

Research Paper



The Relationship Between Certainty in Mentalization and Marital Intimacy with the Mediating Role of Emotional Co-regulation

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Abstract

Introduction and Objective: The quality of marital relationships plays a crucial role in the psychological well-being and life satisfaction of couples. Previous research has indicated that mentalization and emotional co-regulation can enhance marital intimacy. The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of certainty in mentalization on marital intimacy and the mediating role of emotional co-regulation in this process.

Research Methodology: This applied research adopts a descriptive-correlational design. The statistical population consisted of 250 couples residing in Tehran with at least two years of marital life. Sampling was conducted using purposive and convenience methods. Data collection instruments included the Certainty About Mental States Questionnaire (CAMSQ), the Marital Intimacy Questionnaire, and the Emotional Co-Regulation Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and structural equation modeling based on partial least squares (PLS-SEM). The constructs' validity and reliability were assessed through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity.

Findings: Structural analysis revealed that mentalization certainty has a significant and positive direct effect on marital intimacy ($p < 0.001$), accounting for 53% of the variance in marital intimacy through the model's constructs. Additionally, mentalization exhibits a strong and positive effect on emotional co-regulation ($p < 0.001$), which, in turn, has a significant and positive effect on marital intimacy ($p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of mentalization on marital intimacy through emotional co-regulation was also significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the mediating role of this construct.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that mentalization and emotional co-regulation play a pivotal role in enhancing marital intimacy. Improving couples' mentalization abilities and emotional co-regulation skills can significantly enhance the quality of marital relationships. Therefore, incorporating cognitive and emotional constructs into couple education and psychotherapy programs is essential.

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Introduction

Numerous studies have demonstrated that marriage contributes to improved individual health; however, it has been established that factors beyond marriage itself play a significant role in this regard (Dehghani Dolatabadi et al., 2025; Lee & Han, 2023; Tatangelo et al., 2017). Among these, marital intimacy is a critical factor that can enhance marital satisfaction and psychological well-being (Aghamiri & Vaziri, 2019). Intimate and stable marital relationships are considered among the most fundamental pillars of mental health, life satisfaction, and the quality of individual and social functioning (Robson et al., 2018). Intimacy, broadly defined, refers to the experience or feeling of closeness in an interpersonal relationship and a sense of belonging to others (Faridmarandi & Kumasi, 2025). Intimacy is categorized into various types, including psychological, emotional, cognitive, physical, sexual, communicative, social, recreational, aesthetic, intellectual, spiritual, experiential, temporal, and overall intimacy (Moniruzzaman, 2017; Kardan-Souraki et al., 2015).

However, maintaining intimacy in marital relationships, particularly under stressful conditions, requires specific interpersonal and emotional skills (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2015). One such skill is mentalization. Mentalization, or reflective functioning, is the capacity to recognize and interpret mental states (such as desires, needs, emotions, reasons, and beliefs) in oneself and others (Kober et al., 2019). In other words, mentalization is a psychological ability to understand the mental states of oneself or others, which underpins observable behavior (Bateman & Fonagy, 2010). Ultimately, mentalization can be regarded as a form of mental activity rooted in imagination, enabling individuals to comprehend and interpret human behavior in terms of intentional mental states (such as needs, desires, emotions, beliefs, and goals) (Fonagy et al., 2018). In this regard, a study by Matin et al. (2025) indicates that mentalization, or the ability to understand and interpret one's own and others' mental states, plays a fundamental role in the quality of marital relationships and the intimacy of couples. Additionally, another study by Matin and Etemadi (2025) suggests that mentalization can be beneficial for close relationships. Furthermore, research by Dimaggio (2020) revealed that mentalization and interpersonal emotion regulation are associated with marital satisfaction.

Alongside mentalization, both individual emotion regulation and co-regulation are considered among the most critical psychological processes in sustaining marital relationships (Sa'ami et al., 2019; Horn et al., 2023). Emotion regulation is defined as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 2012). Regulation can be introduced at any stage of the emotional process, either before or after an emotional response occurs. It distinguishes between anticipatory strategies and strategies related to the emotional response itself (Johnston et al., 2025). Effective emotion regulation is a transdiagnostic process that encompasses various forms of psychosocial distress and has been shown to reduce a range of psychological problems, thereby improving quality of life (Aldao et al., 2010). Conversely, co-regulation refers to social interaction, necessitating the conceptualization of relational processes to better understand what occurs during this type of interpersonal emotion co-regulation (Horn et al., 2023). In this context, a socio-emotional pathway for emotion regulation has been proposed, reflecting a truly interpersonal process that involves establishing psychological intimacy and leading to a more positive emotional state (Horn et al., 2018; Debrot et al., 2013). Thus, it can be argued that co-regulation is a vital element for success in interpersonal relationships (Bloch et al., 2014). This process includes an individual's inclination to share their emotional states with others to alleviate negative emotions in their presence or to influence others' emotions (Baqai et al., 2025). The use of positive co-regulation strategies by couples enhances marital satisfaction, which in turn increases the partner's satisfaction, a pattern observed across all genders (Russo et al., 2019). Co-regulation is more effective than individual emotion regulation strategies in reducing emotional distress and confusion within relationships (Levy-Gigi & Shamy-Tsoory, 2017). Conversely, employing negative co-regulation techniques in marriage, such as suppressing emotions or inadequately expressing feelings, can lead to psychological issues including disillusionment, self-dissatisfaction, marital discontent, feelings of isolation, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, and diminished intimacy (Brandão et al., 2020).

Given the significance of co-regulation in the quality of marital relationships, recent studies have indicated that this process can serve a mediating role in the relationship between cognitive-emotional characteristics and marital intimacy (Sa'ami et al., 2019; Hashemi et al., 2022; Dimaggio, 2020). Specifically, certainty in mentalization referring to an individual's confidence in understanding and interpreting their own and others' mental states is associated with the ability to co-regulate emotions. This suggests that individuals with greater certainty in mentalization are better equipped to manage their own and their partner's emotions, exhibiting

empathetic and constructive responses (Müller et al., 2023). This mediating process, namely co-regulation, can strengthen the direct relationship between certainty in mentalization and marital intimacy, leading to improved emotional interactions, reduced tensions, and enhanced marital satisfaction (Russo et al., 2019; Levy-Gigi & Shamy-Tsoory, 2017). Additionally, according to findings from Matin et al. (2025), it can be stated that the ability to mentalize in marital relationships depends not only on individual characteristics but also on interpersonal interactions and mutual emotion regulation processes. In other words, co-regulation may act as a mediator, facilitating the impact of certainty in mentalization on marital intimacy. Consequently, couples with greater abilities in mentalization and managing each other's emotions experience higher levels of intimacy and marital satisfaction. Considering the importance of culture and interaction styles in marital relationships, and in light of recent qualitative studies indicating that co-regulation can facilitate the influence of mentalization on intimacy (Matin et al., 2025), there is a pressing need to comprehensively investigate this relationship within the context of Iranian society. Addressing this question could not only enrich the theoretical literature in interpersonal psychology but also provide practical guidance for designing couple therapy interventions and communication skills training, ultimately enhancing the quality of marital life. Despite substantial evidence regarding the importance of mentalization and co-regulation in the quality of marital relationships, a significant gap remains in understanding the interaction between these constructs and their impact on marital intimacy. Most prior studies have examined mentalization or emotion regulation separately, with few empirical investigations focusing on the mediating role of co-regulation in the pathway from certainty in mentalization to marital intimacy. Furthermore, many studies have been limited to quantitative methods, with less attention to the deep experiences of couples within specific cultural contexts, such as Iranian society. Thus, the primary research question is whether a relationship exists between certainty in mentalization and marital intimacy, mediated by co-regulation?

Methodology

The present study falls within the category of applied research and was conducted within the framework of a descriptive-correlational research design. The target population consisted of all couples in the city of Tehran who had been married for at least two years. Sampling was carried out using a purposive and convenience sampling method, with a sample size of 250 couples selected based on Kline's (2023) recommendation for structural equation modeling (SEM), which suggests a sample size of 200 to 400 individuals. According to Kline (2023), a minimum of 200 samples is suitable for models of moderate complexity, and a sample of 250 couples is considered sufficient for SEM with multiple observed and latent variables. Therefore, a sample size of 250 was adopted. Data collection was performed using three standardized questionnaires with appropriate validity and reliability, which are introduced below.

Certainty About Mental States Questionnaire (CAMSQ): The CAMSQ, developed by Müller et al. (2023) as a self-report measure, assesses the perceptual capacity to understand one's own and others' mental states. This scale comprises two dimensions: certainty about self and certainty about others. The CAMSQ consists of 20 items in total, with 10 self-report items for each dimension, scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 7 = Always). The minimum and maximum scores obtainable from this scale are 20 and 140, respectively. In the original study, the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.86 for the certainty about others scale and 0.86 for the certainty about self scale.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Scale: To assess interpersonal emotion regulation strategies, a self-report questionnaire developed by Hofmann et al. (2016) was used. The questionnaire consists of 20 items and four subscales: "enhancing positive affect," "soothing," "social modeling," and "perspective-taking." The internal consistency coefficients for the subscales of "enhancing positive affect," "soothing," "social modeling," and "perspective-taking" were reported as 0.93, 0.94, 0.98, and 0.91, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis also confirmed the presence of these four factors with a good fit index (CFI = 0.94). According to a study by Lotfi et al. (2020), this questionnaire demonstrated favorable psychometric properties in an Iranian student sample. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the four-factor model of the subscales: "enhancing positive affect," "soothing," "social modeling," and "perspective-taking." The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire was reported as satisfactory, with values of 0.90, 0.84, 0.82, and 0.81 for the respective subscales.

Marital Intimacy Scale: The intimacy questionnaire was designed by Walker and Thompson (1983) to measure affection and intimacy in families. The original version includes 17 items. The Persian version was translated and validated by Sanaei (2000). The questionnaire is scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7

(Always), with the total score calculated by summing the item scores and dividing by 17. The minimum score is 17, and the maximum is 119, with higher scores indicating greater intimacy. The reliability of the scale has been reported with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.91 to 0.97, and concurrent validity with another marital intimacy scale was reported at 0.58. Additionally, a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.95 was obtained over a three-week interval. Studies have also shown a significant positive correlation between couples' intimacy and the duration of marriage. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the sample characteristics, as well as correlation tests and structural equation modeling to examine the mediating role of interpersonal emotion regulation. The significance of the mediation effect was assessed using the bootstrap method. Additionally, necessary assumptions for structural equation modeling, such as data normality and multicollinearity, were examined to ensure the validity of the results. The results of the structural analysis indicated that interpersonal emotion regulation significantly mediates the relationship between certainty in mentalization and marital intimacy.

Results

A total of 250 completed questionnaires were collected and included in the research process. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	202	80.8	80.8
	Male	48	19.2	19.2
Age	25–30 years	117	46.8	46.8
	31–35 years	44	17.6	17.6
	36–40 years	25	10.0	10.0
	41–45 years	21	8.4	8.4
	Above 45 years	43	17.2	17.2
Duration of Marriage	2–5 years	147	58.8	58.8
	5–10 years	39	15.6	15.6
	10–15 years	19	7.6	7.6
	15–20 years	4	1.6	1.6
	Above 21 years	41	16.4	16.4
Number of Children	No children	177	70.8	70.8
	1 child	30	12.0	12.0
	2 children	29	11.6	11.6
	3 children	11	4.4	4.4
	4 children	3	1.2	1.2
Education	Primary or below	4	1.6	1.6
	High school diploma	25	10.0	10.0
	Associate degree	14	5.6	5.6
	Bachelor's degree	106	42.4	42.4
	Master's degree	81	32.4	32.4
Employment Status	Doctorate	20	8.0	8.0
	Employed	165	66.0	66.0
Psychiatric Disorder	Unemployed	85	34.0	34.0
	Yes	38	15.2	15.2
	No	212	84.8	84.8

Based on the findings, 250 couples participated in this study, with the majority being female (80.8%). The largest age group was 25–30 years (46.8%), with approximately 17% being above 45 years. The most common duration of marriage was 2–5 years (58.8%), and over two-thirds of the couples had no children (70.8%). In terms of education, the highest frequencies were observed for bachelor's degrees (42.4%) and master's degrees (32.4%), with only about 1.6% having primary education or below. Additionally, 66% of participants were employed, and 15.2% reported having psychiatric disorders, while 84.8% reported no mental health issues. This demographic composition reflects a diverse sample in terms of age, duration of marriage, education, employment status, and mental health status. Additionally, Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Independent, Dependent, and Mediating Variables and Their Subscales (n=250)

Scales and Subscales	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	KS Normality Test	p-value
Certainty About Mental States	250	113.83	19.59	0.098	0.000
Self-Certainty	250	57.81	9.87	0.109	0.000
Other-Certainty	250	56.02	10.13	0.091	0.000
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	249	71.28	19.29	0.068	0.007
Enhancing Positive Affect	250	18.12	4.88	0.089	0.000
Perspective-Taking	250	18.08	4.97	0.102	0.000
Soothing	250	17.77	5.13	0.087	0.000
Social Modeling	250	17.51	5.12	0.086	0.000
Marital Intimacy (Dependent Variable)	249	92.50	20.25	0.105	0.000

Based on the provided table, the variable certainty about mental states has the highest mean (113.83). Within its subscales, self-certainty (57.81) and other-certainty (56.02) have nearly similar means. Among the dimensions of interpersonal emotion regulation, the highest mean is attributed to enhancing positive affect (18.12), followed by perspective-taking (18.08), soothing (17.77), and social modeling (17.51). For the dependent variable, marital intimacy has a mean of 92.50.

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicate that the significance level for all variables and subscales was less than 0.05. Therefore, the data distribution for none of the variables is normal, necessitating the use of non-parametric methods or variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in the analyses. To conduct structural equation modeling, it is essential to establish significant correlations between the variables. Table 3 presents the Spearman correlation matrix for the main variables and their subscales. Significant correlations at the 1% level are marked with two asterisks (**), and those at the 5% level are marked with one asterisk (*). Table 3 illustrates the correlations between the main variables and their subscales. As observed, significant correlations exist between the scales and their subscales at a 99% confidence level.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Variables and Their Subscales

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Certainty about Mental States	1								
2. Self-Certainty	.978**	1							
3. Other-Certainty	.979**	.916**	1						
4. Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	.805**	.774**	.802**	1					
5. Enhancing Positive Affect	.761**	.729**	.761**	.956**	1				
6. Perspective-Taking	.760**	.730**	.758**	.947**	.885**	1			
7. Soothing	.759**	.734**	.752**	.952**	.896**	.881**	1		
8. Social Modeling	.795**	.767**	.789**	.958**	.908**	.872**	.890**	1	
9. Marital Intimacy	.750**	.732**	.736**	.727**	.698**	.687**	.683**	.729**	1

To test the hypotheses and the research model, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilized. To evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement model, various criteria such as factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity were considered. The construct validity is presented in the table below.

Table 4. Construct Validity Assessment

Variable	Item/Subscale	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Marital Intimacy	IS1	0.765	0.91	0.92	0.64
	IS2	0.805			
	IS3	0.764			
	IS4	0.495			
	IS5	0.693			
	IS6	0.768			
	IS7	0.719			
	IS8	0.85			
	IS9	0.856			

	IS10	0.825			
	IS11	0.788			
	IS12	0.844			
	IS13	0.876			
	IS14	0.797			
	IS15	0.757			
	IS16	0.777			
	IS17	0.787			
Mentalization	Self-Certainty	0.856	0.81	0.82	0.72
	Other-Certainty	0.844			
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	Enhancing Positive Affect	0.905	0.92	0.92	0.78
	Soothing	0.901			
	Social Modeling	0.914			
	Perspective-Taking	0.821			

As shown, factor loadings were first examined. The results indicated that, except for two items (questions 4 and 5) related to marital intimacy, which had factor loadings below 0.70, all other items were satisfactory. Consequently, these two items were removed, and the model was retested. The results showed that all Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for the variables were above 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50. Discriminant validity was then assessed using two methods, with results presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Discriminant Validity Assessment

Scales/Indicators	Marital Intimacy	Certainty in Mentalization	Interpersonal Emotion Regulation
HTMT Matrix			
Marital Intimacy <-> Certainty in Mentalization	0.804		
Marital Intimacy <-> Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	0.732		
Certainty in Mentalization <-> Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	0.876		
Fornell-Larcker			
Marital Intimacy	0.802		
Certainty in Mentalization	0.621	0.85	
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	0.696	0.663	0.886

The HTMT index values indicate that the correlations between constructs are below 0.90, confirming discriminant validity in the model. Additionally, in the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its correlation with other constructs, indicating that each construct has the highest correlation with its own indicators, thus confirming discriminant validity and construct distinctiveness at a satisfactory level. After evaluating the measurement models, the structural model of the study was also tested. Figure 1 illustrates the research model in standardized form (path coefficients) and significance values (T-values).

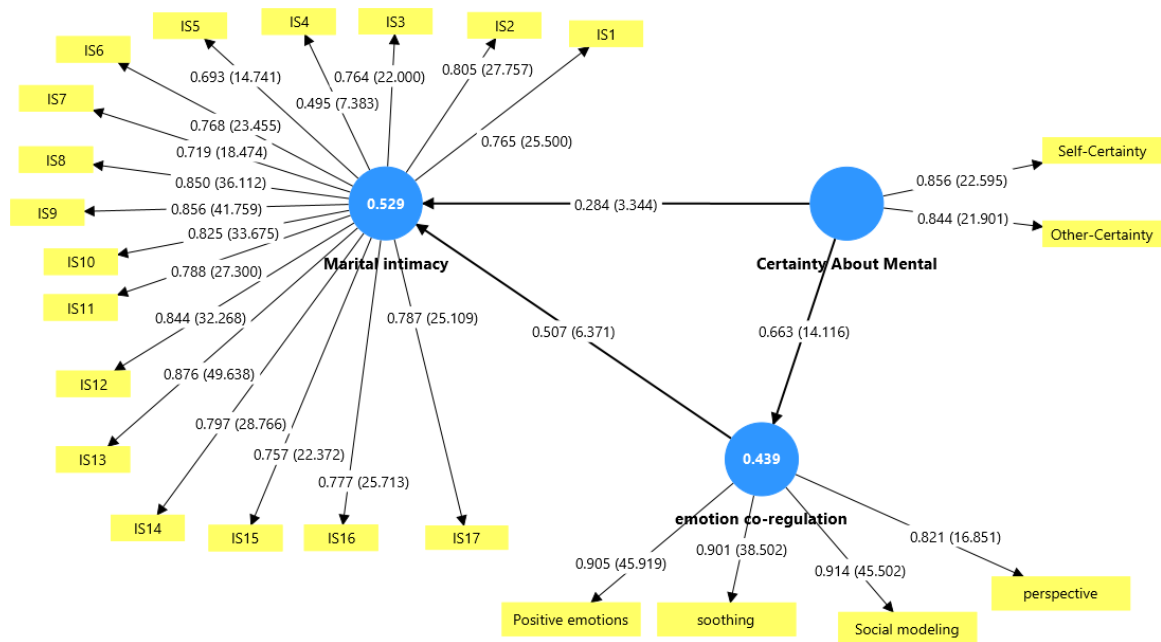


Figure 1. Research Model in Standardized Form and Significance Values

According to Figure 1, the findings related to structural relationships refer to direct and indirect effects, which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Fit Indices for the Structural Model

Path	Path Coefficient/Effect	T-Value	P-Value	F²	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	Coefficient of Determination (R²)	Overall Fit (GOF)
Direct Paths							
Mentalization → Marital Intimacy	0.286	3.369	0.001	0.097	1.784	0.53	0.58
Mentalization → Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	0.663	14.135	0.000	0.784	1.000	0.44	
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation → Marital Intimacy	0.506	6.440	0.000	0.305	1.784		
Indirect Path							
Mentalization → Emotion Regulation → Marital Intimacy	0.336	5.576	0.000				

The results of the structural analysis indicate that certainty in mentalization has a significant positive effect on marital intimacy ($\beta = 0.286$, $T = 3.369$, $p = 0.001$). This path coefficient, along with the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.53$), suggests that approximately 53% of the variance in marital intimacy is explained by the model's constructs, highlighting the significant role of mentalization in predicting marital intimacy. Additionally, the path from certainty in mentalization to interpersonal emotion regulation shows a strong and significant effect ($\beta = 0.663$, $T = 14.135$, $p < 0.001$, $F^2 = 0.784$). The high F^2 value indicates a substantial effect of mentalization on interpersonal emotion regulation, and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.44$) confirms that 44% of the variance in interpersonal emotion regulation is explained by mentalization. The path from interpersonal emotion regulation to marital intimacy also demonstrates a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.506$, $T = 6.440$, $p < 0.001$, $F^2 = 0.305$). This finding confirms that interpersonal emotion regulation plays a crucial mediating role in transmitting the effect of mentalization to marital intimacy. Finally, the indirect effect of certainty in mentalization on marital intimacy through interpersonal emotion regulation, assessed via the bootstrap method in PLS software, is also significant ($\beta = 0.336$, $T = 5.576$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the importance of the mediating role of interpersonal emotion regulation in this model. Furthermore, VIF values below 2 for all paths indicate the absence of multicollinearity issues, reinforcing the validity of the paths. Additionally, the overall model fit ($GOF = 0.58$) suggests that the conceptual model is at a satisfactory level in terms of overall fit and can effectively describe the relationships under investigation. In summary, the structural findings demonstrate that

mentalization has a significant positive effect on marital intimacy, both directly and indirectly through interpersonal emotion regulation, with the mediating role of interpersonal emotion regulation being particularly significant. These results align with previous theories and highlight the importance of addressing cognitive and emotional constructs to enhance the quality of marital relationships.

Discussion and Conclusion

Psychological research underscores that marital intimacy is a critical determinant of psychological well-being and life satisfaction among couples, with the quality of emotional and cognitive interactions playing a pivotal role beyond the mere existence of marriage (Aghamiri & Vaziri, 2019; Roberson et al., 2018). A key ability influencing intimacy is mentalization, defined as an individual's capacity to understand and interpret their own and others' mental states (Bateman & Fonagy, 2010; Köber et al., 2019). Studies indicate that certainty in mentalization, or the degree of confidence in recognizing mental states, is associated with the quality of couple interactions and the ability to manage emotions (Matin et al., 2025; Müller et al., 2023). Additionally, interpersonal emotion regulation, the process through which individuals manage their own and their partner's emotions, serves as a crucial mediator in enhancing marital intimacy (Gross, 2012; Rusu et al., 2019). Couples with high mentalization skills and the ability to regulate their own and their partner's emotions experience greater marital intimacy and satisfaction. Conversely, impairments in mentalization or ineffective emotion regulation can lead to reduced intimacy and the emergence of psychological issues (Müller et al., 2023; Brandão et al., 2020). Given the cultural significance and interactional styles in Iranian society, this study aimed to examine the relationship between certainty in mentalization and marital intimacy, mediated by interpersonal emotion regulation, among couples in Tehran.

Structural equation modeling revealed that certainty in mentalization has a significant positive relationship with marital intimacy, and marital intimacy can be predicted through certainty in mentalization. These findings suggest that mentalization, particularly certainty in understanding and interpreting one's own and others' mental states, plays a substantial role in predicting marital intimacy and can be considered a key predictive variable in couple relationships. These results align with prior research indicating that marital intimacy is a foundational factor in satisfaction and quality of shared life, with close and stable relationships impacting mental health and social functioning (Aghamiri & Vaziri, 2019; Roberson et al., 2018). Recent studies further suggest that mentalization, or the ability to understand and interpret mental states, significantly affects the quality of couple relationships by reducing misunderstandings and enhancing empathy, thereby strengthening intimacy and marital satisfaction (Matin et al., 2025; DiMaggio, 2020).

To elucidate these findings, it should be noted that couples with higher certainty in mentalization demonstrate a superior ability to understand their partner's needs and emotions, directly contributing to increased intimacy. From a theoretical perspective, accurate mentalization creates a safe and predictable psychological environment for couple interactions, facilitating conflict reduction and enhancing marital satisfaction (Fonagy et al., 2018; Müller et al., 2023). The findings also emphasize that merely being in a marital relationship is insufficient; rather, the quality of cognitive and emotional understanding between partners, particularly through mentalization, plays a critical role in promoting intimacy.

Structural analysis and correlation tests further demonstrated that certainty in mentalization has a significant positive effect on interpersonal emotion regulation, with a coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.44$) indicating that approximately 44% of the variance in interpersonal emotion regulation is explained by the model's constructs. The high F^2 value reflects the substantial impact of mentalization on individuals' ability to engage in interpersonal emotion regulation with their partner. These findings are consistent with previous research, including studies by Matin et al. (2025) and DiMaggio (2020), which highlight that mentalization, or the ability to understand and interpret mental states, plays a significant role in managing interpersonal emotions and emotional interactions among couples. Müller et al. (2023) also note that individuals with higher certainty in mentalization exhibit greater empathy, better control over emotional reactions, and enhanced emotional coordination with their partner. As Fonagy et al. (2018) suggest, certainty in mentalization is a crucial prerequisite for effective interpersonal emotion regulation. In other words, couples who achieve a more accurate understanding of their own and their partner's mental states demonstrate greater ability to mutually manage emotions, creating a foundation for positive interactions and conflict reduction.

The structural analysis and correlation tests also revealed that interpersonal emotion regulation has a significant positive relationship with marital intimacy, and marital intimacy can be predicted through interpersonal

emotion regulation. The F^2 value further indicates that the effect of interpersonal emotion regulation on marital intimacy is substantial, confirming its critical mediating role in transmitting the effect of mentalization to marital intimacy. These findings align with previous research, including studies by Rusu et al. (2019), Levy-Gigi and Shamay-Tsoory (2017), and Saemi et al. (2019), which demonstrate that couples' ability to engage in interpersonal emotion regulation—namely, the mutual management and alignment of emotions—leads to improved relationship quality, increased marital satisfaction, and reduced conflicts. Rusu et al. (2019) and Levy-Gigi and Shamay-Tsoory (2017) further indicate that effective emotion regulation, particularly when based on interpersonal co-regulation, enhances intimacy and emotional satisfaction in relationships.

To explain these findings, interpersonal emotion regulation serves as a mediating mechanism linking mentalization to marital intimacy. Even if an individual possesses mentalization abilities, achieving sustained intimacy in a relationship may be challenging without effective interpersonal emotion regulation. Interpersonal emotion regulation enables couples to understand, modulate, and align their emotions, fostering positive emotional interactions and enhancing marital satisfaction.

The bootstrap test results in PLS software showed that the indirect effect of certainty in mentalization on marital intimacy through interpersonal emotion regulation is significant. This finding underscores the critical mediating role of interpersonal emotion regulation in the pathway from mentalization to marital intimacy. These results are consistent with prior research, including studies by Rusu et al. (2019), Matin et al. (2025), and DiMaggio (2020), which indicate that couples' ability to mutually regulate emotions strengthens the effect of mentalization on relationship quality and marital satisfaction. These studies demonstrate that individuals who can understand and manage each other's emotions experience more positive emotional interactions, enhancing intimacy and reducing conflicts.

Even when the direct effect of certainty in mentalization on marital intimacy is limited, the mediating pathway through interpersonal emotion regulation can account for a substantial portion of the variance in marital intimacy. In other words, mentalization can lead to increased intimacy only when couples are capable of coordinating and managing each other's emotions.

The study results demonstrate that certainty in mentalization and the ability to accurately understand one's own and others' mental states form the foundation of marital intimacy, with both direct and indirect effects through interpersonal emotion regulation being highly significant. These findings suggest that marital intimacy is not merely dependent on the presence of a couple or superficial behaviors but is determined by the quality of their cognitive and emotional processing of each other. Consequently, focusing solely on superficial behaviors or teaching general communication techniques is insufficient; what truly sustains couple relationships is their ability to understand and manage their own and their partner's emotions. These findings indicate that successful intervention programs should be designed with a deep psychological understanding and focus on improving mentalization and interpersonal emotion regulation skills, rather than relying solely on general or superficial behavioral training.

From a practical perspective, couples with higher mentalization and interpersonal emotion regulation skills are better equipped to anticipate and manage tensions and conflicts, exhibit empathetic responses, and foster harmonious and satisfying communication. Therefore, the psychological impact of mentalization and emotional co-regulation should be central to any couple-focused intervention, as these two constructs are the primary drivers of increased marital intimacy and satisfaction. This research demonstrates that improving the quality of couple relationships is not limited to directly teaching intimacy but must involve enhancing each partner's cognitive and emotional depth in understanding themselves and their spouse. Consequently, any educational or psychotherapeutic program that empowers couples to better understand each other's thoughts, emotions, and needs will naturally strengthen marital intimacy and satisfaction.

Despite its significant findings, this study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample was limited to Iranian couples, primarily residing in Tehran, making it challenging to generalize the findings to couples from other cultural or social contexts. Second, the use of self-report measures to assess mentalization, interpersonal emotion regulation, and marital intimacy may be subject to personal biases or respondents' tendencies to present a positive self-image. Third, the study's predominantly cross-sectional design limits the ability to make strong causal inferences regarding the relationships between certainty in mentalization, interpersonal emotion regulation, and marital intimacy. Additionally, some potential mediating or moderating variables, such as couples' interactional styles, conflict resolution skills, or environmental stressors,

were not included in the model, which may restrict a comprehensive understanding of the psychological processes in couple relationships.

Given the limitations of a sample restricted to Iranian couples, reliance on self-report measures, and a cross-sectional design, future research should explore more diverse and multicultural samples, utilize longitudinal and experimental methods, employ multi-source assessment tools for measuring constructs, and examine the role of other potential mediating and moderating variables in the model. Such approaches will provide a more precise understanding of the effects of certainty in mentalization and interpersonal emotion regulation on marital intimacy.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles have been considered in this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare that they have no conflict of interest

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Author Contributions

This research was conducted under the scientific guidance and supervision of the academic advisor. The design, implementation, data analysis, and manuscript writing were carried out by the first author and corresponding author. The academic advisor played an effective role throughout all stages of the research, particularly in obtaining the ethics approval and providing scientific review.

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