

## The Relationship Between Marital Fatigue and Attitudes Toward Infidelity: The Mediating Role of Spiritual Intelligence

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### Article Info

#### Article type:

Original Research

#### How to cite this article:

Mirmohammadali, Z.S., Rajabi, M.R. (2024). The Relationship Between Marital Fatigue and Attitudes Toward Infidelity: The Mediating Role of Spiritual Intelligence. *Iranian Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, 3(1), 174-181.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jndd.3.1.19>



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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between marital fatigue and attitudes toward infidelity, with a specific focus on the mediating role of spiritual intelligence among married university students.

**Methods and Materials:** This descriptive-correlational study was conducted on a sample of 322 married students from Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected through standardized questionnaires: the 20-item Marital Fatigue Scale (Pines, 2002), the 12-item Attitudes Toward Infidelity Scale (Whatley, 2006), and the 97-item Spiritual Intelligence Scale (Motahhari, 2009). Data analysis was performed using SPSS-23 for descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation, and AMOS-21 was used for structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the mediating model.

**Findings:** The results showed that marital fatigue was positively correlated with attitudes toward infidelity ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ) and negatively correlated with spiritual intelligence ( $r = -.49, p < .01$ ). Spiritual intelligence also showed a negative correlation with attitudes toward infidelity ( $r = -.44, p < .01$ ). Structural model fit indices indicated a good model fit ( $\chi^2/df = 1.99, RMSEA = 0.055, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.94$ ). SEM results confirmed that spiritual intelligence partially mediated the relationship between marital fatigue and attitudes toward infidelity. The direct effect of marital fatigue on attitudes toward infidelity was significant ( $\beta = 0.38, p < .001$ ), as was the indirect effect via spiritual intelligence ( $\beta = 0.16, p < .001$ ).

**Conclusion:** These findings suggest that spiritual intelligence serves as a protective factor, mitigating the negative impact of marital fatigue on permissive attitudes toward infidelity. Enhancing spiritual intelligence may be an effective strategy in marital counseling and prevention of relational betrayal.

**Keywords:** Marital Fatigue; Spiritual Intelligence; Attitudes Toward Infidelity.

## 1. Introduction

Marital fatigue, characterized by emotional depletion, physical exhaustion, and mental disengagement, has been defined as a form of emotional burnout that arises due to prolonged marital distress. It manifests as a sense of disconnection from the partner, reduced empathy, loss of intimacy, and even psychosomatic symptoms (Fatehi, 2020). Research indicates that marital fatigue not only undermines marital satisfaction but may also influence maladaptive beliefs and behaviors, including openness to extramarital relationships (Ghasemi et al., 2023). Individuals affected by marital fatigue often perceive their relationships as unrewarding or stagnant, making them vulnerable to external emotional or sexual stimuli (Miraghaei & Azizi, 2019).

Parallel to this, the phenomenon of infidelity—which broadly includes emotional, sexual, and virtual betrayals—continues to be a significant threat to the stability of romantic partnerships. It represents a violation of marital norms and values and often results in emotional trauma, trust erosion, and relational dissolution (Rezaei & Ramazaniyan, 2016). Contemporary findings suggest that infidelity is not only the result of external opportunities but is deeply rooted in internal dissatisfaction and distorted cognitive-emotional evaluations of the primary relationship (Goodarzi, 2019). In this regard, attitudes toward infidelity can be viewed as precursors to action, and such attitudes may be shaped by an individual's marital well-being and personal resources such as emotional or spiritual maturity (Kamalju et al., 2017).

A growing body of evidence indicates that spiritual intelligence may serve as a protective psychological factor in intimate relationships. Spiritual intelligence refers to the capacity to use spiritual information to solve problems, maintain inner peace, and engage in value-driven living. It comprises several sub-components, including transcendental awareness, meaning-making, compassion, and forgiveness (Raghibi & Gharehchahi, 2013). In intimate relationships, these qualities manifest as patience, tolerance, moral responsibility, and a deeper connection with the partner (Chehrehvar et al., 2018). Individuals with high levels of spiritual intelligence are more likely to regulate their emotions constructively, cope with marital stressors, and remain loyal to shared commitments despite difficulties (Mohammadian et al., 2020).

Research supports the positive contribution of spiritual intelligence to marital satisfaction and marital adjustment. For example, it has been found that individuals with higher spiritual intelligence exhibit more flexibility in conflict

resolution and are better at practicing forgiveness and emotional regulation (Ashouri et al., 2023). In a related study, spiritual intelligence was positively associated with resilience and life satisfaction among married individuals, further reinforcing its role as a stabilizing force in family dynamics (Rajabiyani Dehzireh & Heydari, 2020). Moreover, findings from studies on marital forgiveness suggest that spiritual intelligence is closely linked to the ability to maintain relational harmony by reducing blame and enhancing empathy (Famili Motaghi et al., 2021).

Spiritual intelligence may also play a crucial role in buffering the impact of marital fatigue. When couples experience ongoing emotional exhaustion, those with high spiritual intelligence are better equipped to view the situation through a broader existential lens, thereby maintaining a sense of purpose and connection (Afsharinia & Soozani, 2018). The transcendental aspects of this form of intelligence allow couples to reframe suffering, tolerate ambiguity, and prioritize long-term emotional investments over short-term gratification (Shirzadi et al., 2021). Furthermore, spiritual intelligence has been shown to reduce the appeal of extramarital relationships by fostering loyalty and existential commitment (Samalpour Baba Ahmadi et al., 2021).

In the Iranian cultural context, where family cohesion is highly valued and spiritual traditions are deeply rooted, the role of spiritual intelligence is particularly noteworthy. Cultural expectations around loyalty and spiritual maturity intersect with personal values to shape marital decisions and coping mechanisms. A number of studies conducted in Iran have highlighted the unique contributions of spiritual intelligence in reducing emotional divorce and enhancing marital cohesion (Shirzadi et al., 2021). For instance, couples with higher levels of spiritual awareness have been found to exhibit fewer symptoms of relational fatigue and greater capacity for constructive dialogue during periods of conflict (Hosseinpanahi, 2020).

From a psychological perspective, it is plausible that individuals with lower spiritual intelligence, when confronted with marital fatigue, might lack the necessary coping resources and resort to justifying or tolerating infidelity as an escape. This aligns with empirical findings suggesting a direct link between reduced spiritual competencies and more permissive attitudes toward extramarital behavior (Chehrehvar et al., 2018). Moreover, those with diminished spiritual insight may be less inclined to recognize the sacredness of relational commitment or to practice forgiveness, thereby perpetuating marital

disengagement and increasing vulnerability to relational betrayal (Mohammadian et al., 2020).

Another dimension of this research lies in how attitudinal shifts toward infidelity may not merely reflect momentary relational dissatisfaction but a deeper existential disorientation. When meaning and spiritual purpose in a relationship erode, individuals may become more prone to seek emotional fulfillment outside the boundaries of their primary commitment. In such scenarios, spiritual intelligence can function as a cognitive-affective moderator, offering individuals tools to maintain loyalty, reframe distress, and adhere to ethical principles even under pressure (Ashouri et al., 2023; Kamalju et al., 2017).

This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by proposing a mediational model in which spiritual intelligence explains how marital fatigue may influence attitudes toward infidelity.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research employed a descriptive-correlational design with a predictive focus, applying quantitative methods to investigate the relationships among marital fatigue, attitudes toward infidelity, and spiritual intelligence. The study population consisted of all married students enrolled at Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, during the 2024–2025 academic year. According to information obtained from the university's Office of Academic Affairs, the total population was estimated to be approximately 2,000 individuals. A total of 322 participants were selected using convenience sampling, and the data were collected using standardized questionnaires. All participants completed the instruments voluntarily and anonymously.

### 2.2. Measures

To measure marital fatigue, the study employed the Marital Fatigue Scale developed by Ayala Pines in 2002. This instrument consists of 20 items designed to assess the degree of emotional depletion experienced within a marital relationship. The scale includes three subscales: physical fatigue, emotional fatigue, and mental fatigue. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always), with higher scores indicating greater marital fatigue. The questionnaire has been validated in various cultural contexts and has demonstrated robust psychometric

properties. In Iranian studies, including adaptations by Mohammadi Far (2020), the scale has shown high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.80$ ) and confirmed construct validity in both clinical and non-clinical samples.

The Attitudes Toward Infidelity Scale, developed by Mark A. Whatley in 2006, was used to assess participants' perspectives on marital infidelity. This standardized instrument contains 12 items measuring cognitive and emotional acceptance of infidelity through three subscales: emotional infidelity, sexual infidelity, and lack of loyalty. Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect more permissive attitudes toward infidelity. The scale has been widely used in relationship research and its validity and reliability have been confirmed in multiple studies. Iranian scholars have translated and validated the tool, reporting acceptable factor structure and reliability coefficients exceeding 0.75 in various student and adult populations.

Spiritual intelligence was assessed using the Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory, originally developed by Amram and Dryer and standardized in Iran by Mohammadreza Motahhari (2009). This comprehensive instrument consists of 97 items distributed across four core subscales: transcendent self-awareness, spiritual experiences, patience, and forgiveness. Participants rate items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), with higher total scores indicating greater spiritual intelligence. The tool has undergone extensive psychometric evaluation in Iran, and its validity has been confirmed through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The reliability of the overall instrument and its subscales is high, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values above 0.85, making it suitable for psychological research in both clinical and general populations.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 23 and AMOS version 21. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and research variables. For inferential analysis, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the bivariate relationships between the dependent variable (attitudes toward infidelity), independent variable (marital fatigue), and mediating variable (spiritual intelligence). Additionally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the

hypothesized mediation model and evaluate the direct and indirect effects among the study variables.

### 3. Findings and Results

Of the total 322 participants, 167 individuals (51.86%) were female and 155 individuals (48.14%) were male. In terms of age distribution, 114 participants (35.40%) were

aged between 20–29 years, 148 participants (45.96%) were between 30–39 years, and 60 participants (18.63%) were aged 40 and above. Regarding education level, 96 participants (29.81%) held a bachelor's degree, 173 (53.73%) were pursuing or had completed a master's degree, and 53 (16.45%) were doctoral students. All participants were currently married at the time of data collection.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables (N = 322)*

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Marital Fatigue	82.47	13.92
Spiritual Intelligence	327.35	36.48
Attitudes Toward Infidelity	28.71	6.24

As shown in Table 1, participants reported moderate to high levels of spiritual intelligence (M = 327.35, SD = 36.48) and moderate levels of marital fatigue (M = 82.47, SD = 13.92). The mean score for attitudes toward infidelity was 28.71 (SD = 6.24), suggesting generally neutral to slightly negative attitudes toward extramarital involvement.

Before performing Pearson correlations and SEM, the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were assessed and confirmed.

Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables ranged from -0.97 to +0.88, indicating acceptable normal distribution. Linearity and homoscedasticity were evaluated through scatterplots, which revealed no systematic pattern of deviation. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.02 to 1.76 and tolerance values were all above 0.57, confirming no concerns regarding multicollinearity. These findings justified proceeding with both Pearson correlation and SEM analyses.

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients and Significance Levels Between Variables (N = 322)*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Marital Fatigue	—		
2. Spiritual Intelligence	-.49**	—	
3. Attitudes Toward Infidelity	.56**	-.44**	—

Table 2 reveals significant relationships between all key variables. Marital fatigue had a strong positive correlation with attitudes toward infidelity ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ) and a significant negative correlation with spiritual intelligence ( $r$

$= -.49, p < .01$ ). Spiritual intelligence was also negatively associated with attitudes toward infidelity ( $r = -.44, p < .01$ ), indicating its protective function.

**Table 3**

*Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Structural Model*

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold
Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	137.62	—
Degrees of Freedom (df)	69	—
$\chi^2/df$	1.99	< 3.00
GFI	0.94	$\geq 0.90$
AGFI	0.91	$\geq 0.90$
CFI	0.96	$\geq 0.95$
TLI	0.95	$\geq 0.95$
RMSEA	0.055	< 0.08

The goodness-of-fit indices in Table 3 demonstrate an excellent fit of the proposed model. The  $\chi^2/df$  ratio was 1.99, which is within the acceptable range. All other indices

including GFI (0.94), AGFI (0.91), CFI (0.96), TLI (0.95), and RMSEA (0.055) confirmed the model's fit with the data, validating the theoretical structure.

**Table 4**

*Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects Among Variables in the Structural Model*

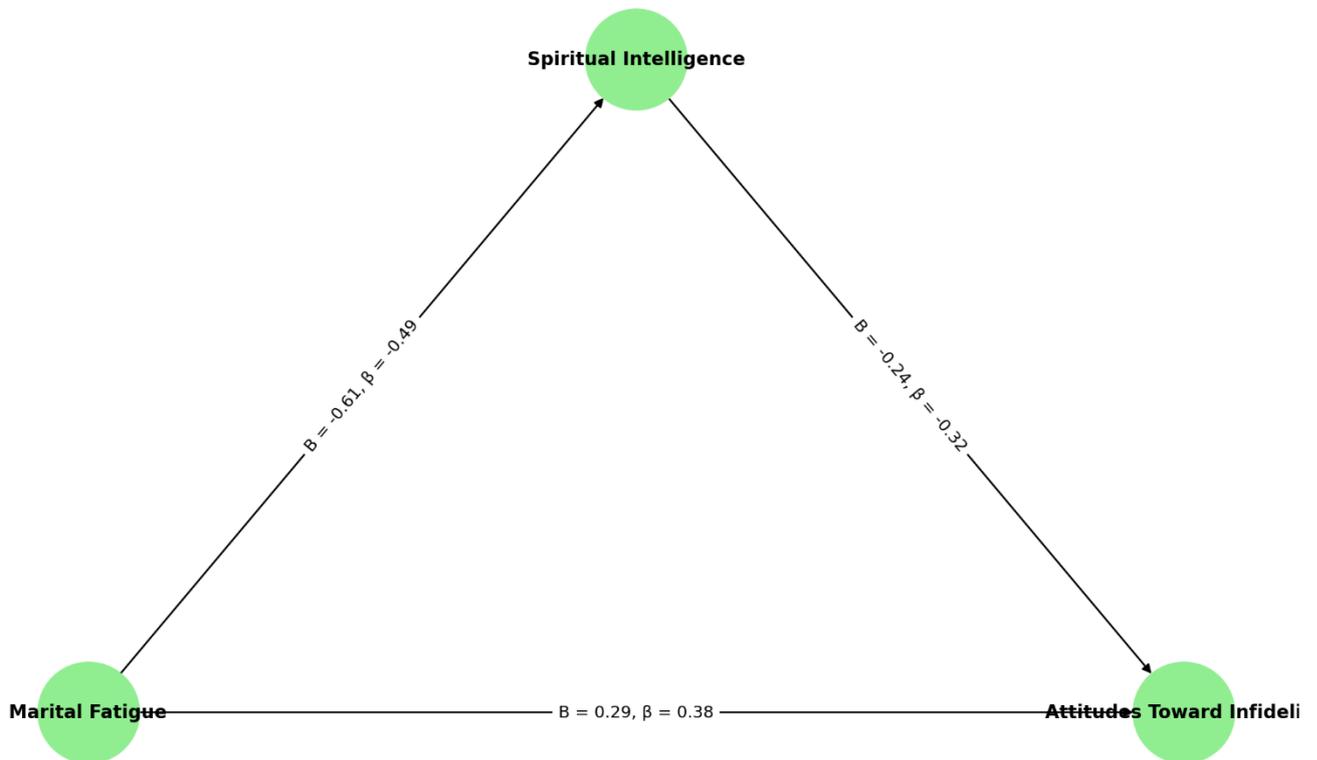
Path	b	SE	$\beta$ (Beta)	p
Marital Fatigue → Attitudes Toward Infidelity (Direct)	0.29	0.05	0.38	< .001
Marital Fatigue → Spiritual Intelligence (Direct)	-0.61	0.07	-0.49	< .001
Spiritual Intelligence → Attitudes Toward Infidelity (Direct)	-0.24	0.06	-0.32	< .001
Marital Fatigue → Attitudes Toward Infidelity (Indirect via Spiritual Intelligence)	0.15	0.04	0.16	< .001
Marital Fatigue → Attitudes Toward Infidelity (Total)	0.44	—	0.54	< .001

Table 4 illustrates both direct and indirect effects in the SEM model. The direct effect of marital fatigue on attitudes toward infidelity was significant ( $\beta = 0.38, p < .001$ ), while the path from marital fatigue to spiritual intelligence was significantly negative ( $\beta = -0.49, p < .001$ ). Spiritual intelligence, in turn, negatively predicted attitudes toward

infidelity ( $\beta = -0.32, p < .001$ ). Importantly, the indirect effect of marital fatigue on infidelity attitudes via spiritual intelligence was also significant ( $\beta = 0.16, p < .001$ ), confirming the partial mediating role of spiritual intelligence.

**Figure 1**

*Final Structural Model*



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between marital fatigue and attitudes toward infidelity among married university students. The findings revealed several important insights: first, there was a significant positive correlation between marital fatigue and attitudes toward infidelity, indicating that individuals who experience higher levels of emotional, mental, and physical fatigue in their marital life are more likely to develop permissive or tolerant attitudes toward extramarital relationships. Second, spiritual intelligence showed a significant negative correlation with both marital fatigue and attitudes toward infidelity. Finally, structural equation modeling confirmed that spiritual intelligence plays a significant mediating role, meaning that higher levels of spiritual intelligence reduce the negative impact of marital fatigue on attitudes toward infidelity.

The positive relationship found between marital fatigue and favorable attitudes toward infidelity aligns with existing literature that describes fatigue in a marital context as an emotional state that erodes intimacy, undermines communication, and increases relational dissatisfaction. As previous studies have documented, chronic emotional exhaustion in marriage can lead to emotional distancing, withdrawal of affection, and ultimately a reevaluation of fidelity norms by one or both partners (Fatehi, 2020; Ghasemi et al., 2023). Research by Goodarzi also supports this view, indicating that marital fatigue significantly predicts the likelihood of engaging in or justifying infidelity behaviors, as individuals perceive extramarital involvement as a coping or escape mechanism from emotional dissatisfaction (Goodarzi, 2019).

Moreover, the findings of this study showed that spiritual intelligence is inversely related to both marital fatigue and attitudes toward infidelity, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of spiritual intelligence are less likely to experience emotional exhaustion in their relationships and less prone to rationalize extramarital involvement. This supports a wealth of prior research identifying spiritual intelligence as a stabilizing factor in marital dynamics. As Chehrehvar et al. noted, couples with high spiritual intelligence tend to show better adjustment and stronger commitment in their relationships (Chehrehvar et al., 2018). Similarly, Mohammadian et al. found that spiritual intelligence positively correlates with marital satisfaction and reduces tendencies toward harmful relational behaviors

such as emotional distancing or infidelity (Mohammadian et al., 2020).

The mediating role of spiritual intelligence, as confirmed in this study, is particularly notable. It demonstrates that while marital fatigue may increase the risk of holding favorable attitudes toward infidelity, this pathway is significantly weakened in individuals with high spiritual intelligence. This finding suggests that spiritual intelligence serves as a psychological buffer, enhancing resilience, meaning-making, and ethical reasoning in challenging relational situations. Ashouri et al. also found that spiritual intelligence is a strong predictor of marital quality, as it empowers individuals to approach marital conflicts with emotional balance and moral awareness (Ashouri et al., 2023). The current study adds to this body of evidence by demonstrating that spiritual intelligence not only enhances positive outcomes but also mitigates negative relational processes such as the fatigue-infidelity link.

The construct of spiritual intelligence combines transcendental awareness with emotional regulation and existential insight. These capacities allow individuals to find meaning in adversity, forgive relational shortcomings, and maintain ethical behavior despite emotional stressors (Raghibi & Gharehchahi, 2013; Shirzadi et al., 2021). This resonates with the finding of Famil Motaghi et al., who identified spiritual intelligence as a significant antecedent of marital forgiveness, which in turn reinforces loyalty and reduces the risk of infidelity (Famil Motaghi et al., 2021). In the context of the current study, it appears that participants with greater spiritual awareness were better able to cope with the demands of marriage and thus less susceptible to adopting permissive attitudes toward extramarital relations.

In addition to emotional resilience, value-driven decision-making plays a central role in the protective effects of spiritual intelligence. Individuals with high spiritual intelligence are more likely to interpret their marital roles through moral and spiritual lenses, emphasizing responsibility, fidelity, and compassion. Samalpour Baba Ahmadi et al. demonstrated that spiritual intelligence negatively predicts emotional divorce and attitudes toward extramarital relationships, especially among women (Samalpour Baba Ahmadi et al., 2021). Their findings parallel those of the current research, confirming that internalized spiritual values can act as effective deterrents against maladaptive relational attitudes.

Furthermore, spiritual intelligence also fosters self-transcendence, allowing individuals to view marital challenges from a broader perspective. According to

Kamalju et al., people with higher spiritual and moral intelligence are less likely to justify infidelity because they possess a deeper sense of meaning and relational responsibility (Kamalju et al., 2017). This theoretical framework helps explain the current findings, where spiritual intelligence served as a mediating variable that significantly reduced the strength of the direct relationship between fatigue and attitudes toward infidelity.

In the Iranian sociocultural context—where marriage is intertwined with religious, ethical, and familial expectations—the role of spiritual intelligence may be especially pronounced. As Rezaei and Ramazaniyan showed, involvement in online social platforms can increase attitudes toward infidelity, particularly in individuals with lower marital satisfaction and spiritual engagement (Rezaei & Ramazaniyan, 2016). Thus, spiritual intelligence may serve not only as a personal resource but also as a cultural asset that reinforces pro-commitment attitudes and behaviors.

It is also worth noting that the inverse relationship between spiritual intelligence and marital fatigue supports prior findings by Afsharinia and Soozani, who demonstrated that spiritual intelligence training enhances psychological well-being and reduces emotional exhaustion among adolescents (Afsharinia & Soozani, 2018). Although their study focused on a younger population, the mechanisms of meaning-making and emotional control remain relevant in adult marital contexts. This supports the generalizability of the benefits of spiritual intelligence across life stages.

Similarly, the protective impact of spiritual intelligence on attitudes toward infidelity is consistent with the results of studies by Shirzadi and colleagues, who found that higher levels of spiritual intelligence are associated with lower levels of emotional divorce and greater attachment security in women (Shirzadi et al., 2021). The current study thus builds on these findings by establishing a clear structural pathway in which spiritual intelligence mitigates the negative consequences of marital fatigue.

Despite the valuable findings, this study has several limitations. First, the use of a non-random convenience sample limits the generalizability of the results to broader populations. The study was conducted solely among married university students in Tehran, which may not represent individuals from different age groups, educational backgrounds, or cultural settings. Second, the study employed self-report questionnaires, which are inherently subject to biases such as social desirability and recall inaccuracies. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study

limits causal inferences; although relationships among variables were identified, the temporal sequence and causality remain speculative.

Future studies should aim to replicate these findings using longitudinal designs to better understand how spiritual intelligence develops over time and whether it has a sustained impact on marital fatigue and fidelity-related attitudes. It is also recommended to explore the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence training programs as a preventive intervention for at-risk couples. Additionally, qualitative research could deepen the understanding of how individuals experience spiritual intelligence in relational contexts. Expanding the sample to include non-academic populations and participants from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds would enhance the external validity of the findings.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study underscore the importance of incorporating spiritual intelligence development into premarital counseling, marital therapy, and relationship education programs. Practitioners can use these insights to design interventions that enhance self-awareness, ethical reasoning, and emotional regulation among couples. Universities and community organizations should consider offering workshops and support groups that foster spiritual competencies, especially for young adults entering long-term relationships. Finally, policy-makers in mental health and education sectors should recognize the protective role of spiritual intelligence and encourage its integration into family life education frameworks.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

### 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 hereby thank all individuals for participating and cooperating us in this study.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

## Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the study and participated in the research with informed consent.

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