Marital Beliefs, Marital Virtues, and Neighborhood Cohesion as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: A Multilevel Analysis

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Abstract: This study examines the role of marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion in marital satisfaction among 386 participants in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The study used a descriptive correlational study design. Participants were selected using multistage random sampling techniques, and data were collected using a questionnaire. Multilevel modeling was employed to analyze the data. Findings indicated that all marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion were positively and significantly associated with marital satisfaction. The findings from multilevel modeling showed that marital virtues and neighborhood cohesion significantly predicted marital satisfaction at both individual and neighborhood levels, whereas marital beliefs predicted marital satisfaction only at the individual level. Besides, marital virtues moderated the association between shared neighborhood cohesion and marital satisfaction, such that participants who reported lower marital virtues had a lower level of marital satisfaction when their neighbors experienced lower shared neighborhood cohesion. The interactive effect of shared marital virtues and marital beliefs can also influence marital satisfaction when participants reported low levels of marital belief and from a neighbor of fewer marital virtues; they tend to report low levels of marital satisfaction. The study concludes that the participants' positive beliefs about marriage, marital virtues, and cohesive relationships with their neighbors positively influence their marital satisfaction. Marriage practitioners, policymakers, and community workers might benefit from this study. Limitations and future directions are also discussed.

Keywords: Marital Beliefs, Marital Satisfaction, Cohesion, Virtues, Neighborhood Cohesion

1. Introduction

Marital satisfaction is an essential aspect of marriage that significantly impacts people's overall health and contributes to the well-being of individuals (Chapman & Guven, 2016) and families as a whole (Javanmard & Garegozlo, 2013). Defined as the overall subjective evaluation of the quality of one's marriage (Li & Fung, 2011, p. 246), many couples in modern times strive to achieve a satisfying marital relationship as one of their primary goals (Carroll, J. S. & Doherty, 2003). A healthy marital relationship has been linked to better quality of marriage (Li & Fung, 2011) and improved health outcomes (Robles et al., 2014), while marriages that experience dissatisfaction are more likely to end in divorce (Røsand et al., 2014).

Studies on marriage have identified various social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors related to marital satisfaction (Bradbury et al., 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2010). Despite past studies' emphasis on the negative aspects of marital relationships, there has been a growing interest in examining positive behaviors contributing to successful marriages (Fincham et al., 2007). Scholars have recently focused on identifying factors contributing to positive relationship behaviors (Braithwaite et al., 2011; Brandau-Brown & Ragsdale, 2008), including the importance of social support (Minnotte et al., 2008), personal character strengths (Dew & Bradford Wilcox, 2013), and positive beliefs about marriage (Willoughby, 2014) in promoting healthy marital relationships.

Despite abundant studies on marital relationships, research on marital satisfaction concerning marital beliefs (Willoughby, 2014), marriage virtues (Dew & Bradford Wilcox, 2013), and neighborhood cohesion (Mannon & Brooks, 2006; Minnotte et al., 2008) remains limited. Furthermore, while contextual factors like the marital environment can impact relationship maintenance (Karney & Bradbury, 2005), their influence on marital satisfaction has not been extensively studied. This limitation hinders our understanding of the complex nature of individual-level and contextual factors impacting marital satisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial to examine how marital virtues, beliefs, and neighborhood cohesion at various contextual levels (individuals and neighborhood) may contribute to marital satisfaction.

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2. Literature Review
2.1. Marital Beliefs and Marital Satisfaction

Marital beliefs play an influential role in determining the outcomes of relationships. A growing body of literature has highlighted the significant role of beliefs about marriage in shaping individuals' thoughts and actions concerning marital relationships (Helgeson, 1994; Willoughby & Belt, 2016). Marital beliefs refer to a collective belief system regarding marriage (Willoughby et al., 2013). There is a consensus in the literature that the meaning individuals attribute to marriage as an institution will have varying impacts on their lives. For instance, individuals' beliefs about marriage can affect their level of commitment and the amount of effort they invest in their relationships (Willoughby, 2014).

Research has found a strong correlation between beliefs about marriage and the quality of marital relationships. Positive beliefs regarding marriage are linked to greater levels of relationship satisfaction and well-being (Willoughby, 2014). Conversely, negative beliefs about marriage can lead to marital instability and dissatisfaction (Willoughby & Belt, 2016). Additionally, couples who report positive beliefs about marriage are better equipped to handle challenges in their relationship. For instance, a strong belief in the permanence of marriage predisposes individuals to work harder to improve their relationship instead of considering divorce (Amato & Booth, 1997). Couples who do not share similar beliefs about the division of household responsibilities are more likely to end up divorced (Hohmann-Marriott, 2006).

Despite its crucial role in enhancing healthy marital relationships, exercising positive beliefs about marriage faces many challenges. The social and cultural changes in modern marriage, such as the heightened emphasis on personal fulfillment (Cherlin, 2010) and evolving gender role expectations (Dew & Wilcox, 2011), have led to conflicts with traditional beliefs and expectations surrounding marriage. These changes can lead to dissatisfaction within a marriage.

Although positive beliefs about marriage are related to better marital functioning, their effect on marital satisfaction has not been extensively studied (Willoughby, 2014; Willoughby & Belt, 2016). Furthermore, contextual factors, such as the community and neighbors in which individuals reside, are likely to influence their beliefs about marriage (Barr & Simons, 2016). Studying beliefs about marriage at various contextual levels is crucial for understanding how these factors influence marital behaviors and outcomes. However, the relationship between these constructs has been underexplored, which limits our understanding of the complex interaction among these variables in different contexts. Moreover, the current research on the relationship between marital beliefs and marital relationships has primarily focused on Western culture (Willoughby, 2014; Willoughby & Belt, 2016). These findings indicate the necessity for further research that explores these issues in various cultural contexts. Given Ethiopia's distinctive culture and the limited research available, it is crucial to investigate the impact of marital beliefs on marital satisfaction.

2.2. Marital Virtues and Marital Satisfaction

Marital virtues play a crucial role in enhancing healthy marital relationships. Research has shown that individuals and relational virtues present in interpersonal relationships can enhance marital well-being (Lopez & Snyder, 2011). Virtues refer to "the qualities of character that enable individuals to be good people, to create good relationships, and to live a worthy life" (Fowers, 2008, p. 3). Cultivating marital virtues between couples will promote better relationship maintenance behaviors, which in turn leads to healthier relationships. Specifically, marital virtues facilitate healthy relationships by promoting the qualities of forgiveness, gratitude, humility, and kindness (Pareek & Jain, 2018), as well as communication and relationship adjustment (Veldorale-Brogan et al., 2010). Virtuous individuals are also better equipped with the skills to approach conflicts and disagreements constructively (Lopez & Snyder, 2011).

Marital virtues are related to marital satisfaction. For instance, studies suggest that marital virtues such as forgiveness, willingness to sacrifice (Fincham et al., 2007), and generosity (Dew & Bradford Wilcox, 2013) are associated with high marital satisfaction and low marital conflict. However, some social and cultural factors that promote individualism and personal gratification (Cherlin, 2010), along with changes in gender roles and expectations (Dew & Wilcox, 2011), may pose challenges in cultivating virtues that promote healthy marital relationships. Although some studies have examined the relationship between marital virtues and marital satisfaction (Dew & Bradford Wilcox, 2013; Fincham et al., 2007), research in this area is still limited. Additionally, research suggests that contextual factors such as neighborhood and community (McFarland et al., 2012) and culture (van Oudenhoven et al., 2014) play a significant role in shaping virtuous behavior. However, there is a lack of research on how marital virtues and marital satisfaction relate to each other in different cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western cultures like Ethiopia.

2.3. Neighborhood Cohesion and Marital Satisfaction

Neighborhood cohesion significantly impacts marital outcomes. Research suggests that neighborhood quality can impact access to social support, which, in turn, affects marriage outcomes (Minnotte et al., 2008). For instance, a study by Völker and Flap (2007) showed that neighbors who engage in supportive behaviors, such as taking care of one another's children, play a crucial role in minimizing the burden of undergoing stressful life events. A supportive neighborhood context can help to strengthen parent-child relations and alleviate marital-related distress

(Minnotte et al., 2008). Neighbors can provide others with various types of social capital, including formal and informal support. Neighborhood cohesion refers to the individuals' overall assessment and perceptions of a sense of community and interaction with their neighbors (Buckner, 1988).

Research also suggests that a supportive neighborhood plays a significant role in enhancing marital satisfaction. Neighborhood qualities such as social support and cohesion are associated with high marital satisfaction (Mannon & Brooks, 2006; Minnotte et al., 2008) and less marital conflict (Madigan et al., 2016). Neighbors' access to social capital, such as a strong sense of connectedness and mutual support, may help to alleviate marital discord (Madigan et al., 2016). However, such relevant resources for marital relationships are experiencing tremendous challenges due to the increasing demands of work and family conflict (Gareis et al., 2009) and the use of technology (Hampton et al., 2011). While research on contextual factors such as neighborhood cohesion and marital relationships has made some progress, there remains a scarcity of research that needs to be addressed. Furthermore, although cultural differences have been shown to influence social support-seeking behaviors (Zheng et al., 2021), existing studies on the role of neighborhood cohesion on marital satisfaction are mainly confined to Western cultures. Thus, studying neighborhood cohesion in relation to marital satisfaction is indispensable in non-Western cultures, particularly in Ethiopia, due to the unique culture and context of the country.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The vulnerability-stress-adaptation (VSA) model suggests that how individuals respond to stressors depends on their individual characteristics, the nature of the stressor, and the availability of social support (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In the context of marital relationships, it proposes that individuals' responses to stressors are influenced by their beliefs about marriage, personal strengths, and the cohesion of their neighborhood. Marital beliefs and virtues are unique characteristics that shape individuals' responses to stressors within their relationships. For example, individuals holding strong beliefs about marital permanence may be more resilient in the face of stressors such as conflict (Amato & Booth, 1997). Similarly, individuals who possess various virtues may be better able to adapt to stressors and maintain marital relationships (Pareek & Jain, 2018). Neighborhood context as an external factor may affect marital satisfaction. Living in a cohesive and supportive neighborhood may reduce the effect of stressors on marital relationships (Madigan et al., 2016). Thus, the VSA model was used as a theoretical framework to understand the role of marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion in predicting marital satisfaction.

2.5. The Present Study

In the present study, we aim to investigate the role of marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion as predictors of marital satisfaction using a multilevel analysis approach. The study utilized a sample of married individuals from diverse neighborhoods. We expected that marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion would be significant predictors of marital satisfaction at the individual and neighborhood levels. Accordingly, we pursue answers to the following questions in this article: (a) Does clustering of individuals within neighborhoods account for a substantial portion of the variance in marital satisfaction? (b) Are individual-level factors predictive of marital satisfaction? (c) Are neighborhood (shared variables) level factors predictive of marital satisfaction? (d) Do neighborhood-level factors *(Shared predictors)* moderate the relationship between individual-level factors and marital satisfaction?

3.   Methodology
3.1. Sample

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design to investigate predictors of marital satisfaction. The study population comprised married public servants of Addis Ababa city. A total of 386 participants were drawn from 50 neighborhoods in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Participants were recruited through multi-stage sampling techniques to obtain a representative sample of individuals nested within neighborhoods. To be eligible for the study, individuals had to be married for at least one year and living together. Of the study participants, the majority were female (N = 210; 54.4%) and highly educated, with most participants (N = 122; 31.6%) holding a B.A./B.Sc. degree, followed by M.A. and above degree holders (N = 120; 31.1%). The mean age of the participants was 34 years (SD = 7.36). The mean marriage age was 25.61 years (SD = 4.62), and the mean duration of marriage was 8.14 years (SD = 6.98). Additionally, participants had an average of 1.86 children and a monthly income of 8439.48 ETB (SD = 7318.79).

3.2. Procedures

We translated the items initially written in English into the Amharic language using the translation and cross-cultural adaptation guidelines of Beaton et al. (2000). All participants gave their permission to participate in the study before data collection. The survey was administered individually to each partner in sealed envelopes. Participants were instructed to complete the survey independently, without consulting their partner, and return it in a sealed envelope within a week. The Ethical Approval Committee of the School of Psychology of Addis Ababa University approved the study protocol.

3.3. Measures

Marital satisfaction was measured using the 3-item scale adapted from the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) (Schumm et al., 1986). Items of KMSS are globally worded and relatively homogeneous. KMSS is the best overall measure of relationship satisfaction with high-reliability scores across studies (Graham et al., 2011). In addition to its acceptable convergent validity (Omani-Samani et al., 2018), KMSS is also preferable due to its unidimensional nature and good construct validity (Schumm et al., 2001). The items assessed participants' satisfaction with their relationship (e.g., marriage, spouse) and were scored on a 7-point scale (ranging from 1= Extremely Dissatisfied to 7 = Extremely Satisfied). An example item is, "How satisfied are you with your marriage?" The scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .95 (Graham et al., 2011). Scores could range from 3 to 21, with higher scores indicating higher marital satisfaction.

Neighborhood Cohesion was measured using 18 items adapted from the Neighborhood Cohesion Instrument (NCI) (Buckner, 1988). Items assess participants' perceptions of their neighborhood's support and cohesion and are scored on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. A sample item is, "My neighbors do favors for each other." The reported internal consistency reliability was .95. High scores indicate a high level of neighborhood cohesion. In addition to its good test-retest stability at the individual level, NCI also demonstrates good discriminatory power and criterion-related validity at the neighborhood level (Buckner, 1988).

Marital Beliefs were measured using 13 items adapted from the Marital Belief Scale (MBS) (Hall, 2006). The items assess beliefs about aspects of marital relationships, such as role sharing and marital permanence. Participants rated each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. An example item is, "I believe marriage is a sacred union that should be taken very seriously." In this study, the internal consistency reliability was .79. Higher scores indicate stronger beliefs in marital relationships.

Marital Virtues were measured using 16 items adapted from the Marital Virtue Profile (MVP) (Fawcett et al., 2013). The items assess virtues such as generosity, forgiveness, and sacrifice in the context of marital relationships. MVP is a reliable measure of marital virtues (Fawcett et al., 2013). Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0= Never to 3= Always. An example item is, "I can easily forgive my partner's mistakes." In this study, the internal consistency reliability was .85. Higher scores correspond with greater marital virtue.

3.4. Control Variables

We also included some background characteristics in the analyses because these variables may potentially impact the relationships of variables with the outcome variable. Accordingly, age, gender, marital age, duration of marriage, level of education, number of children, and monthly income level were added as control variables.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

Face and content validities were ensured before data collection with the help of experts from different disciplines. The reliability of the instruments was also checked using Cronbach's Alpha for each scale. The reliability estimates for marital beliefs, marital virtues, neighborhood cohesion, and marital satisfaction were .79, .85, .94, and .95, respectively, indicating good scale reliability.

3.6. Data Aggregation

For analysis at the neighborhood level, we aggregated individual-level factors. To provide sufficient evidence for the appropriateness of data aggregation, we evaluated both within-group agreement and between-group variability (Bliese, 2000). To calculate the adequacy of within-group agreement (rwg), values of rwg > .70 were used as criteria (Brown & Hauenstein, 2005). Furthermore, we calculated the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC)(1) and ICC(2) to assess within-group consistency and between-group variability, respectively, to further evaluate the appropriateness of aggregation (Bliese, 2000). For satisfactory between-group variability, ICC(1) is expected to be in the range of .05 to .25, and ICC(2) is expected to be above .70 (Bliese, 2000). The ICC(1) coefficient represents the proportion of variance in individual-level ratings that is due to group variability, while the ICC(2) coefficient represents the reliability of group-level means, indicating the extent to which means differ between groups (Bliese, 2000).

3.7. Aggregating Variables at Neighborhood Level

To create measures at the neighborhood level, we aggregated the individual participants' responses for marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion from each neighborhood. For the 50 neighborhoods (N = 386), the mean rwgs were .78 for marital beliefs (ranging from .75 to .81), .78 for marital virtues (ranging from .74 to .81), and .91 for neighborhood cohesion (ranging from .90 to .92). The mean rwgs for marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion were all greater than 0.70 (Brown & Hauenstein, 2005), justifying a reasonable level of agreement. In addition, the ICC(1) of .23 for marital beliefs (F = 2.14, p < .01), .18 for marital virtues (F = 9.50, p < .001), and .38 for neighborhood cohesion (F = 2.59, p < .001). Regarding ICC(2), the coefficients of 0.80, 0.78, and 0.91 represent marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion, respectively. Overall, the mean rwg values, ICC(1), F-values, and ICC(2) provide sufficient justification for aggregating individual-level measures of marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion. In this study, neighborhood-level variables (shared predictors) are derived by aggregating individual responses.

3.8. Analysis

Preliminary analyses were used to check the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Data analysis was carried out using multilevel modeling. Multilevel modeling was employed due to the nature of the data (individuals nested within neighborhoods) and the research questions (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). To answer the research questions, we tested models (Model 1- Model 5) successively. First, an unconditional model with no covariates was estimated to partition the variance across the two levels and estimate the intraclass correlation. Second, a model with random intercepts and covariates at Level 1 (Model 2) and Level 2 (Model 4) was fit to study the effect of these covariates on marital satisfaction separately to address research questions 2 and 4. Third, a random slope (Model 3) included Level 1 covariates to test research question 3. Finally, cross-level interactions (Model 5) analysis was used to answer research question 5. The variables were centered based on Enders and Tofighi's (2007) recommendations. The models were estimated based on the restricted maximum likelihood method. The overall fit of the models was evaluated based on an examination of the Bayesian and Akaike information criteria (Akaike, 1974) and the likelihood ratio test (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). SPSS 26 statistical software was used for data analysis.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researchers' university. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was ensured throughout the study. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence.

4. Analysis
4.1. Correlational Analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of variables. Participants' marital satisfaction was positively correlated with marital beliefs ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), marital virtues ($r = .53$, $p < .01$), and neighborhood cohesion ($r = .34$, $p < .01$). In addition, there was a positive relationship between reports of neighborhood cohesion with marital virtues ($r = .25$, $p < .01$) and marital beliefs ($r = .21$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, there was a positive relationship between marital virtues and marital beliefs ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). Correlations ranged from fairly substantial to modest among these variables. Lastly, background variables such as age, marital duration, and number of children were positively related to marital satisfaction, marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion.

4.2. Multilevel Analysis
4.2.1. Unconditional Model (Model 1)

The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) measures the proportion of total variance in marital satisfaction that can be attributed to differences between neighborhoods. To assess the ICC, we conducted an analysis of variance for the two levels (individuals and neighborhoods) by fitting an unconditional model (without covariates). The ICC value was .18. Using the Wald test to assess the significance of neighborhood variances in the unconditional model, we found that variance between neighborhoods was significant for the outcome variable ($\tau 00 = 1.68$, $p < .01$, one-tailed), as shown in Model 1 of Table 2. These findings highlight the importance of considering variation at the neighborhood level.

4.2.2. Random Intercept Models

The random intercept models examined whether individual- and neighborhood-level predictors were positively related to marital satisfaction after controlling for background variables. Results indicated that all main individual-level predictors were significantly related to marital satisfaction. Marital virtues, neighborhood cohesion, and marital beliefs predicted marital satisfaction ($\gamma = .21$, $.03$ [$ps < .01$], and $.04$ [$p < .05$], respectively) (see Table 2 in Model 2). To address research question 2, we estimated separate random intercept models for marital satisfaction. After controlling for background variables, we found two contextual effects: shared marital virtues and shared neighborhood cohesion significantly predicted marital satisfaction ($\gamma = .29$ [$p < .05$] and $.17$ [$p < .01$], respectively) (see Table 2 in Model 4).

4.2.3. Random Slope Models

We estimated separate random slope models for marital satisfaction to address research question 4. From the random slope analysis, marital virtues ($\tau 11 = .01$, $p < .01$) and neighborhood cohesion ($\tau 11 = .00$, $p < .01$) were statistically significant, indicating that the relationship between marital satisfaction with marital virtues and neighborhood cohesion differed across neighborhoods. Additionally, significant negative covariance estimates between intercepts and slopes ($\tau 01 = -.12$, and $-.06$, $ps < .01$, respectively) suggested that in neighborhoods with low average marital satisfaction, marital virtues and neighborhood cohesion had a weaker relationship with marital satisfaction than in neighborhoods with high average marital satisfaction (see Table 2 in Model 3).

4.2.4. Cross-Level Interaction Model

To answer the final research question, we allowed the slopes for cross-level relationships to vary and fixed the others. The MLM results of Model 5 in Table 2 showed that marital beliefs moderated the relationship between

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for all variables (N=386)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Age	34.01	7.36	-										
Sex	.54	.49	-.20**	-									
Educational level	4.15	1.47	.04	-.14**	-								
Marriage age	25.61	4.62	.31**	-.40**	-.00	-							
Duration of marriage	8.14	6.98	.80**	.03	-.06	-.20**	-						
Number of children	1.86	1.26	.63**	.02	-.03	-.09	.73**	-					
Income	8439.48	7318.79	.18**	-.22**	.36**	.24**	.08	.08	-				
Marital beliefs	54.28	6.99	.14**	.03	.02	-.02	.12*	.11*	.02	-			
Marital virtues	38.20	6.19	.17**	.00	.10*	-.09	.23**	.14**	.04	.33**	-		
Neighborhood cohesion	70.13	13.18	.11*	-.04	.03	-.08	.16**	.119*	.01	.21**	.25**	-	
Marital satisfaction	18.37	3.01	.13*	.09	-.04	-.11*	.20**	.18**	-.05	.30**	.53**	.34**	-

Note. M= mean, SD= standard deviation, *p < .05.   **p< .01 (two-tailed)

Table 2: Multilevel results for marital satisfaction (N=386)

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	γ	SE	γ	SE	γ	SE	γ	SE	γ	SE
fixed effect										
Individual level predictors										
Intercept	18.36**	.25	18.43**	.25	18.41**	.25	18.33**	.19	18.32**	.19
Marital beliefs			.04*	.01	.03	.01	.04*	.01	.04*	.01
Relational virtues			.21**	.02	.20**	.02	.21**	.02	.19**	.02
Neighborhood cohesion			.03**	.00	.03**	.00	.03**	.00	.03**	.00
Group-level predictors										
SMB							.02	.08	.02	.08
SMV							.29*	.11	.28*	.11
SNC							.17**	.06	.17**	.06
Cross-level moderation										
SMV * Marital beliefs									-.02**	.00
SNC * Relational virtues									-.01**	.00
Random effects										
Residual （σ^2）	7.47**	56	4.88**	.37	4.36**	.35	4.86**	.37	4.26**	.34
Intercept variance $\tau00$	1.68**	58	1.93**	.57	2.03**	.58	.85*	.37	.92**	.37
Slope for MV($\tau11$)					.01*	.00				
Covariance for MV($\tau01$)					-.12*	.05				
Slope for NC($\tau11$)					.00*	.00				
Covariance for NC($\tau01$)					-.06*	.02				

ICC	.18				
Model fit statistics					
-2 Log-likelihood	1916.13	1818.93**	1798.50**	1784.56**	1767.37**
AIC	1920.13	1822.931	1806.50	1788.56	1773.37
BIC	1928.04	1830.785	1822.21	1796.40	1785.11
Number of parameters	3	13	15	16	19
PseudoR^2 Level 1	.34				
Level 2	.14				

Note: SNC = Shared neighborhood cohesion; SMV = Shared marital virtues; SMB = Shared marital beliefs; NC= Neighborhood cohesion; MV= marital virtues; AIC= Akaike information criterion; BIC=Bayesian Information Criterion; ICC= intraclass correlation; * $p < 0.05$, and ** $p < 0.01$.
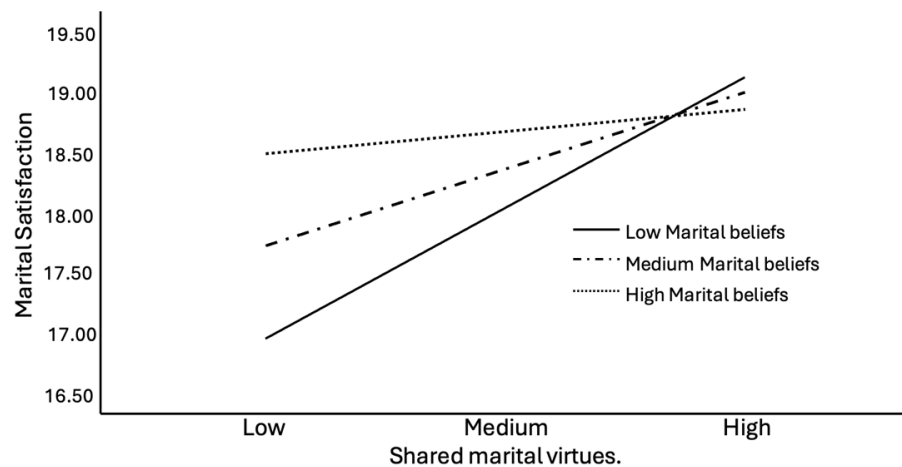
Figure 1: Plot of interaction between shared marital virtues and marital beliefs predicting marital satisfaction
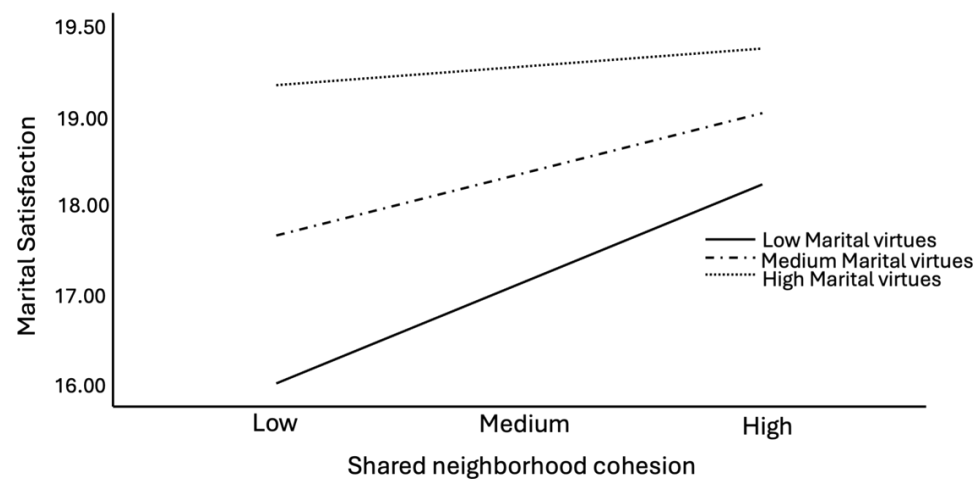
Figure 2: Plot of interaction between shared neighborhood cohesion and marital virtues predicting marital satisfaction

shared marital virtues and marital satisfaction (γ = -.02, p < .01), in which participants reported a lower level of marital satisfaction when they perceived low levels of shared marital virtues and marital beliefs. Simple slope analyses for significant interactions, based on Preacher et al. (2006), revealed that at low and medium levels of marital beliefs, levels of marital beliefs, shared marital virtues were positively and significantly related to marital satisfaction levels of marital beliefs, shared marital virtues were positively and significantly related to marital satisfaction (simple slopes at low (-1SD) and medium (mean) levels of marital beliefs, γ = .56, and .36, p < .01, respectively). However, at a high level of marital beliefs, the relationship was not significant (simple slope at high (+1SD) level of marital beliefs, γ = .15, p > .01).

Furthermore, marital virtues played a moderating role in the relationship between shared neighborhood cohesion and marital satisfaction (γ = -.01, p < .01; see Fig 2). Specifically, individuals who reported low levels of shared neighborhood cohesion and marital virtues also reported lower levels of marital satisfaction. We plotted the interaction using the procedures suggested by Preacher et al. (2006). Figure 2 plots the moderating impact of marital virtues on the relationship between shared neighborhood cohesion and marital satisfaction. The study found that when participants had low or medium levels of marital virtues, there was a significant and positive relationship between shared neighborhood cohesion and marital satisfaction (simple slopes at low (-1SD) and medium (mean) levels of marital virtues, γ = .27 and .15, p < .01, respectively). However, when participants perceived high levels of marital virtues (+1SD), the relationship was not significant (simple slope at high level of marital virtues, γ = .03, p > .01).

4.2.5. Model Fit

Finally, we calculated the "proportional reduction in variance" (PRV) based on Raudenbush and Bryk (2002). The proportional reduction in variance was about 35% for Level 1 and 15% for Level 2, respectively. Moreover, the model fit for each model was assessed and compared to the fit in the previous model. As shown in Table 2 for the outcome variable, the models (1-5) showed lower AIC and BIC information criteria (indicating a better fit) and a significant difference in the likelihood ratio test (p < .01) compared to their respective previous models.

5. Discussion

Our findings confirm that individual-level factors, such as beliefs about marriage, virtues related to marriage, and neighborhood cohesion, are positive predictors of marital satisfaction, previously established by other studies. Consistent with the present study, Willoughby (2014) found that participants holding strong beliefs in marriage reported higher levels of marital satisfaction. When individuals hold positive beliefs about marriage, they tend to have strong convictions about the institution's permanence and place a high value on it. In turn, these are associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. Individuals who value marriage are typically motivated to invest more in their relationships. Prior research has also supported the idea that positive beliefs about marriage contribute to higher levels of commitment and relationship effort (Willoughby, 2014). Amato and Booth (1997) found that individuals who believe that marriage is permanent are more likely to work on improving their relationships. This suggests that people's beliefs about marriage can influence their relationship behaviors and help partners work through differences and address problems between them.

Similarly, scholars have linked beliefs such as marital permanence and gender role-sharing with higher levels of marital happiness (Amato et al., 2003; Stevens et al., 2001) and high-quality marriages (Masarik et al., 2012). These results may help explain the previously observed correlation between beliefs about marriage and marital satisfaction. In the current study, individuals holding positive beliefs about marriage reported higher levels of marital satisfaction. In addition to empirical reasons, this finding is significant for theoretical reasons. For instance, the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) theory (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) has examined how stable characteristics, such as beliefs about marriage, may influence marital behaviors. Our findings support the explanation that positive beliefs about marriage can help individuals adapt to challenging situations.

Regarding the relationship between marital virtues and marital satisfaction, our findings align with the notion that virtuous individuals are likely to be more satisfied with their marriage. Previous research, such as that by Fincham et al. (2007), has positively linked marital virtues like forgiveness and willingness to sacrifice to marital satisfaction. Supporting our findings, Dew and Bradford Wilcox (2013) associated marital virtues such as generosity and kindness with higher levels of marital satisfaction. Previous studies have also suggested that marital virtues promote better relationship behaviors, such as communication (Veldorale-Brogan et al., 2010) and constructively approaching conflicts (Lopez & Snyder, 2011). Cultivating virtues like forgiveness, gratitude, and kindness is believed to foster healthy relationships (Pareek & Jain, 2018), as these behaviors fill partners with positive feelings such as self-worth and being loved. By fostering virtuous behavior, one may create a conducive marital context. In line with VSA theory (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), this finding identifies marital virtues as an essential personal resource for adapting to various marital problems because cultivating these virtues increases compassion and understanding among partners.

The other individual-level predictor of marital satisfaction was neighborhood cohesion. Consistent with this study, prior research has found a positive relationship between neighborhood cohesion and marital satisfaction

(Mannon & Brooks, 2006; Minnotte et al., 2008). It has been suggested that neighborly support can enhance access to social support, affecting marital outcomes (Minnotte et al., 2008). In modern marriages, couples may benefit more from neighborhood support due to work- and childcare-related stress. Madigan et al. (2016), who studied the moderating role of neighborhood collective efficacy on the association between maternal adverse childhood experiences and marital conflict, reported a positive contribution of connectedness and mutual support among neighbors in overcoming marriage-related challenges. Neighbors involved in childcare for one another tend to experience less marital stress (Völker & Flap, 2007). Consistent with VSA theory (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), this finding suggests that neighborhood cohesion is a crucial social capital in adapting to marital problems. Overall, it is evident that marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion are vital for a satisfying marriage.

Our study also found that individuals living in neighborhoods with more positive beliefs about marriage are more likely to experience marital satisfaction. This is consistent with previous research, such as that conducted by Yabiku (2006), which found a correlation between neighbors' beliefs about marriage and marriage rates. Barr and Simons (2016) also discovered that communities and neighborhoods impact individuals' beliefs about marriage. A plausible explanation is that neighbors can positively impact marital relationships by serving as role models and providing guidance on the benefits of being married. For instance, neighbors often discuss their marriage experiences with others, exchange advice, and offer support to one another.

Regarding marital virtues at the neighborhood level, our findings indicate that neighbors' marital virtues significantly shape marital satisfaction. Initiatives at the neighborhood level that foster forgiveness, generosity, and sacrifice may help individuals feel more satisfied with their marriage. McFarland et al. (2012) noted the important role of neighbors in shaping virtuous behavior. It is believed that observing positive qualities in neighbors can lead to emulation and reproduction of those qualities. However, the relationship between marital virtues and marital satisfaction within the neighborhood context remains an area for further study. Future research could focus on how the neighborhood context equips couples with marital virtues and contributes to marital satisfaction.

In addition, our results are in line with past research showing that neighborhood factors, such as access to social support (Minnotte et al., 2008) and supportive behavior among neighbors (Völker et al., 2007), can influence marital relationships. The neighborhood context provides essential social capital for those in marital relationships. Those who perceive their neighborhood as helpful and cohesive are better equipped to deal with marital difficulties (Hook, 2004; Voydanoff, 2001), whereas a lack of cooperation among neighbors can lead to low marital satisfaction (Funk, 2009). Generally, neighbors can affect marital relationships through information sharing and social modeling, as their experiences can influence others in the vicinity. When individuals observe positive life experiences from someone in their neighborhood, they are likely to emulate and apply them to their lives (Macy & Flache, 1995). These findings reinforce the notion that factors such as neighborhood context can contribute to marital satisfaction.

The influence of shared marital virtues on marital satisfaction was moderated by marital beliefs, indicating that those reporting low marital beliefs tend to be less satisfied with their marriage due to the diminished effect of shared marital virtues. We also found that marital virtues moderated the association between marital satisfaction and shared neighborhood cohesion. This underscores the impact of low shared neighborhood cohesion on marital satisfaction among participants who perceived low levels of marital virtues. Participants with lower virtuous dispositions reported decreased marital satisfaction when experiencing low shared neighborhood cohesion. While further research is needed to fully understand these relationships, findings from this study underscore the moderating role of marital beliefs and marital virtues in predicting marital satisfaction.

6. Limitations and Future Recommendations

This study has limitations, the primary one being its reliance on self-reported data, which can introduce bias. Future research should utilize diverse data collection methods to address this concern. Additionally, the study's generalizability is limited as it evaluates marital satisfaction solely within a sample from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Replicating this study in different sociocultural contexts is recommended to confirm if the findings are consistent across various settings.

7. Implications

Despite its limitations, our findings provide valuable insights for researchers and practitioners focused on marital relationships. The positive influence of marital beliefs could inform marriage practitioners to incorporate couples' beliefs about marriage into their interventions and education programs. Anderson et al. (2010) highlighted the beneficial impact of marital beliefs on enhancing marital satisfaction. Thus, counselors and social workers could find this study's findings useful. Additionally, our results emphasize the importance of exhibiting virtuous behavior to improve marital functioning. These findings can guide marriage practitioners to prioritize fostering marital virtues to strengthen and enrich marital bonds. Psychosocial interventions that encourage forgiveness and appreciation for marriage as an institution can lead to better understanding among partners. Butler et al. (2002) underscored the positive role of forgiveness in marital therapy. Cultivating such behaviors can replace negative emotions with positive ones, offering academic and practical applications in marital therapy. Finally, our study shows that a satisfying marital relationship depends not only on positive interpersonal interactions among partners but also on the broader social context. Policymakers and community workers can use these insights to strengthen

neighborhood ties, which are vital for promoting healthy family dynamics. Strengthening community bonds can assist couples in sharing marriage experiences and finding support within their locality. Religious leaders, respected elders, and social workers could leverage this study's findings in their community engagement efforts.

8. Conclusion

Numerous studies have examined various individual and contextual factors influencing marital satisfaction, but few have explored the impact of marital beliefs, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion. This study aimed to address these gaps using a cross-sectional design. It demonstrated that positive beliefs about marriage, marital virtues, and neighborhood cohesion are influential at both individual and neighborhood levels, positively affecting marital satisfaction. These qualities enable individuals to maintain an optimistic view of marriage and enhance their personal and social capital. Developing virtues and fostering emotional and social connections with neighbors can improve adaptability to marital challenges, leading to more fulfilling relationships. The current findings have substantial implications for practitioners, policymakers, and community workers. Interventions aimed at strengthening marriages should not overlook the importance of the neighborhood context.

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