

## Antecedents of Spiritual Health Affecting Family Management and Sexual Relationships of Couples: A Conventional Content Analysis

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### Abstract

*Background: Spiritual Health (SH) is the most meaningful and universal part of health affecting all human dimensions functions. Given that community health depends on the health of the family environment, Islam pays special attention to the basic foundation of the family and its persistence. Therefore, this qualitative study aimed to determine the antecedents of SH in Muslim couples according to Islamic sources. Methods: To collect the required data, some keywords, including “spiritual health”, “spirituality”, “spouses”, “couples”, and “Islam” were searched both in Persian and Arabic in Google Scholar, Noormags, SID, and Magiran databases in 1980-2023. After examining 37 documents, the conventional content analysis method was adopted to determine the antecedents of SH. Results: The 139 extracted codes were then classified into six categories (affecting the family management and their sexual, spiritual, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive relations). This paper elaborates on the antecedents of SH “affecting the family management”, and “sexual relationships” of couples. The first category includes four subcategories, “family boundaries and management”, “mutual and exclusive rights”, “planning”, and “cooperation and division of labor”. The second includes five subcategories, “encouragement to marry with trust in God”, “having offspring”, “preparation and contextualization”, “request and response”, and “infidelity prevention”. Conclusion: Both categories of “affecting the family management” and “sexual relationships” affect the lives of Muslim couples as antecedents and consequences of the concept of SH. It is suggested to perform more research by considering the texts of Sunni scholars.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Spirituality, Spouses, Sexual Relationships

### INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Health (SH), a state of being shaped based on a person’s personal, communal, environmental and transcendental relationships, is one of the basic needs of humans and society [1] and an integral part of the spirituality concept [2].

From the perspective of Islamic teachings, SH, including faith in God Almighty, resurrection, and worship, is equivalent to religious health and the most crucial aspect of human well-being [3]. Non-religious secular scholars consider spirituality only as a means for patients’ physical health promotion [4]. In contrast, according to the divine religion of Islam, different types of human health (e.g., physical, emotional, mental, and social) [5] as well as humans reaching the realm of monotheism are affected by SH [2]. The soul of a human with SH directs his/her scientific and practical structures as such the best harmony is created among them, hence, he/she becomes a wise and mature human [6].

Moreover, research findings have indicated the positive effects of SH on the stability and promotion of spouses’ quality of life [2, 3, 6]. Therefore, although God is the origin of both human creation [Al-Mo’menoon, 14] and spiritual well-being [Al-A’raf, 30], it seems necessary to identify SH antecedents in Muslim spouses. However, in a literature review, no study was found regarding the antecedents of this concept from the Islamic perspective.

Given the crucial role of couples as the basis of family and society [7] and the critical effects of SH, this study aims to identify the antecedents of SH in Muslim couples according Islamic resources.

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**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In this qualitative study, some keywords, including “spiritual health”, “spirituality”, “spouses”, “couples”, and “Islam” were searched both in Persian and Arabic in Google Scholar, Noormags, SID, and Magiran databases regarding the 1980-2023 interval.

The inclusion criteria were texts published in Persian and Arabic on couples’ SH, whose full texts were available. Papers on Sunnism and extramarital affairs were excluded from this study. The full texts of 37 eligible documents were then analyzed using Graneheim and Lundman’s conventional content analysis method, which is a research method for the mental interpretation of the content of textual data through coding and systematic categorization processes [8].

The second researcher, experienced in content analysis, studied the full text of each reference several times carefully and deeply to reach a general understanding. Then she studied the texts word by word considering semantic units. In other words, the sentences with the same content were shortened as long as the main content was preserved. The compressed semantic units were summarized in the form of codes. Considering the investigation objective, the researcher then became more precise and compared the similarities and differences of the obtained codes [8]. After that, the codes were classified into several subcategories, the subcategories were summarized in the categories, and the antecedents of SH in Islamic texts were extracted. The data coding and categorizing process is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Data coding and categorizing process.**

Codes	Subcategories	Categories	Themes
Creating exclusive spaces for wife and husband	Family boundaries and management	Affecting the family management	Antecedents of SH in Muslim couples
Creating a shared spaces for intercourse			
Asking permission to enter the couple space			
Responsibility of husband in family management			
Cooperation of family members in the family management			
The husband’s rights or wife’s duties	Mutual and exclusive rights		
The wife’s rights or husband’s duties			
The couple’s mutual rights			
Observing spouse’s rights without any disrespect			
Considering all the human’s spiritual, physical, and psychological needs	Planning		
Gradualism			
Consultation			
Foresight			
Prioritization			
Adherence to plan			
Benefitting from each single moment	Cooperation and division of labor		
Entrusting the household chores to wife			
Entrusting the outside affairs to husband			
Wife’s jihad reward for house keeping			
Husband’s divine and worldly reward for helping his wife			
Husband and wife’s cooperation	Encouragement to marry with trust in God		
Encouraging the marriage of single people			
Trust in God’s providence in the financial field			
The necessity of following holy prophet tradition			
Receiving worship and charity reward			
Felicity of the parents by the birth of a child	Having offspring		
Fostering a righteous child as a reservoir for the hereafter			
calmness before sexual encounter	Preparation and contextualization	Affecting the sexual relationships	
Performing ablution and praying to benefit from His blessings			
Having intercourse at the end of the night			
Observing sexual hygiene			
Beautifying a woman before having sex			

Having a romantic relationship before sex	Request and Response		
Satisfying the sexual instinct based on couples' wish			
Revealing their satisfaction regarding sexual affair			
The effect of moderation in sexual relationships on health			
Observing eye chastity and hijab	Infidelity Prevention		
God's anger of impure eyes			
Mutual couple commitment			

SH; Spiritual Health

## RESULTS

A total of 145 primary codes were extracted, and after merging and removing duplicates, 139 confirmed codes were classified based on similarities and differences into six different categories as follows: 1) affecting the family management and 2) the sexual, 3) spiritual, 4) behavioral, 5) emotional, and 6) cognitive relationships. Considering the limitations in reporting the findings in this article, the data on the antecedents of SH “affecting the family management” and “sexual relationships” of Muslim couples were provided.

### Antecedents Of SH Affecting the Family Management

*1- Family boundaries and management:* Imam Sadiq says, “The man should inform his family of his arrival with the sound of his shoes and coughing” [9, 10]. Also, the Islam Prophet says about spouses taking advantage of each other in their private time and space: “Learn the crow how to hide during intercourse” [11]. Further, the holy Qur’an says about respecting boundaries, “Your children who have not reached puberty should ask you for permission to enter the house before the Fajr prayer, at midday when you take off your clothes, and after the Isha prayer. At other times, you do not commit any sin if you pass the boundaries of each other. When children mature, they should ask for permission just like others” [Al-Noor, 58-59]. Furthermore, according to Verse 18 of Surah Al-Nisa’, the family’s custody is the man’s responsibility. However, family members should cooperate in managing the family [12].

*2- Mutual and exclusive rights:* The Prophet said regarding couple’s rights, “Gabriel always emphasized the observance of women’s rights in such a way that I thought it was not permissible for the husband even to tell his wife the slightest thing to hurt her [13]. The wife either cannot fulfill God’s rights unless she fulfills her husband’s rights” [12, 14]. The couples’ mutual rights include kindness and mercy [Al-Rum, 21], enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong [Al-Taubah, 71], and forgiveness of the spouse’s mistakes [Al-Nisa, 128]. The husband’s rights are: wife’s submission [Al-Nisa, 34], preserving the husband’s secrets [Al-Baqarah, 187], and fidelity [Al-Fahrim, 3, 10]. The husband’s duties are: maintaining the foundation of the family by arbitration [Al-Nisa, 34-35], being generous in family finances [Al-Nisa, 128], not bothering or mocking his wife [Al-Baqarah, 187], observing justice [Al-Nisa, 3, 129], and preserving chastity [Al-Mo’menoon, 5-6, Al-Me’raj, 29-30].

*3- Planning:* The Prophet Mohammad says, “There is no wisdom like a plan” [14]. Imam Ali also says, “Good planning improves life affairs and bad planning is the cause of perishing” [14, 15]. It has been narrated from Imam Kazem, “Divide your time into four parts: praying, life affairs, talking with trusted individuals who tell your defects, and taking advantage of halal pleasures” [16]. Couples should pay attention to the planning principles (e.g., gradualism, consultation, foresight, prioritization, adherence to plan, and benefitting from each single moment) which are explained below:

Imam Ali says regarding gradualism, “A little continuous affair is better than a lot of boring affairs” [17]. Also, The Qur’an orders the Holy Prophet to consult with the people in planning to implement the decrees [Al-Omran, 159, [12]]. Besides, regarding foresight Imam Ali says, “The wisest people are the most farsighted ones toward the ultimate end of affairs” [15, 18]. Further, regarding right prioritization Imam Ali says, “Whoever engages in unimportant affairs destroys the more important ones” [12, 18]. More, regarding adherence to plan The Messenger of God says, “Every affair depends on its own time” [12]. Additionally, regarding benefitting from each single moment Qur’an says, “After fulfilling an important task, start another one immediately” [Al-Inshirah, 7].

*4- Cooperation and division of labor:* According to Imam Sadiq, “To solve the discussion between Imam Ali and Fatima, the Messenger, entrusted the household chores to Fatima and the outside affairs to Imam Ali” [12, 13]. The Prophet of Islam says, “Proper housekeeping is crucial for women and is regarded as equal to jihad in the way of God” [14, 16]. Further, The Prophet says regarding cooperation, “A man receives a divine reward for putting a morsel in his wife’s mouth” [11, 12, 19] and “Does not serve his family except for a man for whom God wants the good of this world and the afterlife” [15].

## **Sexual Relationships**

*1- Encouragement to marry with trust in God:* Qur’an says, “Marry off the free singles among you, as well as the righteous of your bondmen and bondwomen. If they are poor, Allah will enrich them out of His bounty” [Al-Noor, 32-33]. The Holy Prophet, as the highest role model of piety [20], says: “Whoever refrains from my tradition (marriage) is not my follower” [12]. The Islam Prophet also told his companions, “Marry because it would have the reward of charity for you” [9].

*2- Having offspring:* According to the Prophet, “Have children because they are a pleasure to the heart [14]; righteous children are flowers from heaven” [21]. In the Qur’an, we also have, “Send forth something good for yourselves (by bearing children)” [Al-Baqarah, 223].

*3- Preparation and contextualization:* Imam Ali says, “Sexual relationship should be conducted with calmness” [12]. Imam Baqir also says, “Perform ablution before intercourse” [11]. The Holy Prophet says, “During the first intercourse, pray and say: ‘God! Accumulate goodness and blessing between us [14]’”. Further, Imam Reza says, “Have intercourse at the end of the night because God made the night [Al-Namal, 86] and women [Al-Araf, 189] a source of peace [22], and it is more appropriate for having a wise child” [12, 23]. Regarding sexual hygiene, the hadiths have admonished couples from copulation with a full stomach [9, 15], bowel and bladder [23, 24]. Also, bathing is obligatory before intercourse for a wet-dream man [Al-Nisa, 43, [12, 13]], or a woman after her period [Al-Baqarah, 222, [11]]. Regarding the beautifying the wife The Prophet said: “A wife should use the best perfumes and clothes in her house” [9]. Imam Ali also says about romantic relationship, “At the time of intercourse with your wife, you should not act hastily. You should kiss her, and make love using words” [9, 25].

*4- Request and response:* Regarding sexual instinct The Qur’an says: “Your wives are your tilth; go, then, into your tilth as you wish” [Al-Baqarah, 223]. Further, Imam Sadiq says, “Wives should not be modest in showing their satisfaction in sexual relationships [26]. However, excess in the sexual affair is wrong; moderation in intercourse promotes human health and life” [9].

*5- Infidelity Prevention:* The Holy Prophet says, “Any married woman who fills her eyes with a look at non-mahram men makes God get furious. A man’s lustful look is also a poisonous arrow from the devil, causing long-lasting grief and regret” [9, 22]. Qur’an also says: “He is aware of (impure) eyes whose look betrays and are to satisfy sexual needs through astray” [Al-Noor, 91] and, “Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and not to reveal their adornments except what normally appears” [Al-Noor, 30-31].

## **DISCUSSION**

The antecedents of SH “affecting the family management” include four subcategories: “family boundaries and management”, “mutual and exclusive rights”, “planning”, and “cooperation and division of labor”.

Given the equality of the man and woman in creation [Al-Omran, 195, [7]], their complementary roles [Al-Baqarah, 187, [27]], accompanying their rights and duties [Al-Tahrim, 6, [11, 13, 14, 19, 21, 28, 29]], and counseling benefits [17, 30], Islam provides instructions to ensure the SH of the family by strengthening family management.

In Islam, spouses’ private boundaries are respected [7]. Therefore, couples with an Islamic lifestyle should have an exclusive space for being prepared for intercourse and a shared and protected space for sexual encounter [4, 24]. If there is no preparation, each of the couples may face indecent affairs [22]. Accordingly, the family structure is a type of delimitation protected against others’ interference and damages [10]. Further, the man’s

custody does not mean his superiority in the family [4]. In Islamic standards, the criterion of superiority is only piety [Al-Hujurat, 13], and couples should seek the right, and if the wife's opinion is sounder, they should accept it submissively [2, 9] to reinforce their relationship and empathy [31].

God sets duties and rights for men and women based on their features and abilities and makes them fulfill them without any disrespect [32]. Couples have rights toward each other, which account for the other's duties [26]. Some rights are mutual, and some are exclusive [9]. The family management can be a type of interaction in the couples' mutual and exclusive rights [7]. However, the Islamic family structure focused on forgiveness to achieve the prosperity of the family members [18], and the couples' rights are mentioned so that each of them should try to fulfill their duties, and express their expectations within the typical limits regarding the spouse's capabilities, and avoid imposing pressure on the spouse to reach one's rights [33]. Additionally, having a plan in life affairs is one of the keys to success in family management [20, 33]. It seems that Islam pays attention to planning for satisfying all the spiritual, physical, and psychological human's needs [20] to improve their different kinds of health [1, 2]. In setting goals, small, and achievable goals should be set so that family members do not feel frustrated [9]. Also, seeking help from others' opinions and experiences is a critical principle since it enriches planning and attracts the cooperation of others [18, 34]. Besides, making haste in decision-making and not using foresight, causing conflicts between couples, is one of the factors forbidden in religious texts [9, 12, 16, 18, 35]. Further, one of the planning skills is to arrange affairs based on their priority [18]. More, it is necessary to perform each affair at determined and due time [17]. Additionally, in the Islamic lifestyle, no opportunity for human development should be missed [9].

More, God has given couples responsibilities based on justice and their capacities [17, 23]. However, the division of labor does not hinder the husband and wife's cooperation [13]. Non-engagement in the household chores is a factor causing the wife to get tired and, consequently, dysfunction in the family [4]. Therefore, it is recommended that husband and wife help each other compassionately as much as possible [9, 13, 16, 32]. Shiite Imams, as role models for other Muslims, cooperated in household chores as well [11].

A review of hadiths, reveals five points: first, fulfilling the spouse's rights is equal to God's rights and necessary to gain His satisfaction. Second, the affectionate atmosphere governing the spouses' relationship should be so strong that the rights are fulfilled with no disrespect to the spouse. Third, with precise planning, it is possible to improve a couple's health and inhibit unilateral pressure on one of the spouses, which would lead him/her to feel injustice. Fourth, although couples should be familiar with each other's rights, what makes the family environment an intimate space is the couples' sacrifice. After giving up their rights, they give affection to their spouse and play an acceptable role model for similar behaviors on the other part. Fifth, in addition to the positive effect of family management on SH, it seems that SH also has a positive effect on family management and the divorce rate is lower in couples with high SH [30]. These spouses see God closer to them than their jugular vein [Qaf, 16], and by trying to fulfill their duties, and sacrifice their rights, in addition to pleasing God, creating security in the family [36], which according to Imam Ali, is the true faith [9].

The antecedents of SH "affecting sexual relationships" are five factors: "encouragement to marry with trust in God", "having offspring", "preparation and contextualization", "request and response", and "infidelity prevention".

The desire for the opposite sex is normal, and its suppression would impose irreparable damages [37]. Therefore, to satisfy this desire properly and meet the goals of marriage, the perspicuous religion of Islam has recommended instructions, the compliance of which is highly effective in the psychological and physical health and moral excellence of the couple and the child they may give birth to [12, 38]. Islam recommends obtaining human vivacity [9] and social safety through marriage and provides his support to those with bad economic conditions regarding marriage and having children [3, 36]. Further, similar to other aspects of life, the marriage would have the worship reward if it is done with divine intent [37].

Couples can see the fruit of their intercourse with the birth of children [33]. Success in fostering a righteous child is considered a reservoir for the hereafter and causes felicity to the parents [9, 11, 14, 15, 31]. This point is important due to the increasing the world's aging population and the necessity of child-bearing [4].

Preparation and contextualization are essential to satisfy the spouse's sexual desires [11, 22]. Therefore, it is emphasized that intercourse should be performed without any anxiety [13]. Accordingly, one should start a sexual relationship in the name of God to benefit from His blessings and bring compassion to the relationship [37]. It seems that having intercourse at the end of the night was recommended due to better preservation of the couples' privacy. Also, the differences between spouses in terms of sex must be considered [17, 32]. Men's sexual arousal is carried out faster and more frequently through vision [36]. Accordingly, women are recommended to make up before sexual relationships [37]. Women are often aroused late via hearing and touch [36]. So, Islamic scholars say to prepare a woman, considered a necessary action in Islam [31], the relationship should be filled with love feelings [27].

Sexual instinct gratification is proportional to an individual's needs [9]. However, spouses should act in the provision of this natural desire as such they respect each other's rights, reveal their satisfaction, and avoid harming their bodies [11, 13, 14].

To prevent extramarital relations, the perspicuous religion of Islam recommends observing eye chastity and hijab [9, 13, 19, 25, 27, 33, 35]. In Islam, both men and women are obliged to avoid the continuous, repeated, and improper looks to prevent infidelity [12, 25, 28]. Also, the observance of hijab and chastity in society paves the way for the prevention of social harms [11-13, 18, 19, 25, 27, 34].

A review of hadiths about sexual relationships shows fifth points: First, Muslims are advised to marry with divine intent to create loving, faithful, and satisfying sexual relations based on their mutual need and readiness and achieve physical and mental health. Second, the long-term results of this relationship include having a righteous child, as well as gaining afterlife rewards, and improving SH. Third, Islam obliged men to provide the basis for satisfying the needs of their wives through romantic relationships. Fourth, Islam pays attention to the couples' mutual commitment to infidelity prevention. Fifth, SH has a positive effect on sexual relationships, and couples with high SH, have better quality in their relations [3, 4, 36].

Some limitations in the present study were the limited number of search engines and excluding Sunnite texts. Further studies are suggested including the comparison of Shiite and Sunnite texts regarding couples' SH. Moreover, interventions and training programs can be used based on the obtained antecedents to promote the SH, family structure, and quality of sexual relationships.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Muslim couples, by respecting the mutual and exclusive rights and personal privacy of each other, can use participatory planning for division of family labors to improve family management and SH. Further, Muslim couples can have loving sexual relationships with trust in God and mutual commitment based on each other's needs and preparations, to have children, receive the divine reward, and improve the SH, which also affects the family structure and quality of sexual affairs.

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