

# Predicting Marital Intimacy Based on Mindfulness with the Mediating Role of Self-Compassion in Married Women

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## ABSTRACT

Marital intimacy is a significant factor in strengthening couple relationships. Given its importance, the present study aimed to predict marital intimacy based on mindfulness with the mediating role of self-compassion in married women. This descriptive correlational research was conducted using structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of married women in Rasht in 2022. A total of 280 married women participated in the study through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Marital Intimacy Questionnaire, the short form of the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory, and the Self-Compassion Scale. SPSS and SmartPLS software were used for data analysis. The results showed that the proposed model had a good fit. The findings indicated that the direct effects of mindfulness on marital intimacy ( $\beta = 0.23$ ), self-compassion on marital intimacy ( $\beta = 0.16$ ), and mindfulness on self-compassion ( $\beta = 0.66$ ) were all statistically significant. Additionally, the indirect effect of mindfulness on marital intimacy through self-compassion ( $\beta = 0.10$ ) was also significant. Therefore, self-compassion played a mediating role in the relationship between mindfulness and marital intimacy. Overall, the results demonstrated that mindfulness influences marital intimacy both directly and indirectly through self-compassion. Based on these findings, implementing educational and therapeutic programs focusing on mindfulness and self-compassion is recommended to enhance marital intimacy.

## **Introduction**

As one of the most fundamental social institutions, marriage has long been regarded as a vital source of emotional fulfillment (Farhadi et al., 2020). The primary purpose of marriage is connection, and a marriage without communication lacks meaning. For many individuals, marriage represents an intimate relationship that serves as a source of support, companionship, and joy (Sasani et al., 2020). Marital intimacy forms the core of romantic relationships, playing a crucial role in marital functioning, commitment, stability, and both psychological and physical well-being. A lack of intimacy in marriage can erode trust, weaken romantic bonds (Kamali et al., 2020), and contribute to distress, isolation, incompatibility, stress, depression, and psychological disorders among couples (Babae & Ghahari, 2016). Research indicates that intimacy is a key factor in fostering stable marriages, while avoidance of intimacy is associated with relationship dissolution and family breakdowns (Sasani et al., 2020).

Marital intimacy is a critical dimension of relationship quality, influencing the continuity and uniqueness of a couple's bond (Javadivala et al., 2019). It encompasses emotional, psychosocial, spiritual, and physical aspects (Rezaei Vala & Yarmohamadi Vassel, 2021). Intimacy is a dynamic concept in human relationships, particularly in marriages, facilitating the fulfillment of psychological and emotional needs such as attention, trust, care, and security (Hajimoradi et al., 2021). Those who experience higher levels of intimacy in their relationships tend to present themselves more authentically and communicate their needs more effectively (Abusaidi et al., 2018). In general, marital intimacy operates on three levels: dyadic, individual, and social. The dyadic level involves various degrees of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral bonding between partners. The individual level pertains to the ability of each spouse to be open, authentic, and willing to share thoughts and feelings. The social level reflects how couples function as a unit within their broader social environment (Mohammadi et al., 2017).

Several factors influence marital intimacy, among which self-compassion plays a significant role. Individuals with high self-compassion exhibit greater control over physical and verbal aggression in their relationships and are perceived as more emotionally engaged and accepting by their partners. Research has shown that self-compassionate individuals are more likely to meet their own emotional needs, which in turn enhances their ability to express compassion toward their spouses (Neff & Beretvas, 2012). Additionally, self-compassion training has been found to increase intimate attitudes and reduce the likelihood of divorce among women (Bozorgi et al., 2017). Those who experience high levels of self-compassion tend to develop greater confidence, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication skills, all of which contribute to improved marital intimacy (Rezaei Vala & Yarmohamadi Vassel, 2021). Neff (2011) conceptualizes self-compassion as comprising three key components: self-kindness (being kind to oneself rather than self-critical), common humanity (recognizing imperfection as a shared human experience rather than feeling isolated), and mindfulness (being aware of thoughts and emotions without over-identifying with them) (Jacobson et al., 2018; Vahedi, 2021).

Another crucial factor affecting marital intimacy is mindfulness, which plays a vital role in enhancing emotional regulation. Mindfulness allows individuals to accept their emotions as they arise, leading to greater self-regulation and improved marital intimacy (Ghasemi et al., 2018). It has been shown to reduce negative thoughts, tension, and marital conflicts, thereby fostering stronger relationships between couples (Alizadeh Asli & Jafarnejad Langroodi, 2018). Mindfulness involves present-moment awareness, openness to experience, and nonjudgmental acceptance of emotions and thoughts. Through mindfulness training, individuals can cultivate emotional skills that enhance marital satisfaction and strengthen intimate bonds (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). By preventing avoidance of distressing emotions, mindfulness enables individuals to remain present and engaged in their relationships, even during challenging times (Neff & Germer, 2017).

It is hypothesized that self-compassion stems from mindfulness, with mindfulness training fostering self-acceptance and compassion (Sedighimornani et al., 2019). Several studies support the notion that self-compassion mediates the relationship between mindfulness and various psychological outcomes. For instance, Yip et al. (2016) found that therapists with higher mindfulness scores experienced less emotional exhaustion due to their self-compassionate tendencies. Similarly, Fulton (2018) demonstrated that self-compassion mediates the link between mindfulness and compassion toward others. Additionally, Sedighimornani et al. (2019) reported that self-compassion mediates the relationship between mindfulness and shame. Another study by Rezaeipour et al. (2022) highlighted that mindfulness indirectly influences COVID-19 anxiety through self-compassion. Since mindfulness is a broader construct than self-compassion, researchers emphasize the need to cultivate mindfulness skills to enhance self-compassion as a protective strategy against emotional distress (Bergen-Cico et al., 2013).

Given the importance of marital intimacy in maintaining a stable marriage and the impact of mindfulness and self-compassion on enhancing intimacy, previous research has largely overlooked the mediating role of self-

compassion in the relationship between mindfulness and marital intimacy. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the prediction of marital intimacy based on mindfulness, with self-compassion as a mediating variable among married women.

## **Methods**

This study was a descriptive correlational research conducted using the structural equation modeling (SEM) method. The statistical population included married women in Rasht city in 2022. The sample consisted of 280 married women selected through convenience sampling. According to Garver & Mentzer (1999), the recommended minimum sample size for SEM studies is 200 participants; however, to reduce potential attrition effects and consider the sampling method, the sample size was increased to 280 participants.

The sampling process was conducted online via the Porsline platform, and the questionnaire link was shared in virtual social media groups. The inclusion criteria were residence in Rasht city, an age range of 18 to 55 years, and a marriage duration of at least one year and at most 20 years. The exclusion criterion was the failure to complete the questionnaire.

All participants voluntarily took part in the study with full awareness of the research objectives. Their confidentiality was ensured, and participation in the study posed no physical or psychological harm. Data analysis was performed using SPSS and Smart PLS software.

### **2.1. Measurement tools**

1. Marital Intimacy Scale (MIS): Developed by Walker and Thompson (1983), this scale consists of 17 items designed to assess the level of intimacy between spouses across five dimensions: emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, and physical. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always), with total scores ranging from 17 to 119. Higher scores indicate greater marital intimacy. This scale was translated into Persian by Sanaei et al. (2017). Reliability analyses have reported strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.91 to 0.97. In a study by Etemadi et al. (2014), the scale was administered to 100 randomly selected couples in Isfahan, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96, confirming its high reliability. Item analysis also indicated that removing any individual item did not significantly impact the scale's reliability (Hamedei & Zarei, 2010).

2. Short Form of the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI-SF): Developed by Walach et al. (2006), this scale consists of 14 items measuring mindfulness on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Rarely) to 4 (Always). Item 13 is reverse-scored. The total score ranges from 14 to 56, with higher scores reflecting greater mindfulness. Ghasemi Jobaneh et al. (2015) translated this scale into Persian and validated its psychometric properties. Convergent validity was confirmed through correlations with self-control ( $r = 0.69$ ) and emotion regulation ( $r = 0.68$ ), both significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Confirmatory factor analysis indicated an acceptable model fit, supporting the structural validity of the questionnaire. The reliability analysis demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, an ordinal beta of 0.93, and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.83 over a four-week interval.

3. Self-Compassion Scale (SCS): Designed by Neff (2003), this scale consists of 26 items assessing six key dimensions: self-kindness, self-judgment (reverse-scored), common humanity, isolation (reverse-scored), mindfulness, and over-identification (reverse-scored). Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Rarely) to 5 (Almost Always), with total scores ranging from 26 to 130. Higher scores indicate greater self-compassion. This scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including high reliability and validity. In a study by Neff (2003) on 391 university students, the scale showed excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92. Convergent validity was established using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, yielding a correlation of 0.59. In Iran, Momeni et al. (2013) conducted a factor analysis, identifying four factors that accounted for 47% of the total variance. Confirmatory factor analysis further supported the extracted factor structure. Internal consistency for this scale in Iranian samples was reported as acceptable, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 (Ghorbani et al., 2012).

## **Results**

This study was conducted on 280 married women, but only 255 questionnaires were used for analysis after excluding outliers. In the present study, the mean age of participants was 32.55 years, and the mean duration of marriage was 10.80 years. Additionally, 175 participants had children, while 80 participants were childless. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of the study variables.

*Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Matrix*

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
Marital Intimacy	94.60	23.60	-1.31	0.96	1		
Mindfulness	40.09	6.91	-0.34	0.56	0.32**	1	
Self-Compassion	82.03	14.26	0.10	0.60	0.30**	0.64**	1

\*\*P < 0.01

Table 1 illustrates a significant positive correlation ( $p < 0.01$ ) between the predictor variable (mindfulness), the mediator variable (self-compassion), and the criterion variable (marital intimacy).

One of the key assumptions in predictive modeling is the Tolerance Index, which measures the degree of multicollinearity among predictor variables. A value closer to 1 indicates lower multicollinearity. In the present study, the Tolerance Index was calculated as 0.59, suggesting an acceptable level of collinearity.

Figure 1 displays the path coefficients and the model's coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ).

Figure 1: Path coefficients and model determination

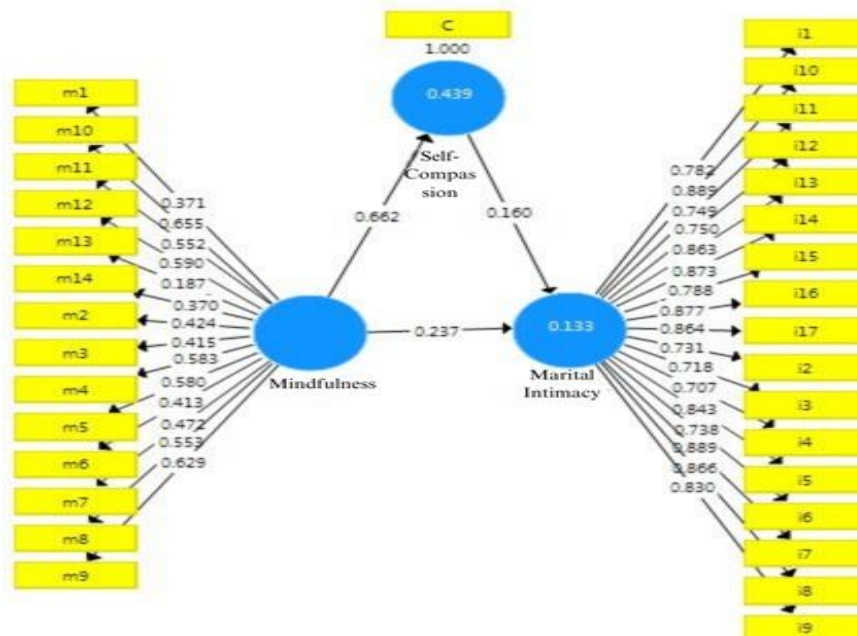


Figure 1 shows that 13.3% of the variance in marital intimacy is explained by mindfulness and self-compassion ( $R^2 = 0.133$ ). The direct effects of mindfulness and self-compassion on marital intimacy are 0.237 and 0.160, respectively. This indicates that as mindfulness and self-compassion increase, the level of marital intimacy also increases. One of the key model fit indices in structural equation modeling is the Stone-Geisser's  $Q^2$  value. A  $Q^2$  greater than zero indicates an acceptable predictive relevance of the model. Values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large predictive relevance, respectively (Hair et al., 2017). In the present study, the  $Q^2$  value was 0.07, suggesting that the model's predictive relevance is below moderate. Moreover, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was reported to be less than 0.08, which reflects a valid model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Figure 2 illustrates the absolute t-values indicating the significance of the path coefficients, derived through the bootstrap procedure.

Figure 2: Significance of Path Coefficients (t-values)

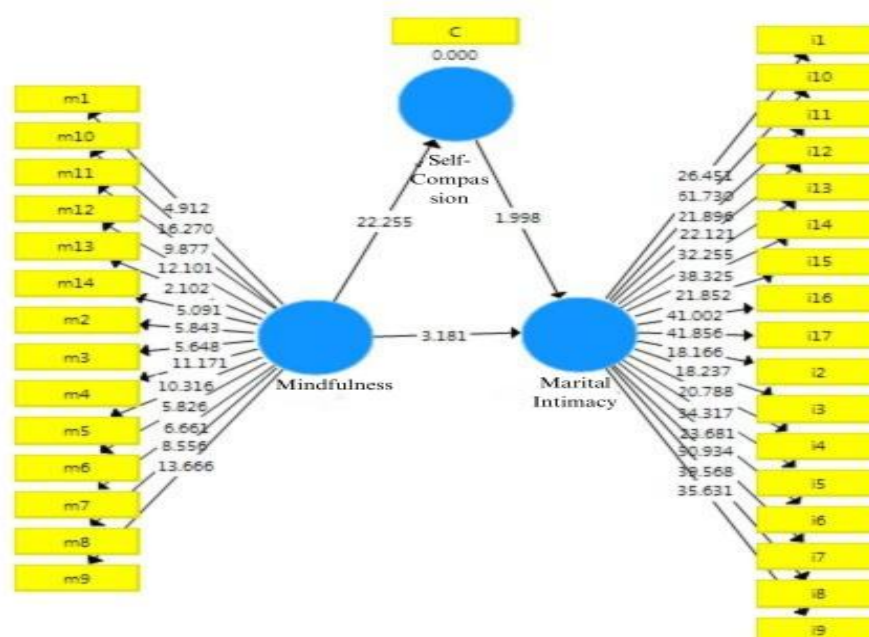


Figure 2 shows that the calculated t-values for all path coefficients are greater than 1.96; therefore, they are considered statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2 presents the indirect path and the significance of the model.

Table 2: Indirect Path and Significance

Variable	Path	t-value	Significance
Mindfulness → Self-Compassion → Marital Intimacy	0/10	2/01	$P \leq 0/05$

Table 2 shows that the indirect effect of mindfulness on marital intimacy, mediated by self-compassion, is 0.10. According to the bootstrap test, this effect is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, self-compassion mediates the relationship between mindfulness and marital intimacy.

Table 3 presents the direct paths and their significance.

Table 3: Direct Paths and Significance

Variable	Path Coefficient	t-value	Significance
Mindfulness → Marital Intimacy	0/23	3/31	$P \leq 0/001$
Self-Compassion → Marital Intimacy	0/16	2/04	$P \leq 0/05$
Mindfulness → Self-Compassion	0/66	21/12	$P \leq 0/001$

Table 3 shows that the direct effect of mindfulness on marital intimacy is 0.23, the direct effect of self-compassion on marital intimacy is 0.16, and the direct effect of mindfulness on self-compassion is 0.66. According to the bootstrap test, these effects are statistically significant at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to predict marital intimacy based on mindfulness with the mediating role of self-compassion in married women. The results indicated that the direct effect of mindfulness on marital intimacy was significantly positive; in other words, increased mindfulness was associated with increased marital intimacy. This finding aligns with the studies of Wachs and Cordova (2007), Ghasedi et al. (2018), Alizadeh Asli and Jafar Nezhad Langroudi (2018), Foroozesh Yekta et al. (2018), and Mahmoudpour et al. (2020).

Mindfulness involves purposeful and nonjudgmental attention to present-moment experiences and is associated with emotional regulation, distress tolerance, psychological flexibility, and increased life satisfaction. These mechanisms can alter partners' perceptions of their relationship and interpersonal emotions. For instance, mindful individuals tend to delay premature judgments and engage in constructive behavior during conflicts, thereby fostering a supportive and intimate environment (Foroozesh Yekta et al., 2018). Therefore, higher levels of self-regulation, flexibility, and adaptability, as well as a positive outlook toward the spouse, may increase the likelihood of experiencing deeper intimacy in mindful individuals (Mahmoudpour et al., 2020).

Another finding showed that self-compassion also had a significant positive direct effect on marital intimacy. In other words, increased self-compassion was associated with increased intimacy. This result is consistent with the findings of Neff and Beretvas (2012), Dasht Bozorgi et al. (2017), Jacobson et al. (2018), Rezaei Vala and Yarmohamadi Vassel (2021), and Vahedi (2021). Self-compassionate individuals are more capable of meeting their emotional needs, which helps them maintain balance in their marital relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Moreover, they are better at conflict resolution because they can see their partner's perspective during disagreements and interpret struggles as part of the human experience rather than personal failings (Neff et al., 2007). With nonjudgmental awareness of their negative emotions, such individuals tend to respond to distress with emotional balance, which promotes the use of mindfulness processes to resolve relational issues (Jacobson et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the results demonstrated that mindfulness had a significant direct effect on self-compassion; as mindfulness increased, so did self-compassion. This finding supports previous research by Bergen-Cico et al. (2013), Yip et al. (2016), Fulton (2018), Sedighimornani et al. (2019), Sakeni et al. (2019), and Rasaei (2020). Mindfulness fosters nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment, helping individuals refrain from overidentifying with distressing thoughts and instead view them as temporary experiences. Consequently, individuals are more likely to accept difficulties consciously and respond to them with kindness and self-compassion (Kolts, 2016; Rasaei, 2020).

Moreover, the findings showed that self-compassion mediated the relationship between mindfulness and marital intimacy. Mindful individuals tend to exhibit empathy toward others, while those high in self-compassion demonstrate forgiveness, altruism, and strong social bonds. Overall, people who are both mindful and self-compassionate are more likely to express positive attitudes toward others. Specifically, mindful individuals with high levels of self-compassion extend their compassion to others as well (Fulton, 2018). This nonjudgmental awareness of present-moment experiences contributes to a greater sense of being accepted by the partner and creates an atmosphere of openness and kindness, enhancing feelings of closeness between spouses (Mahmoudpour et al., 2020).

From a practical standpoint, developing mindfulness skills in married women—such as present-focused attention and nonjudgmental awareness of negative thoughts and emotions—can help them face challenges more constructively and respond with thoughtful solutions. Increasing mindfulness may also reduce rumination and suppression of negative emotions, thereby enhancing self-compassion. As a result, women are more likely to develop positive self-regard and express greater kindness and empathy toward their partners, leading to enhanced marital intimacy.

This study was subject to limitations, including the use of convenience sampling, data collection conducted online, and a sample limited to married women, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Additionally, potential confounding variables such as age, length of marriage, parental status, education, and employment were not controlled. Future research is recommended to address these limitations by employing random sampling, in-person data collection, and including gender-based analyses. Based on the findings, it is recommended that interventions aiming to enhance marital intimacy focus on promoting self-compassion and that clinicians incorporate mindfulness- and compassion-based therapies in couple counseling to strengthen family bonds.

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