

## Comparison of Marital Intimacy Challenges in Dual-Income Couples with Low and High Marital Intimacy

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research was to compare the challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with low and high marital intimacy. The research was conducted using a qualitative thematic analysis method. Participants included 7 couples, all aged between 35 and 46 years, selected through purposive and convenient sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Braun and Clarke method. Additionally, the Marital Intimacy Scale by Thompson and Walker (MIS) was used to screen the information obtained from the interviews. The findings of the present research regarding the core theme of "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with low marital intimacy" included two main themes: "couple-centered challenges" with sub-themes: weakness in effective communication, neglecting the spouse's wishes, time constraints, weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles, and unreasonable expectations of the spouse; and "individual-centered challenges" with sub-themes: personality traits, thoughts of separation and divorce, and normalizing frequent arguments by one party. Furthermore, the findings regarding the core theme of "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with high marital intimacy" included three main themes: "couple-centered challenges" with sub-themes: weakness in effective communication, neglecting the spouse's wishes, time constraints, postponing discussions about expectations to uncomfortable times, and unreasonable expectations of the spouse; "job-centered challenges" with the sub-theme: work-family conflicts; and "individual-centered challenges" with the sub-theme: personality traits. In addition, the findings regarding the core theme of "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples (common to both groups)" included two main themes: "couple-centered challenges" with sub-themes: weakness in effective communication, weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles, and unreasonable expectations of the spouse; and "job-centered challenges" with the sub-theme: work-family conflicts. Overall, it can be concluded that some challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples are dependent on the level of marital intimacy, while others are independent of it.

## **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 theory of psychosocial development, 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 each other, 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 genuine 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 (Sanagouizadeh, 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). Several factors contribute to the establishment of marital intimacy. Some of these factors, such as attachment styles, 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., 2022). Studies indicate that one of the influential factors on intimacy in adult relationships is attachment styles and unresolved internal conflicts with primary caregivers, which can manifest in other intimate relationships during adulthood. The 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., 2021). Therefore, marital intimacy is related to the 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 psychological well-being. On the other hand, costs are negative experiences that result in emotional, psychological, and physical problems. According to this theory, marital relationships remain stable as long as one partner's experiences meet acceptable criteria for both husband and wife (Moqimi et al., 2020). Additionally, various studies show 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 expectant wife/withdrawn husband and the expectant husband/withdrawn wife (Timan et al., 2024). Furthermore, another influential factor on marital

intimacy identified in various studies 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 establish marital intimacy (Avanti and Setiawan, 2022).

Numerous studies have reported a significant relationship between marital intimacy and the increase in quality of life and the qualitative improvement of couples' communication (Hosseini et al., 2019). Therefore, intimacy is an important criterion for enhancing the durability of couples' emotional relationships (Rezaeifar et al., 2018). Marital intimacy makes marital relationships much more effective, enjoyable, and interesting, and this depends on the continuous efforts of spouses to create intimacy (Zakhirehdari et al., 2019). Intimate relationships create a context in which the emotional experiences of couples manifest, and these emotional experiences shape the nature of their relationship. These reciprocal intimate relationships influence couples' evaluations of their partners and their experiences of their relationships (Yousefi et al., 2022). In fact, intimacy creates a foundation for an individual's satisfaction and dissatisfaction with life; because the commitment of couples strengthens the relationship and has a positive correlation with marital happiness and compatibility (Pouryahi et al., 2019). Marital intimacy, satisfaction with communication between spouses, and the desired quality of these communications have various consequences that will affect the relationships of couples, children, and other family members, as well as their work life (Nazari et al., 2021). The intimacy of couples plays an undeniable role in fulfilling the needs of both parties and maintaining the health of spouses in various aspects of life (Namvaran Garimi et al., 2018). Intimacy is a means of fulfilling emotional and psychological needs such as attention, affection, care, trust, security, affirmation, worthiness, understanding, and self-actualization. Accordingly, marital intimacy leads to an increase and improvement in marital satisfaction, feelings of happiness, and vitality (Nazari et al., 2019). Additionally, intimacy reduces stress and plays a crucial role in marital functioning, commitment, stability, and mental and physical health (Kamali et al., 2020). Marital intimacy and an individual's overall health have a direct and significant relationship, to the extent that the absence of intimacy and couples' boredom is associated with general weakness, a low immune system, and cardiovascular problems. Conversely, the lack of marital intimacy psychologically may lead to depression, anxiety, weakened immune response, increased pain perception, and a tendency towards harmful behaviors (Tavakoli and Jafari, 2020). Therefore, marital intimacy has a direct relationship with the mental health of couples in such a way that it can reduce depression, anger, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, alleviate pain, and improve the course of illness; because evidence has shown that when intimacy prevails in relationships, spouses can easily release their emotions outside of their relationships and feel at peace (Sanagouizadeh, 2021).

The findings of multiple studies indicate that intimacy between couples is one of the essential components for the stability and strength of a marital life, and any factor that weakens it is, in fact, a destructive factor for marital satisfaction and compatibility, which can increase the likelihood of divorce (Mokhles et al., 2021). The most important barriers to creating intimacy include the inability to listen actively, selective listening, defensive listening, listening with the aim of changing the other person's perspective, using ambiguous words, blaming, perfectionistic expectations from the relationship, lack of empathy, bias, and adherence to stereotypes, cultural differences, and individuals' unconscious defenses (Sahat et al., 2020).

Intimacy and compatibility between couples are influenced by various factors, one of which is whether the woman is employed or not (Jabari et al., 2022). Given that the number of couples where both partners are employed in universities and other institutions is increasing today, it can be said that dual-income couples are the largest group of non-traditional families. The strong inclination of women to obtain higher education degrees has led to women working and studying alongside men, managing their family life with their joint income (Gharam, 2019). Therefore, dual-income couples are defined

as a specific type of dual-worker families in which both members pursue professional careers while simultaneously maintaining their family life (Rahimi et al., 2020). The emergence of a significant number of dual-income families, where both spouses pursue simple, specialized, or managerial jobs and are described 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., 2019).

Changes in roles, relationships, and family structure in 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., 2022). 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 and weakening of gender roles (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 displace 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).

Studies have examined marital intimacy and its impacts. 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 influence the marital intimacy of dual-income couples. Fallahchai et al. (2019) concluded that job stress has a negative relationship with marital quality, and this relationship is moderated by gender, such that women experiencing higher job stress report lower marital quality. Additionally, couple coping moderates the relationship between job stress and marital quality, such that shared couple coping weakens the negative relationship between job stress and marital quality. Akram et al. (2018) found that career advancement, work overload, stress, and quality of life significantly impact work-life balance. Furthermore, work overload does not significantly affect the work-life balance of dual-income couples. Also, women's work-life balance is greater compared to men's. Beegam et al. (2017) concluded that single-income couples have better marital adjustment than dual-income couples. Kamali et al. (2020) identified factors that enhance marital intimacy as: (1) family, (2) duration of the shared marital relationship, (3) mutual sacrifice, (4) appreciation, (5) new shared activities, (6) parenting, (7) shared social networks, and (8) religion. 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.

Omidifar and colleagues (2016) concluded in their research that there is a significant difference in the

average emotion regulation strategies, marital boredom, and marital intimacy between two groups of couples: one where one partner is employed and another where both partners are employed. Couples where both partners are employed have lower positive emotion regulation strategies and marital intimacy, and higher negative emotion regulation strategies and marital boredom compared to couples where one partner is employed. Additionally, there is a significant relationship between emotion regulation strategies and marital boredom, emotion regulation strategies and marital intimacy, as well as between marital intimacy and marital boredom. Khani and colleagues (2023) found in their research that unmarried women who experience higher work-family conflict consider an older age to be suitable for marriage. Furthermore, higher work-family conflict among women with spouses is associated with a lower number of children. Asgari Nadoshan and Razaghi Nasrabadi (2023) concluded in their research that the main challenges related to childbearing for working women can be categorized into 10 sub-themes and 4 main themes, which are: occupational challenges (work environment), parenting, economic issues, and child education. The outcome of these conditions has led working women to prefer having fewer children as a way to avoid these conflicts and challenges. Jabari and colleagues (2021) found in their research that the model regarding the relationship between power structure in the family and marital adjustment, with the mediation of marital justice among couples, has a good fit. Gharam (2019) concluded in their research that the meaning of career path has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction, meaning in life, and life satisfaction in dual-income couples; therefore, attention to the variable of career path meaning can improve life satisfaction among them. Rahimi and colleagues (2020) identified two main themes in their research, which include "healthy functioning" with sub-themes: positive functions for children, interactive parenting, and skilled parenting, and "unhealthy functioning" with sub-themes: negative functions for children, confrontational parenting, risky parenting, and parenting as a threat. Panahpoury and Jouhari (2023) concluded in their research that marital intimacy has a significant direct relationship with sexual performance and self-disclosure in marriage, and an inverse relationship with the tendency towards divorce. The results also showed that self-disclosure in marriage has a significant direct relationship with sexual performance and an inverse relationship with the tendency towards divorce. Timan and colleagues (2023) found 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, and the constructive communication pattern, the expectant/withdrawn communication pattern, and the mutual avoidance communication pattern have a significant relationship with self-differentiation. The results clearly indicated no significant relationship between the constructive communication pattern and the expectant/withdrawn communication pattern with marital intimacy. Additionally, the results showed a significant relationship between the constructive communication pattern, the expectant/withdrawn communication pattern, the mutual avoidance communication pattern, and the health of the primary family with marital intimacy, mediated by self-differentiation in female students suffering from chronic pain. Bakhtiari and colleagues (2021) concluded in their research that since marriage and partner selection 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 towards marital infidelity, it is essential to emphasize the need to examine these two variables in pre-marital counseling and also in educating parents about child-rearing and attachment styles. Triouh and colleagues (2020) found in their research that communication beliefs, 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, there is a direct relationship between emotional involvement and received criticisms with marital intimacy, and between communication beliefs and marital commitment, as well as between marital intimacy and marital commitment. Moghimy and colleagues (2020) concluded in their research that forgiveness, self-differentiation, and intimacy are effective on marital commitment, and as a result, despite experiencing painful events, couples maintain their togetherness due to marital commitment and are committed to specific actions and frameworks towards a higher goal.

As mentioned, marital intimacy plays a crucial role in the quality of the relationship between couples, and increasing marital satisfaction leads to the stability and strength of this relationship, thus significantly preventing divorce. Additionally, it seems that the specific conditions created for dual-income couples pose challenges to their marital intimacy, which vary according to the level of marital intimacy. Given the importance of intimacy in married life, it is necessary to identify and explain these challenges. Furthermore, in reviewing the research background, no study was found that compared the challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with low and high marital intimacy, and the few studies that exist on marital intimacy in dual-income couples have been conducted using quantitative methods. Therefore, this research aims to qualitatively compare the challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with low and high marital intimacy, relying on primary sources.

#### Research Methodology

**Research Method:** The present study was conducted using thematic analysis, which is one of the types of qualitative studies. Thematic analysis is a common qualitative method and a process for analyzing textual data that is used to understand, analyze, and report the semantic patterns present in qualitative data; in such a way that it transforms scattered and diverse data into rich and detailed information.

Considering that thematic analysis is applicable for both description and explanation of phenomena, and the present research focused on both description and explanation, this method was deemed appropriate.

**Study Population:** The population under study consisted of accessible participants selected from among dual-income couples in Tehran in the year 1403 (2024). The inclusion criteria for the research were as follows: (1) both individuals (husband and wife) must be willing to participate in the research; (2) both individuals (husband and wife) must possess the necessary cognitive literacy to share their experiences; (3) both individuals (husband and wife) must be employed in one of the legitimate professions recognized by the Islamic Republic of Iran; (4) at least two years must have passed since their marriage; and (5) they must have at least one child.

**Sample and Sampling Method:** In this study, participants were selected using a purposive and accessible sampling method. The sampling process continued until the information reached a state of saturation, which occurred after interviewing 7 couples.

**Data Collection Tools:** In the present research, two tools were used for data collection:

1) **Semi-structured interviews:** The structure of this interview lies between unstructured and structured interviews; that is, this interview possesses 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) based on them, which are asked to all participants. In the present study, the following general questions were used: "How often do you have disagreements?", "What expectations and demands does your spouse have from you that, if unmet, lead to their complaints?", "Who do you prefer to spend your leisure time with?", "How much time do you usually dedicate to joint activities with your spouse? Please name a few of these activities." and "To what extent do you feel satisfied with the time you spend together?". Additionally, to explore the phenomenon in depth, probing questions such as "Can you elaborate on this?" were used.

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

2) **Marital Intimacy Scale by Thompson and Walker (MIS):** This scale was developed by Linda Thompson and Alexis J. Walker (1983) to measure the affection and intimacy of couples. This scale is unidimensional and consists of 17 items that measure the level of intimacy between couples using a 7-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, mostly, almost always, and always), with each item having a value between 1 and 7 (never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4, mostly = 5, almost always = 6, and always = 7). The participant's score on this scale is obtained by summing the item scores and dividing by 17. The score range is between 1 and 7, with a higher score indicating greater intimacy.

To determine the content and face validity, the scale was reviewed by 15 counseling professors and 15 couples, and its content and face validity were confirmed. Additionally, Khazaei (2007) calculated the correlation coefficient through simultaneous administration with the Bagarozzi questionnaire to be 0.82, which was significant at the 0.01 level, indicating criterion validity for this scale. Furthermore, Etemadi (2005) in his doctoral dissertation, which was conducted on 100 couples in Isfahan, obtained a total reliability coefficient of 0.96 using Cronbach's alpha method, indicating acceptable reliability for this scale.

**Data Analysis Method:** After each interview, the content was fully transcribed and then coded and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's method, which consists of six steps: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, coding, searching for and identifying themes, mapping themes, analyzing theme networks, and compiling

the report. Additionally, the scores from the Marital Intimacy Scale were used to identify dual-income couples with low and high marital intimacy, allowing for a comparison of the interview data between the two groups.

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

For the analysis of the information obtained from the interviews, the following procedure was followed:

First, based on the scores obtained from the questionnaires, the couples were divided into two categories: couples with low marital intimacy and couples with high marital intimacy (since the scores obtained by the couples ranged from 4 to 7, couples whose marital intimacy score was less than 5.5 were considered as couples with low marital intimacy, and couples whose marital intimacy score was greater than 5.5 were considered as couples with high marital intimacy).

Then, phrases related to the research topic were extracted from the interviews and, according to the classification of couples into two categories of couples with low marital intimacy and couples with high marital intimacy, were coded in tables 1, 3, and 5.

Finally, the themes were extracted from the obtained codes in the form of tables 2, 4, and 6. .

**Table 1 - Coding Table for Dual-Income Couples with Low Marital Intimacy**

Key phrases of interviews	Codes
Approximately once or twice a month, we engage in conflicts.	Occurrence of recurrent conflicts
Overall, there is no significant issue if my spouse does not prioritize appeasing their family at all costs.	Prioritizing the paternal family at the expense of neglecting the spouse
My spouse is typically occupied with external work responsibilities and is a diligent individual; however, they tend to neglect their duties towards their spouse and child, including child-rearing and spending quality time with the child. As a result of managing all matters related to the infant alone, I am increasingly reluctant to consider having more children.	Neglecting spousal and parental responsibilities
Indeed, I sometimes feel regretful that I must endure this lifestyle for the sake of my child.	Thoughts of separation and divorce
My spouse operates solely on logic and is indifferent to emotions.	Disregarding the emotions of others (especially the spouse)
They consistently pursue actions that they believe are correct; in my view, the only bothersome issue with my spouse is their aversion to social gatherings. Although they insist on family gatherings, they typically oppose suggestions from others and exhibit a degree of obstinacy in this regard.	Self-centeredness of one party
They expect to have everything simultaneously and instantaneously. For instance, they expect me to be employed, pursue education, and fulfill all domestic responsibilities flawlessly and comprehensively; in essence, to be entirely devoted to them and the household, which I find exceedingly challenging and at times, impossible.	Unrealistic expectations of the spouse
I feel isolated. Frequently, they do not accept responsibility, and physical limitations coupled with a lack of time hinder the fulfillment of these expectations.	Lack of assistance from the husband to the working wife in household tasks

We seldom allocate time to discuss our expectations of one another.	Time constraints for discussing mutual expectations
We experience the same ordinary discussions that occur in all families; there is not much conflict between us, and the issues that arise seem entirely natural and are likely to occur in any relationship.	Normalization of recurrent conflicts by one party
My spouse tends to be somewhat irritable and sensitive, often making hasty judgments. Occasionally, I feel hurt by their actions, but I prefer to remain silent. All these disagreements and periods of estrangement stem from my spouse's sensitivity to certain matters.	Irritability and hasty judgment
My spouse generally does not have specific expectations; the issues they raise tend to resolve over time and are not of great significance.	Belittling the expectations of the spouse

Table 2 - Extraction table of themes for dual-income couples with low marital intimacy

- Frequent occurrences of disputes	Subordinate Themes	Main Topics	Nuclear subject
- Indifference to the emotions of others (particularly the spouse)	Ineffectiveness in Effective Communication	Couple-Centered Challenges Main Topics Couple-Centered Challenges	Challenges of marital intimacy in couples both working with low marital intimacy
- Proneness to irritability and hasty judgment			
- Prioritization of one's parental family at the expense of neglecting the spouse			
- Lack of assistance from the husband to the working wife in household tasks	Neglect of Spousal Desires Temporal Limitations		
- Minimization of the spouse's expectations			
- Time constraints for discussing mutual expectations			
- Neglect in fulfilling spousal and parental responsibilities			
- Idealistic expectations of the spouse	Inadequate Fulfillment of Spousal and Parental Roles		
- Self-centeredness of one party			
- Thoughts of separation and divorce	Unreasonable Expectations of the Spouse	Main Topics	
- Normalization of frequent disputes by one party			
- Frequent occurrences of disputes	Personality Traits		

As inferred from Tables 1 and 2, the analysis and examination of the conducted interviews yielded 2 main themes, 8 sub-themes, and 12 extracted codes. Thus, it can be stated that the core theme of "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with low marital intimacy" is divided into two main themes: "couple-centered challenges" and "individual-centered challenges".

The main theme "couple-centered challenges" is further divided into five sub-themes: "weakness in effective communication," "disregard for spouse's desires," "time constraints," "weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles," and "unreasonable expectations of the spouse." The codes under the sub-theme "weakness in effective communication" include: frequent arguments (e.g., we argue about once or twice a month), disregard for others' feelings (especially the spouse) (e.g., my spouse only operates on logic and does not consider emotions), and being easily offended and quick to judge (e.g., my spouse is somewhat irritable and sensitive and usually judges quickly. Sometimes I feel hurt by them, but I prefer to remain silent). The codes under the sub-theme "disregard for spouse's desires" include: prioritizing one's own family over the spouse (at the expense of neglecting the spouse) (e.g., generally,



it is not a significant issue if my spouse does not prioritize pleasing their family at all costs), lack of assistance from the husband to the working wife in household tasks (e.g., I am alone. Often, they do not take on responsibilities themselves, and physical inability and lack of time lead to unmet expectations), and downplaying the spouse's expectations (e.g., my spouse usually does not have specific expectations; the issues they raise are resolved over time and are not very important). The sub-theme "time constraints" has only one code: time limitations for discussing each other's expectations (e.g., we spend very little time discussing our expectations of each other). The sub-theme "weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles" also has only one code: neglecting spousal and parental duties (e.g., my spouse is usually busy with outside work and is a hardworking individual, but they neglect their responsibilities towards the spouse and child, including child-rearing and spending time with the child). The sub-theme "unreasonable expectations of the spouse" has only one code: idealistic expectations from the spouse (e.g., they expect to have everything at once and overnight. For instance, I should be employed, study, and fulfill all the duties of a housewife perfectly and flawlessly; in general, I should be entirely devoted to them and the household, which I find truly difficult and sometimes impossible).

The main theme of "individual-centered challenges" is divided into three sub-themes: "personality traits," "thoughts of separation and divorce," and "normalization of frequent conflicts by one of the parties." The sub-theme "personality traits" contains only one code: egocentrism of one party (for example: [my spouse] is always pursuing what he/she believes is right). The sub-theme "thoughts of separation and divorce" also contains only one code: thoughts of separation and divorce (for example: yes, sometimes I truly regret that I have to endure this life for the sake of my child). The sub-theme "normalization of frequent conflicts by one of the parties" likewise contains only one code:

normalization of frequent conflicts by one of the parties (for example: we also experience the same ordinary arguments that occur in all families).

Table 3 - Coding table for dual-income couples with high marital intimacy

Key phrases of interviews	Codes
Our disagreements often arise over trivial and almost insignificant issues; for example, about being late to get ready to go out – there had only been occasional discussions about changing our residence – since my husband shares our house with his brother, there have sometimes been disagreements about switching homes – our main disagreement is mostly about changing residences – we often have disagreements over minor issues, such as my husband's night shifts – usually, our disagreements occur over trivial matters, for instance, I do beekeeping alongside my job, and when I make the stairs or inside the house dirty, my wife stays upset for two days.	Occurrence of fights and disagreements over trivial and minor issues
	- The feeling of being overlooked by the spouse
I get upset when I feel ignored or when there has been a shortcoming in fulfilling responsibilities – another issue that bothers me more is my wife's indifference – I get upset when I assign my wife a task to do, but she keeps postponing it.	- Low mutual understanding between the parties
	- Lack of action to correct one's own faults
Our disagreements and quarrels sometimes happen due to not understanding each other's intentions – disagreements primarily stem from a lack of understanding of each other's characteristics, morals, and tastes, and not valuing each other, while marital problems come later – these disagreements and quarrels arise from not fully understanding each other – these disagreements and quarrels stem from a lack of mutual understanding or insufficient knowledge of each other's morals.	- Time constraints for spending time together
	- One party's concern about the spouse's relationship with the opposite sex at work
There is never enough time, and the backlog of work does not allow for it, resulting in complaints from her. Even though I am fully aware that the mistake is mine, I often do nothing.	- Postponing discussions about expectations to uncomfortable times and conflicts
	- Time limitations for performing joint tasks with the spouse
Despite the discomfort and dissatisfaction from the lack of time and the busyness of life and work, we cannot think about having more leisure time...	- Intensification of disagreements and failure to reach an understanding
These disagreements and quarrels are due to the additional fatigue caused by working both at home and outside, and the low understanding between the parties – due to the heavy workload or additional fatigue from working at home and outside, I cannot meet my spouse's expectations and demands.	- Additional fatigue resulting from work at home and outside for the working woman
We usually quarrel when we are very tired and angry with each other – our arguments mostly lead to quarrels when we are exhausted and lack patience for each other.	- Fatigue from each other and lack of patience with one another
Typically, our disagreements are about my job, as I work night shifts, and being alone or the children feeling lonely makes it difficult for us to have fun together – the main reason for these disagreements is my night shifts, which leave my husband alone. Given that we have two young children and my spouse works night shifts, the children feel lonely, and this causes disagreements and longing for each other – most of our conflicts arise solely because of my spouse's night shifts.	- Effects of night shifts on the woman
They expect me not to go to work – my spouse was employed before marrying me and now expects me to accept this situation with all its challenges and not to make my own discomfort from the support I provide; as we both try to resolve our issues.	- Non-acceptance of the woman's employment by the husband

They are uncomfortable with my night shifts and wish I would rest more – it's not that I oppose my spouse's job; it's just that when I see our children feeling lonely at night, I want my spouse to stay home and be with them.	- Non-acceptance of the woman's night shifts by the husband
Even though they know how much my salary is and that amount goes towards paying off debts and rent, they expect me to always have money in my pocket.	- Financial expectations from the husband without regard to his financial situation

Table 4 - Extraction table of themes for dual-income couples with high marital intimacy

Extraction table of themes for dual-income couples with high marital intimacy			
Codes	Subtopics	Main Topics	Nuclear Subject
Occurrence of disputes and disagreements over trivial and minor issues	Weakness in Effective Communication Disregard for Spouse's Wishes Time Constraints	Couple-Centered Challenges Job-Centered Challenges Main Topics	Nuclear Subject Nuclear Subject
Low mutual understanding between the parties			
Escalation of differences and failure to reach an agreement			
Fatigue from each other and lack of patience for one another			
Impression of being overlooked by the spouse			
Time constraints for spending time together	Postponing Discussions about Expectations to Times of Discomfort and Resentment Unreasonable Expectations of Spouse		
Time constraints for carrying out joint tasks with the spouse			
Postponing discussions about expectations to uncomfortable times and conflicts	Work-Family Conflicts	Couple-Centered Challenges	Challenges of Marital Intimacy in Dual-Income Couples with High Marital Intimacy
Financial expectations from the husband without regard to his financial situation			
Concerns of one party about the spouse's relationship with the opposite sex at work	Weakness in Effective Communication Disregard for Spouse's Wishes	Job-Centered Challenges Main Topics	
Additional fatigue resulting from working both at home and outside for the working woman			
Effects of night shifts on the woman			
Husband's refusal to accept the wife's employment			
Husband's refusal to accept the wife's night shifts			
Failure to take action to correct one's own faults	Time Constraints		

As inferred from Tables 3 and 4, the analysis and examination of the conducted interviews yielded three main themes, seven sub-themes, and fifteen codes. Accordingly, it can be stated that the core theme of "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with high marital intimacy" is

divided into three main themes: "couple-centered challenges," "job-centered challenges," and "individual-centered challenges".

The main theme "couple-centered challenges" is further divided into five sub-themes: "weakness in effective communication," "disregard for spouse's desires," "time constraints," "postponing discussions about expectations to times of discomfort and resentment," and "unreasonable expectations of the spouse." The codes under the sub-theme "weakness in effective communication" include: occurrence of disputes and disagreements over trivial and minor issues (for example: our disagreements often arise over trivial and almost insignificant matters; for instance, regarding being late to go out), low mutual understanding between partners (for example: these disagreements and quarrels stem from a lack of complete mutual understanding or insufficient knowledge of each other's character), escalation of disagreements and failure to reach consensus (for example: when we cannot reach an agreement and the disagreement becomes very severe, we end up quarreling), and fatigue from each other and lack of patience (for example: our discussions often lead to quarrels when we become tired of each other and lack patience). The sub-theme "disregard for spouse's desires" has only one code: the feeling of being overlooked by the spouse (for example: I tend to withdraw when I feel overlooked or when there is negligence in fulfilling responsibilities). The codes under the sub-theme "time constraints" include: time limitations for spending time together (for example: despite discomfort and dissatisfaction with the limited time and the demands of life and work, we cannot think of having more leisure time...) and time limitations for performing joint activities with the spouse (for example: if an opportunity arises, such as once a week, we engage in activities like house shopping, walking in the street, or going to nature together). The sub-theme "postponing discussions about expectations to times of discomfort and resentment" has only one code: postponing discussions about expectations to times of discomfort and resentment (for example: we usually discuss our expectations and discomforts regarding each other's behavior when we are upset with one another). The sub-theme "unreasonable expectations of the spouse" also has only one code: financial expectations from the husband without regard to his financial situation (for example: even though she knows how much my salary is and that amount goes towards installments and rent, she expects me to always have money in my pocket).

The main theme "job-centered challenges" has only one sub-theme titled "work-family conflicts." The codes under the sub-theme "work-family conflicts" include: concern of one partner regarding the spouse's relationship with the opposite sex at the workplace (for example: given my job and the clients I have had and still have, I often interacted comfortably and somewhat intimately, which sometimes made my spouse uncomfortable regarding the opposite sex), additional fatigue resulting from working both at home and outside for the employed woman (for example: these disagreements and quarrels arise due to the additional fatigue from working at home and outside and the low understanding between partners), effects of night shifts on the wife (for example: our disagreements usually concern my job, which involves night shifts, and the loneliness or the children feeling homesick, as we are not together and cannot enjoy leisure time), non-acceptance of the wife's employment by the husband (for example: my spouse was employed before marrying me and now expects me to accept this situation along with all its challenges without it being burdensome for me; as we both strive to resolve our issues), and non-acceptance of the wife's night shifts by the husband (for example: it is not that I oppose my spouse's job; I just wish she would stay home with the children when I see their nighttime longing).

The main theme "individual-centered challenges" has only one sub-theme titled "personality traits." The sub-theme "personality traits" has only one code: failure to take action to correct one's flaws (for

example: there is never time to address the overdue tasks, which consequently leads to complaints from my spouse. Although I am fully aware that the fault lies with me, I often do nothing).

Table 5 - Coding table for common factors between both groups

Key phrases of interviews	Codes
Forgetting to do something that was supposed to be done often happens when one of the parties is busy with work or social commitments – sometimes my spouse gets upset with me when disagreements arise during times when the pressure of work outside the home is high on them – sometimes due to numerous commitments, I forget some small points that cause my spouse to feel upset.	Effects of excessive workload
Our disagreements have been resolved through several hours or half a day of not talking – so far, disagreements may have led to temporary discomfort – yes, [our disagreements] sometimes lead to being upset – yes, [our disagreements] have led to being upset – we have been upset with each other a few times – [our disagreements] have only led to being upset – I have been upset [in response to disagreements] – [our disagreements] have only led to being upset for 2 to 3 days – usually, I only ignore my spouse for a day or two and then start over – yes, usually I get upset, which lasts a maximum of three days, and then we reconcile again.	Temporary outbursts
It has happened, and maybe my spouse hasn't realized that the discomfort was due to something that happened at work – it has happened very little – yes, sometimes it has happened – yes, this sometimes occurs due to work-related problems. In these situations, my spouse tries not to react, but sometimes they become upset about the situation – sometimes it has happened due to excessive work fatigue – it has happened very little – yes, it has happened a lot. My husband reacts very logically and patiently and often blames himself for not being able to manage life alone while I don't go to work – maybe it has happened sometimes – it has happened a lot.	Transferring workplace discomfort to home and venting it on the spouse + unconstructive reactions from the spouse
[In response to my spouse's unreasonable expectations] I cry and get upset – I have always tried to meet all my husband's expectations, even if it is difficult for me – [if my spouse has an unreasonable expectation,] I get very angry, lose control, and shout – sometimes, despite my inner reluctance, I give in to his unreasonable expectations and fulfill them, but sometimes I get angry and lose my temper and start shouting.	Unconstructive reactions from one party towards unreasonable expectations of the spouse
Due to my spouse being employed and a student, and my being an employee, we have had some disagreements and problems regarding child care – our disagreements are mostly about how to behave and raise the children – our disagreements are mostly about the way we behave and raise the children – another disagreement we have is in the area of child-rearing, where we argue about how strict we should be – another disagreement we have is in the area of child-rearing, regarding the level of strictness towards the children and their timely return home – we mostly have disagreements about how to behave with the child. My spouse fulfills all the children's requests, but I believe we should be a bit stricter with them.	Marital conflicts and problems
A small part [of my spouse's expectations] I cannot meet due to the excessive fatigue resulting from the hardships of work and life – because my job is stressful and hard... [I cannot meet my spouse's expectations and demands].	In the area of child-rearing and care
My spouse expects me not to go anywhere without them, which is always a point of disagreement – I think some of their expectations are unreasonable, and I do not fulfill those expectations, which is always a point of disagreement – they want me to stay home after work and not go out.	Effects of work stress

Table 6 - Table of Extracted Themes for Common Factors Between Both Groups

Codes	Subtopics	Main Topics	nuclear subject
Occurrence of temporary quarrels	Weakness in effective communication	Couple-Centered Challenges	Challenges of marital intimacy in couples Both working (common between both groups)
Unconstructive reactions from one party to the unreasonable expectations of the spouse			
Disagreements and marital problems regarding the upbringing and care of the child	Weakness in fulfilling the roles of spouse and parent		
Imposing strict limitations on the spouse	Unreasonable expectations of the spouse		
Effects of a heavy workload		Main Topics	
Transferring workplace discomforts to home and unloading them on the spouse + unconstructive reaction of the spouse			
Effects of work difficulties			

As inferred from Tables 5 and 6, the analysis and examination of the conducted interviews yielded 2 main themes, 4 sub-themes, and 7 codes. Thus, it can be stated that the core theme of "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples (common to both groups)" is divided into two main themes: "couple-centered challenges" and "job-centered challenges".

The main theme "couple-centered challenges" is further divided into three sub-themes: "weakness in effective communication," "weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles," and "unreasonable expectations of the spouse." The codes under the sub-theme "weakness in effective communication" include: temporary conflicts (for example: our disagreements are resolved after several hours or half a day of not speaking) and unconstructive reactions from one party to the unreasonable expectations of the spouse (for example: sometimes, despite my inner reluctance, I comply with his unreasonable expectations and fulfill them, but at times I become angry and lose my temper, leading to shouting). The sub-theme "weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles" has only one code: marital disagreements and issues regarding child-rearing and care (for example: due to my spouse being employed and a student, and my own job, we faced some disagreements and problems in child care). The sub-theme "unreasonable expectations of the spouse" also has only one code: imposing strict limitations on the spouse (for example: my spouse expects me not to go anywhere without him, which is a constant source of conflict).

The main theme "job-centered challenges" has only one sub-theme titled "work-family conflicts." The codes under the sub-theme "work-family conflicts" include: the impact of excessive workload (for example: my spouse becomes upset with me when disagreements arise during times of high work pressure), transferring workplace discomfort to home and unloading it on the spouse + unconstructive reactions from the spouse (for example: yes, this sometimes occurs due to work-related problems. In these situations, my spouse tries not to react, but sometimes he also expresses dissatisfaction with the situation) and the effects of job difficulties (for example: I am unable to meet some of my spouse's expectations and demands due to extreme fatigue from work and life).

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to compare the challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with low and high marital intimacy. From the analysis and examination of interviews conducted with dual-income couples with low marital intimacy, 2 main themes, 8 sub-themes, and 12 codes were extracted.

Therefore, the core theme "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with low marital intimacy" is divided into two main themes: "couple-centered challenges" with sub-themes: weakness in effective communication (frequent arguments, neglecting the feelings of others (especially the spouse), and being overly sensitive and judgmental), neglecting the spouse's wishes (prioritizing the family of origin (at the expense of neglecting the spouse), lack of assistance from the husband to the working wife in household tasks, and trivializing the spouse's expectations), time constraints (time limitations for discussing each other's expectations), weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles (shortcomings in fulfilling spousal and parental duties), and unreasonable expectations of the spouse (idealistic expectations from the spouse) and "individual-centered challenges" with sub-themes: personality traits (self-centeredness of one party), thoughts of separation and divorce (thoughts of separation and divorce), and normalizing frequent arguments by one party (normalizing frequent arguments by one party). Additionally, from the analysis and examination of interviews conducted with dual-income couples with high marital intimacy, 3 main themes, 7 sub-themes, and 15 codes were extracted. Therefore, the core theme "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples with high marital intimacy" is divided into three main themes: "couple-centered challenges" with sub-themes: weakness in effective communication (arguments and disagreements over trivial and minor issues, low mutual understanding, exacerbation of differences, and inability to reach consensus, and fatigue from each other), neglecting the spouse's wishes (imparting a sense of being overlooked to the spouse), time constraints (time limitations for spending time together and time limitations for performing joint tasks with the spouse), postponing discussions about expectations to times of discomfort and resentment (postponing discussions about expectations to times of discomfort and resentment), and unreasonable expectations of the spouse (financial expectations from the husband without regard to his financial situation), "job-centered challenges" with the sub-theme: work-family conflicts (concerns of one party regarding the spouse's relationship with the opposite sex at work, additional fatigue from working both at home and outside for the working woman, effects of night shifts on the wife, and the husband's non-acceptance of the wife's employment and night shifts), and "individual-centered challenges" with the sub-theme: personality traits (failure to take action to correct one's flaws). Furthermore, from the analysis and examination of the conducted interviews, 2 main themes, 4 sub-themes, and 7 codes were identified as common factors between both groups. Therefore, the core theme "challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples (common to both groups)" is divided into two main themes: "couple-centered challenges" with sub-themes: weakness in effective communication (temporary conflicts and unconstructive reactions from one party to the unreasonable expectations of the spouse), weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles (marital disagreements and issues regarding child-rearing and care), and unreasonable expectations of the spouse (imposing strict limitations on the spouse) and "job-centered challenges" with the sub-theme: work-family conflicts (the impact of excessive workload, transferring workplace discomfort to home, and unloading it on the spouse).

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "weakness in effective communication" are as follows: If couples adopt a communication pattern that is either expectant/withdrawn (which can manifest as either the wife being expectant and the husband withdrawn, or the husband being expectant and the wife withdrawn) or a mutually avoidant communication pattern (which leads to conflict between spouses and transforms arguments into a perpetual pattern), instead of a constructive reciprocal communication pattern (where couples avoid aggression and irrational reactions), marital intimacy and consequently, marital satisfaction will decrease, which may ultimately lead to the failure of the marriage. The findings of the present study are consistent with the research conducted by Timan et al. (2024); they concluded that the mutually avoidant communication pattern has a significant relationship with family health and self-differentiation in relation to marital intimacy, as well as the constructive communication pattern, expectant/withdrawn communication pattern, mutually avoidant communication pattern, and family health with self-differentiation. The results clearly indicate a lack of significant relationship between the constructive communication pattern and the expectant/withdrawn communication pattern with marital intimacy. Furthermore, the results



demonstrate a significant relationship between the constructive communication pattern, expectant/withdrawn communication pattern, mutually avoidant communication pattern, and family health with marital intimacy, mediated by self-differentiation among female students suffering from chronic pain. Additionally, the findings of the present study align with the research by Triouh et al. (2020); they concluded that communication beliefs, emotional involvement, and criticism within the family can predict marital commitment, and marital intimacy can mediate the relationship between communication beliefs and emotional involvement and criticism within the family. Moreover, there exists a direct relationship between emotional involvement and received criticisms with marital intimacy, as well as between communication beliefs and marital commitment, and between marital intimacy and marital commitment.

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "neglecting the spouse's wishes" indicate that individuals sometimes fail to understand their spouse's expectations and needs due to an inability to engage in active listening, selective hearing, or a lack of empathy. This situation leads to the emergence of conflict between couples, subsequently weakening marital intimacy to the extent that it may increase the likelihood of divorce.

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "time constraints" can be explained in the context of time-based conflict, which is one of the types of work-family conflicts: When time is allocated to one role, it makes participation in another role difficult; the more time couples dedicate to their professional roles, the less time they will have to fulfill their spousal duties. Spending leisure time together may help resolve marital disputes. Therefore, a lack of shared time may undermine romantic relationships, create conflicts between couples, and reduce the level of intimacy. The findings of the present study are consistent with the research conducted by Kamali et al. (2020); they concluded that factors enhancing marital intimacy include: (1) family, (2) duration of shared marital relationship, (3) mutual sacrifice, (4) appreciation, (5) new shared activities, (6) parenting, (7) shared social networks, and (8) religion.

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "postponing discussions about expectations to uncomfortable times and conflicts" indicate that due to the time constraints faced by both working spouses, these couples often delay discussions about their expectations until it leads to arguments and conflicts, and subsequently, to avoid similar discomforts in the future, they will engage in discussions about their expectations. In summary, it can be stated that these couples prefer treatment to prevention.

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "weakness in fulfilling spousal and parental roles" suggest that if women are inclined to participate in outside work and society provides this opportunity for them, and if gender role divisions are such that household and child-rearing responsibilities are placed on women, they may face significant challenges in balancing professional roles with domestic roles, especially if husbands are unwilling to share household responsibilities. Consequently, motherhood imposes greater costs on women who are employed or more committed to their careers. These challenges may affect the childbearing and child-rearing plans of these couples and may even lead to marital disputes. The findings of the present study are consistent with the research conducted by Khani et al. (2023); they concluded that higher experiences of work-family conflict among married women are associated with a lower number of children. Additionally, the findings of the present study align with the research by Askari Nadushan and Razavi Nasrabadi (2023); they concluded that the main challenges related to childbearing among employed women participating in the study can be categorized into ten sub-themes and four main themes, which include: occupational

challenges (work environment), child-rearing, economic issues, and education of children. The outcome of these conditions has led employed women participating in the research to prefer having fewer children as a means of avoiding these conflicts and challenges. Furthermore, the findings of the present study are consistent with the research conducted by Rahimi et al. (2020); they successfully identified two main themes, which include "healthy functioning" with sub-themes: positive functions. The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "unreasonable expectations of spouses" are as follows: Occasionally, individuals possess perfectionistic expectations from their relationships or lack empathy, leading them to have demands from their spouses that, at least at present, they are unable to fulfill. This situation results in conflicts between couples, subsequently undermining marital intimacy to the extent that it may increase the likelihood of divorce.

The findings of the present study concerning the codes of the impact of excessive workload, the transfer of workplace discomfort to the home, and displacing these issues onto the spouse, along with the spouse's unconstructive reactions, compounded fatigue from work both at home and outside, the challenges of work, and the effects of night shifts on women, which fall under the sub-theme of "work-family conflicts," can be explained in light of pressure-based conflict: Given that pressure in one role may interfere with participation in another role; the more couples experience tension, anxiety, fatigue, or job dissatisfaction, the more their physical or mental energy diminishes. The negative effects of work-related stressors may manifest in the home environment, as employees displace their negative emotions stemming from work experiences and express them within the family. In such circumstances, if couples adopt a pattern of mutual avoidance in communication, the conflict arising from this communication pattern diminishes the marital intimacy of the couples. The findings of the present study align with the research of Gharam (2019), who concluded that the significance of career purpose has a meaningful positive impact on job satisfaction, life meaning, and life satisfaction among dual-income couples; thus, attention to the variable of career purpose in dual-income couples can enhance their life satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings of the present study are consistent with those of Fallahchai et al. (2019), who found that job stress has a negative relationship with marital quality, and this relationship is moderated by gender, such that women experiencing higher job stress report lower marital quality. Additionally, couple coping also moderates the relationship between job stress and marital quality, whereby shared couple coping weakens the negative relationship between job stress and marital quality. Moreover, the findings of the present study are in agreement with Akram et al. (2018), who concluded that career advancement, workload, stress, and quality of life significantly impact work-life balance. Additionally, workload does not significantly affect the work-life balance of dual-income couples. Furthermore, the work-life balance of women is greater compared to that of men.

The findings of the present study regarding the concern of one party about their spouse's relationship with the opposite sex in the workplace, which falls under the sub-theme of "work-family conflicts," can be explained by the necessity of trust in the social dimension of marital intimacy: Trust is essential in social intimacy as it enables an individual to believe in their spouse's social life. Without trust in the relationship, individuals quickly become suspicious of the extent of their spouse's relationships, which can jeopardize marital intimacy and, consequently, the stability of the marriage. The findings of the present study are consistent with the research of Bakhtiari et al. (2021), who concluded that since marriage and partner selection are among the most significant 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 in parental education regarding child-rearing and attachment styles. Additionally, the findings of the present study align with those of Moghadam et al. (2020), who concluded that forgiveness, differentiation, and intimacy significantly affect marital commitment, and

consequently, despite experiencing painful events, couples maintain their togetherness due to their marital commitment and adherence to specific actions and frameworks towards a higher goal. Furthermore, the findings of the present study are consistent with the research of Dessyrianti and Setiawan (2023), who concluded 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. Additionally, the findings of the present study are in agreement with those of Avanti and Setiawan (2022), who concluded that trust and forgiveness significantly influence the marital intimacy of dual-income couples.

The findings of the present study regarding the codes of employment rejection of women by their husbands and the rejection of night shifts for women by their husbands, which fall under the sub-theme of "work-family conflicts," can be explained in light of the male dominance model in marriage: everything depends on the woman to make the man happy, thereby guiding the marriage towards happiness. In this context, if a woman wishes to pursue a job or work night shifts against her husband's wishes, this may lead to conflicts that result in a decrease in marital intimacy. The findings of the present study are consistent with the research conducted by Jabari et al. (2022), who concluded that the research model concerning the relationship between power structure in the family and marital adjustment, with marital justice as a mediating factor, exhibited a good fit.

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "personality traits" are as follows: since personality characteristics are among the individual factors influencing marital intimacy, if at least one of the spouses insists on continuing their erroneous behaviors in a self-centered manner and does not take steps to rectify these flaws, this may negatively impact marital intimacy.

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "thoughts of separation and divorce" indicate that although dual-income couples contribute to increased family income, they have specific effects on marital performance. Due to their shared responsibilities in financial matters, sexual roles, child-rearing, family care, and the attitudinal disposition that determines the stability of their marital life, they exhibit a high level of incompatibility in their relationships. Prolonged incompatibility may lead to marital distress, separation, and ultimately, divorce. The findings of the present study align with the research of Panafpouri and Jouhari (2023), who found that marital intimacy has a significant direct relationship with sexual performance and marital self-disclosure, and an inverse relationship with the tendency towards divorce. Additionally, the results indicated that marital self-disclosure has a significant direct relationship with sexual performance and an inverse relationship with the tendency towards divorce. Furthermore, the findings of the present study are consistent with the research of Omidifar et al. (2016), who concluded that there is a significant difference in the mean emotion regulation strategies, marital boredom, and marital intimacy between couples with one working spouse and those with both spouses working. Couples with both spouses working exhibit lower positive emotion regulation strategies and marital intimacy, while they have higher negative emotion regulation strategies and marital boredom compared to couples with one working spouse. Moreover, there is a significant relationship between emotion regulation strategies and marital boredom, emotion regulation strategies and marital intimacy, as well as between marital intimacy and marital boredom. Additionally, the findings of the present study are consistent with the research of Beegam et al. (2017), who concluded that single-income couples have better marital adjustment compared to dual-income couples. The findings of the present study also align with the research of Naddaf and Heidari (2017), who found 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.

The findings of the present study regarding the sub-theme of "normalizing frequent conflicts by one party" indicate that if couples face frequent conflicts in their shared life and these conflicts are portrayed as normal by one party, it may create a sense in the other party that their spouse is indifferent to the occurring events, which may lead to further conflicts that jeopardize marital intimacy over time.

The present study has certain limitations as follows: first, the participants of the present study were in their late youth and early middle age (35 to 46 years), which may have led to a certain degree of adaptation to their circumstances, resulting in incomplete information; therefore, it is recommended that future studies be conducted on younger couples. Second, the majority of the participants in the present study were employed in administrative positions, while those in self-employment were in the minority. Third, for screening in the present study, the researchers themselves considered a hypothetical cutoff point for the questionnaire, but it is advisable that future studies utilize a standardized cutoff questionnaire for this purpose. In conclusion, given that marital intimacy is considered one of the essential pillars of marital quality of life, it is recommended that family counselors gather necessary information regarding the challenges of marital intimacy in dual-income couples and disseminate this information through media channels. Furthermore, it is suggested that family therapists collaborate to design preventive measures to address the negative consequences of marital intimacy challenges in dual-income couples.

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