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The Mediating Role of Marital Satisfaction in the Relationship Between Sexual Satisfaction and Marital Stability Among Urban Married Individuals in Nifas Silk Lafto Sub City, Addis Ababa

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Research Article

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The Mediating Role of Marital Satisfaction in the Relationship Between Sexual Satisfaction and Marital Stability Among Urban Married Individuals in Nifas Silk Lafto Sub City, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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Abstract

This study examined the mediating role of marital satisfaction in the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among urban married individuals in Nifas Silk Lafto Sub-City, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, marital communication and marital conflict resolution. A cross-sectional explanatory design was used. Participants were 308 married individuals from Nifas Silk Lafto Sub City and selected through systematic sampling. Data were collected using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the Marital Status Inventory and the ENRICH Marital Inventory. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses following a four-step procedure were conducted and Sobel's test assessed the indirect effect. Results showed that sexual satisfaction significantly predicted marital stability ($b = .25$, $p < .001$) and marital satisfaction ($b = 1.24$, $p < .001$). Marital satisfaction also significantly predicted marital stability ($b = .17$, $p < .001$). When marital satisfaction was controlled, the direct effect of sexual satisfaction on marital stability decreased from $b = .25$ to $b = .07$ but remained significant ($p = .01$). The indirect effect was significant (Sobel $z = 5.68$, $p < .001$), supporting the presence of a partial mediating effect. The findings suggest that sexual satisfaction influences marital stability both directly and indirectly through marital satisfaction. These results highlight the importance of addressing both sexual satisfaction and overall marital satisfaction in marriage counseling and relationship education programs in Ethiopia. The study contributes to the limited research on marital stability in non-Western contexts and offers practical implications for practitioners and policymakers seeking to reduce divorce rates and promote healthy marriages.

***Keywords**:* Sexual satisfaction, marital satisfaction, marital stability, mediation, married individuals, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Introduction

Marriage is a foundational social institution that can influence the psychological well-being of individuals, family functioning and the quality of social life. A satisfying and stable marriage can provide emotional support, companionship, security and a sense of belonging (Umberson, 2006). However, when marriages become stressful or unsatisfying, they can lead to emotional distress, conflict and divorce. Research on marriage has consistently shown that marital satisfaction and marital stability are closely related, although they represent different aspects of marital life. Marital satisfaction refers to how positively individuals evaluate their marriage while marital stability refers to the continuity and durability of the marital relationship. In their review of longitudinal research on marriage, Karney and Bradbury (1995) emphasized that marital satisfaction and

stability develop over time through the interplay of enduring vulnerabilities, stressful circumstances and adaptive processes within relationships. Understanding the processes through which specific aspects of marital satisfaction contribute to stability is therefore important for both theory and intervention.

In Addis Ababa, marital instability is a growing concern. According to the city's Civil Registration and Residency Services Agency, 4,452 marriages were officially dissolved in just nine months. This means about 17 divorces happened every day and roughly 115 every week (Fidel Post, 2026). These numbers show that there is an urgent need to understand what factors affect marital satisfaction and stability in this context. A study in Jimma Zone also found high levels of marital dissatisfaction and linked it to divorce (Tegegne et al., 2016). Despite these concerns, little research has examined what keeps marriages strong in Ethiopia.

Research conducted in Western countries has consistently shown that sexual satisfaction plays a vital role in marriage. In fact, a systematic review and meta-analysis by Bafrani et al. (2023) found that couple-based psychological interventions, particularly counseling, can improve both sexual and marital satisfaction. In a longitudinal study, Yeh et al. (2006) found that sexual satisfaction affects marital satisfaction and marital instability. They also found that marital satisfaction mediates the link between sexual satisfaction and marital instability, but this pathway is still understudied in non-Western contexts. More recent research has begun to unpack how these factors shape each other over time. In a three-wave, cross-lagged actor–partner interdependence model with Chinese couples in early marriage, Cao et al. (2019) found that husbands' earlier sexual satisfaction predicted their later marital satisfaction, but not the reverse. For wives, the pattern differed: earlier marital satisfaction predicted later sexual satisfaction from Wave 1 to Wave 2. Together, these findings underscore just how complex the link between sexual and marital satisfaction can be, and they point to a clear need for research in a wider range of cultural settings.

Despite the growing body of research on marriage in Ethiopia, significant gaps remain. A recent qualitative study noted that most studies on marriage have primarily focused on the negative aspects of marital relationships. No study has yet examined the contributing factors to marital satisfaction from a strengths-based perspective in the Ethiopian context (Wondimu & Andualem, 2023). Furthermore, the specific mediating role of marital satisfaction in the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability has not been adequately tested in Ethiopia, particularly

after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, marital communication and marital conflict resolution. The few Ethiopian studies that have examined marital satisfaction have focused on premarital expectations, religiosity and socio-demographic determinants (Zewdu, 2020; Deressu & Girma, 2019; Tegegne et al., 2016), but none have systematically investigated the mediating pathway from sexual satisfaction through marital satisfaction to marital stability.

This study carries implications for several audiences. For researchers, it contributes to the limited literature on marriage in Ethiopia and offers evidence on how sexual and marital satisfaction shape marital stability in a non-Western context. For marriage counselors and therapists, the findings may inform culturally appropriate interventions targeting both sexual satisfaction and overall marital quality. For policymakers and community leaders, understanding the factors that sustain marriages can guide programs that support family well-being. Given the high divorce rates in Addis Ababa (Fidel Post, 2026), this research is both timely and relevant, and it responds to Mekonnen et al.'s (2023) call for studies that emphasize the strengths of marital relationships rather than only their problems. Accordingly, this study examines the mediating role of marital satisfaction in the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among urban married individuals in Addis Ababa, controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, marital communication and marital conflict resolution. It is hypothesized that marital satisfaction will mediate this relationship even after accounting for these controls. By testing this mediation pathway, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how sexual and marital experiences relate to marital stability in an Ethiopian urban context.

Methods

Research Design. This study employed an explanatory research design. An explanatory research design is a correlational design that enables researchers to examine the extent to which two or more variables are associated and provides for data collection at one point in time (Creswell, 2012). This design was appropriate for testing the hypothesized mediation pathway from sexual satisfaction through marital satisfaction to marital stability.

Participants. The target population consisted of all heterosexual married individuals legally bound by the state of marriage as husband and wife and residing in Nifas Silk Lafto Sub-City, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Three Woredas (Two, Four and Seven) were selected from the sub-city. From these Woredas, 326 households were randomly selected from a total of 1,700 households.

The final sample consisted of 308 married individuals (130 males and 178 females) who returned completed questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 94.5%.

Participants were in committed marriage relationships for at least six months and no single-parent or cohabiting parent families were examined. The mean age of participants was 34.47 years (*SD* = 8.25) with ages ranging from 23 to 53. Female participants had a mean age of 33 years (*SD* = 7.80) while male participants had a mean age of 36.45 years (*SD* = 8.48). Regarding education, 186 participants (60.4%) had completed college or above, 69 (22.4%) had completed secondary school and 53 (17.2%) had gained primary school certificates. The majority (81.5%) were employed in governmental, private or non-governmental organizations while 10.7% were merchants, 4.9% were housewives and 2.9% were laborers. The mean average monthly income was 2,829.67 Ethiopian Birr (*SD* = 1,482.77). Mean relationship duration was 9.69 years (*SD* = 8.75) ranging from 1 to 35 years and the majority (89.3%) were in their first marriage.

Sampling Techniques. A systematic sampling technique along with simple random sampling was employed to select study units. First, three *Woredas* were selected randomly using the lottery method. Second, from the chosen *Woredas* (1,700 households), 326 households were selected systematically. The sampling interval was every fifth house. Households listed in the frame were numbered sequentially according to their physical proximity. The first house number was identified using the lottery method. Where no eligible respondent was identified in the selected household, the data collector proceeded to the next household until an eligible respondent was found.

Sample Size Determination. The sample size was computed using a formula for differences in means with assumptions of 95% confidence level, 80% power, 3% margin of error and a population variance of 93.7 (estimated from the pilot study sample variance). The minimum sample size was calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{(Z_{a/2} + Z\beta)^2 2\sigma^2}{d^2}$$

$$n = \frac{((1.96) + (.84))^2 2 * 93.7}{3^2} = 163$$

Where, n = 163*2=326 samples

$(Z\,\alpha/2)$=Critical value at 95% confidence level of certainty (1.96)

- z_β = 0.84, is the critical value of the standard normal distribution corresponding to the desired level of power (80%)
- σ^2 = is the population variance (93.7) which was estimated from the marital satisfaction sample variance of the pilot test.
- d= the marginal error (which is, 3) between the sample and the population mean

To account for potential attrition, the sample size was doubled to 326.

Measures. A structured questionnaire gathered demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity, age at first marriage, number of marriages or unions, length of marriage, type of marriage, inter-race and inter-faith status, number of children, education level, occupation and income.

Marital satisfaction was measured with the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby et al., 1995), a 14-item Likert-type measure. Scores range from 0 to 69 with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction. The RDAS has shown strong validity and reliability (Cronbach's α = .90; Crane et al., 2000); in this sample, α was .91.

Marital stability was assessed with the Marital Status Inventory (MSI; Weiss & Cerreto, 1980), a 14-item, true–false and Guttman-type scale capturing the dissolution potential of marriage. Scores range from 0 to 14 with higher scores indicating greater instability. We reversed the scores so that higher values reflect greater stability. Cronbach's α in this sample was .92.

Sexual relationship, marital communication and marital conflict resolution were measured using the ENRICH Marital Inventory (Olson et al., 1983), with 10 five-point Likert-type items per scale. The inventory has demonstrated reliabilities from .68 to .86. In this sample, alphas were .73, .78 and .80, respectively.

Pilot Testing. The instruments were translated from English to Amharic and back-translated by two English Literature graduate students fluent in both languages. A pilot study was conducted with 42 married individuals (20 males and 22 females) selected through convenience from a different target population to avoid contamination. The pilot study assessed internal reliability, appropriateness of data analysis techniques and clarity of items. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for

the pilot study were: RDAS = .82, MSI = .86, ENRICH Sexual Relationship = .71, ENRICH Marital Communication = .72 and ENRICH Marital Conflict Resolution = .74. These values indicated acceptable internal consistency for all scales.

Data Collection Procedures. After approval from the Addis Ababa University School of Psychology Internal Review Board, participants were informed of the purpose and benefits of the study and verbal informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were distributed to voluntary participants with no time limit for completion. Three assistant data collectors were recruited and given one-day orientation on administration and collection procedures. The training covered the

Analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Before testing the mediation hypothesis, the data were screened for normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Normality was assessed using skewness, kurtosis values, histograms and Q-Q plots. All skewness values were below 1 and kurtosis values ranged from -1.33 to -.14, indicating approximately normal distributions. Linearity was examined through scatter plots which showed linear relationships among the variables. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values. No tolerance value fell below .10 and no VIF value exceeded 10, indicating no multicollinearity concerns (Keith, 2006). Homoscedasticity was checked by examining scatter plots of standardized residuals against predicted values. The residuals were randomly scattered around zero, indicating equal variance. One case was removed from the original sample of 308 because it did not satisfy the assumptions required to run the mediation analysis, resulting in a final sample of 307. To test the mediating role of marital satisfaction in the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability, a series of hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses were conducted following the four-step procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). The indirect effect of sexual satisfaction on marital stability through marital satisfaction was calculated as the product of the predictor-to-mediator path and the mediator-to-outcome path. Sobel's test (Sobel, 1988) was used to determine whether this indirect effect was statistically significant. Significant statistical associations and mean differences were determined at an alpha level of .05 (5%).

Ethical Considerations. Ethical approval and clearance were obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the School of Psychology, Addis Ababa University. Written permission was obtained from Nifas Silk Lafto Sub-City Administration to carry out the study. Participants were made fully aware of the content and purpose of the research and only willing participants were

included. Participants were informed that the information they provided would be confidential and used only for academic purposes. Codes instead of names were used to identify participants. The study did not inflict any harm on study subjects, the community, data collectors, or supervisors.

Results

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables. The mean score for marital satisfaction was 52.01 (*SD* = 13.74). Marital stability had a mean score of 11.14 (*SD* = 3.55). Sexual relationship with a mean score of 38.70 (*SD* = 7.53). The zero-order correlations among the study variables showed that marital satisfaction was strongly, positively and significantly correlated with marital stability (r = .68, p < .01) and with sexual relationship (r = .70, p < .01). Sexual relationship was also positively and significantly correlated with marital stability (r = .58, p < .01). Collectively, these correlations satisfied the preliminary condition for mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986), as the predictor was associated with the outcome, the predictor was associated with the mediator and the mediator was associated with the outcome.

Hypothesis. Marital satisfaction mediates the relationship between a sexual relationship and marital stability.

Table 1. *Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Marital Satisfaction on Sexual Relationship and Marital Stability (N=307)*

	Variables	*B*	*β*	*t*	*P*	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2	*F*	ΔF
Step 1	Block 1 control variables					.40	.16	.16	11.72***	11.72***
	Block 2 Control variables					.66	.43	.27	38.53***	144.71***
	Sexual relationship	.25	.53	12.03	.001					
	a. Dependent Variable: Marital stability									
Step 2	Block 1 control variables					.32	.10	.10	6.98***	6.98***
	Block 2 Control variable					.75	.56	.46	63.43***	309.94***
	Sexual relationship	1.24	.68	17.61	.001					
	b. Dependent Variable: Marital satisfaction									
Step 3	Block 1 Control variables					.40	.16	.16	11.72***	11.72***

	Block 2					.73	.53	.36	55.69***	230.95***
	Control variables									
	marital satisfaction	.17	.64	15.19	.001					
c.	Dependent Variable: Marital stability									
Step 4	Block 1					.66	.44	.44	33.07***	33.07***
	Control variable									
	Block 2					.74	.55	.11	40.07***	36.88***
	Marital quality	.12	.44	6.52	.001					
	Sexual relation	.07	.15	2.55	.011					

d. Dependent Variable: Marital stability

To test the hypothesis that marital satisfaction mediates the relationship between sexual relationship and marital stability among married individuals, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. In the first step, a hierarchical multiple regression was run to examine the predictive value of the independent variable (sexual relationship) on the criterion variable (marital stability) while controlling for age at first marriage, number of unions, occupation, marital communication and marital conflict resolution. Only these five variables were included as controls because preliminary testing confirmed their confounding nature. As Table 1 shows that in the first step, sexual relationship was significantly predict marital stability. It was found that, controlling for confounding variables, 27% of the variance in marital stability was explained by sexual relationship and which was significant, ΔF (1,301) = 144.71, $p < .001$. The regression coefficient of sexual relationship, after controlling for confounding variables, was significant (b =.25, t = 12.03; $p < .001$).

In step 2 and the second criteria, other hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to examine whether sexual relationship predicts the mediator variable (i.e., marital satisfaction). To carry out this analysis, in the first block control variables were entered followed by sexual relationship in the second block of the hierarchical multiple regressions to examine the predictive value of sexual relationship on marital satisfaction. It was found that 46% of the variance in marital satisfaction was explained by sexual relationship, after controlling for confounding variables, ΔF (1,301) =309.94, $p<.001$. The regression coefficient of sexual relationship with marital satisfaction, controlling for confounding variables, was significant (b =1.24, t = 17.61, $p < .001$).

Third step, to examine the relationship between the mediator (marital satisfaction) and the criterion variables (marital stability), another hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. It was found that 36% of the variance in marital stability was predicted by the mediator (marital satisfaction), controlling for confounding variables and ignoring the independent variable (sexual relationship), and the regression coefficient of marital satisfaction was (b = .17, t = 15.19; p< .001). As suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) all the first-three relationships were significant. The last and the fourth step was to examine the relationship between the predictor and the criterion variables, after controlling for the relation between the mediator and the criterion variables, to this end a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. It was found that sexual relationship became still significant, after controlling for marital satisfaction (i.e., the mediator), (b = .07 β =.15, t = 2.55; p=.01). However, the effect of sexual relationship on marital stability decreased dramatically when the effect of the mediator (marital satisfaction) was present. In step one the unstandardized regression coefficient of sexual relationship was (b=.25, t=12.03, p<.001, see Figure 1). The results evidenced that after controlling for the effect of marital satisfaction the (b=.12, β =.44, t=6.52, P<.001) effect of sexual relationship on marital stability had been reduced (see Figure 2).

It is imperative further examine the significance of the mediation (i.e., the indirect effect); to achieve this Sobel z-score was calculated using Sobel Test calculator on the website. The Sobel Test uses the magnitude of the indirect effect compared to its estimated standard error of measurement. The indirect effect equals to the product of paths 'A' and 'B', which is the relationship between the independent variable and the mediator (b=1.24,SE=.07) after adjusting confounding variables and the relationship between the mediator and the criterion variable after controlling for the effect of the independent variable and confounding variables (b=.12.SE=.02), respectively. In this research the amount of the indirect effect of sexual relationship through the mediator was .15. The Sobel's Test indicated that the indirect effect of the independent variable (sexual relationship) on the dependant variable (marital stability) through the mediator variable (marital satisfaction) was significant (Sobel's Test statistics = 5.68, p< .0001). Therefore, marital satisfaction had a significant partial mediation effect on the relationship between sexual relationship and marital stability.

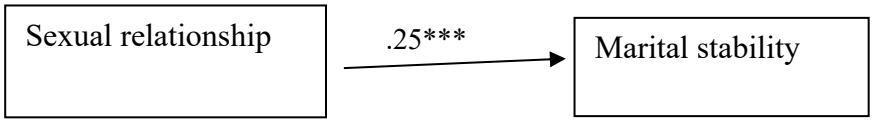


Figure 1. Total effect path coefficients (unstandardized betas') of sexual relationship for predicting marital stability

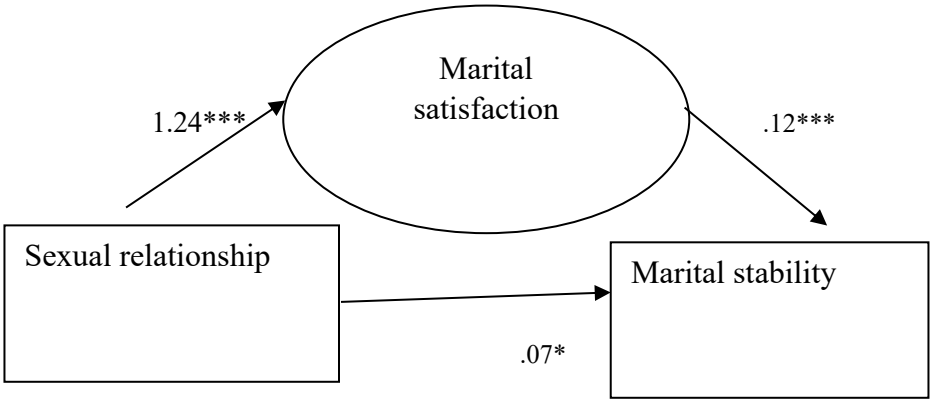


Figure 2. Path coefficients (unstandardized betas') for predicting marital stability from sexual relationship through marital satisfaction

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the mediating role of marital satisfaction in the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among urban married individuals in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, marital communication and marital conflict resolution. It was hypothesized that marital satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability. The findings supported this hypothesis. Sexual satisfaction predicted marital stability, sexual satisfaction predicted marital satisfaction, marital satisfaction predicted marital stability and the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital stability decreased but remained significant when marital satisfaction was controlled. The Sobel test confirmed that the indirect effect was statistically significant, indicating partial mediation.

This finding is consistent with previous research. Yeh et al. (2006) found that marital satisfaction mediates the link between sexual satisfaction and marital instability in a Western context. The

present study extends that finding to an Ethiopian urban context where this pathway had not been tested. The result also aligns with Cao et al. (2019), who showed that sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction influence each other over time among Chinese couples. Together, these studies suggest that the mediating role of marital satisfaction is not limited to Western or Asian contexts but also applies to urban Ethiopia. This is important because most marital research has been conducted in Western settings (Shek & Cheung, 2008) and the present study provides evidence that similar processes operate in a non-Western African context.

Several explanations may account for why marital satisfaction partially mediates this relationship. Sexual satisfaction can be understood as a relationship reward that strengthens emotional bonding and commitment (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014). When individuals are satisfied with their sexual relationship, they may evaluate their marriage more positively, feel more loved and connected and become more committed to the relationship. This improved overall marital satisfaction then makes the marriage more stable. At the same time, sexual satisfaction may also affect stability directly, perhaps by reducing the desire for divorce or separation even when other aspects of the marriage are not fully satisfying. In the Ethiopian context, where open discussion of sexual matters is often limited, sexual satisfaction may play an especially powerful role in shaping how individuals feel about their marriage as a whole (Girma, 2020).

The partial rather than full mediation is theoretically meaningful. According to the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), adaptive processes such as sexual relationship quality influence marital satisfaction which in turn predicts stability. The present findings support this model because marital satisfaction explained part, but not all, of the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital stability. This suggests that other factors may also be involved. For example, religiosity, family involvement, economic stress and cultural expectations about marriage may influence marital stability in Ethiopia. Future research should examine these additional pathways. The partial mediation also supports social exchange theory which frames sexual satisfaction as a relationship reward that improves subjective marital evaluations. When individuals perceive their sexual relationship as rewarding, they may view their marriage more positively which increases their commitment and reduces the likelihood of divorce.

These findings have important practical implications. Marriage counselors and therapists in Ethiopia should recognize that sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction are closely connected and that both matter for marital stability. Interventions that address only sexual concerns may not be enough; counselors should also work on overall marital quality, including communication, conflict resolution and emotional intimacy. Similarly, premarital counseling and relationship education programs should include content on sexual satisfaction and its role in marital satisfaction and stability. Given the high number of divorces in Addis Ababa (Fidel Post, 2026), such programs may help couples build stronger and more stable marriages. Policymakers and community leaders can also use these findings to support family programs that promote healthy marital relationships.

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal conclusions, so the direction of effects cannot be confirmed. Future research should use longitudinal designs to examine how sexual satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and marital stability influence each other over time as Cao et al. (2019) did. The study also relied on self-report measures, which may be affected by social desirability bias especially regarding sensitive topics like sexual satisfaction. The sample was drawn from one sub-city in Addis Ababa, so the findings may not generalize to rural areas or other regions of Ethiopia. Finally, the study used Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step procedure and Sobel's (1988) test which are widely used but have limitations. Future research should consider bootstrapping with the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022) for more accurate estimates of indirect effects.

In conclusion, this study found that marital satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among urban married individuals in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Sexual satisfaction influences marital stability both directly and indirectly through its effect on marital satisfaction. These findings contribute to the limited body of research on marriage in Ethiopia and provide evidence that sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction are important factors in marital stability. By understanding how these factors work together, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective interventions to support healthy and stable marriages in Ethiopia and beyond.

Data availability. The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors' contributions. ZG designed the study, collected, analyzed and interpreted the data. The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Consent for publication. This part is not applicable because the manuscript contains no person's data in any form (including individual details, images, or videos).

Competing interests. The author declare that he has no competing interests.

Clinical trial number: Not applicable.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate. The study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975, as revised in 2008. No personal information was collected during the study (such as individual identifiers, images, or videos). The data were kept confidential. Furthermore, the data were analysed and reported in a de-identified, aggregate form.

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