

Exploring the Intersection of Spirituality and Marital Satisfaction: Insights from Islamic Families

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Abstract

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the role of spirituality in marital satisfaction among Islamic families in East Java, Indonesia. Quantitative data from 408 participants were collected using the Marital Satisfaction Scale and the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale and analyzed through descriptive and regression methods. Qualitative insights were derived from interviews with six couples (three husbands and three wives), revealing that spiritual practices such as joint prayer and seeking divine guidance significantly enhance marital satisfaction. The results showed a strong positive correlation between spirituality and marital happiness, with transcendence having a more substantial impact than other spiritual activities. These findings suggest that integrating spiritual practices into marital counseling can significantly improve relationship quality, emphasizing the need for further research across diverse cultural contexts. The findings also provide practical guidance for marriage counselors to enhance relationship quality through spiritual practices.

Keywords: family harmony, married couples, marital satisfaction, religiosity, spirituality

1. Introduction

Marital satisfaction is critical to overall well-being, influencing physical and mental health outcomes for individuals and families. Scholars have long sought to identify the factors contributing to marital satisfaction, recognizing its importance for maintaining stable and healthy relationships. Traditionally, research has focused on communication, conflict resolution, emotional support, and shared values. [1], [2]. However, an emerging body of literature suggests that spirituality and religious practices also play a significant role in marital satisfaction [3], [4]. Spirituality, including religious beliefs, practices, and personal spiritual experiences, can influence marital dynamics. The connection between spirituality and marital satisfaction is particularly pertinent in cultural contexts where religion and spirituality are deeply integrated into daily life, such as among Islamic families.

Despite the extensive research on factors influencing marital satisfaction, such as communication, conflict resolution, emotional support, and shared values, there needs to be more understanding of the specific impact of spirituality, especially within the context of Islamic families. While some studies have explored the role of spirituality in marital satisfaction, these often focus on broader religious practices without delving into the unique spiritual dimensions and practices specific to Islamic culture [5], [6]. Furthermore, existing research predominantly originates from Western contexts, leaving a significant gap in understanding how spirituality influences marital satisfaction in non-Western cultures, particularly Islamic ones. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of spirituality in marital satisfaction among Islamic families in East Java, Indonesia, providing culturally specific insights currently lacking in the literature.

Research on marital satisfaction reveals three primary methodological trends: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative research often employs surveys and questionnaires to measure correlations between spiritual values and marital satisfaction, involving large samples and standardized instruments [7], [8]. Qualitative research, on the other hand, uses in-depth interviews and focus groups to explore how shared spiritual practices, such as prayer or worship, influence communication dynamics and emotional closeness between partners. This approach captures profound subjective experiences and personal narratives [9], [10]. Mixed methods combine these approaches, utilizing quantitative data to identify general patterns and qualitative data to provide detailed explanations of these findings. This triangulation strengthens the research outcomes [11], [12]. This article elaborates on the mixed methods approach, focusing on Muslim families as the subject of study. By doing so, it aims to understand how spirituality influences marital satisfaction in the context of Muslim families.

This study aims to investigate the correlation between spirituality and marital satisfaction and explore strategies couples use to develop marital satisfaction through spirituality among Islamic families in East Java, Indonesia. Using the Marital Satisfaction Scale and the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale, the study quantifies how much spiritual engagement influences marital happiness through statistical analyses, including descriptive and regression analyses. Additionally, through interviews with ten couples, the research uncovers personal narratives and thematic insights into how couples integrate spirituality into their daily lives to foster fulfilling relationships. This study aims to provide practical guidance for marriage counseling and relationship enhancement programs by understanding how spirituality can improve marital fulfillment.

Marital satisfaction has been extensively studied, with researchers identifying various factors contributing to a fulfilling marriage. Key determinants include effective communication, emotional intimacy, conflict resolution skills, and shared values and goals. Studies show that couples who communicate openly and resolve conflicts constructively report higher levels of marital satisfaction [13], [14]. Additionally, emotional support and a strong sense of partnership significantly enhance marital happiness [15], [16]. These elements create a stable and nurturing marital environment essential for long-term relationship success.

Furthermore, spirituality is increasingly recognized as a vital component of personal well-being, influencing various aspects of life, including health, stress management, and overall life satisfaction. Spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, and religious observance, give individuals a sense of purpose and connection to a higher power. This spiritual grounding helps individuals cope with life's challenges, fostering resilience and emotional stability. In the context of marriage, spirituality can offer a shared framework of beliefs and values, strengthening the marital bond and promoting mutual understanding and support. Thus, these spiritual aspects are significant in fortifying a harmonious and supportive marital relationship.

Several studies have explored the connection between spirituality and marital satisfaction, suggesting that couples with a solid spiritual foundation often report higher levels of marital happiness. Spiritual practices, such as joint prayer and religious activities, can enhance emotional intimacy and create a sense of unity and purpose within the marriage. Research indicates that spirituality can act as a buffer against marital stress, helping couples navigate challenges and maintain a positive outlook on their relationship [3], [17]. This correlation underscores the potential benefits of integrating spirituality into marital life to foster greater satisfaction and stability.

In Islamic cultures, marriage is a social contract and a sacred covenant with spiritual dimensions. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of mutual respect, love, and spiritual growth within the marital relationship [18], [19]. The Quran and Hadith guide maintaining a harmonious marriage, stressing that spouses should work together to foster an environment conducive to spiritual development. Regular religious practices like prayer, fasting, and Quran reading allow couples to connect spiritually and strengthen their bond [20], [21]. Previous research has highlighted the importance of spirituality in marital satisfaction. However, most of these studies are conducted in Western contexts and do not specifically address the unique spiritual practices within Islamic cultures. This leaves a significant gap in understanding how spirituality influences marital satisfaction among Islamic families. This study aims to fill this gap by providing culturally specific insights into the role of spirituality in marital satisfaction among Islamic families in East Java, Indonesia.

2. Research Method

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively understand the relationship between spirituality and marital satisfaction. The quantitative component used standardized scales to measure marital satisfaction and spiritual engagement, allowing statistical data analysis. The qualitative component comprised in-depth interviews with a subset of participants, providing rich, contextual insights into how spirituality is integrated into daily marital life. This mixed-methods design was chosen to capture both the measurable aspects of the relationship and the nuanced, personal experiences of the participants, ensuring a well-rounded exploration of the research questions.

This study involved 408 participants from Islamic families in East Java, Indonesia, equally divided between 204 husbands and 204 wives. The participants were selected from seven regional cities, ensuring a diverse representation of urban and rural settings. Participants were recruited through community centers, mosques, and social media platforms, with the primary inclusion criterion being that they were married and practicing Muslims. The age range of participants varied, with the majority being between 25 and 55 years old, providing a broad perspective on marital satisfaction across different stages of marriage. Qualitative data were taken from six participants (three husbands and three wives) with high spirituality and marital satisfaction levels.

Data collection was conducted using two primary instruments: the Marital Satisfaction Scale [22] and the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale [23]. The MSS is a validated tool that measures various dimensions of marital satisfaction, including emotional, social, and physical aspects of the marital relationship. The DSES, on the other hand, assesses the frequency and intensity of spiritual experiences in daily life. Both scales have been widely used in previous research and have demonstrated strong reliability and validity. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three couples to gain qualitative insights into how they integrate spirituality into their marital lives.

The data collection process consisted of two phases. Participants completed the Marital Satisfaction Scale and Daily Spiritual Experience Scale questionnaires in the first phase. These questionnaires were administered in a paper-and-pencil format during community gatherings and religious events to facilitate participation. In the second phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten couples who volunteered to share their experiences in more detail. The interviews were held in participants' homes or community centers, ensuring a comfortable and familiar environment. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent. The interview questions focused on how couples use spiritual practices to enhance marital satisfaction and cope with marital challenges.

Data analysis was performed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the Marital Scale Satisfaction (MSS) and Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the participants' marital satisfaction and spiritual engagement. Regression analysis examined the relationship between spiritual engagement and marital satisfaction. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis to identify common themes and coping strategies related to spirituality. The integration of statistical and thematic analyses provided a comprehensive understanding of the role of spirituality in marital satisfaction, highlighting the participants' quantitative significance and personal experiences.

3. Results

The study focused on exploring the influence of spirituality on marital satisfaction. Several key findings emerged through a rigorous analysis encompassing descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and qualitative interviews with four husbands and four wives. These findings underscore the profound impact of spirituality on marital dynamics and emphasize its significance in promoting lasting happiness and harmony within relationships.

3.1. Description of spirituality and marital satisfaction

The descriptive statistics reveal significant variations in spirituality and marital satisfaction across different demographics. There is no noticeable difference between genders regarding spirituality and marital satisfaction levels. However, older participants and those who have been married longer tend to exhibit higher levels of spirituality and marital satisfaction. Participants with higher education levels and more children also show similar results, indicating that these factors influence spiritual and marital satisfaction.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics for total spiritual and total marital satisfaction

Category	F	(%)	Spirituality		Marital satisfaction	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Gender						
1. Male	204	50.12	63.23	7.13	63.41	8.69
2. Female	204	49.88	62.96	7.14	62.38	8.55
Age						
1. 21-30	100	24.57	61.22	7.06	62.85	7.83
2. 31-40	241	59.21	63.22	6.85	62.61	8.96
3. 41 +	66	16.22	65.45	7.54	64.03	8.55
Marriage duration						
1. 1 - 10 years	106	26.04	61.44	7.12	62.84	7.93
2. 11 – 20 years	86	21.13	63.84	5.84	62.49	7.6
3. 21 +	215	52.83	63.6	7.49	63.09	9.34
Children						
1. One child	68	16.71	62.22	7.72	62.12	7.7
2. Two children	223	54.79	62.71	6.9	62.77	8.16
3. Three + Children	116	28.5	64.34	7.09	63.6	9.94
Education level						
1. Elementary school	13	3.19	59.62	7.49	62.54	8.05
2. Junior high school	31	7.62	61.48	8.72	62.29	7.54
3. Senior high school	32	7.86	62.06	6.87	61.75	8.1
4. Graduate Program	189	46.44	63.7	7.02	62.96	9.31
5. Magister program	138	33.91	66.28	5.71	67.22	6.68
6. Doctoral program	4	0.98	68.0	3.92	70.5	3.7

F= Frequencies, %=Percentage, SD= Standard deviation

Table 1 presents the respondents' characteristics, including gender, age, marriage duration, number of children, education level, and reported levels of spirituality and marital satisfaction. From this data, we observe that older participants (aged 41 and above) and those married for longer durations (more than 21 years) exhibit higher levels of spirituality (mean 65.45) and marital satisfaction (mean 64.03) compared to other age groups and marriage durations. This suggests that experience and the length of the relationship contribute to increased spirituality and marital satisfaction.

3.2. Effect of spirituality on marital satisfaction

The regression analysis results indicate that spirituality, especially transcendence, significantly influences marital satisfaction. The regression model shows that transcendence has a coefficient of 0.620 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, suggesting that each one-unit increase in transcendence will increase marital satisfaction by

0.620 units. Spiritual activity also has a positive influence with a coefficient of 0.299 and a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Table 2.
The effect of spirituality on marital satisfaction

Variables	Unstandardised Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient
	β	Std. Error	β
1. Transcendence	.620	.150	.270**
2. Activity	.299	.142	.137*

Note: ** = .001, * = .005.

Table 2 demonstrates that transcendence, as a component of spirituality, significantly impacts marital satisfaction more than other spiritual activities. This confirms that profound spiritual experiences and transcendent meaning contribute more to marital happiness than merely engaging in spiritual activities. This finding highlights the importance of deepening spiritual experiences to enhance marital satisfaction.

3.3. Strategies for marital satisfaction based on spirituality

In our study, we delved into the intricate role of spirituality in fostering marital satisfaction through in-depth interviews with four husbands and four wives. These interviews provided a nuanced understanding of how spirituality influences the development of spiritual satisfaction within marital relationships. Participants shared personal insights, experiences, and perspectives, shedding light on the significance of spiritual connection in enhancing overall satisfaction within the marriage. To further explore the rich tapestry of data gleaned from these interviews, we present a comprehensive analysis in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3.
The husband's strategies for marital satisfaction based on a spiritual program

No	Statements from informants	Coding
1	<i>Respect is fundamental in a relationship. In a marriage, we should focus on each other's strengths and be grateful for the blessings Allah has given us in our partner. Acknowledging our partner's strengths and seeking Allah's guidance can build a more fulfilling and harmonious marriage. This spiritual approach fosters a supportive environment where both partners feel appreciated and loved, enhancing the overall satisfaction and stability in the marriage (The subject is a 40-year-old male with a bachelor's degree, business works, and has two children).</i>	Gratitude for Allah's blessings (spiritual activity)
3	<i>Honesty, sincerity, trust, and mutual support are vital in a marriage. Couples should face life's ups and downs together, maintaining a strong commitment and embracing each other's strengths and weaknesses. By focusing on the children's future and striving to earn Allah's blessings through hard work and dedication, couples can strengthen their bond and build a stable, loving home environment. (The subject is a 32-year-old male with a bachelor's degree, a teacher, and has two children).</i>	Striving to earn Allah's blessings (spiritual activity)
4	<i>Mutual respect and acceptance are essential in a marriage. Recognizing and valuing each other's differences helps to complement and balance the relationship. Being grateful for Allah's blessings, forgiving each other's mistakes, and apologizing when wrong are crucial practices. This attitude fosters a nurturing and forgiving environment, promoting peace and harmony within the family. (The subject is a 33-year-old male with a senior high school degree, Work as a businessman, and has two children)</i>	Gratitude for Allah's blessings (spiritual activity)

The statements highlight the vital role of spirituality in enhancing marital satisfaction. Respect, gratitude for Allah's blessings, and seeking His guidance are fundamental for a harmonious marriage. Emphasizing each other's strengths and maintaining open communication fosters a supportive and loving environment. Honesty, sincerity, mutual support, and a focus on shared goals and collective decision-making strengthen the marital bond. Recognizing and valuing each other's differences, practicing forgiveness, and striving to earn Allah's blessings contribute to peace and stability in the family. Overall, spiritual activities such as gratitude, mutual respect, and seeking divine blessings are essential in nurturing a fulfilling and stable marriage.

Table 4.
The wife's strategies for marital satisfaction based on a spiritual program

No	Statements from informants	Coding
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1	<i>Building a loving home requires mutual respect, trust, and support. Both partners must fulfil their roles and responsibilities as husband and wife, maintaining their faith and continually striving together to draw closer to Allah. This shared spiritual journey strengthens the marital bond and ensures their relationship is anchored in a common purpose guided by their faith. (The subject is a 28-year-old female with a bachelor's degree, a teacher, and has two children).</i>	Striving together to draw closer to Allah (transcendence)
2	<i>Couples should work together to overcome life's challenges, offering each other support through prayer. They should aim to raise their children to be strong, self-reliant, and honourable individuals, all under the guidance and blessings of Allah. By integrating prayer and faith into their daily lives, they create a spiritually enriching environment that nurtures their children's development and reinforces the family's collective commitment to their religious values. (The subject is a 48-year-old female with a senior high school degree and has two children).</i>	Support through prayer (spiritual activity)
3	<i>Open communication and cooperation are crucial for a harmonious relationship. Both partners must be open-minded and refrain from believing one is always right. Together, they should seek completeness through mutual understanding and faith-based support. This spiritual foundation helps them navigate differences and find unity in their shared beliefs and values, fostering a deeper connection and a sense of purpose in their relationship. (The subject is a 26-year-old female with a bachelor's degree, a teacher, and has two children).</i>	Guided by faith (transcendence)

Spirituality enhances marital satisfaction for women by fostering mutual respect, acceptance, and gratitude for Allah's blessings. A harmonious marriage includes recognizing differences, practicing forgiveness, and building a loving home through trust and shared spiritual journeys. Overcoming challenges with support and prayer strengthens family commitment to religious values. Open communication, cooperation, and faith-based support help deepen connections. Commitment, honesty, and adherence to religious teachings ensure stability. In conclusion, a harmonious marriage is rooted in respect, open communication, and spiritual values, creating a strong and loving family environment.

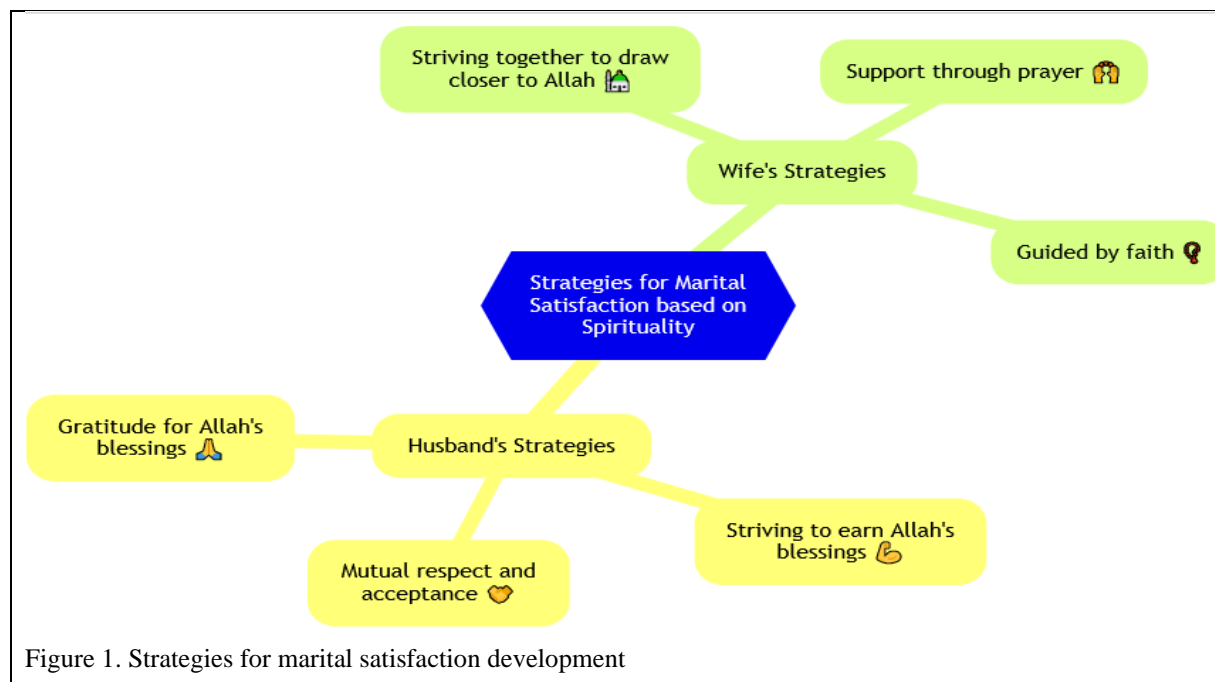


Figure 1. Strategies for marital satisfaction development

Figure 1 illustrates strategies for enhancing marital satisfaction through spirituality, categorizing them into approaches for husbands and wives. Key strategies for husbands include gratitude, striving to earn Allah's blessings, and mutual respect and acceptance. For wives, strategies emphasize striving together to draw closer to Allah, providing support through prayer, and being guided by faith. These spiritual activities and foundations foster a harmonious, fulfilling, resilient marital relationship.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a significant effect of spirituality on marital satisfaction among Islamic families in East Java. The statistical analysis indicated that spirituality accounts for 24% of the variance in marital happiness, underscoring the substantial impact of spiritual practices on marital quality. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative analyses underscore spirituality's critical role in enhancing marital satisfaction among Islamic families in East Java. The significant correlation and regression results highlight the strong impact of spiritual engagement on marital happiness. The thematic analysis provides a deeper understanding of couples' specific practices and strategies to integrate spirituality into their lives, offering valuable insights for marriage counseling and relationship enhancement programs. These results advocate for incorporating spiritual practices into efforts to improve marital fulfillment and underscore the need for further research in diverse cultural and religious contexts.

The interview qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of how Islamic couples use spirituality to cope with marital challenges and enhance satisfaction. Common themes included the importance of regular prayer, reliance on religious teachings for guidance, and the religious community's support. Couples reported that their faith helped them navigate conflicts, provide mutual support, and maintain a positive outlook on their relationship. These findings highlight the practical applications of spirituality as a coping mechanism, suggesting that spiritual beliefs and practices offer valuable resources for couples striving to maintain a fulfilling marriage [24], [25], [26]. In conclusion, spirituality is vital in helping Islamic couples navigate marital challenges, offering a foundation for mutual support and enhancing overall relationship satisfaction.

The results of this study are consistent with existing literature on the role of spirituality in marital satisfaction. Previous studies have found that couples who engage in joint religious activities, such as prayer and worship, often report higher marital happiness and stability levels [27], [28], [29]. This study adds to the growing body of evidence by providing specific insights into the experiences of Islamic couples in East Java. The findings suggest that the principles and practices emphasized in Islamic teachings, such as mutual respect, love, and spiritual growth, are effectively integrated into marital relationships, contributing to higher satisfaction levels. This reinforces the idea that spirituality, regardless of religious context, is vital in nurturing and maintaining healthy marriages.

The insights gained from this study have important implications for marriage counseling and relationship enhancement programs. Counselors and therapists working with Islamic couples can incorporate spiritual practices into their therapeutic approaches, recognizing the central role of spirituality in these relationships [30], [31], [32]. Techniques such as encouraging joint prayer, Quranic study, and participation in religious activities can help couples strengthen their emotional bonds and improve marital satisfaction. Additionally, community leaders and religious organizations can develop programs and workshops emphasizing the importance of spiritual growth within marriage, providing couples with practical tools and strategies to enhance their relationships through spiritual engagement.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant correlation between spiritual engagement and marital satisfaction among Islamic families in East Java. The quantitative analysis revealed that spirituality accounts for 24% of the variance in marital happiness, demonstrating its substantial impact on the quality of marital relationships. The qualitative insights further enriched these findings by uncovering couples' strategies to integrate spirituality into their daily lives, such as regular prayer and reliance on religious teachings. These combined results underscore the vital role of spirituality in fostering emotional intimacy, mutual support, and overall marital fulfillment.

The implications of these findings are profound for both academic research and practical applications. Future research should expand the scope to include diverse cultural and religious contexts, exploring how different spiritual practices influence marital satisfaction. Longitudinal studies would also provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of spiritual engagement on marital relationships. Practically, marriage counselling and relationship enhancement programs should incorporate spiritual practices, recognizing their importance in promoting healthy and fulfilling marriages. By continuing to explore the intersection of spirituality and marital satisfaction, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to support couples in their journey toward a harmonious and satisfying marital life.

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