

Research Paper

Investigating the Relationship Between Differentiation and Moral Justice in Sexual Satisfaction

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**ABSTRACT**

Objective: This study aims to investigate the model of the relationship between differentiation and moral justice in sexual satisfaction.

Methods: This descriptive and applied research was done based on structural equations. The statistical population consisted of 300 individuals who were selected via the convenience sampling method. The differentiation questionnaire moral justice questionnaire were distributed to the individuals online.

Results: The results indicated that differentiation (0.243) ($P < 0.01$), and moral justice (0.175) ($P < 0.01$) are related to sexual satisfaction.

Conclusion: The individual and interpersonal dimensions of human beings can affect sexual satisfaction. According to different human dimensions, it is suggested that cognitive issues, interpersonal relationships, and moral dimensions be trained even before starting marital life as a model. Meanwhile, conditions can be provided to promote sexual satisfaction and its continuation in a safe and healthy environment to help maintain this path.

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Highlights

- Sexual satisfaction is determined by a variety of factors;
- Sexual content and sexual satisfaction are multifaceted;
- No study has yet demonstrated how distinct sexual content is from sexual satisfaction.

Plain Language Summary

The main purpose of this study is to develop a sexual satisfaction model based on cognitive, social, and moral factors and clarify the importance of these factors in improving the quality of healthier sex satisfaction. This research is applied in terms of purpose and in terms of the descriptive method is equations structural. Individual and interpersonal dimensions of human beings can affect sexual satisfaction. It is suggested that necessary training be carried out according to different human dimensions in the form of a model that focuses on cognitive issues, interpersonal relationships and moral dimensions. This provides conditions for promoting sexual satisfaction and its continuation in a safe and healthy environment to help for the continuity of this path.

1. Introduction

Couples have various criteria in their marital lives that play a significant role in the continuity or non-continuity of their relationship. Sexual satisfaction of the parties is one of the criteria that form the main part of the relationship among couples in marital life. Sexual satisfaction depends on several factors and healthy and pleasant sexual intercourse is the most significant factor. However, there is no significant basic information on this field in Iranian society (Khangahi & Bamdi, 2019).

Sexual affairs are a complete sensory experience that involves the brain and the body and is not limited to the activity of the reproductive system; however, it is manifested in all human beings and includes values, attitudes, behaviors, physical appearance, beliefs, emotions, interests, spiritual aspects, personality, and socialization (Yoshioka & Kaneko, 2019). Sexual intercourse begins by requesting a specific activity, providing the spouse with feedback on activities and types of stimuli that are pleasant or unpleasant, and also includes showing love and other emotions (Amiri & Jamali, 2018). Sexual health is a situation in which a man and a woman enjoy a healthy, appropriate, and normal sexual relationship and are satisfied with it. In recent years, many studies have been conducted on extramarital relations consisting of excessive and uncontrollable sexual fantasies, urges, and behaviors (Myhre et al., 2020). Communication skills play an important role in sexual intercourse, such as general information from the partner and direct behavioral observation, evaluation, and focus on minor skills, such as the use of eye contact, facial expression, and appropriate

tone of voice, which also includes non-verbal skills. Various factors play a role in life satisfaction, and healthy and pleasant sexual intercourse with the spouse is one of these factors (Rastgou et al., 2014). More than half of the sexual problems that destroy life and long-term relationships originate from unawareness or insufficient awareness and incorrect beliefs about sex (Khajeh, 2011).

Differentiation is a kind of emotional system that governs the structure of the family and can be transmitted between generations. A person's mental health depends on the level of separation from this system. Differentiation refers to the ability to balance emotional and intellectual processes at the intra-psychological level and to balance individuality with the experience of intimacy at the interpersonal level (Faghani, 2019). People who have higher sexual desire experience more intimacy during sex; therefore, they react to their partner during sex and understand that their partner feels the desire, arousal, and higher intimacy (De Jong et al., 2019).

The results of a study showed a significant correlation between self-differentiation and its subscales (emotional reactivity, self-situation, emotional detachment, and integration with others) with marital satisfaction (Danesh, 2010). Moreover, the results of Zarandi (2011) showed a positive and significant relationship between self-differentiation and marital satisfaction, emotional intelligence and self-differentiation, and emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction. Nasiri et al. (2018) showed that self-differentiation and sexual function had a relationship with the tendency to have extramarital affairs. Also, the correlation coefficient between sexual function and self-differentiation with the tendency to extramarital af-

fairs was significant. Accordingly, sexual function and self-differentiation affect the desire for extramarital affairs. [Najafui \(2006\)](#) confirmed the direct relationship between differentiation and sexual compatibility and satisfaction. There is a correlation between behavioral and physiological scales of non-differentiation and marital incompatibility among troubled couples.

Justice is the greatest human and moral virtue and the goal of social relationships. This transcendent goal has been recognized as a rule, which should be considered in social relationships, including couple's relations on various issues while communicating and so on ([Naqibi, 2008](#)). Justice cannot be considered the only human virtue, however, it should be acknowledged that one of the moral virtues of humans in mutual interaction and also the main virtue of social institutions is to observe justice. On the other hand, justice is one of the conditions of individual happiness, because if we ought to endure, grow, and flourish as a self, the existence of ethics is necessary ([Molhami, 2020](#)). Moral justice is the degree that comes from a judgment and justice from a sense of duty and moral obligation ([Beugre, 2012](#)).

[Nobre et al. \(2018\)](#) found that having dysfunctional sexual beliefs, negative thoughts, and negative emotions

and feelings, along with valuing such beliefs during sexual intercourse can affect thoughts and feelings and predict sexual dissatisfaction. For instance, limitations for women, including the lack of evaluation of psychological and interpersonal variables that may affect women's sexual dissatisfaction, play an important role in sexual satisfaction, which can result from the moral judgment of interpersonal relationships

[Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) found that beliefs during sex can affect thoughts and feelings and predict sexual dissatisfaction. For example, in many traditional Asian societies, sex is associated with fertility, while in modern Western societies it is seen more as recreational and often focuses on pleasure. These wide differences show how different belief and moral systems are, in some Asian cultures, such as China, sexuality is a taboo subject, and sex education is included. Schools are traditionally reluctant to teach and talk about sexuality, and this education is minimal. Furthermore, parents and health professionals may be reluctant to discuss.

Sexual satisfaction is a component related to human sexual desires that are considered the last stage of the cycle of sexual response. Considering that talking about sexual issues in Iran is still one of the cultural taboos,

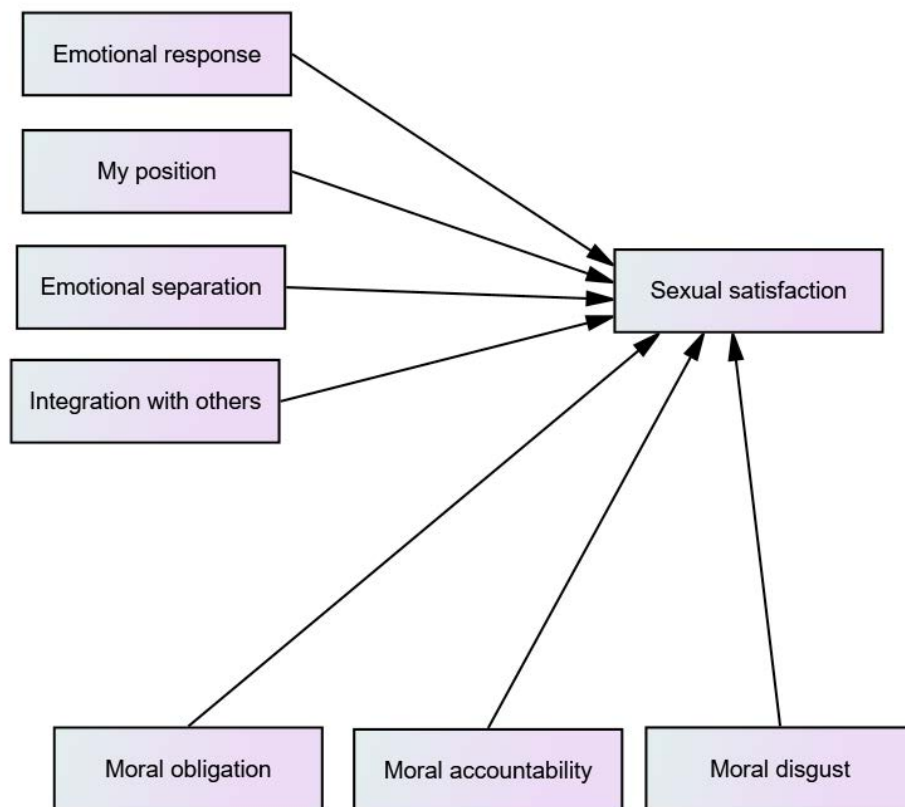


Figure 1. The hypothetical research model

the rate of sexual satisfaction and marital compatibility is higher in men compared to women (Zarandi, 2011). Hence, men are more compatible with sexual issues compared to women. Therefore, culture and gender increase sexual awareness and sexual satisfaction (Nami, 2017). The spirit of hope, vitality, and happiness has a great impact on the sexual function and happiness of the next generation (Dehghan, 2016). According to the relationship between sexual satisfaction and satisfaction with married life, the application of approaches for education and sexual counseling of men and women at marriage age is essential to succeed in married life in society with the cooperation of the health care system (Rahmani & Marghani Khoii, 2011). Sexual dysfunction is a serious problem and negatively affects the quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem of individuals. It may be the direct cause of psychological disorders (Eyada, 2020). The foundations of a healthy life are stronger when sexual, mental, and emotional health are in the same direction. Suppression of natural needs has adverse effects on the intimacy and vitality of family members (Polad, 2017). Differentiation and moral justice both have the same structural foundations, and the balance between them is set based on emotional and intellectual desires. This study is conducted to explain the relationship between differentiation and moral justice in marital relationships.

2. Participants and Methods

Participants

This was descriptive and causal-comparative research and we used structural equations. The research is based on maximum diversity in education, age, job, and geographical location of the residential area, which has been conducted in different regions of Tehran City, Iran, considering the online distribution of questionnaires. The research of the statistical population is an example that is matched with the statistical unit. Sampling was done via the convenience sampling method, and the sample size was selected by the Morgan formula for the normality of the data related to the research variables. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used and also to check the research hypotheses, the factor analysis method was employed as well. To hypothesize the model in question, given that sexual satisfaction has different dimensions, including sexual, physical, and mental health, the sample size consisted of 300 men and women in the age range of 20 to 40 years, both married. The minimum level of education was having a diploma and the research question was as follows: "Have you had sexual experience?" If the answer was yes, they could answer the following

questions. The questionnaire in this sampling was provided to people in the form of Google software, and for this reason, it was done voluntarily and with the confidentiality of the respondent's identity. The inclusion criteria were having an education level of diploma or higher; being in the age range of 20 to 40 years; having sexual experience; and having access to and familiarity with the internet and various software, including Telegram and WhatsApp, and entering the website. The exclusion criteria were returning incomplete questionnaires and withdrawing from the study. All Ethical considerations were observed as the questionnaires were filled with the complete satisfaction of the participants. The information was kept strictly confidential and there was no cost for volunteers to participate in the research.

Differentiation of self-inventory-2

The differentiation of self inventory-2 (DSI) (Skowron, 1995) is a 43-item questionnaire scored based on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (not all true for me) to 6 (very true for me). DSI contains 4 subscales: 11 items on the emotional reactivity (ER) scale (the scores on this scale are inversely scored); 11 items on the "I" position (ID) scale; 13 items on the emotional cut-off (EC) scale; and 9 items on the fusion with others (FO) scale. The confirmatory factor analysis by Skowron (1995) has confirmed the aforementioned subscales. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by internal consistency using Cronbach α . For ER, ID, EC, and FO, we had 0.89, 0.81, 0.84 and 0.86, respectively (Skowron, 1995). In the present study, this questionnaire was translated and submitted to instructors of the counseling department of Isfahan University to examine its content validity. Then, the questionnaire was tested on 40 clients (17 men and 23 women). These clients were randomly chosen from the subjects who were referred to counseling centers throughout Isfahan. The subjects were asked to note down whatever ambiguity or question they had about the items. The results revealed no need for correction on the items. The Cronbach α for each scale was 0.89, 0.91, 0.81, and 0.86, respectively, which are acceptable for research purposes.

Deontic justice scale (DJS)

The deontic justice Scale (DJS) has 18 items in which the 3 factors are ethical (items 1 to 8), ethical responsibility (items 9 to 14), and ethical disgust (items 15 to 18). The subjects' responses are scored based on a 5-point scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Beugre has mentioned the content validity of the questionnaire appropriately and has obtained the reli-

ability by the Cronbach α method to be at 0.85 (Beugre, 2012). In Iran, Sadeghi has obtained the reliability of the questionnaire components of ethical obligation at 0.77, moral responsibility at 0.73, and moral disgust at 0.71, and moral justice at 0.83, respectively (Sadeghi, 2011). The reliability of this scale using the Cronbach α coefficient was obtained at 0.86, 0.93, and 0.79 for ethical obligation, moral responsibility, and moral disgust, respectively.

Data analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis

The confirmatory factor analysis method, which is an extension of the conventional factor analysis, is one of the important aspects of structural equation modeling in which certain hypotheses are tested concerning the structure of factor loadings and mutual correlation between variables. To introduce a theoretical construct, a set of questions is usually prepared, and factor analysis helps formulate the indices used in the research. To introduce the underlying dimensions of the construct, factor analysis can reveal one or more factors. Based on the results of factor analysis, a structure is one-dimensional or multi-dimensional. This approach is now called exploratory factor analysis as it is exploratory and not hypothesis-testing in nature. Factors in the factor analysis method predict the responses in measured and observed variables. Also, the validity of factor analysis is obtained by determining how much the factors justify the variance in each question; that is, how much of the variance of the questions overlap with the factors? In this method, the researcher must first ensure the importance and fit of the parts to reach the final result and finally draw the overall model.

Model fit indicators

The most important issue is the importance of the model by indicators called “fit indices” after drawing the model, the initial assurance of the accuracy, and the importance of the information. Acceptable scientific criteria for validating the developed theoretical model using the collected data is the main issue in the model fit indices. In this research, the following criteria were used to evaluate the appropriate fit of all models, and the number of each index of AGFI, GFI, RMSEA, and CFI is presented separately in the following tables. In the structural equation modeling method, the latent structure is necessary to check the validity of the structure to determine that the selected items have the necessary accuracy to measure the desired variables. For this pur-

pose, confirmatory factor analysis is used so that the factor load of each item with its variable has a t value higher than 1.96. In this case, this item measures the precision of that construct or latent variable.

3. Results

In this section, the subjects were classified according to gender and the frequency of each category along with percentages (Table 1). According to Table 1, 55.5% of the subjects were female and 44.5% were male. Next, the subjects were classified based on their marital status and the frequency of each category along with the percentage was shown. According to Table 1, 44.1% of the subjects were single and 55.9% were married. Table 1 shows that 7.2% of the subjects were under 25 years old, 23.4% were between 25 and 30 years old, 28.6% were between 30 and 35 years old, and 40.7% were over 35 years old. Meanwhile, 13.1% of the subjects had a diploma, 10% had an associate degree, 40.3% had a bachelor's degree, 31% had a master's degree, and 5.5% had a PhD.

The information in Table 2 shows the statistical characteristics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, and Kurtosis) of the research variables. Also, according to the skewness and kurtosis values that are within a reasonable range for predicting the normality of the data, the assumption of data normality can be proposed and accepted. The normality of the data related to the research variables was examined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which is presented in Table 2. The statistical significance level of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows that for all variables, their statistics are in the range of +1.96 to -1.96, which the significance level of this test in the last column confirms the normality (the null hypothesis that the data does not have a normal distribution is rejected).

After examining the normality of the data, we evaluated the relationship (correlation) between the research variables. Therefore, we used the correlation test and presented its results in Table 3.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the model of the relationship between differentiation and moral justice in sexual satisfaction. The results showed a relationship between indicators and components of differentiation and moral justice, sexual satisfaction, and the subsets of differentiation and moral justice have a direct relationship with each other. These indicators and components are required to be observed to achieve healthy sexual satisfaction.

Table 1. Description of demographic variables

Variables		No. (%)
Gender	Female	161(55.5)
	Male	129(44.5)
	Total	290(100)
Marital Status	Total	290(100)
Age Range	Under 25	21(2.7)
	25 to 30	68(23.4)
	30 to 35	83(28.6)
	Over 35	118(4.7)
	Total	290(100)
Education Degree	Diploma	38(13.1)
	Associate degree	29(10)
	BA	117(40.3)
	MA	90(31)
	PhD	16(5.5)
	Total	290(100)

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Table 2. Mean±Standard deviation of research variables

Variables	Components	Mean±SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Differentiation	Emotional response	33.75±5.50	0.16	-0.08
	My position	34.71±8.05	1.20	-0.91
	Emotional separation	37.67±7.04	0.29	-0.41
	Integration with others	46.71±6.15	0.25	0.60
Moral justice	Moral obligation	35.99±3.74	-0.62	-0.36
	Moral accountability	26.46±2.60	-0.38	-0.64
	Moral disgust	50.17±2.11	-0.32	-0.73
	Sexual satisfaction	59.17±10.24	-0.47	-0.38

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Table 3. Correlation between variables

Variables	Status	Sexual Satisfaction
Differentiation	Correlation	-0.243
	Significance	0.000
Moral justice	Correlation	0.175
	Significance	0.003

Table 4. Path coefficients and significance Sexual satisfaction and differentiation

Paths	Path Coefficient	t	Position
Emotional response →	-0.85	-7.78	Accepted
My position →	-0.53	-5.59	Accepted
Emotional separation →	-0.50	-5.27	Accepted
Integration with others →	-0.70	-6.22	Accepted

Relationship between sexual satisfaction and differentiation is inferred.

Table 5. Path coefficients and significance relationship between sexual satisfaction and moral justice

Path	Path Coefficient	t	Position
Moral obligation →	0.46	4.69	Accepted
Moral accountability →	0.59	6.52	Accepted
Moral disgust →	0.60	6.58	Accepted

Relationship between sexual satisfaction and moral justice is inferred

The results of [Nasirijounaghani \(2021\)](#) showed that the lack of differentiation and sexual performance is related to the desire for extramarital relationships. The findings of the research generally indicate that the lack of differentiation between self and sexual performance has an effective role in the phenomenon of infidelity and sexual dissatisfaction, and necessary measures and preventions can be considered.

In differentiation, it is required to exercise the ability to maintain a person to stay in touch with others, in other words, the ability to maintain independence while keeping contact with others. Considering a spectrum, at the end of the spectrum, individuals are differentiated, and indistinguishable (severely entangled) individuals and other individuals are located at different points in the middle of the spectrum at another end of the spectrum, so that differentiation can be significantly predicted with marital compromise. In differentiation and relationships, if individuals can achieve the ability to separate emotional processes from the rational process according to the ac-

quired skills and based on the interpersonal function, they can also show the ability to experience intimacy with independence in interpersonal relationships along with its proper balance. They can be more satisfied in their lives as well ([Abdolmanafi et al., 2018](#)). If the members of a family feel threatened or more insecure, they feel more sympathy. Thus, constant stress can make members disable to differentiate themselves from the family, and naturally, they are always dependent on the family and the family does not leave them ([Nami & Mazlounian, 2017](#)). Hence, couples are constantly in internal conflicts and struggle between two opposite poles. They adhere to the wishes of their original family or follow their independent wishes. Family problems are usually rooted in the family system. The couple's relationship with their parents is important, and the problems they have with each other and their children are an attempt to deal with the initial conflicts in the paternal family; consequently, the nature and quality of the marital relationship depends on the paternal family of the couple and especially on the extent to which conflicts are unsolved in these fami-

lies (Feramo, 2000). It can be concluded that the couple's families affect the couple's relationship since the couple has not been able to differentiate themselves from the family yet. This lack of differentiation is a pathological concept. The lower the degree of differentiation, the more intense and emotional the reaction (Habibipour et al., 2014). In differentiated situations, individuals react emotionally and emotions prevail over reason and logic in their behavior, decisions are based on emotional reactions, similar to creating behavioral barriers, such as not speaking, not having sex with a partner, or physically distancing from those around (Feng, 2020). If undifferentiated individuals are related to each other, they form a nuclear family with a low level of differentiation and undifferentiated couples suffer from anxiety and disorders in all aspects of their marital relationship under stress (Ghasemi & Aliabadi, 2014).

Nobre et al. (2018) found that beliefs about sexual relations are dysfunctional, negative automatic thoughts, negative emotions, and feelings, and excessive valuing of these beliefs can affect thoughts and feelings during sex and predict sexual dissatisfaction. Kim & Ward (2018) stated in his results that for informal sex there is a feeling of worry, disgust, pressure to have sex, regret, and fear of moral judgment. In contrast, experiencing a higher level of sexual satisfaction, finding a sexual partner, and having initiative predicted less sexual failure. However, women were more likely than men to regret their last immoral sexual encounter. The above research was consistent with the hypothesis of sexual satisfaction and moral justice; although all dimensions of moral justice and its effect on sexual satisfaction were not discussed thoroughly, it was examined in the formulation of the model of sexual satisfaction based on the factor of moral justice. It was found that moral justice can be one of the components of sexual satisfaction.

Respecting the rights of others, fairness, and judgment automatically lead to the moral debate of justice in social justice (Waite, & Joyner, 2001). In moral education, the main goal is to foster moral talents and achieve human perfection. In other words, some consider the purpose of moral education as laying the groundwork and applying methods for flourishing, strengthening and creating moral traits, behaviors, and manners, and correcting and eliminating immoral traits, behaviors, and manners in oneself or another person in all aspects of life (Ferron et al., 2016). In addition, justice is significant in individual behavior in dealing with others. As a result, justice can be considered a psychological, scientific, and social factor. Ethics also plays an important role in human growth and flourishing as it enables people to pursue their goals

in peace and freedom. In addition to encouraging them to friendship, loyalty, and so on, ethics invites people to excellence and valuable life. Moreover, ethics is considered an effective way of resolving conflicts arising from conflicts of interest, and consequently, ethics shows human beings how to achieve individual happiness through acquiring virtues and happiness (Amer, 2019). Justice is understood as a practical principle. Moral anthropology has studied ethics as a virtue of freedom and creativity, although justice has often been accompanied by the observance of laws or even law, in contrast, justice can be studied as a virtue that its social dynamics can initiate moral change in normal life (Brandtstädter, 2020). This virtue includes the desire to conform to determined norms and can restructure human relations. Therefore, ethics is a social concept and it is not the discovery or the fake of the individual to guide themselves. Ethics existed before and the person entered into it, or more or less participate in it, and it will continue to exist after the person. People involve values, such as fairness, satisfaction, honesty, and altruism in making decisions in addition to financial benefit (Little, & Johnson, 2015). However, sexual desire can diminish in long-term romantic relationships, and the usual intense desire disappears in the early stages over time (Yong & Riss, 2015). Attitudes, values, and beliefs about gender vary around the world. Societies with historical roots, philosophical traditions, family structures, and differences in interpersonal relationships may lead to the acceptance of different attitudes about sexual activity. However, everyone is aware that sexual health is part of mental health, and its disruption can greatly affect mental health, more than half of sexual problems destroy lives because of insufficient awareness and wrong beliefs related to sexual relations (Abuzari & Rashidpour, 2018).

Therefore, as the definitions and findings of the research explain, it can be concluded that differentiation in the common relationship of couples depends on the understanding and awareness of the parties of the interactions of marital life. If the differentiation is less, the excitement of couples will be more, and ultimately, it destroys behavioral cohesion. On the other hand, moral justice plays an important role, and observing moral indicators in life enables us to control differentiation and prevent relationship breakdown.

This research was conducted only for the participants in the age range of 20 to 40 and cannot be generalized to other age groups. Also, this research was conducted only on men and women in Tehran City, Iran, and cannot be generalized to other societies. It is suggested to design and implement studies to formulate effective so-

lutions for sexual satisfaction as premarital counseling by experts through counseling centers and relevant government institutions to improve the mental health of individuals and couples' relationships. It is suggested that quasi-experimental research be conducted to investigate the effect of training of differentiation patterns on sexual satisfaction performance.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The participants received an explanation of the general purpose of the research and the confidentiality of the information, and after informed consent, they completed the questionnaires. In addition, the subjects were free to discontinue the intervention sessions at any time.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to all parts of the study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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