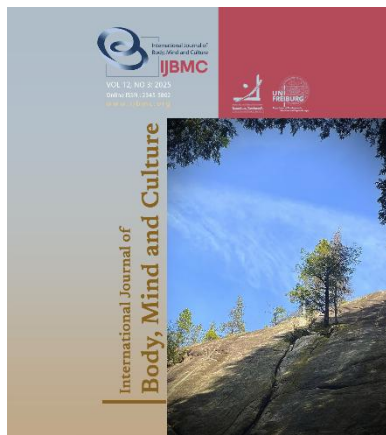


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Introduction

The family, as a fundamental social and emotional unit, plays a vital role in shaping individuals' personalities. This foundational unit is formed through the marital bond between a man and a woman, where the quality of this bond is reflected in marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction, as an essential indicator of marriage quality, encompasses positive subjective feelings,

Explaining Marital Satisfaction Based on Attributional Styles and the Mediating Role of Happiness

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explain the structural model of marital satisfaction based on attributional styles with the mediating role of happiness among married women. Understanding the interplay between these factors provides insights into fostering stronger marital relationships.

Methods and Materials: Using a descriptive-correlational design and structural equation modeling (SEM), this study surveyed 120 married women employed in schools in Tehran, selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, Attributional Style Questionnaire, and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 26 and SMART-PLS software to evaluate model fit and relationships between variables.

Findings: Results revealed that the structural model had an excellent fit (e.g., RMSEA=0.05, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94). Attributional styles significantly impacted marital satisfaction both directly and indirectly through happiness. Positive attributional styles enhanced happiness ($\beta=0.17$, $p<0.01$), which subsequently increased marital satisfaction ($\beta=0.56$, $p<0.001$). Conversely, negative attributional styles reduced happiness ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$) and marital satisfaction ($\beta = -0.20$, $p<0.01$).

Conclusion: The findings emphasize the role of attributional styles and happiness as critical determinants of marital satisfaction. Positive attributional styles not only foster happiness but also contribute to stronger marital satisfaction. These results highlight the need for interventions focusing on promoting positive attributional styles and enhancing happiness to strengthen marital relationships. Future research should explore these variables in diverse populations and develop targeted programs for couples.

Keywords: Happiness, marriage, marital satisfaction, female.

satisfaction with married life, and the ability to enjoy various aspects of marital relationships (Davoudi-Monfared et al., 2023; Omidi & Talighi, 2017). Importantly, the compatibility and satisfaction between spouses often determine the success of a marital relationship. In recent years, researchers have emphasized marital satisfaction as a crucial factor influencing not only individual well-being but also the

stability of families and societies (Pirzadeh & Parsakia, 2023; Roohafza et al., 2014).

Empirical evidence in family psychology highlights the significant role of cognitive processes in shaping the quality of interactions within families (Bilal et al., 2021). Among these processes, attributional styles have received particular attention. Attributional styles reflect how individuals interpret life events, particularly success and failure, and play a central role in determining their reactions to marital conflicts (Bean et al., 2020). Positive attributional styles, which emphasize external, temporary, and specific causes for negative events, are associated with better marital interactions. Conversely, negative attributional styles, which attribute failures to internal, stable, and global causes, can weaken marital bonds (Araghi, 2025; Parvizi, 2025).

Happiness is another critical variable influencing marital satisfaction. It represents a sense of contentment, joy, and overall life satisfaction that can mitigate the impact of negative events and enhance relational resilience (Tsutsui, 2018). Happy couples are more likely to maintain strong emotional bonds and create supportive family environments (Shapiro et al., 2016). In marital contexts, happiness often mediates the relationship between cognitive styles and marital satisfaction. Positive attributional styles can enhance happiness, which in turn strengthens marital satisfaction (O'Donnell et al., 2013). This highlights the importance of exploring the interplay between attributional styles, happiness, and marital satisfaction.

Despite the growing body of research on these variables, there remain gaps in understanding the structural relationships among attributional styles, happiness, and marital satisfaction, particularly in specific populations like married women employed in schools. Previous studies have largely examined these variables independently, leaving their combined effects underexplored (Coleman et al., 2022). Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the mediating role of happiness in these relationships within the cultural context of Iranian society.

Thus, the present study seeks to address this gap by explaining the structural model of marital satisfaction based on attributional styles with the mediating role of happiness among married women. The research question driving this study is: "Can the structural model of marital satisfaction be explained based on

attributional styles mediated by happiness?" By investigating this question, the study aims to provide actionable insights for interventions aimed at enhancing marital satisfaction and overall family well-being.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the relationships between marital satisfaction, attributional styles, and happiness among married women. SEM was selected for its capability to model complex relationships, including mediation effects, and its applicability in exploring both direct and indirect relationships among variables.

The research population comprised all married women employed in primary and secondary schools in Tehran, encompassing a total of 41,656 individuals. The sampling method used was convenience sampling, chosen for its feasibility and accessibility to participants. However, it is acknowledged that convenience sampling may introduce selection bias, potentially affecting the generalizability of the results. To address this, efforts were made to include participants from diverse school environments to capture a broader spectrum of experiences.

The minimum required sample size for SEM using the PLS software is determined based on the model's complexity and the number of constructs. According to Barclay et al. (1995), a minimum of 70 participants is sufficient for such studies. Nonetheless, to ensure robustness and account for potential dropout, a sample of 120 participants was recruited. Although the sample size aligns with SEM recommendations, it would have been more statistically robust to determine the sample size using power analysis, considering effect size and statistical power. Future research is recommended to adopt this approach.

Data were collected using both physical and electronic formats of the questionnaires. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, and informed consent was obtained. Ethical considerations included maintaining participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage.

Data Collection

This study was conducted using face-to-face questionnaire survey. With our population were volunteer from each sports event. For Tour de Borobudur, data was collected on 5-6 August 2023 in Solo City for day one and Magelang Regency for day two. For World Aquatics Championship, data was collected on 10-11 August 2023 in Fukuoka. From both event, 420 respondents were filling out the questionnaire.

Survey Instrument

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (1989): This 47-item tool measures marital satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale. Scores range from severe dissatisfaction to very high satisfaction. The Persian version of the questionnaire demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$; Arab Alidousti et al., 2015). Reverse-scored items were carefully addressed to minimize potential response bias, and clear instructions were provided to participants (Yavari & Habibi, 2024).

Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ, 1992): This instrument evaluates attributional styles across positive and negative scenarios using a 7-point Likert scale. The Persian adaptation showed acceptable reliability for positive ($\alpha = 0.93$) and negative ($\alpha = 0.63$) attributional styles. Construct validity was confirmed through factor analysis, with extracted components accounting for 41.19% of the variance (Qazi Askar, 2023).

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (1989): This 29-item tool measures happiness using a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater happiness. The Persian version of the questionnaire demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The questionnaire assesses key components such as self-concept, psychological readiness, and life satisfaction (Ying & Parsakia, 2024).

All instruments were validated in the Iranian context in prior studies, ensuring their cultural appropriateness and relevance to the target population.

Data Analysis

SEM was conducted using SMART-PLS software, chosen for its ability to handle non-normal data

distributions, small sample sizes, and complex models with mediating variables. PLS is particularly suited for exploratory research and facilitates the estimation of latent variables with minimal measurement error. Assumptions for SEM, including linearity, normality, and absence of multicollinearity, were tested. The results showed acceptable skewness and kurtosis values (all between -2 and +2), indicating normal distribution. Variance inflation factors (VIF) were below the threshold of 10, confirming the absence of multicollinearity among predictors. Model fit was evaluated using standard indices such as Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's α . AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.45 for all constructs, demonstrating adequate convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and all constructs met the required standards. The mediating role of happiness was tested by examining both direct and indirect effects using bootstrapping techniques. Path coefficients and significance levels were calculated to interpret the relationships among attributional styles, happiness, and marital satisfaction. To reduce the influence of confounding variables, the study focused on a homogeneous group of employed women, minimizing variability in work-life balance. However, potential confounders such as mental health conditions, prior marital experiences, and socioeconomic factors were not explicitly controlled. These limitations should be addressed in future research to enhance the study's internal validity.

Findings and Results

The majority of participants were aged 31-40 (45.8%) and held a Bachelor's degree (54.2%). Most had been married for over 6 years (75%), reflecting a reasonably diverse sample in terms of marital duration and age. The descriptive statistics of the main variables are summarized in Table 1, including means, standard deviations, and distribution indices (skewness and kurtosis).

Table 1*Descriptive statistics for the research variables*

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis	SD	Mean	Max.	Min.
Marital Satisfaction	-0.317	-0.146	35.0	139.2	211	52
Positive Attribution Style	0.895	-1.08	18.2	94.62	126	18
Negative Attribution Style	0.391	0.025	17.4	73.64	112	33
Happiness	-0.462	-0.724	27.5	48.9	107	6
Self-Concept	-0.550	-0.666	8.09	13.37	30	0
Life Satisfaction	-0.115	0.572	2.9	5.18	12	0
Psychological Readiness	-0.446	-0.398	4.1	7.10	16	0
Enthusiasm	-0.080	-0.786	2.1	3.15	8	0
Aesthetic Appreciation	-0.484	-0.471	5.03	8.41	20	0
Self-Efficacy	-0.177	-0.700	4.03	6.59	16	0
Hope	0.552	0.915	2.06	3.45	10	0

The convergent validity of the measurement model was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). All AVE values exceed the threshold of 0.45, confirming adequate convergent validity. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion was used to evaluate discriminant validity. Results indicate that the square root of the AVE

for each latent variable is greater than the correlations with other variables, confirming adequate discriminant validity. The Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR) values, presented in [Table 2](#), indicate acceptable internal consistency.

Table 2*The results of Internal consistency*

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Marital Satisfaction	0.89	0.90	0.517
Positive Attribution Style	0.80	0.82	0.500
Negative Attribution Style	0.77	0.75	0.460
Happiness	0.90	0.91	0.845

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ([Table 3](#)) are below the threshold of 10, indicating no multicollinearity among predictors.

Table 3*The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values*

Variable	VIF (Happiness)	VIF (Marital Satisfaction)
Positive Attribution Style	1.05	1.09
Negative Attribution Style	1.09	1.18

The direct effects of attributional styles and happiness on marital satisfaction are summarized in [Table 4](#).

Table 4*Direct effects between variables*

Path	b	SE	T	P	f ²
Positive Attribution → Marital Satisfaction	0.12	0.055	6.26	0.023	0.039
Positive Attribution → Happiness	0.17	0.058	2.96	0.003	0.037
Negative Attribution → Marital Satisfaction	-0.20	0.061	3.40	0.001	0.097
Negative Attribution → Happiness	-0.25	0.078	3.33	0.001	0.080
Happiness → Marital Satisfaction	0.56	0.061	9.27	0.000	0.66

Positive attributional styles significantly enhance both marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.023$) and happiness ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = 0.003$). Negative attributional styles reduce marital satisfaction ($\beta = -0.20$, $p = 0.001$) and happiness ($\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.001$). Happiness exerts

the strongest direct effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.56$, $p = 0.000$). The mediating role of happiness in the relationships between attributional styles and marital satisfaction is presented in [Table 5](#).

Table 5

Indirect effects between variables

Path	b	SE	T	P
Positive Attribution → Happiness → Marital Satisfaction	0.09	0.033	2.92	0.004
Negative Attribution → Happiness → Marital Satisfaction	-0.14	0.048	3.06	0.002

Happiness mediates the relationship between attributional styles and marital satisfaction. Positive attributional styles indirectly enhance marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = 0.004$), while negative styles reduce it ($\beta = -0.14$, $p = 0.002$). This underscores the pivotal role of happiness in fostering marital satisfaction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to develop and explain a structural model of marital satisfaction based on attributional styles, with happiness as a mediating variable. The findings confirmed that attributional styles (both positive and negative) significantly influence marital satisfaction, both directly and indirectly through happiness. This section discusses the implications of these results, their alignment with existing literature, theoretical contributions, practical applications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

The results showed that positive attributional styles enhance marital satisfaction directly and indirectly by increasing happiness. Conversely, negative attributional styles negatively impact both happiness and marital satisfaction. The mediating role of happiness underscores its critical function in the relationship between cognitive styles and marital outcomes. These findings align with the broader psychological literature, which highlights the importance of cognitive processes and emotional well-being in sustaining healthy marital relationships (Akbari & Hossaini, 2018; Bean et al., 2020; Bilal et al., 2021; Çelik et al., 2022; Coleman et al., 2022).

Happiness emerged as the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction, corroborating previous studies emphasizing its role as a key determinant of relationship

quality (Tsutsui, 2018; Whisman et al., 2018). The findings suggest that fostering happiness within couples can act as a buffer against the negative effects of maladaptive attributional styles. These results align with prior research demonstrating the link between attributional styles and marital satisfaction (Halford & Pepping, 2017; O'Donnell et al., 2013). For instance, studies have consistently shown that optimistic attributional styles are associated with greater happiness and stronger marital bonds (Coleman et al., 2022; Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019). Furthermore, the mediating role of happiness mirrors findings by O'Donnell et al. (2013), which highlighted that emotional well-being enhances the impact of positive cognitive patterns on relationship satisfaction (O'Donnell et al., 2013).

However, some divergence was observed when comparing the impact of negative attributional styles. While this study found significant negative effects, other studies have suggested that their impact may vary depending on contextual factors, such as cultural norms or communication patterns (Akbari & Hossaini, 2018). This discrepancy warrants further investigation to better understand the boundary conditions under which attributional styles operate.

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of marital satisfaction by integrating attribution theory and happiness research into a comprehensive model. It reinforces the notion that cognitive and emotional variables are interdependent in shaping marital outcomes. Specifically, the findings extend attribution theory by demonstrating that happiness acts as a mediator, suggesting that emotional well-being can amplify or mitigate the effects of attributional styles (Sanjuán et al., 2013; Shapiro et al.,

2016). This underscores the need to consider both cognitive and emotional dimensions in models of marital satisfaction.

Counselors and educators should help couples develop positive attributional patterns, emphasizing external, temporary, and specific explanations for negative events. Cognitive-behavioral techniques, such as attributional retraining, can be particularly effective (Cirhinlioglu et al., 2017; Coleman et al., 2022). Interventions aimed at increasing happiness—through mindfulness practices, gratitude exercises, or shared positive experiences—can significantly improve marital satisfaction. These strategies are supported by evidence linking emotional well-being with improved relationship outcomes (Bilal et al., 2021). Given the negative effects of maladaptive attributional styles, specialized support should be provided to couples exhibiting pessimistic cognitive patterns to reduce their impact on marital satisfaction.

The use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Participants were all employed women in Tehran, which may not represent the broader population of married individuals. The reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduces potential biases, such as social desirability effects, that could influence the accuracy of the responses. The study's cross-sectional nature prevents causal inferences about the relationships among variables. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish the directionality of these effects. Factors such as mental health, communication styles, or socioeconomic status were not explicitly controlled, which may have influenced the results.

Investigate these relationships in different cultural and demographic groups to enhance the generalizability of the results. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine how attributional styles and happiness evolve over time and their long-term impact on marital satisfaction. Explore other variables, such as emotional regulation, communication patterns, or stress management, that may influence the relationship between attributional styles and marital satisfaction. Use experimental approaches to test the efficacy of targeted interventions aimed at enhancing positive attributional styles and happiness.

This study highlights the critical role of attributional styles and happiness in shaping marital satisfaction.

Positive attributional styles and high levels of happiness significantly enhance marital satisfaction, while negative attributional styles diminish it. By emphasizing the mediating role of happiness, the findings offer valuable insights for both theory and practice. Future research should build on this foundation to develop and evaluate interventions that foster positive cognitive and emotional patterns, thereby promoting healthier and more satisfying marital relationships.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional. The ethics code for this study is IR.AU.K.REC.1403.88. Data were anonymized to ensure privacy and prevent any identification of participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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