

Designing a Structural Model of Marital Satisfaction Based on the Components of Systemic–Spiritual Couple Therapy with the Mediating Role of Power Structure in the Family

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Tabatabaeian, S. A., Ghanbari, Z., Hosseini, S., & Taheri, A. (2025). Designing a Structural Model of Marital Satisfaction Based on the Components of Systemic–Spiritual Couple Therapy with the Mediating Role of Power Structure in the Family. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 6(5), 1-9.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.4255>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to design and validate a structural model of marital satisfaction based on the components of systemic–spiritual couple therapy, with the mediating role of the family power structure.

Methods and Materials: The research adopted a descriptive–correlational design with an applied objective. The statistical population included all couples in Isfahan who had been married for at least five years. Using convenience sampling, 384 participants (192 couples) were selected from counseling centers. Participants completed the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Family Power Structure Questionnaire, and the Systemic–Spiritual Couple Therapy Scale. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS software.

Findings: Results showed that systemic–spiritual couple therapy had a significant positive effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.54, p < 0.001$) and on the family power structure ($\beta = 0.61, p < 0.001$). The family power structure also significantly predicted marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$), confirming its mediating role. The overall model demonstrated good fit indices, supporting the hypothesized relationships among variables. Regression analysis also revealed that the components of systemic–spiritual couple therapy and family power structure together explained 25% of the variance in marital satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.25, F = 66.51, p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: The findings support the effectiveness of systemic–spiritual couple therapy in enhancing marital satisfaction, both directly and indirectly through improvements in family power dynamics. The proposed model underscores the importance of integrating spiritual and systemic interventions with structural family variables to improve relationship outcomes.

Keywords: Marital satisfaction; systemic–spiritual couple therapy; family power structure; structural equation modeling; couples counseling.

1. Introduction

Marital satisfaction is a dynamic and multidimensional construct central to the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals and the stability of families and societies. It reflects the subjective evaluation of the quality, harmony, and contentment experienced within a marital relationship. As families evolve in response to cultural, social, and economic pressures, understanding the underlying mechanisms of marital satisfaction becomes increasingly essential. Among the theoretical frameworks that have recently garnered scholarly attention is the integration of systemic and spiritual approaches in couple therapy, especially when examined in the context of internal family dynamics such as the power structure.

In recent years, researchers have emphasized the spiritual dimension as an influential factor in the development and maintenance of marital satisfaction. Spiritual experiences often foster deeper emotional bonds, shared values, and enhanced coping strategies in couples. Ashori et al. (2022) demonstrated that spiritual tendencies significantly mediate the relationship between cognitive emotion regulation and marital adjustment, emphasizing the transformative potential of spiritual orientation in romantic partnerships (Ashori et al., 2022). Similarly, Hakimi Dezfouli and Ebrahimpour (2024) found that psychological flexibility, emotional empathy, and spiritual experiences significantly predicted marital satisfaction in married women (Hakimi Dezfouli & Ebrahimpour, 2024). These findings align with earlier works such as that of Jan Bozorgi (2016), who introduced the "Mehr and Power" model in systemic-spiritual family therapy, which seeks to balance love and authority within marital dynamics to promote satisfaction and functioning (Jan Bozorgi, 2016).

The interaction between spiritual therapeutic components and systemic constructs provides a rich foundation for exploring marital satisfaction. Spiritual systemic couple therapy (SSCT), which blends cognitive-behavioral, narrative, and spiritually informed interventions within a systemic framework, targets core elements such as mutual respect, forgiveness, emotional intimacy, and shared meaning. This integrative therapeutic model not only enhances the emotional climate between spouses but also redefines conflict resolution through value-based communication. Taghipour and Panah Ali (2023) showed that spiritual therapy based on conscientiousness significantly enhanced marital satisfaction and intimacy,

suggesting that virtue-based frameworks yield profound psychological benefits in intimate relationships (Taghipour & Panah Ali, 2023).

A less explored, yet equally critical, mediator in the relationship between couple therapy and marital satisfaction is the power structure within the family. Power dynamics influence decision-making, emotional safety, and autonomy, thereby shaping the quality of the marital bond. Khakpour et al. (2015) argued that imbalances in power distribution are associated with diminished marital adjustment, particularly when authority is exercised rigidly or without reciprocity (Khakpour et al., 2015). Furthermore, Movahed et al. (2012) emphasized that power distribution structures are embedded in broader cultural norms and socioeconomic statuses, which means that marital satisfaction cannot be isolated from its contextual determinants (Movahed et al., 2012). These findings suggest that any attempt to understand or improve marital satisfaction must consider how power is perceived, negotiated, and enacted in the couple's daily life.

The mediating role of power structures becomes even more pronounced in therapeutic settings. For instance, systemic-spiritual couple therapy emphasizes the importance of mutual empowerment, recognizing that dominance or passivity in one partner can lead to resentment, emotional withdrawal, and erosion of intimacy. As highlighted by Kabiri and Khakpour (2020), the spatial and behavioral manifestations of authority within the family directly correlate with relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being (Kabiri & Khakpour, 2020). This insight underscores the necessity of integrating therapeutic interventions with an understanding of power asymmetries, making power structure a critical mediator in the path from therapy to satisfaction.

The literature also reveals the enduring importance of emotional skills and cognitive flexibility in shaping marital satisfaction, particularly when spiritual and systemic components are present. For example, Hakimi Dezfouli and Ebrahimpour (2023) found that emotional empathy and spiritual experiences significantly correlated with higher levels of satisfaction, thereby reinforcing the holistic nature of healthy marital dynamics (Hakimi Dezfouli & Ebrahimpour, 2023). Likewise, Khalili Baseri et al. (2023) revealed that adjustment styles mediated the relationship between spiritual health and marital satisfaction among nurses, a population frequently exposed to psychological strain (Khalili Baseri et al., 2023). These findings collectively affirm that the interplay between emotional,

cognitive, and spiritual resources can significantly buffer against marital dissatisfaction.

Another important context for examining marital satisfaction is the experience of marital crises and unresolved conflicts. Abedi et al. (2024) demonstrated that group conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory reduced emotional divorce and increased life hope in married women, indicating that structured therapeutic interventions can mitigate the adverse effects of marital discord (Abedi et al., 2024). Similarly, Derakhshan et al. (2023) emphasized the psychological resilience and spiritual cohesion among infertile couples who reported higher marital satisfaction despite life stressors (Derakhshan et al., 2023). These studies suggest that resilience and adaptive strategies—often nurtured in spiritual and systemic interventions—contribute to sustained relational well-being.

In clinical practice, the application of spiritually integrated systemic therapy enables couples to explore meaning-making, forgiveness, and shared narratives in a structured yet flexible manner. Nasiri et al. (2022) highlighted that the absence of these therapeutic qualities can lead to infidelity, dissatisfaction, and eventual breakdown, particularly in relationships lacking emotional depth and spiritual alignment (Nasiri et al., 2022). Therefore, preventing relational rupture requires a model that not only resolves surface conflicts but also addresses deeper existential and value-laden dimensions of marital life.

From a psycho-spiritual perspective, spiritual well-being acts as a protective factor in marital life, especially in collectivistic cultures where religious identity forms an integral part of family functioning. Tolo Takmili Torabi et al. (2020) found that religious orientation mediated the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction, suggesting that faith-based beliefs can regulate interpersonal behavior and reduce destructive tendencies (Tolo Takmili Torabi et al., 2020). Complementing this, Ramadhina et al. (2023) identified spirituality and marital satisfaction as significant predictors of subjective happiness in married couples, reinforcing the idea that well-being is not merely individual but relational and spiritual in essence (Ramadhina et al., 2023).

Heydarnia et al. (2021) also contributed to this field by identifying marital enrichment skills rooted in Iranian culture, noting that culturally sensitive interventions are essential for therapeutic efficacy in diverse populations (Heydarnia et al., 2021). These cultural dimensions are especially relevant in societies where hierarchical family

systems prevail, making the study of power dynamics and their modification through therapy all the more pertinent.

Taken together, these findings support the development of a comprehensive structural model in which systemic–spiritual couple therapy predicts marital satisfaction, with the power structure of the family serving as a mediating variable. This approach not only addresses the emotional and spiritual needs of couples but also intervenes at the level of structural dynamics that often go unexamined in traditional therapeutic frameworks.

The present study builds upon this theoretical and empirical foundation by testing a structural equation model that integrates the components of systemic–spiritual couple therapy and the mediating role of power structure in predicting marital satisfaction.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive–correlational in terms of research type. Considering that this study examines a structural model of marital satisfaction based on the dimensions of systemic–spiritual couple therapy with the mediating roles of cohesion, functioning, and power structure, the research method is descriptive (in that the researcher evaluates existing conditions without manipulation) and correlational (in that the researcher assesses relationships between variables).

The statistical population of the study included all couples in the city of Isfahan who had been married for at least five years. For sample selection, 500 individuals referred to counseling centers were considered for participation in the model. Initially, each member of the couples referred to counseling centers was given the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire. From among those who obtained low scores on this questionnaire and expressed willingness to participate in the study, 384 individuals were selected through random sampling.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Marital Quality of Life

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, developed by Olson (1998), consists of 47 items and includes 12 subscales: Idealistic Distortion, Marital Satisfaction, Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities,

Sexual Relationship, Marriage and Children, Family and Friends, Egalitarian Roles, and Religious Orientation. The questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), with scores ranging from 1 to 5 for each item. According to Olson, Fournier, and Druckman (1989), Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales are as follows: Idealistic Distortion (.90), Marital Satisfaction (.81), Personality Issues (.73), Communication (.68), Conflict Resolution (.75), Financial Management (.74), Leisure Activities (.76), Sexual Relationship (.48), Children and Parenting (.77), Family and Friends (.72).

2.2.2. Family Power Structure

The Family Power Structure Questionnaire was developed by Mahdavi and Sabouri Khosroshahi (2003). It contains 36 items and consists of three subscales: Power Relationship Structure (12 items), Domains and Scopes of Power (14 items), and Methods of Exercising Power (10 items). The instrument is used to assess the power structure and its dimensions within the family.

2.2.3. Systemic-Spiritual Couple Therapy Questionnaire

This test includes several sections. One section assesses couples' irrational beliefs, developed by Jan Bozorgi (2021), designed to evaluate irrational beliefs during and after the marriage phase. It consists of 54 items, and exploratory factor analysis identified five factors. The overall reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the entire questionnaire is reported as .88. The next section is the Spousal Interaction Test, also developed by Jan Bozorgi and colleagues (in press), designed based on religious sources to assess spousal interaction and used within the framework of systemic-spiritual family therapy. This test includes two versions: an 80-item version for women and a 76-item version for men, containing multiple subscales. The reliability for the entire test was reported as .96. The third section, Differentiation-Disclosure, was developed by Jan Bozorgi and Noori (2022)

to assess the level of differentiation and emotional disclosure in families. It includes 28 items, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of .92. The final section assesses Spousal Flexibility-Resistance, developed to measure the degree of flexibility and resistance among spouses in systemic family therapy. It consists of 14 items and has a Cronbach's alpha of .86.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Initially, descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were calculated for the main variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationships between systemic-spiritual couple therapy, family power structure, and marital satisfaction. To test the predictive relationships and assess the proposed mediating effects, multiple regression analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted using AMOS software. Model fit was evaluated through standard indices such as the chi-square statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The significance level for all analyses was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Findings and Results

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for marital satisfaction among the participants was 142.35 (SD = 18.27), indicating a relatively high level of satisfaction within the sample. The mean score for systemic-spiritual couple therapy components was 168.92 (SD = 21.14), reflecting participants' generally positive perceptions of spiritual and systemic therapeutic elements in their marital relationships. Additionally, the mean score for family power structure was 88.76 (SD = 12.43), suggesting a moderate and somewhat balanced perception of power dynamics within the families studied. These descriptive statistics provide a foundational understanding of the levels and variability of the key variables prior to conducting inferential analyses.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Main Study Variables (N = 384)

Variable	M	SD
Marital Satisfaction	142.35	18.27
Systemic-Spiritual Couple Therapy	168.92	21.14
Family Power Structure	88.76	12.43

In this study, to test the hypothesis that systemic–spiritual couple therapy predicts marital satisfaction through the mediating role of family power structure, regression analysis

and structural equation modeling (SEM) were employed. The results are presented in the following tables.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis (Multiple Correlation)

Multiple Correlation (R)	R ²	Standard Error of Estimate	Significance
0.742	0.25	1.83	0.001**

The correlation between the variable of marital satisfaction and the various components of systemic–spiritual couple therapy was calculated as $R = 0.25$. This is referred to as a multiple correlation, which is the correlation between several independent variables and one dependent variable. If the coefficient is squared, it equals 0.25,

indicating that 25% of the variance or individual differences in marital satisfaction are explained by the variance or individual differences in the components of systemic–spiritual couple therapy. This correlation is statistically significant ($p = 0.001$).

Table 3

Results of ANOVA for Multiple Regression Predicting Marital Satisfaction Scale

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Significance
Regression	141.23	2	70.61	66.51	0.0001**
Residual	403.46	380	1.06	—	—
Total	544.70	382	—	—	—

As shown in Table 3, the results of the ANOVA confirm the validity of the regression analysis conducted to predict

the marital satisfaction scale through the study variables ($F = 66.51$, $p < 0.0001$).

Table 4

Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients in Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	B	Standard Error	β	t	p
Constant	12.10	0.231	—	52.37	0.000
Family Power Structure	0.024	0.004	0.265	5.98	0.000
Systemic–Spiritual Therapy	0.077	0.008	0.425	9.61	0.000

Overall, according to the information in Table 4 and the standardized beta coefficients, the family power structure variable ($\beta = 0.265$) and the systemic–spiritual therapy variable ($\beta = 0.425$) have the most significant effects in explaining the variance and predicting marital satisfaction.

Path coefficients for the main hypothesis along with the regression coefficients and partial indices related to the hypothesis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Structural Coefficients of the Main Model

Result	p-value	Critical Ratio	Standard Error	Unstandardized Estimate	Standardized Estimate	Hypothesized Path
Significant	0.0001	5.82	0.0765	0.498	0.61	Power Structure <--- Systemic–Spiritual Therapy
Significant	0.01	5.29	0.123	0.321	0.24	Marital Satisfaction <--- Power Structure
Significant	0.0001	6.12	0.081	0.63	0.54	Marital Satisfaction <--- Systemic–Spiritual Therapy

As illustrated in Figure 1, systemic–spiritual couple therapy functions as an exogenous variable, and family power structure and marital satisfaction (and its dimensions) serve as endogenous variables. Measurement errors were assumed for endogenous and exogenous variables and their dimensions and are displayed as *e1* through *e7*.

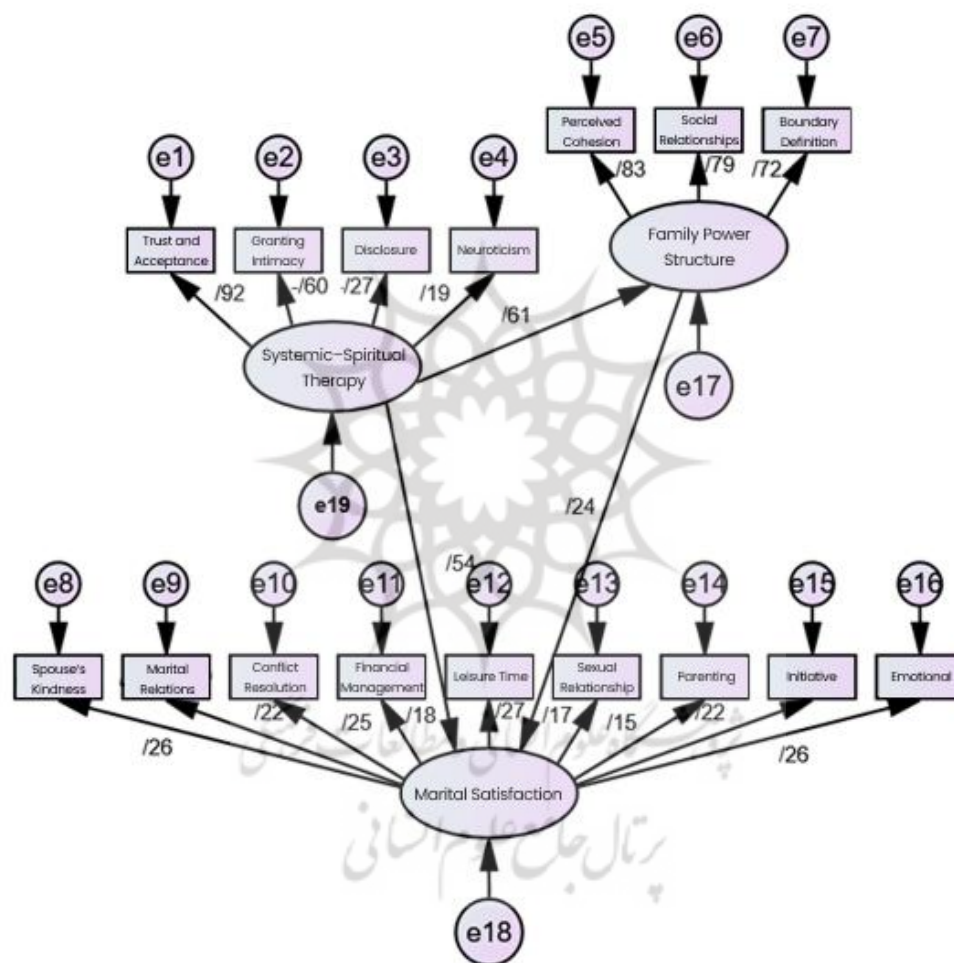
The beta coefficient between systemic–spiritual couple therapy and family power structure is reported as 0.61. The

beta coefficient between family power structure and marital satisfaction is 0.24, and the loading of systemic–spiritual couple therapy on marital satisfaction is 0.54.

Based on the obtained beta coefficients, the study hypothesis stating that systemic–spiritual couple therapy, through the mediating role of family power structure, predicts marital satisfaction is confirmed.

Figure 1

Structural Equation Model



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine a structural model of marital satisfaction based on systemic–spiritual couple therapy components with the mediating role of the power structure in the family. The results confirmed the proposed structural equation model and demonstrated that systemic–spiritual couple therapy significantly predicts marital satisfaction both directly and indirectly through the

mediating effect of family power structure. The findings showed that systemic–spiritual couple therapy had a strong direct effect on family power structure ($\beta = 0.61$), a moderate effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.54$), and that power structure itself had a meaningful mediating effect on the relationship between therapy and marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.24$). These outcomes provide empirical support for the integrative model linking therapeutic, relational, and structural variables in understanding marital well-being.

The finding that systemic–spiritual couple therapy is a strong predictor of marital satisfaction aligns with several previous studies that have underscored the transformative role of spiritual and systemic processes in enhancing couple relationships. Jan Bozorgi (2016), in introducing the “Mehr and Power” model, emphasized the critical interplay of spiritual awareness, emotional connection, and mutual respect in fostering marital stability and satisfaction (Jan Bozorgi, 2016). Similarly, Taghipour and Panah Ali (2023) reported that spiritual therapy based on conscientiousness significantly improved marital satisfaction and intimacy among couples in Tabriz, highlighting the value of spiritual integrity and moral development in couple dynamics (Taghipour & Panah Ali, 2023). The current study extends this line of evidence by incorporating not only spiritual but also systemic constructs, such as flexibility, empathy, and value-driven communication, within a structural model.

Furthermore, the results emphasize the crucial role of the family power structure as a mediating factor. This supports earlier findings by Khakpour et al. (2015), who demonstrated that balanced power dynamics—characterized by mutual decision-making and shared authority—are closely associated with marital adjustment (Khakpour et al., 2015). The current findings are also consistent with the work of Movahed et al. (2012), who illustrated that uneven power distribution can lead to dissatisfaction, emotional disengagement, and relational instability (Movahed et al., 2012). In the present study, the power structure not only correlated with marital satisfaction but also served as a pathway through which spiritual and systemic therapeutic components exerted their influence. This implies that even when couples engage in therapy, its effectiveness may depend on the transformation of entrenched power hierarchies within the marital context.

Another notable result is the significant contribution of spiritual and systemic therapy dimensions—such as mutual interaction, forgiveness-disclosure, and flexibility—to marital satisfaction. This finding echoes the results of Hakimi Dezfouli and Ebrahimpour (2024), who found that psychological flexibility, emotional empathy, and spiritual experiences are significant predictors of marital satisfaction among women (Hakimi Dezfouli & Ebrahimpour, 2024). These qualities, central to systemic–spiritual couple therapy, enable couples to approach conflicts constructively and to appreciate the emotional and existential dimensions of their relationship. Moreover, research by Ashori et al. (2022) confirmed that spiritual tendencies mediate the link between cognitive emotion regulation and marital adjustment,

supporting the idea that spiritually grounded coping strategies are essential in achieving and sustaining marital harmony (Ashori et al., 2022).

The direct effect of therapy on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.54$) in this study also aligns with research highlighting the efficacy of structured therapeutic interventions. For example, Abedi et al. (2024) demonstrated that group training in conflict resolution based on Choice Theory significantly reduced emotional divorce and increased life hope in married women, suggesting that intervention programs based on well-defined models can bring about meaningful relational change (Abedi et al., 2024). Additionally, Derakhshan et al. (2023) showed that despite high stress levels among infertile couples, those with higher levels of spiritual and relational cohesion reported greater marital satisfaction (Derakhshan et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the idea that therapy's success in improving marital outcomes depends not only on surface-level behavioral changes but also on deep emotional and spiritual alignment between partners.

Importantly, the mediating effect of family power structure suggests that therapy alone may not be sufficient unless it actively targets the underlying relational architecture within the family. As shown by Kabiri and Khakpour (2020), the distribution of actional space—referring to the ability of spouses to exercise autonomy and influence—is a strong determinant of satisfaction in family life (Kabiri & Khakpour, 2020). Therefore, therapy that promotes egalitarian roles and shared authority may be more effective in contexts where patriarchal or hierarchical structures are prevalent. The current model, by emphasizing both systemic–spiritual processes and the restructuring of power dynamics, offers a comprehensive framework for fostering marital well-being.

This integrated model also accounts for cultural and spiritual nuances that are essential in shaping marital expectations and coping strategies. For example, Tolo Takmili Torabi et al. (2020) demonstrated that religious orientation mediates the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction, indicating that faith-based values significantly influence interpersonal behavior (Tolo Takmili Torabi et al., 2020). Additionally, Ramadhina et al. (2023) found that spirituality and marital satisfaction were strong predictors of subjective happiness, suggesting that the benefits of spiritual couple therapy may extend beyond the relationship itself to broader domains of well-being (Ramadhina et al., 2023). These findings affirm the validity

of including spiritual constructs in systemic therapy models, particularly in religious or collectivist societies.

From a therapeutic perspective, the results support the growing consensus that effective marital interventions should combine emotional, cognitive, structural, and spiritual elements. Hakimi Dezfuli and Ibrahimpour (2023) emphasized the unique role of spiritual experiences and empathy in promoting marital satisfaction (Hakimi Dezfuli & Ibrahimpour, 2023), and Khalili Baseri et al. (2023) showed that adjustment styles mediated the effect of spiritual health on satisfaction in high-stress professions like nursing (Khalili Baseri et al., 2023). These insights suggest that spiritual and systemic therapy may be especially beneficial for populations facing external stressors, as the integration of therapeutic dimensions offers resilience and emotional regulation in times of crisis.

Moreover, research by Nasiri et al. (2022) into the causes of marital infidelity revealed that many relational disruptions stem from deficiencies in emotional connection and lack of shared meaning (Nasiri et al., 2022). This aligns with the emphasis in systemic-spiritual therapy on meaning-making, mutual understanding, and value alignment as tools for preventing relational breakdown. Heydarnia et al. (2021) further supported this by identifying culturally grounded marital enrichment skills, underscoring the importance of contextual sensitivity in therapeutic interventions (Heydarnia et al., 2021).

Collectively, these findings support the central hypothesis of this study: systemic-spiritual couple therapy predicts marital satisfaction, both directly and through the mediating effect of family power structure. This model not only integrates previously fragmented theoretical domains but also offers a culturally and spiritually sensitive roadmap for intervention. It invites future scholars and practitioners to consider the dynamic interplay between therapy, family systems, and power relations in understanding and promoting marital well-being.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

This study, while offering important insights, is not without limitations. First, the sample consisted solely of couples from Isfahan, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural or geographic populations. The use of convenience sampling may have introduced selection bias, as individuals attending counseling centers might differ in significant ways from the general population. Additionally, the reliance on self-report measures can lead

to social desirability bias, particularly when assessing sensitive topics like power dynamics and spiritual experiences. Finally, the cross-sectional design precludes any conclusions about causality between variables.

Future research should aim to replicate these findings in more diverse cultural and religious contexts to enhance external validity. Longitudinal studies would be particularly beneficial in examining the long-term effects of systemic-spiritual couple therapy and shifts in power structure over time. Moreover, future models could incorporate additional mediators or moderators—such as gender roles, conflict resolution style, or socioeconomic status—to gain a more nuanced understanding of relational dynamics. Including qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews could also offer richer insights into the lived experiences behind the statistical associations.

Practitioners are encouraged to incorporate systemic-spiritual frameworks in their therapeutic interventions, particularly when working with couples who value spirituality or come from traditional family backgrounds. Interventions should not only focus on improving communication and empathy but also address the power structures that may be impeding relational growth. Structured assessments of family dynamics and tailored therapeutic plans that include forgiveness work, meaning-making, and shared spiritual practices may significantly enhance marital satisfaction. Ultimately, therapy should aim for both relational healing and structural transformation.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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