

Exploring Marital Satisfaction Through the Lens of Psychology and Islamic Perspectives: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract. Marriage, a significant life milestone, holds profound importance in both human experience and Islamic belief, representing fulfillment, love, and sacred duty. However, achieving marital satisfaction, crucial for a fulfilling union, encompasses multifaceted factors, including communication, conflict resolution, and shared responsibilities. This study employs a Systematic Literature Review method to explore marital satisfaction from psychological and Islamic perspectives. Psychological research emphasizes interpersonal dynamics, communication, and problem-solving skills, while Islamic teachings underscore tranquility, affection, and adherence to divine guidance. By integrating insights from both perspectives, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of marital satisfaction, shedding light on its essence, indicators, and the interplay of human endeavor and divine guidance in nurturing a harmonious marital bond.

Keywords : Marital Satisfaction, Psychological perspective, Islamic Perspective.

1. Introduction

Humans face numerous life challenges, one of which involves embarking on the journey of marriage during early adulthood. In Islamic belief, marriage is seen as a fulfillment of religious duty and holds a sacred significance. Every person aspires to marry at least once in their lifetime, aiming to find joy and love within this union. This longing stems from the inherent social nature of humans, as highlighted by Maslow, who emphasized the innate need for love and affection [1].

Marriage is considered a fundamental need for individuals, involving emotional commitment, shared activities, responsibilities, and economic management between partners [2]. And, happiness is a significant motivation for marriage [3].

In marriage, each individual possesses different needs, hopes, and desires. They strive to attain happiness and satisfaction within their relationship. Marital satisfaction involves various factors such as education, socio-economic status, love, commitment, communication, conflict resolution, gender dynamics, length of marriage, sexual relations, and household responsibilities [4]. Other factors influencing marital satisfaction include the duration of marriage, cultural background, religious beliefs, and societal norms [5]. Research indicates that elements like love, jealousy, attachment to one's partner, as well as self-efficacy in marital relationships, along with demographic factors such as education, income, age, gender, number of children, and health, play significant roles in determining marital satisfaction [6].

Marital satisfaction as a continual response to perceptions and emotions regarding satisfaction with the quality and meaning of the marital relationship, as well as the gaps present within the marriage [7]. On the other hand, marital satisfaction entails meeting the expectations and desires of both spouses within the marriage, comprising subjective evaluations of the overall quality of the marital relationship [8].

Couples who attain happiness in marriage typically exhibit skills in fostering caring and enjoyable interpersonal relationships. They establish strong bonds within the family unit, demonstrate effective parenting responsibilities, adeptly manage and resolve conflicts, and mutually support each other's personalities [9]

However, the reality is not all couples can achieve happiness in marriage. Continuous decline in marital satisfaction can lead to conflicts, domestic violence, and even divorce [10]. Factors such as imbalance in household role

division, lack of effective communication between partners, and unhealthy attachment between spouses can hinder marital satisfaction [11].

Marital dissatisfaction can also serve as a trigger for divorce. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2021), divorce cases in East Java, Indonesia, reached 557,447 from 2015 to 2021, with the highest divorce rate recorded in Malang Regency. Based on case reports adjudicated by the Religious Courts of Malang Regency, during the period of 2023, there were 8,181 divorce petitions recorded, in addition to 816 pending cases from the previous year. Out of this total, a sum of 6,177 divorce cases has been finalized [12].

After embarking on married life, every couple will experience various periods and stages in their life together. These stages include the early stage, the middle stage, and the mature stage [13]. Meanwhile, the stages in marriage encompass the honeymoon period filled with hope, the phase where the wife is seen as perfect, the period when primary focus is on children, the time when two individuals with different dreams share a bed, the distance phase, the midlife divorce phase, the renegotiation phase, the search for balance phase, and the warm and affectionate love phase [14]. Each stage and phase of marriage always involves conflicts, challenges, and tensions that may arise.

To achieve marital satisfaction, individuals need to deeply understand the meaning of marital satisfaction itself from both psychological and Islamic perspectives, in order to comprehend the aspects within marital satisfaction better. With this knowledge, individuals can identify the challenges in married life and how to strive for marital satisfaction.

2. Method

In this study, the researcher employed the Systematic Literature Review method. This method involves collecting and analyzing data from relevant previous research [15]. The data obtained will be identified, examined, evaluated, and interpreted to ensure accuracy. In other words, this method seeks data or information from previous studies, including books, relevant journals, dissertations, etc., to obtain relevant and accurate data in accordance with the research topic.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Essence of Marital Satisfaction from a Psychological Perspective

According to Fowers and Olson, marital satisfaction is described as a subjective feeling experienced either collectively as husband and wife or individually related to aspects that apply within a marriage, such as happiness, satisfaction, and pleasant experiences with one's partner [16].

Marital satisfaction, an essential aspect for achieving quality, happy, and stable marriages, is crucial for ensuring fulfillment in marital relationships [17]. Without marital satisfaction, married life can feel empty, leading to disharmony between spouses and potentially causing cracks in the marriage [18]. Thomas N. Bradbury, Frank D. Fincham, and Steven R. H. Beach have noted that scientific studies on marital satisfaction have garnered attention from scholars since the 1990s. Over the decades, research in the field of marital satisfaction has seen conceptual advancements. In the past decade, marital satisfaction has been linked to several aspects: firstly, interpersonal processes related to marriage including cognitive influences, physiology, behavioral patterns, social support, and violence. Secondly, the context in which marriages occur, encompassing micro-contexts (such as the presence of children) and macro-contexts (such as economic factors). Thirdly, the conceptualization and measurement of marital satisfaction [19].

Marital satisfaction, essentially, is the sense of happiness between husband and wife in their married life. Marital satisfaction means the happiness felt by both husband and wife in their marriage [20]. It also signifies the level of pleasure or happiness obtained by the couple during their marriage [21]. Other experts explain that marital satisfaction is a reflection of a marriage that benefits the couple [22]. Happiness and pleasure in marriage will be attained if the expectations, needs, and desires of the couple are fulfilled within the marriage [23]. Marriage will bring satisfaction to the couple if there is emotional security, respect, communication, helpful and playful behavior, sexual relations, and loyalty within the marriage [24].

According to [25], to achieve marital satisfaction, several aspects need to be considered. (1) Personality Issues involve perceptions of behavior, habits, and levels of satisfaction with a partner's personality. (2) Communication, including feelings and behaviors during communication, as well as the level of comfort in exchanging emotional and cognitive information. (3) Problem-solving involves perceptions of conflict resolution and strategies for addressing issues. (4) Financial Management, related to behaviors and attention to financial management, as well as joint decision-making regarding finances. (5) Leisure Activities involve activities to spend leisure time, both together and individually. (6) Sexual Relationship involves feelings and sexual relations, including sexual issues, sexual behavior, and sexual fidelity. (7) Children and Parenting are related to feelings and attitudes when having and raising children, including discipline issues and parental responsibilities. (8) Family and Friends involve feelings and expectations related to relationships with family and friends. (9) Role Similarity is related to perceptions and behaviors regarding various roles in marriage, including roles in work, household, and as parents. (10) Religious Orientation involves the role of religion in marriage and actions based on religious beliefs. (11) Idealism Distortion is an aspect used to evaluate expected social responses and is used to adjust individual scale values.

Factors during marriage that influence marital satisfaction according to [26] include: (1) Couples are able to openly express their affection towards each other. (2) Couples trust each other. (3) Emphasis on the principle of equality in decision-making, so that no party dominates. (4) Applying free and open communication between partners. (5) Couples feel satisfaction in the aspect of sexual relationship. Most couples have sexual intercourse more frequently in the first year of marriage. The frequency of sexual intercourse is related to the satisfaction of partners regarding their marriage. (6) Couples participate in each other's activities and cultivate friendships. (7) Having a stable place of residence. (8) Sufficient income. (9) The presence of children greatly influences marital life. Couples who have children generally feel satisfaction and happiness in their married life compared to couples who do not have children.

3.2. Marital Satisfaction Indicators from Positive Psychology Perspective

Fundamentally, psychology is a field of science that studies human behavior [27]. From this individual behavior, their mental condition can be predicted [28]. Similarly, marital satisfaction can be reflected in the behavior of individuals experiencing marriage. There are six categories of behavior that can indicate satisfaction or failure in marriage, namely:

1. Expression of Affection. Affection plays a crucial role in marital relationships and is recognized as a fundamental need in psychology [29]. According to Abraham Maslow, affection is a basic need that individuals must fulfill, placed third out of five needs [30]. In the context of marriage, affection is used as an indicator of marital satisfaction. It is important for both parties (husband and wife) to express their affection by loving, respecting, and accepting each other, both through words and actions [31].
2. Communication. Communication in marriage is an expression of attitudes and behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, that can stimulate responses from partners [32]. It involves the exchange of information, opinions, feelings, and inner thoughts, as well as using body language that demonstrates affection and through intimate relationships [33]. Communication plays a crucial role in creating satisfaction in marriage, where research shows that positive communication between husbands and wives can enhance trust and happiness [34]. Therefore, it is important for married couples to develop positive communication by being open, understanding, appreciative, and empathetic towards each other [35].
3. Consensus. The mutual agreement between husband and wife in household life is crucial for aligning visions and achieving common goals [36]. Matters related to mutual agreement include lifestyle, financial management, child-rearing, sexual relations, religious orientation, recreation, as well as relationships with family and others [37]. The agreements made need to be upheld and maintained by both parties. Violations of these agreements without clear reasons can lead to a loss of trust between them, ultimately disturbing marital harmony.
4. Sexuality and Intimacy. Sexuality and intimacy are fundamental needs in marriage. When sexuality and intimacy are well-maintained, the husband-wife relationship becomes harmonious and comfortable. These aspects become meaningful when they are grounded in love and affection, creating a deep bond, mutual ownership, mutual care, mutual assistance, and mutual respect. However, if sexuality and intimacy are not based on love and affection, rejection can occur, disrupting marital harmony [38].

5. Conflict Management. Conflicts between husband and wife in marriage are difficult to avoid; therefore, skills in handling conflicts are crucial. The best way to resolve conflicts is by considering mature solutions and providing space for both parties. This is important for building a healthy relationship and achieving common goals, without blaming or seeking self-justification, but with the principle of mutual respect and appreciation [39].
6. Distribution of Roles. Husband and wife couples need to balance their roles in marriage [40]. Satisfaction in fulfilling these roles affects marital happiness. Role changes due to various factors such as financial issues or changing needs can lead to conflicts [41]. Therefore, good communication is essential to address these changes.

Sternberg asserts that in marriage, love can be divided into two forms: romantic love and affectionate love. Romantic love typically arises in early adulthood or at the beginning of relationships, often driven by physical attraction, sexual desire, and romance [42]. Conversely, affectionate love typically emerges in mid-adulthood, supported by feelings of security, sincerity, loyalty, and emotional connection. From a psychological perspective, to achieve satisfaction in marriage, it is important for couples not only to rely on romantic love but also to cultivate affectionate love. This will help maintain the bond between spouses amidst physical and sexual changes [43].

3.3. The Essence of Marital Satisfaction According to the Islamic Perspective

Marital satisfaction, which is the essence of marriage itself, encompasses positive feelings such as happiness, contentment, and tranquility experienced by couples in their relationship. This aligns with the purpose of marriage in Islamic teachings, which aims to achieve tranquility and peace through the bond of love and affection. Besides serving as a means to expand human progeny, marriage is also regarded as a safeguard against temptations and moral transgressions. Marriage provides inner peace that enables husbands and wives to experience joy, tranquility, serenity, and happiness, as expressed in Surah Ar-Rum, ayat 21:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

"Among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, so that you may find tranquility in them. And He placed between you affection and mercy. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect."

"Sakinah" is a term defined by Quraish Shihab as tranquility or peace that arises after anxiety [44]. This indicates that in the context of marriage, worries or uncertainties turn into tranquility or "sakinah". Another definition by [45] associates "sakinah" with tranquility in facing situations and peace of mind. According to [46] there is also a connection between "sakinah" and "rahmah" and "thuma'ninah", which signify tranquility and freedom from anxiety in worship [47]. Etymologically, "sakinah" originates from a word meaning dwelling place, which portrays a comfortable, peaceful, and loving family environment for all members bound by marriage [48].

"Mawaddah" means "affection" [49]. Reflecting the inner drive to always wish for the best and protect loved ones from harm [50]. "Rahmah" indicates the gentleness of heart and empathy that lead to good behavior towards loved ones [51]. Furthermore, Quraish Shihab explains that love, mawaddah, mercy, and trust from Allah are spiritual bonds that serve as the adhesive of marriage. If there is no love and mawaddah in a marriage, there is still mercy. If mercy is absent, then trust must be upheld. As long as the husband and wife practice their religion properly, their trust will be preserved, as religion commands treating the wife well, for behind it, Allah has ordained much goodness (Quran, Surah An-Nisa: 19).

In Islam, marriage is not only seen as a bond between a man and a woman but also considered as a responsibility bestowed by Allah. Marriage is viewed as a trust, where husbands and wives are responsible for maintaining and nurturing the relationship in accordance with the will of Allah. The primary goal is to create a harmonious, loving, and compassionate family [52].

3.4. Indicators of Marital Satisfaction from the perspective of the Al-Qur'an

Surah Ar-Rum, ayat 21 of the Quran outlines the purpose of marriage as forming a happy, loving, and merciful family. This goal also serves as an indicator of marital satisfaction in the Quranic perspective, which emphasizes the presence of peace and comfort within a household filled with love.

From an Islamic perspective, marital satisfaction entails tranquility, security, and trust. These aspects are not solely achieved through human efforts but also through the guidance provided by Allah through the Quran and Sunnah. Abdul Mudjib refers to this as a theo-anthropocentric paradigm, where views are based on the omnipotence of God and human endeavors. Conversely, views solely based on human efforts are termed anthropocentric paradigms [53].

Genuine marital satisfaction is only attained when marriage is conducted solely to obey Allah's command, following the guidance of the Sunnah, and with the concerted efforts of both spouses [54]. Additionally, feelings of gratitude and the level of religiosity of both husband and wife also play crucial roles in realizing marital satisfaction [55].

3. Conclusion

Marital satisfaction refers to the contentment, tranquility, and happiness experienced by married couples. It plays a crucial role as it serves as a desired goal for married couples, both from the perspective of the Quran and positive psychology. The indicators of achieving marital satisfaction differ between the Quranic perspective and positive psychology. According to the Quran, marital satisfaction is attained through the presence of a peaceful and loving relationship, not merely fulfilling sexual needs and raising offspring but also as a trust. Meanwhile, in positive psychology, marital satisfaction is achieved through love, positive communication, consensus, sexuality, conflict management, and role balance. From the perspective of positive psychology, human efforts are the dominant factor in achieving marital satisfaction in marriage, contrasting with the Quranic view which also considers the theo-anthropocentric factor.

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