2022). Similarly, differentiation of self has been associated with emotional intimacy, constructive conflict management, and relational adjustment among married couples (Telli & Yavuz Güler, 2023). Studies conducted among married adults indicate that differentiated individuals are more capable of balancing autonomy and connectedness, which facilitates healthier interactions with spouses (Kim & Kang, 2023). In addition, differentiation of self predicts better emotion regulation and lower emotional distress, both of which contribute to higher marital adjustment (Mozas Alonso et al., 2022). Research on couples further suggests that emotional regulation mediates the relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction, indicating that emotional functioning plays an important role in this association (Kashefi et al., 2023; Yıldırım & Demir, 2022).

Research has also demonstrated that differentiation of self is positively associated with psychological well-being. Individuals with higher differentiation generally experience greater emotional balance, autonomy, environmental mastery, and interpersonal effectiveness (Lampis, 2022). Such individuals are better able to regulate stress and maintain psychological stability during interpersonal challenges (Lim & Lee, 2024). Emotional regulation appears to be one of the principal mechanisms linking differentiation of self to well-being because differentiated individuals are less emotionally reactive and more capable of adaptive coping (Kim & Lee, 2023). Studies have shown that higher differentiation predicts lower anxiety, fewer depressive symptoms, and greater psychological adjustment (Lampis,

2022). Therefore, differentiation of self may contribute to marital satisfaction not only directly but also indirectly through promoting positive psychological functioning.

Another major factor associated with marital satisfaction is perceived social support. Social support refers to individuals' perception that emotional, informational, and practical assistance is available through relationships with family members, friends, and significant others (Taylor, 2022). Contemporary theoretical perspectives suggest that perceived social support operates as a psychological resource that buffers stress and promotes adaptive functioning (Lakey & Orehek, 2023). Individuals who perceive themselves as supported generally demonstrate higher emotional resilience, more effective coping strategies, and lower psychological distress (Acoba, 2024). In the context of marital relationships, social support contributes to intimacy, emotional security, and relationship stability.

Empirical studies consistently indicate that perceived social support is positively associated with marital satisfaction. Meta-analytic evidence has demonstrated a robust association between social support and relationship satisfaction across different populations and cultural contexts (Don & Mickelson, 2022). Supportive interactions enhance feelings of belongingness, intimacy, and emotional validation within relationships, thereby improving marital quality (Lakey & Orehek, 2023). Research among married women has shown that perceived social support is associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction, emotional commitment, and marital adjustment (Jalambadani, 2024). Furthermore, emotional support appears to reduce relational stress and facilitate constructive communication between partners (Rusu et al., 2024). Couples who perceive higher levels of support are more likely to engage in collaborative coping strategies and adaptive conflict resolution (Ledermann et al., 2023).

Perceived social support also has an important role in promoting psychological well-being. Social support contributes to emotional security, self-esteem, resilience, and stress reduction (Taylor, 2022). Studies have repeatedly shown that individuals with higher perceived support report greater life satisfaction, lower loneliness, and higher psychological well-being (Yoo & Kim, 2022; Yu et al., 2023). Emotional regulation has been identified as a major mechanism underlying this relationship because supportive interactions facilitate adaptive emotional processing and reduce emotional dysregulation (Szkody & McKinney, 2022). Similarly, perceived support reduces loneliness and

psychological vulnerability, thereby enhancing well-being (Wang et al., 2024). Cross-cultural findings further indicate that social support is universally associated with positive mental health outcomes and subjective well-being (Yu et al., 2023).

Psychological well-being itself represents one of the most important dimensions of positive mental health and adaptive functioning. Ryff conceptualized psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 2022). Unlike approaches focused solely on the absence of psychopathology, psychological well-being reflects optimal psychological functioning and fulfillment. Individuals with high well-being typically demonstrate better emotional regulation, interpersonal competence, resilience, and adaptive coping strategies (Sørensen & Ryff, 2023). Psychological well-being has therefore become an important construct in understanding relationship functioning and marital adjustment.

Research has consistently shown that psychological well-being is positively associated with marital satisfaction. Individuals with greater well-being generally report more satisfying interpersonal interactions, better emotional functioning, and stronger relationship quality (Ulrich et al., 2022). Psychological well-being enhances individuals' capacity to regulate emotions, respond adaptively to relational stress, and maintain supportive communication with spouses (Kim & Lee, 2023). Studies have also shown that emotional processes and psychological resources significantly contribute to relationship satisfaction (Parker et al., 2023). In addition, dyadic coping and emotional support appear to strengthen the association between well-being and marital quality (Rusu et al., 2024). Conversely, poor psychological well-being may contribute to emotional withdrawal, depressive symptoms, and reduced relational intimacy (Yang et al., 2023).

Psychological well-being may also function as a mediating mechanism between interpersonal and intrapersonal resources and marital satisfaction. Studies have indicated that social resources contribute to marital satisfaction indirectly through enhancing well-being (Park & Lee, 2023). Similarly, differentiation of self may influence relationship quality by promoting emotional regulation and psychological adjustment (Lim & Lee, 2024). Individuals with greater psychological well-being are more capable of maintaining adaptive interactions, emotional intimacy, and constructive communication in their marital relationships

(Eryilmaz & Atak, 2023). Thus, psychological well-being may explain how differentiation of self and perceived social support contribute to marital satisfaction.

The importance of these variables becomes even more evident among teachers. Teaching is widely recognized as a highly demanding profession characterized by emotional labor, occupational stress, and heavy social responsibilities (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2023). Teachers frequently experience work-family conflicts, emotional exhaustion, and stress-related challenges that may negatively affect their mental health and interpersonal relationships (Wang et al., 2023). Female teachers in particular often experience additional burdens associated with balancing occupational demands with marital and parental responsibilities (Cinamon & Rich, 2022). Such pressures may negatively influence marital satisfaction if adequate psychological and social resources are not available.

Teacher well-being is strongly associated with social support and psychological adjustment. Research has shown that perceived support reduces burnout and enhances psychological well-being among teachers (Zhao & Li, 2023). Supportive social environments may therefore protect teachers from emotional exhaustion and relational difficulties. Likewise, stress management and emotional regulation are critical for maintaining healthy interpersonal functioning among individuals exposed to chronic occupational demands (Randall & Bodenmann, 2023). Female teachers with higher psychological well-being may consequently demonstrate greater relational satisfaction and adaptive marital functioning.

Despite the growing literature on marital satisfaction, several gaps remain in the existing research. First, many studies have examined differentiation of self, social support, and psychological well-being independently rather than simultaneously within an integrated model. Second, relatively few studies have investigated the mediating role of psychological well-being in explaining the relationship between differentiation of self and perceived social support with marital satisfaction. Third, limited attention has been given to married female teachers, despite the unique occupational and family challenges experienced by this population. Existing evidence suggests that emotional regulation, stress management, and supportive interactions are especially important among individuals exposed to high occupational stress (Ledermann et al., 2023; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2023). Therefore, examining these variables together may provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital satisfaction among female teachers.

Given these considerations, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between differentiation of self and perceived social support with marital satisfaction through the mediating role of psychological well-being among married female teachers.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

The present study was descriptive-correlational in nature and was conducted based on path analysis modeling. The statistical population consisted of married female teachers working in elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools in Shiraz during the 2023–2024 academic year, all of whom had at least one child. According to methodological recommendations for structural equation modeling, a minimum sample size of 200 participants is considered appropriate (Kline, 2011). In order to increase accuracy and control for possible attrition, 378 participants were selected using convenience sampling. Of these, 125 participants (33%) were teaching at the elementary level, 117 participants (31%) at the lower secondary level, and 136 participants (36%) at the upper secondary level. The inclusion criteria included being female, being employed as a teacher, being married, having at least one child, and providing informed consent. Incomplete questionnaires or unwillingness to continue cooperation were considered exclusion criteria. Participants were assured that their information would remain completely confidential.

2.2. Measures

1) ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMSS): This scale was developed by Fowers and Olson (1989) to provide a multidimensional assessment of marital satisfaction. The original version of this instrument included 125 items and 14 subscales, and later shorter forms with 115, 47, 35, and 15 items were developed. Among these versions, the 35-item form, validated by David and Amy Olson (2000), is one of the most widely used versions in international research. In the present study, this version was used to assess marital satisfaction. This form includes four subscales: marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and idealistic distortion. Responses are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Olson’s initial reports showed that the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for these subscales ranged from 0.80 to 0.86, and

test–retest coefficients ranged from 0.81 to 0.92, all indicating appropriate reliability of the instrument. The Persian version of the questionnaire was prepared by Asoodeh et al. (2010) with the approval of Professor Olson, and forward translation and face validity assessment were observed in its localization process. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales were reported to range from 0.74 to 0.80 (Asoodeh et al., 2010).

In the present study, the reliability of the instrument was evaluated as desirable; the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale was 0.93, and for the four subscales of marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and idealistic distortion, the values were 0.86, 0.74, 0.77, and 0.85, respectively. These results indicate appropriate internal consistency of the instrument in the studied sample.

2) Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI): The Differentiation of Self Inventory was first developed by Skowron and Friedlander (1998). It included 43 items and assessed individuals' thoughts and feelings about themselves and their relationships with others. This questionnaire consists of four subscales: emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others. Using Cronbach's alpha, they reported the overall reliability of differentiation as 0.88, and the reliability coefficients for the subscales of emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others as 0.83, 0.80, 0.80, and 0.74, respectively. In the study by Yousefi and Azizi (2018), Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported as 0.78 for emotional reactivity, 0.63 for fusion with others, 0.63 for I-position, 0.78 for emotional cutoff, and 0.81 for the total scale. In the present study, the shortened 20-item form of the Differentiation of Self Inventory by Skowron and Smith (2003) was used.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients calculated in the present study were 0.84 for the total score and 0.72, 0.61, 0.66, and 0.73 for the subscales of emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others, respectively. These values indicate desirable internal consistency of the scale and its factors.

3) Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale – Short Form (RSPWB-SF): This scale was first developed by Ryff in 1989, and its original version included 120 items. Following psychometric evaluations, shorter versions, including 84-, 54-, and 18-item forms, were proposed to increase the efficiency of the instrument while maintaining its structural validity. The present study used the 18-item form, which includes six theoretical dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental

mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Three items are designed for each dimension. Responses are given on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"), with higher scores indicating higher levels of psychological well-being. The Persian version of this scale was psychometrically evaluated by Khanjani et al. (2014), and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale was reported as 0.71. In the present study, the reliability of the total scale was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating appropriate internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

4) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support was developed by Zimet et al. (1988). It consists of 12 items and assesses the level of social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others, using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The Persian version of this instrument was standardized by Besharat (2019), and higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived social support. Valid psychometric evidence in international studies has supported the validity and reliability of this scale. According to previous reports, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the total scale and the subscales of family, significant others, and friends support were reported as 0.91, 0.87, 0.83, and 0.89, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the total scale and the aforementioned subscales were obtained as 0.90, 0.86, 0.87, and 0.91, respectively, indicating desirable internal consistency and appropriate reliability of the instrument in the present sample.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS-26 and AMOS-18 software with a path analysis approach.

3. Findings and Results

In the demographic characteristics section, 73.2% of the respondents were in the age range of 25 to 30 years, 16.4% were between 30 and 35 years, and 10.4% were between 36 and 40 years old. In terms of educational level, 52.4% of the studied sample held a bachelor's degree, 32% held a master's degree, and 15.6% held a doctoral degree. Regarding duration of marriage, 89.6% of the studied sample had been married for less than 10 years, and 10.4% had been married for 10 to 20 years.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables (n = 378)

| Variables | Mean | Standard Deviation | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|--------------------------|--------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Marital satisfaction | 114.52 | 20.98 | -0.33 | -0.26 |
| Perceived social support | 51.47 | 15.27 | -0.30 | -0.55 |
| Psychological well-being | 90.66 | 11.95 | -0.37 | -0.30 |
| Differentiation of self | 70.29 | 11.40 | -0.01 | -0.19 |

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Matrix among the Research Variables

| | Marital satisfaction | Perceived social support | Psychological well-being | Differentiation of self |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Marital satisfaction | 1 | | | |
| Perceived social support | 0.35** | 1 | | |
| Psychological well-being | 0.63** | 0.37** | 1 | |
| Differentiation of self | 0.42** | 0.095 | 0.53** | 1 |

The findings in Table 2 show the correlation coefficients of the research variables with marital satisfaction scores. Differentiation of self ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$), psychological well-being ($r = 0.63, p < 0.01$), and perceived social support ($r = 0.35, p < 0.01$) had positive and significant relationships with marital satisfaction. However, the correlation between the two predictor variables of the study, namely perceived social support and differentiation of self, was positive but not significant ($r = 0.095, p > 0.01$).

First, missing data and outliers, both univariate and multivariate, were identified and removed using box plots

and the Mahalanobis distance index. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test indicated that the data were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). In addition, the skewness and kurtosis values of all variables were within the standard range of ± 2 , indicating a normal or approximately normal distribution. Examination of the prerequisite assumptions for path analysis showed that the independence of errors was established, and the variance inflation factor values for all variables were less than 10, confirming the absence of multicollinearity. Subsequently, path analysis modeling was used to test the mediating role of psychological well-being.

Table 3

Standardized Regression Coefficients and Significance Levels of the Model

| Path | Direct effect | Direct effect | Indirect effect | Indirect effect | Total effect | Total effect |
|---|---------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| | β | p | β | p | β | p |
| Differentiation of self → Marital satisfaction | 0.108 | 0.004 | 0.276 | 0.001 | 0.384 | 0.001 |
| Perceived social support → Marital satisfaction | 0.124 | 0.002 | 0.180 | 0.001 | 0.304 | 0.001 |
| Psychological well-being → Marital satisfaction | 0.557 | 0.001 | ... | ... | 0.557 | 0.001 |
| Differentiation of self → Psychological well-being | 0.496 | 0.001 | ... | ... | 0.496 | 0.001 |
| Perceived social support → Psychological well-being | 0.323 | 0.001 | ... | ... | 0.323 | 0.001 |

Table 4

Results of Model Fit Indices

| Index | Abbreviation | Obtained value | Acceptable range |
|--|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| Chi-square | χ^2 | 1.81 | - |
| Chi-square divided by degrees of freedom | χ^2/df | 1.81 | Less than 3 |
| Comparative Fit Index | CFI | 0.99 | 0.95–1 |
| Goodness-of-Fit Index | GFI | 0.99 | 0.95–1 |
| Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index | AGFI | 0.97 | 0.95–1 |
| Root Mean Square Error of Approximation | RMSEA | 0.04 | 0–0.08 |

According to Table 3, the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between differentiation of self and perceived social support with marital satisfaction was examined. Given the appropriate fit of the model, differentiation of self had a direct and significant effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.108$, $p < 0.05$), and its indirect effect through psychological well-being was 0.276 and significant. Perceived social support also showed a direct and significant effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.124$, $p < 0.05$), and its indirect effect through psychological well-being was reported as 0.180 and significant. Psychological well-being also had a strong direct effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.557$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, differentiation of self and perceived social support had significant effects on psychological well-being, with coefficients of 0.496 and 0.323, respectively ($p < 0.05$). Based on the coefficients of determination, 45% of the variance in marital satisfaction was explained by the variables in the model, and the predictor variables of the model explained 38% of the variance in psychological well-being.

To examine the magnitude of the mediating effect of psychological well-being, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) index was calculated. This index is obtained from the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect and indicates the contribution of the mediating pathway in explaining the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variable. The results showed that the VAF values for the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction, and also in the relationship between perceived social support and marital satisfaction, were 0.72 and 0.60, respectively. These values indicate an acceptable mediating role of psychological well-being in the research model. Therefore, part of the effect of differentiation of self and perceived social support on marital satisfaction is explained through psychological well-being, and this variable plays an important role in transmitting the effect of the predictor variables on marital satisfaction.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrated that the proposed structural model predicting marital satisfaction based on differentiation of self and perceived social support through the mediating role of psychological well-being had an acceptable fit among married female teachers. The results indicated that differentiation of self, perceived social

support, and psychological well-being were all positively and significantly associated with marital satisfaction. Furthermore, psychological well-being significantly mediated the relationships between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction, as well as between perceived social support and marital satisfaction. Overall, the findings suggest that both interpersonal and intrapersonal psychological resources contribute substantially to relationship quality and marital functioning among married female teachers.

One of the major findings of the present study was the positive and significant relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that individuals with higher levels of differentiation generally report greater relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, and adaptive marital adjustment (Kashefi et al., 2023; Telli & Yavuz Güler, 2023; Yıldırım & Demir, 2022). From a theoretical perspective, differentiation of self reflects individuals' ability to maintain emotional autonomy while preserving intimacy and connectedness within close relationships. Individuals with higher differentiation can regulate emotional reactivity more effectively, think rationally under stressful conditions, and avoid excessive emotional fusion or withdrawal during interpersonal conflicts (Kim & Yoon, 2023). Such individuals are more capable of balancing personal independence and emotional closeness, which facilitates healthier marital interactions and greater relationship stability.

The findings can also be interpreted through the emotional regulation perspective. Previous research has shown that emotional regulation plays a central role in marital adjustment and relational functioning (Işık & Işık, 2022). Individuals with higher self-differentiation are more capable of regulating negative emotions, tolerating interpersonal tension, and engaging in constructive communication during marital disagreements. Consequently, they are less likely to experience destructive conflict patterns, emotional distancing, or impulsive reactions that undermine marital quality. Research has further demonstrated that emotional regulation mediates the relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction (Yıldırım & Demir, 2022). In this regard, differentiated individuals may experience greater emotional balance and psychological flexibility, enabling them to maintain intimacy and relational stability even under stressful circumstances.

Another important finding of the study was the significant positive relationship between perceived social support and marital satisfaction. This result is consistent with previous evidence indicating that perceived social support is one of the strongest predictors of relationship quality and emotional adjustment in couples (Don & Mickelson, 2022; Jalambadani, 2024). Social support contributes to marital satisfaction by enhancing feelings of emotional security, acceptance, intimacy, and belongingness within relationships. According to relational regulation theory, supportive social interactions help individuals regulate emotional distress and maintain psychological equilibrium (Lakey & Orehek, 2023). Consequently, individuals who perceive greater support from spouses, family members, friends, and significant others are better able to cope with relational stressors and maintain satisfying marital interactions.

The findings may also be explained by the stress-buffering function of social support. Research has shown that social support reduces psychological vulnerability and promotes adaptive coping under stressful conditions (Taylor, 2022). Married individuals who perceive stronger social support networks are more likely to experience reduced loneliness, lower emotional distress, and improved relational functioning (Yoo & Kim, 2022; Yu et al., 2023). Emotional support provides reassurance and validation, while informational and instrumental support help individuals manage practical and emotional challenges more effectively. Such resources may strengthen couples' resilience and collaborative coping strategies, thereby enhancing marital satisfaction. In addition, social support may improve communication quality and emotional responsiveness between spouses, both of which are central components of satisfying marital relationships.

The present findings further demonstrated that psychological well-being had a strong positive relationship with marital satisfaction. This result aligns with prior studies showing that psychological well-being is closely associated with relationship quality, intimacy, and adaptive interpersonal functioning (Parker et al., 2023; Ulrich et al., 2022; Van Osch et al., 2023). Individuals with greater psychological well-being generally experience more positive emotions, stronger interpersonal competence, and greater emotional stability. Such individuals are more likely to engage in supportive communication, effective conflict resolution, and adaptive emotional interactions with their spouses. Conversely, lower psychological well-being may

contribute to emotional withdrawal, depressive symptoms, and relational dissatisfaction (Yang et al., 2023).

From a positive psychology perspective, psychological well-being reflects optimal psychological functioning characterized by self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others (Ryff, 2022). Individuals with high well-being tend to possess greater emotional resilience and stronger coping capacities, enabling them to manage relational stress more effectively. Research has shown that psychological well-being contributes to relationship functioning through emotional processes and supportive interpersonal behaviors (Kim & Lee, 2023; Parker et al., 2023). In intimate relationships, emotionally healthy individuals are more capable of empathic understanding, emotional responsiveness, and constructive interaction patterns, which ultimately strengthen marital satisfaction.

One of the most important findings of the present study was the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that differentiation contributes to marital quality through psychological adjustment and emotional functioning (Kim & Kang, 2023; Lampis, 2022; Lim & Lee, 2024). Individuals with higher differentiation experience lower emotional reactivity and greater emotional regulation, which promote psychological well-being and adaptive functioning. In turn, improved well-being enhances interpersonal competence, emotional intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, psychological well-being appears to represent an important mechanism through which self-differentiation influences marital functioning.

The mediating role of psychological well-being may also be understood in terms of emotional resilience and stress management. Differentiated individuals are better able to preserve emotional stability in the face of interpersonal tension and occupational stressors. This capacity reduces chronic anxiety and emotional exhaustion while enhancing feelings of competence and control. Previous studies have demonstrated that differentiation of self predicts psychological well-being through emotional regulation and adaptive coping (Kim & Kang, 2023; Lampis, 2022). Consequently, individuals with higher differentiation are more likely to maintain satisfying marital relationships because they possess greater emotional resources for managing interpersonal challenges.

The findings additionally indicated that psychological well-being mediated the relationship between perceived

social support and marital satisfaction. This result is supported by prior evidence showing that social support enhances relationship satisfaction indirectly through improving mental health and emotional functioning (Park & Lee, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Social support contributes to well-being by reducing loneliness, emotional distress, and perceived stress while simultaneously promoting emotional security and resilience (Acoba, 2024). Individuals who feel emotionally supported are more likely to experience optimism, positive affect, and emotional stability, all of which facilitate healthier interpersonal interactions and stronger marital bonds.

The mediating role of psychological well-being in this relationship may further be explained by emotional regulation mechanisms. Previous studies have shown that emotional regulation mediates the association between social support and psychological well-being (Szkody & McKinney, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Supportive relationships help individuals process emotions more adaptively, regulate negative affect, and maintain emotional balance under stressful conditions. Consequently, individuals with stronger perceived support may display more constructive communication patterns, reduced interpersonal hostility, and greater emotional responsiveness within marital relationships. Such emotional and relational benefits contribute significantly to marital satisfaction.

The occupational context of the participants also provides an important framework for interpreting the findings. Female teachers frequently experience high levels of occupational stress, emotional labor, and role conflict due to the simultaneous demands of professional responsibilities and family obligations (Cinamon & Rich, 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2023). Such stressors may negatively influence psychological adjustment and relationship quality if adequate coping resources are not available. In this regard, differentiation of self, social support, and psychological well-being may function as protective resources that help female teachers maintain relational stability and emotional balance despite occupational pressures.

Research has shown that occupational stress and burnout among teachers are strongly associated with reduced well-being and impaired interpersonal functioning (Wang et al., 2023). Conversely, supportive social environments and adaptive psychological resources contribute to resilience and emotional adjustment among teachers (Zhao & Li, 2023). Female teachers with higher levels of self-differentiation may therefore be better equipped to manage emotional demands and maintain healthy boundaries between

occupational and family stressors. Similarly, perceived social support may buffer the negative effects of occupational stress on marital functioning. These findings underscore the importance of considering occupational context when examining marital satisfaction among employed women.

The findings of the present study also support contemporary relational perspectives emphasizing the interactive role of personal and social resources in relationship functioning (Overall & McNulty, 2022). Marital satisfaction does not emerge solely from external relationship conditions but is substantially influenced by individuals' emotional capacities, psychological resources, and interpersonal support systems. Psychological well-being appears to function as a central mechanism linking these resources to relationship quality. In this sense, satisfying marital relationships may reflect the combined influence of emotional regulation, adaptive coping, supportive interactions, and psychological resilience.

Another important implication of the findings concerns the multidimensional nature of marital satisfaction. Relationship quality is influenced simultaneously by emotional, interpersonal, and contextual variables. Studies have shown that emotional support, dyadic coping, emotional intimacy, and psychological flexibility all contribute to healthy marital functioning (Ledermann et al., 2023; Rusu et al., 2024). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that differentiation of self and social support may contribute to marital satisfaction through enhancing psychological well-being. Therefore, interventions aimed at improving relationship quality should simultaneously address emotional regulation, social support systems, and psychological adjustment.

5. Conclusion

The results are consistent with broader positive psychology frameworks emphasizing the importance of flourishing and emotional well-being in interpersonal functioning (Ryff, 2022; Sørensen & Ryff, 2023). Psychological well-being is not merely the absence of distress but represents a positive state of functioning characterized by purpose, growth, autonomy, and positive relations with others. Such characteristics facilitate adaptive communication and emotional responsiveness within intimate relationships. Consequently, enhancing psychological well-being may contribute not only to

individual mental health but also to stronger and more satisfying marital relationships.

6. Limitations and Suggestions

One limitation of the present study is that the findings were obtained from married female teachers in a single city; therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to men, unemployed women, or individuals from other cultural and occupational contexts. Another limitation concerns the correlational and cross-sectional nature of the study, which prevents definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships among the variables. Additionally, all data were collected through self-report measures, which may be influenced by response bias, social desirability, or participants' subjective interpretations.

Future research should examine these relationships using longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify causal pathways among differentiation of self, perceived social support, psychological well-being, and marital satisfaction. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate additional mediating and moderating variables such as attachment styles, coping strategies, personality traits, emotional intelligence, and occupational burnout. Comparative studies involving men, dual-career couples, and individuals from different professions and cultural backgrounds may further improve understanding of the mechanisms underlying marital satisfaction.

The findings of the present study have several practical implications for counselors, family therapists, and mental health professionals. Educational and counseling programs aimed at improving marital satisfaction may benefit from strengthening self-differentiation skills, emotional regulation capacities, and supportive interpersonal interactions among couples. Interventions focused on enhancing psychological well-being and resilience may also improve relational functioning and marital stability. Furthermore, workplace mental health programs designed for teachers should incorporate strategies for stress management, emotional support, and work-family balance in order to promote both psychological adjustment and family well-being.

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.

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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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