

A phenomenological study: Examining marital intimacy from the perspective of dual-income couples

Arman Khosraviani ¹

1. Senior Family Counseling Expert, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran, Iran.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

phenomenology, dual-income couples, marital intimacy

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research was to examine marital intimacy from the perspective of dual-income couples. The study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive phenomenological method. The participants included 7 couples, all aged between 35 and 46 years, who were selected through purposive and convenient sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Colaizzi's seven-step method. The findings of the research included 6 categories as follows: effective communication, mutual thinking and participation of spouses, pleasurable marital relationship, indicators of mutual love, trust-building factors, and spouses' expectations and demands from each other. The role of intimacy in the marital life of couples is of great importance, and their perspective on this component of marital quality will influence their lifestyle and behaviors; as marital intimacy significantly affects the quality of the relationship between spouses, and increasing marital satisfaction leads to the stability and strength of this relationship, thereby largely preventing divorce.

Introduction

One of the most valuable dimensions of human existence is intimacy, which is essential for healthy functioning. Intimacy is defined as a combination of love and affection, disclosure and expression, compatibility, integrity, sexual connection, conflict resolution, self-following, and similarity (Moradi and Keshavarz Afshar, 2021). Intimacy means that at least two people engage in each other's lives intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually (Irandoost et al., 2018). According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, the psychosocial crisis of young adulthood is intimacy versus isolation. Intimacy means that an individual's identity merges with another's without the fear of losing it. Mature intimacy is a prerequisite for marriage, signifying the ability and willingness to share mutual trust, which requires sacrifice, compromise, and commitment in the relationship between two equal individuals (Feist and Feist, 2009) .

Since intimacy is a fundamental human need, strengthening intimate relationships between spouses can be the first step toward a desirable marital life (Khojasteh Mehr et al., 2017). The common conceptualization of marital intimacy includes the level of closeness to a spouse, sharing values and ideas, joint activities, sexual relations, knowledge of one another, and emotional behaviors such as affection (Omidifar et al., 2016). Marital intimacy is one of the important components of marital quality of life, encompassing closeness in the relationship, respect, love, and sexual desires (Ghasemi Jobaneh et al., 2019). Marital intimacy is defined as an interpersonal and reciprocal process through which one partner shares personal feelings, thoughts, and information with their spouse, and as a result of their partner's response, they feel validated and cared for (Canavarro et al., 2015). Marital intimacy is a state in which spouses, while trusting each other, are sensitive to each other's feelings, verbally or non-verbally, and disclose things about themselves (Mostafaei et al., 2021) .

In other words, intimacy is a real human need in the relationships between spouses, through which they can easily empathize with each other by engaging in self-disclosure, leading to effective division of labor, sexual desires, and the establishment of love and affection (Sana Gooyizadeh, 2021). In summary, marital intimacy involves discussing deep feelings, dreams, wishes, concerns, and joys, which requires self-awareness and consideration of hidden inner feelings (Naddaf and Heidari, 2017) .

Self-disclosure constitutes an important part of interpersonal relationships and is essential for understanding marital functioning. Self-disclosure plays a significant role in reducing the distance between individuals and expanding intimate relationships, and in marital relationships, revealing and informing one's spouse about thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes has a decisive role in marital satisfaction, as well as increasing health, self-esteem, and the ability to overcome problems in couples (Panahpour and Joohari, 2024). When a genuine loving relationship between a husband and wife begins to grow, love, affection, and intimacy also begin to flourish, and both individuals gradually develop a better spirit. Overall, it can be said that other emotional aspects, such as sufficient verbal communication, eye contact, and good physical interaction, can create a high level of intimacy in the marital relationships of couples (Zakhirehdari et al., 2019). Marital intimacy has three levels: first, the couple level, which encompasses various degrees of affection, understanding, and behavioral solidarity between two individuals. Second, the individual level, which reflects each spouse's ability to be straightforward and honest (not hiding matters from each other), to be authentic (being their true selves), and to share thoughts and feelings. Third, the social level, which refers to the way in which an individual can be considered as a marital unit with their spouse (Mohammadi et al., 2017). Intimacy consists of multiple elements that are formed gradually and step by step; it begins with rational intimacy (conversation and self-disclosure) and continues with physical intimacy (holding hands, hugging, and sexual relations), ultimately culminating in emotional intimacy (being available, providing support, emotional expression, and mutual sensitivity) (Pouryahi et al., 2019).

Intimacy in marital relationships has emotional, affective, and social dimensions, and acceptance, satisfaction, and love create it (Behbahani and Ghorbanshiroudi, 1399). Intimacy is a composite element that encompasses various components such as affection, emotion, self-disclosure,

compatibility, similarity, independence, and attachment. The combination and balance of all these elements create intimacy and sustain it. In other words, intimacy is an interactive process that includes several interrelated components, with the center of this process being awareness, understanding, acceptance of the spouse, and empathy to comprehend their feelings and understand their unique perspective of the world (Nazari et al., 1398). Bagarozzi (2013) identified nine interrelated components for the need for intimacy: emotional intimacy (the need to communicate and share all feelings and emotions with the spouse, comfortably expressing feelings), psychological intimacy (the need to share fears, worries, doubts, and inner conflicts with the spouse), rational intimacy (the need to share opinions, thoughts, and beliefs with each other), sexual intimacy (the need to share feelings, desires, and sexual fantasies with the spouse and stimulate sexual desires), physical intimacy (non-sexual) (the need for physical contact with the spouse that is not a precursor to sexual relations), spiritual intimacy (the need to share feelings, beliefs, and spiritual, ethical, and moral experiences with the spouse), aesthetic intimacy (the need to share feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and experiences related to aesthetics with the spouse), social and recreational intimacy (the need to engage in enjoyable activities and experiences together with the spouse), and temporal intimacy (the amount of time each spouse wishes to spend together) (Namvaran Garimi et al., 1397).

Various factors are involved in creating marital intimacy. Some of these factors, such as attachment style, personality traits, individual attitudes, and relationship skills, are individual factors, while others, including empathy, mutual self-disclosure between spouses, and trust, are interpersonal factors (Khabazi et al., 1401). Studies show that one of the influential factors on intimacy in adult relationships is attachment styles and unresolved inner conflicts with primary caregivers, which can manifest in other intimate relationships during adulthood. Attachment theory posits that if a child has insecure attachment, they are likely to experience insecure attachment in their romantic relationships in adulthood, leading them to spend their lives trying to fill the voids they feel in relation to their attachment figure (Bakhtiari et al., 1400). Therefore, marital intimacy is related to attachment theory regarding marital commitment. According to this theory, the outcomes of social interactions based on received rewards or incurred costs can be pleasant or unpleasant. Rewards are positive experiences that lead to happiness and, consequently, emotional and affective well-being. On the other hand, costs are negative experiences that lead to emotional, psychological, and physical problems. According to this theory, marital relationships remain stable as long as the experiences of one spouse meet acceptable criteria for both husband and wife (Moqimi et al., 1399). Additionally, various studies indicate that communication patterns and skills play a constructive role in marital intimacy and are very important in different aspects of couples' shared lives, affecting their satisfaction in other areas of shared life and even the failure of couples in marriage. Couples' communication patterns can be divided into three categories: (1) mutual avoidance pattern, which leads to conflict between spouses and turns arguments into a constant pattern; (2) constructive mutual pattern, where spouses avoid aggression and irrational reactions; and (3) expectant/withdrawn pattern, which can be seen in two forms: the wife being expectant/the husband withdrawn and the husband being expectant/the wife withdrawn (Timan et al., 1403). Furthermore, another influential factor on marital intimacy identified from various research is trust. Strong trust in marriage brings satisfaction and stable, healthy relationships. Trust is essential for individuals and can lead to self-disclosure. Individuals' self-disclosure creates intimacy in marriage. Therefore, trust in marriage is intended to help couples create marital intimacy (Avanti and Setiawan, 2022).

Intimacy and compatibility between spouses are influenced by various factors, one of which is whether the woman is employed or not (Jabari et al., 1401). Given that the number of dual-income couples in universities and other institutions is increasing today, it can be said that dual-income couples represent the largest group of non-traditional families. The strong inclination of women to obtain higher education degrees has led them to work and study alongside men, managing their family life with their

joint income (Gharam, 1398). Therefore, dual-income couples are defined as a specific type of dual-employee families, where both members pursue professional careers while simultaneously maintaining their family life (Rahimi et al., 1399). The emergence of a significant number of dual-income families, where both spouses pursue simple, specialized, or managerial jobs, characterized by strong commitment, personal growth, and increasing levels of responsibility, is one of the notable changes that have occurred in family structure and relationship patterns over the past few decades (Agah et al., 1398).

The changing roles, relationships, and structure of families with dual-income couples have led to various issues in these families, affecting both family life and work life (Samavatian et al., 2019). Work-family conflict is a type of role conflict in which the pressures arising from work roles are incompatible, and if one role is more important to the individual, they will dedicate more time and commitment to it, leading to interference with other roles (Khani et al., 2023). Work-family conflict usually arises due to the incompatibility of the domains of both roles and is more prevalent in the middle class where both men and women work; although both parties' jobs allow them to meet their personal and financial goals (Akram et al., 2018). Therefore, although dual-income couples have a higher level of economic well-being and experience fewer material concerns, various types of work-family conflicts exist in their lives, such as high job stress, excessive work pressure, role conflicts, childcare issues, and personal needs. These conflicts pose a serious challenge to the quality of daily interactions in such marriages. One of the causes of these conflicts is the ambiguity of gender roles and their weakening (Dargahi et al., 2020). There are three types of work-family conflict: first, time-based conflict, which occurs when time allocated to one role makes participation in another role difficult. Second, pressure-based conflict, which occurs when pressure in one role interferes with participation in another role. This type of conflict does not imply contradictory demands. It happens when the demands of one domain create tension, anxiety, fatigue, or dissatisfaction for the working individual, thereby reducing their personal resources such as energy and physical or mental capacity. While, unlike time-based conflict, the individual is not directly involved in administrative tasks, the negative effects of work-related stressors become apparent at home, as workers transfer their negative emotions arising from work experiences and express them within the family. Third, behavior-based conflict occurs when specific behaviors required by one role are incompatible with the expected behaviors in another role (Vashisht et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have examined marital intimacy and its effects and influences. Dessyrianti and Setiawan (2023) concluded in their research that trust and communication play a significant role in the marital intimacy of dual-income couples; therefore, to maintain marital intimacy, dual-income couples must trust each other. Avanti and Setiawan (2022) found that trust and forgiveness significantly impact the marital intimacy of dual-income couples. Kamali et al. (2020) identified the factors that enhance marital intimacy as: (1) family, (2) duration of the marital relationship, (3) mutual sacrifice, (4) appreciation, (5) new joint activities, (6) parents, (7) shared social networks, and (8) religion. Khojasteh Mehr et al. (2017) found a significant relationship between perceptions of equality, altruistic behaviors, and marital intimacy. Additionally, the relationship between altruistic behaviors and marital intimacy was stronger in women with higher perceptions of equality than in those with lower perceptions; however, this interaction was not observed in men. Naddaf and Heidari (2017) concluded that marital intimacy enhances the quality of life of employees, and with the increase in physical, spiritual, aesthetic, social, emotional, psychological, rational, and sexual intimacy, their quality of life also improves.

Timan et al. (2024) concluded in their research that the pattern of mutual avoidance communication, the health of the primary family, and self-differentiation have a significant relationship with marital intimacy, as well as constructive communication patterns, expected/withdrawn communication

patterns, mutual avoidance communication patterns, and the health of the primary family with self-differentiation. The results clearly indicated no significant relationship between constructive communication patterns and expected/withdrawn communication patterns with marital intimacy. Furthermore, the results showed a significant relationship between constructive communication patterns, expected/withdrawn communication patterns, mutual avoidance communication patterns, and the health of the primary family with marital intimacy, mediated by self-differentiation in female students suffering from chronic pain. The research by Reihani et al. (2022) resulted in the creation of a main category called "Marital Intimacy: A Process from Within to Out," which consists of 12 components including "effective personality," "self-differentiation," "secure marital attachment," "enjoyable couple time," "family-religious teachings," "rational maturity," "conscious marriage," "socio-economic issues," "children and the transition to parenthood," "constructive couple interactions," "instrumental-emotional support for the spouse," and "enhancing the quality of marital life." Bakhtiari et al. (2021) concluded in their research that since marriage and partner selection are among the important life decisions and considering the predictive role of insecure attachment styles and the role of marital intimacy in individuals' attitudes towards marital infidelity, it is essential to emphasize the need to examine these two variables in pre-marital counseling and also in parental education regarding child-rearing and attachment styles. Triouh et al. (2020) concluded that communication beliefs and emotional involvement and criticism within the family can affect marital commitment.

As mentioned, marital intimacy plays a significant role in the quality of the relationship between spouses, and increasing marital satisfaction contributes to the stability and strength of this relationship, thereby largely preventing divorce. Additionally, it seems that the specific conditions faced by dual-income couples influence their perspective on marital intimacy. Given the importance of marital intimacy in married life, it is necessary to examine marital intimacy from their viewpoint. Furthermore, in reviewing the research background, no studies were found that specifically examined marital intimacy from the perspective of dual-income couples, and the few studies that exist in this area have been conducted using quantitative methods. Therefore, this research aims to qualitatively explore marital intimacy from the viewpoint of dual-income couples, relying on primary sources.

Research Method

Research Method: This study was conducted using descriptive phenomenology, which is one of the types of qualitative studies. This method allows for the examination of topics with a focus on the lived experiences of the participants, where the researcher's interpretation and involvement are minimized. The lived experience in this method refers to what an individual is deeply connected to and perceives within themselves.

Study Population: The study population consisted of accessible participants selected from dual-income couples in Tehran in 2024 who met the entry criteria for the research. These criteria included: (1) both individuals (husband and wife) being willing to participate in the research; (2) both individuals (husband and wife) having the necessary cognitive literacy to share their experiences; (3) both individuals (husband and wife) being employed in one of the legitimate professions recognized by the Islamic Republic of Iran; (4) having been married for at least two years; and (5) having at least one child.

Sample and Sampling Method: In this study, participants were selected using a purposeful and accessible sampling method. The sampling process continued until data saturation was reached, which occurred after interviewing seven couples.

Data Collection Tool: In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The structure of these interviews lies between unstructured and structured interviews; that is, this interview has characteristics of both unstructured and structured interviews. In this interview, the interviewer identifies themes based on the research title and designs general questions (open-ended questions) that are asked of all participants. In this study, the following general questions were used: "How do you

define marital intimacy?", "In your opinion, what characteristics do intimate couples have?", and "Do you consider yourselves a couple that is intimate with each other? Why?". Additionally, to explore the phenomenon in depth, probing questions such as "Can you elaborate on this?" were used.

In this study, the interviews were conducted virtually, and individuals were informed through announcements published on social networks. Those who met the criteria participated in the interviews.

Data Analysis Method: In this study, the seven-step method of Colaizzi was used for data analysis. These steps include: (1) transcribing the interviews and understanding the overall meaning of their content; (2) identifying significant sentences related to the phenomenon; (3) giving meaning to each sentence (conceptualization); (4) classifying the concepts into categories (theme clusters); (5) integrating all extracted themes into a comprehensive description (forming the overall structure of the phenomenon in question); (6) reducing the findings (removing redundant, inappropriate, and exaggerated descriptions); and (7) the validation process (whether the findings truly reflect the participants' experiences). Additionally, to ensure the credibility of the data and to verify their accuracy and alignment with the participants' subjective perceptions and experiences, the research findings were presented to them, and changes were made if necessary.

Ethical Considerations: In this study, the following ethical considerations were taken into account: (1) using the term "participant" instead of "subject" to respect human dignity; (2) informing participants about the purpose of the research; (3) obtaining informed consent from participants to participate in the research; (4) obtaining permission from participants to record the interviews; (5) maintaining confidentiality, protecting participants' names, and using pseudonyms; (6) allowing participants to withdraw at any stage of the research; and (7) providing the research results to the participants.

Findings

In the present study, interviews were conducted with a sample consisting of 14 participants (7 couples), all of whom were aged between 35 and 46 years.

To analyze the information obtained from the interviews, the following steps were taken:

First, phrases related to the research topic were extracted from the interviews and coded in Table 1 .

Table 1 - Coding Table

Key phrases of interviews	codes
Over time, differences have become much less and faded – considering the passage of time and complete understanding of each other, differences rarely arise – with God's grace, we have a carefree life that is almost free of conflicts – we rarely have disagreements – sometimes we have disagreements – we rarely have disagreements – we rarely have disagreements – I can say that we hardly have any differences of opinion – conflicts occur very rarely – I consider marital intimacy as having mutual understanding – disagreements usually arise between us infrequently; perhaps once every six months – usually our disagreements happen once every two or three months.	Understanding and fewer marital conflicts
When making decisions on important matters, we definitely explain that, for example, I am tired today and the conditions are not suitable for discussing this important topic, and we will talk about it at the right time for decision-making, so that even if one party disagrees with the decision made, they will definitely be convinced and agree through discussion – we consult with each other in everything.	Consultation in important decision-making times
The party who knows they are at fault in the discussion topic and has made	Taking the

an excuse takes the initiative to resolve the disagreement and discusses the topic to resolve it.	initiative to resolve marital conflicts
When they have expectations that I cannot fulfill, I clearly and explicitly state that your expectations are beyond my ability – if there are unreasonable expectations, they will be resolved through discussion and collaboration – if my spouse has unreasonable expectations, I explain and persuade them – if my spouse has unreasonable expectations, I will try to justify them with reason and logic – if my spouse has unreasonable expectations, I will try to reach an understanding together – if my spouse has unreasonable expectations, I will try to convince them through conversation – if my spouse has unreasonable expectations, I will try to convince them through conversation – if it happens that my spouse has unreasonable expectations of me, I will talk to them – if my spouse has unreasonable expectations, I will try to persuade them through discussion.	Constructive reactions of one party to the unreasonable expectations of the spouse
Sometimes in better and calmer conditions, we talk about our expectations and express our satisfaction or dissatisfaction – whenever we feel the need to discuss this matter, we definitely talk – we spend all our time, except for our jobs outside the home, talking about each other.	Discussing each other's expectations
After a few hours, I have bravely and apologetically brought up the topic of management, and they have concluded the matter with a nod and silence, and sometimes with consolation – for me, marital intimacy means mutual understanding and respect for oneself, one's spouse, children, and both families – we have a sense of mutual understanding; the passage of time has improved the relationship more than before, which indicates mutual understanding – intimate couples understand each other – in such situations, my spouse understands me and responds with kindness – intimate couples have mutual understanding – in my opinion, marital intimacy means that spouses understand each other in times of difficulty and fatigue – I consider marital intimacy as understanding each other – marital intimacy occurs when both parties understand each other well – we have always tried to understand each other well and solve problems through discussion.	Mutual understanding
On different days, the collaboration time varies, but if we have time, we do collaborative tasks like cleaning the house, daily shopping, or taking my son to classes – if there's an opportunity, I help my wife with tasks like organizing the house, shopping for ourselves or the home, and sometimes cooking – we dedicate our leisure time to shared activities like watching movies, going out, shopping, and hosting gatherings; about 4 hours a day – we usually spend around 3 hours a day on shared tasks like shopping and cooking at home – my wife usually helps me with cleaning and tidying up the house or cooking whenever she gets the chance – I generally try to do half of the household chores (even cooking) myself. For example, we always do the spring cleaning together at the end of the year.	Doing joint activities with a spouse
The times we are together, I feel a hundred percent satisfaction – we are mostly satisfied – intimate couples are those who feel good together – intimate couples are happy and satisfied to be next to each other – I feel a lot of satisfaction – I feel a lot of satisfaction – most of the time I feel satisfied	Feeling satisfied with the time spent together
In my opinion, marital intimacy means selflessness – intimacy between husband and wife means doing certain things against one's inner desire and	Mutual sacrifice

solely for the sake of the other person – [intimate couples] have selflessness.	
In my opinion, marital intimacy means loving and being loved – intimacy between husband and wife means deep mutual love – in my view, marital intimacy means being good and kind to each other.	Mutual interest
The most important priority for achieving marital intimacy is having the partner in a life filled with a sense of security and tranquility; in such a way that each can express their needs without fear of judgment – in my opinion, marital intimacy can be defined as having peace and a good state of being – intimate couples are happy together and have tranquility – in my view, marital intimacy means that the husband and wife care for each other and feel calm and secure together.	A life full of security and peace
We should accept the other person as they are and not try to change them.	Unconditional acceptance of the spouse
We mention the smallest daily occurrences – for me, marital intimacy means being honest with each other – for me, marital intimacy means being one and honest with each other – intimate couples do not hide anything from each other – intimate couples do not lie to each other – for me, marital intimacy means having complete mutual honesty – intimate couples have mutual honesty.	Honesty and lack of secrecy
When it is felt that the other person is uncomfortable, we definitely try to alleviate the discomfort – if discomfort arises, after some time, we talk to each other until that problem or discomfort and resentment is resolved – if a problem arises, I won't back down until it is solved, and I take the time to convince my spouse – whenever discomfort and a problem arise, we definitely take the time and through conversation, the issue will be resolved – my spouse calms me down with patience and comfort, and by preparing a drink, when events outside of me lead to my anger.	Efforts to alleviate the spouse's discomfort
No, I have never had a history of sulking – there has never been a sulk from my side; because no serious issue has come up – I have neither sulked... – nor have I ever sulked...	No quarrels
Our expectations and desires from each other are such that they are within our capabilities and can be fulfilled – my spouse is so understanding and knowledgeable that so far there have been no unreasonable expectations – as far as I remember, there has never been an expectation that I could not fulfill and that would cause my spouse to complain – they have never had unreasonable expectations – in my opinion, intimate couples have expectations that are within each other's capabilities – I have not observed any unreasonable expectations from them so far – usually, such a thing does not happen [that my spouse has unreasonable expectations of me].	Having reasonable expectations from the spouse
We try to change the atmosphere when our time together feels monotonous and boring by introducing variety, going out, eating snacks, or engaging in entertainment, etc.	Renewing every moment
In my opinion, marital intimacy can be defined by mutual respect and valuing each other in family or friendly gatherings – intimate couples respect each other's opinions and beliefs – intimate couples speak to each other with respect – maintaining each other's respect and dignity is, in my view, the most important characteristic of intimate couples – we preserve	Mutual respect

each other's respect – in my opinion, intimate couples never disrespect each other in front of their children and families.	
Intimate couples are those who do not restrict each other.	Not limiting each other
Intimate couples are those who strive for each other's well-being.	Striving for each other's well-being
Intimacy between husband and wife means forgiveness towards each other.	Forgiveness
I have tried, to the best of my ability, to provide for all the issues related to a normal life (including housing, car, clothing, food), which my spouse has also accepted. I also try not to fall short in emotional and spiritual support – if there have been any expectations that have not been met, there are no specific complaints, and she deals with problems and issues logically, understanding that her desires are sometimes not feasible due to life circumstances – intimate couples have low expectations and consider each other in all life situations, especially financial hardships.	Acceptance of each other's abilities and efforts
In my opinion, marital intimacy means having a high understanding of the existing conditions and helping each other in difficult times –	Not being demanding
In my opinion, marital intimacy means being one and having a united heart – to me, marital intimacy means being united in all the hours we spend together – I believe that being united in all moments of life, even when we are not together, defines marital intimacy.	Cooperating in solving problems
In my view, marital intimacy means the complete attention of spouses to each other in every aspect – intimate couples have complete attention to one another – intimate couples have mutual attention.	Mutual attention
To me, marital intimacy means commitment and loyalty, even when we are apart.	Commitment and loyalty
In my opinion, marital intimacy means missing each other when we cannot spend time together – I believe the most important characteristic of intimate couples is that the husband and wife miss each other at every moment and instead of having repulsion, they try to attract each other more.	Longing for each other
Overall, there is no swearing or cursing in our life – we have tried to solve problems through conversation and have preferred dialogue over cursing at each other or raising our voices at one another – in our 14 years of shared life, we have neither cursed at each other nor raised our voices – marital intimacy occurs when, when [the husband and wife] have a disagreement, instead of cursing each other, they sit down and talk logically like sensible people to solve the problem.	Absence of verbal conflicts between spouses
In my opinion, intimate couples always care for each other.	Mutual support
Intimate couples cover each other's flaws - a characteristic of intimate couples is that in family gatherings, whether in the lady's side or the gentleman's side, they do not mention each other's flaws.	Covering each other's flaws

Then, the categories were extracted in the form of Table 2 from the obtained codes.

Table 2 - Table of Extracted Categories

Subordinate codes	Sayings
Having understanding and fewer marital conflicts – Taking the initiative to resolve marital conflicts – Constructive reactions of one party to unreasonable expectations of the spouse – Discussing each other's expectations – Mutual understanding – Unconditional acceptance of the spouse – Efforts to alleviate the spouse's discomfort – Absence of sulking – Mutual respect – Not limiting each other – Full mutual attention – Absence of verbal conflicts between spouses – Mutual support	Effective communication
Consultation during important decision-making – Doing joint activities with the spouse – Collaboration in solving problems	Mutual thinking and participation of spouses
Feeling satisfied with the time spent together – A life full of security and peace – Renewing every moment – Striving for each other's well-being	Enjoyable marital relationship
Mutual sacrifice – Mutual affection – Forgiveness – Being together and united – Missing each other – Covering each other's flaws	Indicators of mutual love
Honesty and lack of secrecy – Commitment and loyalty	Trust-building factors
Having reasonable expectations from the spouse – Accepting the spouse's abilities and efforts and not being overly demanding	Expectations and demands of spouses from each other

As can be inferred from Tables 1 and 2, the analysis and examination of the conducted interviews resulted in the extraction of 6 categories and 30 codes. Thus, it can be said that "marital intimacy from the perspective of both working spouses" is summarized in 6 categories: "effective communication," "spousal collaboration and participation," "enjoyable marital relationship," "indicators of mutual love," "trust-building factors," and "spouses' expectations and demands from each other."

The codes under the category "effective communication" include: having mutual understanding and fewer marital conflicts (for example: given the passage of time and complete understanding of each other, disagreements rarely arise), taking the initiative to resolve marital conflicts (for example: the party who knows they are at fault in a discussion takes the initiative to address the issue and talk about it to resolve it), constructive reactions from one party to unreasonable expectations of the spouse (for example: when there are expectations that I cannot fulfill, I clearly state that your expectation is beyond my ability), discussing each other's expectations (for example: sometimes in better and calmer conditions, we talk about our expectations and express our satisfaction or dissatisfaction), mutual understanding (for example: we always try to understand each other's words well and solve problems through conversation), unconditional acceptance of the spouse (for example: accepting the other person as they are and not trying to change them), efforts to alleviate the spouse's discomfort (for example: when I sense that my partner is uncomfortable, I definitely try to alleviate their discomfort), absence of sulking (for example: I have never sulked; because no serious issue has arisen), mutual respect (for example: in my opinion, marital intimacy can be defined in mutual respect and valuing each other in family or friendly gatherings), not restricting each other (for example: intimate couples are those who do not restrict each other), complete mutual attention (for example: in my opinion, marital intimacy means complete attention of spouses to each other in all aspects), absence of verbal conflicts between spouses (for example: we have tried to solve problems through conversation and prefer dialogue over insults or raising our voices at each other), and mutual support (for example: in my opinion, intimate couples always care for each other).

The codes under the category "spousal collaboration and participation" include: consulting during important decision-making (for example: when making decisions on important matters, we definitely explain that, for instance, I am tired today and it is not the right time to discuss this important issue, and we will talk at an appropriate time for decision-making, so that even if one of the parties disagrees with the decision made, they will definitely be persuaded and their agreement will be sought through discussion), doing joint tasks with the spouse (for example: on different days, the hours of cooperation vary, but if we have time, we do collaborative tasks like cleaning the house, daily shopping, or taking my son to class), and collaborating in solving problems (for example: in my opinion, marital intimacy means having a high understanding of the existing conditions and helping each other in difficult situations).

The codes under the category of "Pleasurable Marital Relationship" are as follows: feeling satisfied with the time spent together (for example: when we are together, I feel completely satisfied), a life filled with a sense of security and peace (for example: the most important priority for achieving marital intimacy is having the partner in a life filled with a sense of security and peace; in such a way that each can express their needs without fear of judgment), refreshing moments (for example: we try to change the atmosphere when our time together feels monotonous and boring by creating variety, going out, eating snacks, or engaging in entertainment, etc.), and striving for each other's well-being (for example: intimate couples are those who strive for each other's well-being).

The codes under the category of "Indicators of Mutual Love" are as follows: mutual sacrifice (for example: intimacy between husband and wife means doing certain things against one's own will solely for the sake of the other), mutual affection (for example: intimacy between husband and wife means deep mutual love), forgiveness (for example: intimacy between husband and wife means forgiving each other), being united and of one heart (for example: to me, marital intimacy means being united and of one heart during all the hours we are together), longing for each other (for example: in my opinion, the most important characteristic of intimate couples is that the husband and wife long for each other at every moment and instead of having repulsion, they try to attract each other more), and covering each other's flaws (for example: a characteristic of intimate couples is that they do not speak of each other's flaws in family gatherings, whether in the wife's family or the husband's family).

The codes under the category of "Trust-Building Factors" are as follows: honesty and lack of concealment (for example: in my opinion, marital intimacy means having complete mutual honesty) and commitment and loyalty (for example: in my opinion, marital intimacy means commitment and loyalty when we are apart).

The codes under the category of "Expectations and Demands of Spouses from Each Other" are as follows: having reasonable expectations from the spouse (for example: our expectations and demands from each other are such that they are feasible and can be fulfilled) and accepting the spouse's abilities and efforts and not being overly demanding (for example: if there has been a demand that has not been met, there are no specific complaints, and they deal with problems and issues logically and understand that their demands are sometimes not feasible due to life circumstances).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine marital intimacy from the perspective of dual-income couples. From the analysis and review of the conducted interviews, 6 categories and 30 codes were extracted. Therefore, "Marital Intimacy from the Perspective of Dual-Income Couples" is summarized in 6 categories: "Effective Communication," "Spousal Collaboration and Participation," "Pleasurable

Marital Relationship," "Indicators of Mutual Love," "Trust-Building Factors," and "Expectations and Demands of Spouses from Each Other".

The codes under the category of "Effective Communication" are as follows: having understanding and fewer marital conflicts, taking the initiative to resolve marital conflicts, constructive reactions from one party to unreasonable expectations of the spouse, discussing each other's expectations, mutual understanding, unconditional acceptance of the spouse, efforts to alleviate the spouse's discomfort, absence of sulking, mutual respect, not limiting each other, complete mutual attention, absence of verbal conflicts between spouses, and mutual support. The findings of the present study regarding the category of "Effective Communication" are as follows: if couples avoid the communication pattern of mutual avoidance (which leads to conflicts between spouses and turns discussions into a permanent pattern) and the communication pattern of demanding/withdrawn (which can be seen in two forms: demanding wife/withdrawn husband and demanding husband/withdrawn wife) and instead adopt the constructive mutual communication pattern (in which couples avoid aggression and illogical reactions), marital intimacy and consequently marital satisfaction will increase. The findings of the present study are consistent with the research by Timan et al. (2023); they concluded that the mutual avoidance communication pattern is significantly related to family health and self-differentiation with marital intimacy, and that the constructive communication pattern, the demanding/withdrawn communication pattern, and the mutual avoidance communication pattern have a significant relationship with family health and self-differentiation. The results clearly indicated no significant relationship between the constructive communication pattern and the demanding/withdrawn communication pattern with marital intimacy. Additionally, the results showed a significant relationship between the constructive communication pattern, the demanding/withdrawn communication pattern, the mutual avoidance communication pattern, and family health with marital intimacy, mediated by self-differentiation in female students suffering from chronic pain. Furthermore, the findings of the present study align with the research by Trioh et al. (2020); they concluded that communication beliefs and emotional involvement and criticism in the family can predict marital commitment, and marital intimacy can mediate the relationship between communication beliefs and emotional involvement and criticism in the family. Additionally, the relationship between emotional involvement and received criticisms with marital intimacy and between communication beliefs with marital commitment, as well as the relationship between marital intimacy and marital commitment, is direct.

The codes under the category of "spousal collaboration and participation" include: consulting during important decision-making, doing joint activities with the spouse, and collaborating in problem-solving. The findings of the present research regarding the category of "spousal collaboration and participation" are as follows: the higher the marital intimacy between couples, the greater the level of self-disclosure, and consequently, couples empathize with each other more easily, leading to effective division of labor and the establishment of affection and warmth. This reflects the level of marital intimacy, which encompasses various degrees of affection, understanding, and behavioral solidarity between couples.

The codes under the category of "enjoyable marital relationship" include: feeling satisfied with time spent together, a life filled with a sense of security and tranquility, refreshing moments, and striving for each other's well-being. The findings of the present research regarding the category of "enjoyable marital relationship" are as follows: the greater the level of marital intimacy between couples, the higher the quality of their marital life, and they will derive the most enjoyment and benefit from their marital relationship. The findings of the present research are consistent with Naddaf and Heidari (2017); they concluded that marital intimacy enhances the quality of life of employees, and with the increase in physical, spiritual, aesthetic, social, emotional, psychological, rational, and sexual

intimacy, the quality of life of employees also improves. Additionally, the findings of the present research align with the work of Reyhani et al. (2022); their research resulted in the creation of a main category called "marital intimacy: a process from within to outside," which consists of 12 components including "effective personality," "differentiation," "secure marital attachment," "enjoyable moments together," "family-religious teachings," "rational maturity," "conscious marriage," "socio-economic issues," "children and transitioning to parenthood," "constructive couple interactions," "instrumental-emotional support for the spouse," and "enhancing the quality of marital life".

The codes under the category of "indicators of mutual love" include: mutual sacrifice, mutual affection, forgiveness, being together and united, missing each other, and covering each other's flaws. The findings of the present research regarding the category of "indicators of mutual love" are as follows: marital intimacy is based on acceptance, satisfaction, and love, and is formed from multiple elements that develop gradually and step by step; it begins with rational intimacy (dialogue and self-disclosure) and continues with physical intimacy (holding hands, hugging, and sexual relations), ultimately culminating in emotional intimacy (being available, providing support, emotional expression, and mutual sensitivity). The findings of the present research are consistent with Kamali et al. (2020); they concluded that the factors increasing marital intimacy include: (1) family, (2) duration of the shared marital relationship, (3) mutual sacrifice, (4) appreciation, (5) new joint activities, (6) parents, (7) shared social networks, and (8) religion. Furthermore, the findings of the present research align with Khojasteh Mehr et al. (2017); they concluded that there is a significant relationship between the perception of equality, altruistic behaviors, and marital intimacy. Additionally, the relationship between altruistic behaviors and marital intimacy in women with a higher perception of equality was greater than in women with a lower perception of equality; however, this interaction was not observed for men.

The codes under the category of "trust-building factors" include: honesty and transparency, commitment, and loyalty. The findings of the present research regarding the category of "trust-building factors" are as follows: Trust is essential in social intimacy; it allows an individual to believe in their partner's social life. Without trust in a relationship, individuals will quickly become suspicious of their partner's range of relationships, which can jeopardize marital intimacy and, consequently, the stability of the marriage. This reflects the individual level of marital intimacy, demonstrating each partner's ability to be straightforward and honest (not hiding matters from each other), authentic (being their true selves), and also their ability to share thoughts and feelings. The findings of the present research align with Bakhtiari and colleagues (2021); they concluded that since marriage and choosing a partner are among the most important life decisions, and considering the predictive role of insecure attachment styles and the role of marital intimacy in individuals' attitudes toward marital infidelity, it is essential to emphasize the need to examine these two variables in pre-marital counseling and also to educate parents regarding child-rearing and attachment styles. Additionally, the findings of the present research are consistent with Moghadam and colleagues (2020); they concluded that forgiveness, differentiation, and intimacy significantly affect marital commitment, and as a result, despite experiencing painful events, couples maintain their togetherness and are committed to specific actions and frameworks towards a higher goal. Furthermore, the findings of the present research are in agreement with Dessyrianti and Setiawan (2023); they concluded that trust and communication play a significant role in the marital intimacy of dual-income couples. Therefore, to maintain marital intimacy, both working spouses must trust each other. The findings of the present research also align with Avanti and Setiawan (2022); they concluded that trust and forgiveness significantly impact the marital intimacy of dual-income couples.

The codes under the category of "expectations and demands of spouses from each other" include: having reasonable expectations from a spouse, accepting a spouse's abilities and efforts, and not being overly demanding. The findings of the present research regarding the category of "expectations and

demands of spouses from each other" are as follows: Couples with high marital intimacy avoid perfectionistic expectations and have a desirable level of empathy; as a result, they accept each other's abilities and efforts for their life and relationship and have expectations and demands from each other that are within their capabilities and achievable.

The present research has some limitations as follows: First, the participants in the present research were in their late youth and early middle age (35 to 46 years), which may have somewhat adapted to their circumstances, and complete information may not have been obtained; therefore, it is better for future research to be conducted on younger couples. Second, the participants in the present research were mostly employees, and those with self-employment were in the minority. In conclusion, considering that marital intimacy is one of the important pillars of marital quality of life, it is suggested that family counselors develop strategies to strengthen marital intimacy in dual-income couples and disseminate this information through the media. Additionally, it is recommended that family therapists collaborate to design preventive measures to counteract the negative effects of both spouses working on marital intimacy.

Sources

- 1Aghaei, Mahdi; Tajik Ismaili, Azizollah; Kasaei Isfahani, Abdolrahim; and Asgariyan, Somayeh (2019). Comparison of coping strategies and differentiation of dual-income and single-income couples. *Family Psychology*, 6(2), 57-70 .
- 2Omidifar, Hananeh; Pour Ebrahim, Taghi; Khoshkonash, Abolghasem; and Moradi, Ayoub (2016). Comparison and relationship of emotional self-regulation with marital boredom and intimacy in dual-income

and single-income couples in government offices. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Counseling*, 8(26), 50-67 .

-3Irandoost, Razieh; Sohrabi, Faramarz; Malih Al-Zakerini, Saeed; and Ahi, Qasem (2018). Causal model of the relationship between emotional disclosure and sexual performance of women with the mediating role of psychological distress and marital intimacy. *Journal of Family Research*, 14(56), 515-531 .

-4Bakhtiari, Ansieh; Hosseini, Saeedah Al-Sadat; Arefi, Mokhtar; and Afshari Nia, Karim (2021). The mediating role of marital intimacy in the relationship between attachment styles and attitudes towards marital infidelity. *Scientific Journal of Counseling Research*, 20(77), 122-140 .

-5Behbahani, Maryam; and Ghorbanshiroudi, Shahra (2020). Effectiveness of group therapy based on acceptance and commitment on marital intimacy and sexual satisfaction of pre-menopausal women. *Scientific-Research Journal of Applied Psychology*, 14(56), 369-389 .

-6Panahpoury, Nora; and Johari, Shakib (2024). The mediating role of marital self-disclosure in the relationship between intimacy and sexual performance and inclination towards divorce in couples on the verge of divorce: a descriptive study. *Journal of Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences*, 23(4), 337-351 .

-7Pour Yahya, Seyed Mostafa; Shirkoond, Farideh; Salimi, Arman; Davarniya, Reza; and Shakermi, Mohammad (2019). The impact of forgiveness-based group intervention on marital intimacy of women affected by their spouse's infidelity. *Scientific-Research Journal of Knowledge Horizon*, 25(2), 102-109 .

-8Triouh, Behzad; Karimi, Kiumars; Akbari, Maryam; and Moradi, Omid (2020). Structural model of marital commitment based on marital communication beliefs, emotional involvement, and criticism in the family: the mediating role of marital intimacy. *Scientific Journal of Applied Psychology*, 14(53), 158-139 .

-9Timan, Maryam; Safarzadeh, Sahar; and Fathi, Keyhan (2024). Testing the model of marital intimacy based on the communication pattern of couples and the health of the primary family with the mediating role of self-differentiation. *Journal of Nursing Psychology*, 12(6), 1-15 .

-10Sanagouizadeh, Mohammad (2021). A structured self-care model in marital intimacy based on Islamic perspectives. *Biannual Scientific Journal of Cultural Psychology*, 5(1), 166-194 .

-11Jabari, Reyhaneh; Zahra Kar, Kianoush; and Sadri Damirchi, Ismail (2022). Presenting a model of marital adjustment based on power structure in the family with the mediating role of marital justice in working couples in the armed forces. *Scientific Journal of Military Psychology*, 13(52), 11-31 .

-12Khani, Saeed; Daneshmehr, Hossein; and Behzadi Nia, Asrin (2023). The relationship between work-family conflict and attitudes towards marriage and childbearing: a study among working women in Sanandaj. *Letter of the Iranian Demographic Association*, 18(35), 191-233 .

-13Khabbazi, Maliheh; Kimiaei, Seyed Ali; Karshaki, Hossein; and Mashhadi, Ali (2022). Evaluation of the structural equation model of factors affecting marital intimacy of couples during engagement. *Research in Cognitive and Behavioral Sciences*, 12(22), 89-110 .

-14Dargahi, Shahryar; Sadri Damirchi, Ismail; Ghamari Kiwi, Hossein; Rezaei Sharif, Ali; and Nazari, Ali Mohammad (2020). Explanation of sexual dissatisfaction in working couples: a phenomenological study. *Journal of Health and Care*, 22(4), 358-372 .

-15Rahimi, Rouhollah; Salimi Bajestani, Hossein; Farahbakhsh, Kiumars; and Asgari, Mohammad (2020). A phenomenological study: narratives of working couples regarding children in family performance. *Social Work Quarterly*, 9(2), 34-47 .

-16Reihani, Reza; Soudani, Mansour; Farhadi Rad, Hamid; and Khajasteh Mehr, Reza (2022). Identifying components of marital intimacy in stable marriages: based on grounded theory. *Journal of New Psychological Research*, 17(65), 117-128 .

-17Samavatian, Hossein; Mousavi, Seyed Mohammad; and Noori, Abolghasem (2019). The effectiveness of quality of work life training and enriching marital life on increasing work life quality and job satisfaction among working couples. *Biannual Journal of Applied Counseling*, 9(2), 115-132 .

- 18Fist, Jess; and Fist, Gregory G. (2002). Theories of personality. Translated by Seyed Mohammadi, Yahya (2009). Tehran: Ravan Publishing, 4th edition .
- 19Ghasemi Joobneh, Reza; Mousavi, Seyed Valiollah; and Hosseini Sadiq, Maryam Al-Sadat (2019). The mediating role of cognitive impairment in the relationship between mindfulness and marital intimacy in the elderly. *Journal of Aging Psychology*, 5(3), 251-261 .
- 20Gharam, Kazem (2019). Presenting a model of life satisfaction in dual-income couples based on job satisfaction and career mission. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Counseling*, 11(39), 157-170 .
- 21Mohammadi, Mohammad; Zahra Kar, Kianoush; Jahangiri, Jahangir; Davarniya, Reza; Shakermi, Mohammad; and Morshedi, Mehdi (2017). Evaluating the effectiveness of educational intervention based on the Gottman model on marital intimacy of women. *Journal of Health and Hygiene*, 8(1), 74-84 .
- 22Moradi, Zahra; and Keshavarz Afshar, Hossein (2021). Quality of life, marital satisfaction, and marital intimacy among police force employees (qualitative research). *Military Psychology*, 12(47), 27-44 .
- 23Mostafaei, Nafiseh; Khodadadi, Javad; Dargahi, Shahryar; and Azimi, Daryoush (2021). Predicting the quality of the relationship with the spouse's family based on marital intimacy and the health of the primary family. *Knowledge and Research in Applied Psychology*, 22(84), 148-157 .
- 24Moghim, Sanbal; Moradi, Omid; Seyed Al-Shahadaei, Asrin; and Ahmadian, Hamzeh (2020). Developing a structural model of marital commitment based on forgiveness and self-differentiation with the mediating role of marital intimacy. *Family Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 10(29), 69-90 .
- 25Namvaran Garami, Kobra; Moradi, Alireza; Farzad, and ...
- 25Namvaran Garmi, Kobra; Moradi, Alireza; Farzad, Valiollah; and Zahra Kar, Kianoush (2018). Determining the dimensions of marital intimacy among Iranian couples: a qualitative study. *Cultural-Educational Journal of Women and Family*, 12(42), 61-78 .
- 26Nazari, Farahnaz; Etemadi, Azra; and Abedi, Ahmad (2019). Enriching couples' relationships using the Olson method on marital intimacy. *Journal of Behavioral Science Research*, 17(3), 448-456.
- 27- Akram, F; Abrar ul Haq, M; & Victor, S. (2018). Work – life Balance among dual working couples in Pakistan. *International Journal of Innovative Knowledge Concepts*, 6(11), 130-135.
- 28- Avanti, F.T; & Setiawan, J.L. (2022). THE ROLE OF TRUST AND FORGIVENESS IN MARITAL INTIMACY ON HUSBANDS OR WIVES OF DUAL-EARNER COUPLES IN SURABAYA. *Jurnal Ilmu Keluarga dan Konsumen*, 15(2), 117-126.
- 29- Canavarro, M.C; Silva, S; & Moreira, H. (2015). Is the link between posttraumatic growth and anxious symptoms mediated by marital intimacy in breast cancer patients? *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 19(6), 673-679.
- 30- Dessyrianti, R.F; & Setiawan, J.L. (2023). Trust and communication as predictors of marital intimacy among individuals in dual-earner marriages. *Humanitas: Indonesian Psychological Journal*, 20(1), 1-10.
- 31- Kamali, Z; Allahyar, N; Ostovar, S; Shafeq bin, M; Alhabshi, M; & Griffiths, M.D. (2020). Factors that influence marital intimacy: A qualitative analysis of Iranian married couples. *Cogent Psychology*, 7(1), 1-17.
- 32- Khojasteh Mehr, R; Kavand, M; & Soudani, M. (2017). The Interaction between Sacrificing Behaviors and Equity Perception: How Does It Contribute to Marital Intimacy? *International Journal of Psychology*, 11(2), 175-195.
- 33- Naddaf, S; & Heidari, A. (2017). The Relationship Between Marital Intimacy and Quality of Life. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, 8(4), 63-67.
- 34- Vashisht, S; Punj, N; & Vashisht, R. (2022). A qualitative analysis of experiences of work – life integration of dual career couples. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, 31(2), 216-228.
- 35- Zakhirehdari, N; Navabinejad, S; & Koraei, A. (2019). The effectiveness of cognitive – behavioral couple therapy on improving marriage performance and marital intimacy of couples. *Medical Science*, 23(97), 290-293.