

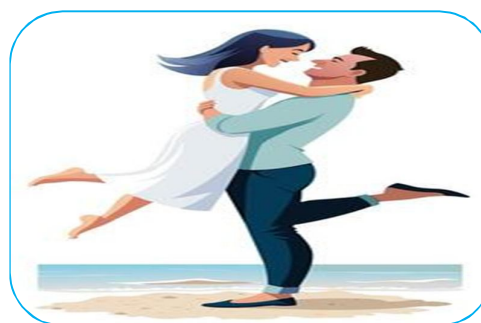


THE ROLE OF MEANINGFUL COUPLE TIME IN MARITAL HAPPINESS AMONG EMPLOYED COUPLES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marital happiness constitutes a central dimension of adult well-being and has been consistently linked to psychological health, life satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Kamp Dush et al., 2008). In recent decades, the structure of marital relationships has undergone substantial transformation due to socio-economic changes, particularly the rise in dual-earner households. Employment among both partners, while contributing to financial security and personal growth, has simultaneously introduced complex challenges related to time management, role expectations, and work-family balance (Matei & Vîrgă, 2023). These challenges often limit opportunities for partners to engage in meaningful interpersonal interactions, thereby potentially undermining the quality of marital relationships (Allen et al., 2020; Shockley & Singla, 2011). Within this evolving context, the concept of meaningful couple time has gained increasing attention as a vital relational resource that may buffer the adverse effects of occupational stress and time scarcity on marital happiness.



Meaningful couple time extends beyond the mere quantity of time partners spend together and instead emphasizes the quality, intentionality, and emotional depth of shared experiences (Jiao et al., 2025). It involves active engagement, mutual responsiveness, and the creation of shared emotional meaning through activities such as open communication, joint decision-making, and participation in enjoyable or supportive interactions (Whillans et al., 2025). The distinction between time availability and time quality is particularly significant among employed couples, for whom limited time necessitates more purposeful and emotionally enriching interactions. Research indicates that couples who engage in meaningful shared experiences report higher levels of intimacy, understanding, and relational satisfaction, as these interactions foster emotional closeness and reinforce relational bonds (Girme et al., 2014; Williamson & Lavner, 2020; Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022). Thus, meaningful couple time may serve as a critical mechanism through which partners maintain and enhance marital happiness despite external pressures.

The importance of meaningful couple time can be further understood through established theoretical frameworks. Social exchange theory suggests that individuals evaluate their relationships based on a subjective assessment of rewards and costs, wherein positive interactions contribute to greater satisfaction and relational stability. Meaningful shared time can be conceptualized as a relational reward that enhances perceived benefits and strengthens commitment. Concurrently, attachment theory highlights the role of emotional availability, responsiveness, and secure bonding in adult intimate relationships. Engaging in emotionally meaningful interactions enables partners to fulfill attachment needs, thereby promoting a sense of security and satisfaction within the marriage.

Additionally, the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions provides further insight by suggesting that positive shared experiences expand individuals' emotional resources and contribute to the development of enduring relational strengths (Fredrickson, 2013; Randall & Bodenmann, 2017).

Empirical evidence has consistently supported the association between shared activities and marital quality. Studies have demonstrated that couples who participate in joint leisure activities and maintain regular, meaningful communication tend to report higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower levels of conflict (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Rauer & Volling, 2013). Daily interactions characterized by emotional support, empathy, and responsiveness have been shown to play a significant role in sustaining relationship satisfaction over time. Furthermore, research on work-family dynamics indicates that meaningful couple time can mitigate the negative impact of work-related stress and role overload by providing emotional support and opportunities for relational renewal (Falconier et al., 2015; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2021). These findings suggest that the quality of couple interactions may be a more significant predictor of marital happiness than the mere amount of time spent together, particularly in the context of demanding work schedules.

Even though the recognition of its importance, the concept of meaningful couple time remains underexplored in empirical research, especially in relation to employed couples. Much of the existing literature has focused on broader constructs such as marital satisfaction, communication patterns, or work-family conflict, often neglecting the qualitative aspects of shared time that contribute to relational well-being. Moreover, the majority of studies have been conducted in Western contexts, which may not fully capture the cultural nuances influencing marital relationships in non-Western societies. In collectivistic cultures such as India, marital relationships are embedded within broader familial and social structures, and expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and emotional expression may differ significantly from those in individualistic cultures (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013). Consequently, there is a need for culturally sensitive research that examines how meaningful couple time operates within these contexts and contributes to marital happiness among employed partners.

In the Indian socio-cultural setting, rapid urbanization, changing gender roles, and increased participation of women in the workforce have reshaped traditional marital dynamics. Employed couples often face competing demands from professional responsibilities and family obligations, leaving limited time for personal interaction. In such circumstances, the ability to engage in meaningful, emotionally enriching interactions becomes crucial for maintaining relational harmony and satisfaction. However, the extent to which meaningful couple time influences marital happiness in this context remains insufficiently investigated. Addressing this gap is essential not only for advancing theoretical understanding but also for informing practical interventions aimed at enhancing marital quality and well-being among working couples.

In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to examine the role of meaningful couple time in marital happiness among employed couples. By focusing on the qualitative dimensions of shared time, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how intentional and emotionally significant interactions contribute to relationship satisfaction. The study is expected to contribute to the existing body of literature by highlighting the importance of meaningful engagement in sustaining marital happiness within the context of modern dual-earner relationships, while also offering implications for counseling practices, work-life balance initiatives, and policies designed to support family well-being.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Marital happiness has been a central focus of psychological and family research, often conceptualized as an individual's subjective evaluation of the quality, satisfaction, and overall functioning of the marital relationship. Extensive empirical work has demonstrated that marital happiness is influenced by a range of interpersonal, contextual, and intrapersonal factors, including communication patterns, emotional intimacy, conflict resolution strategies, and work-family dynamics (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). Among these, the quality of time couples spend together has emerged as a particularly salient predictor of relationship satisfaction, especially in the context of dual-earner couples who experience competing demands on their time and energy.

Recent research has emphasized the importance of shared activities in fostering marital satisfaction. Couples who engage in joint leisure activities report higher relationship quality compared to those who spend less time together in shared pursuits (Rauer & Volling, 2013). Such shared experiences enhance communication, mutual understanding, and emotional bonding between partners, thereby strengthening relational stability. Subsequent research has refined this perspective by introducing the concept of “quality time,” underscoring that not all shared time contributes equally to relationship satisfaction. Studies have shown that positive interaction patterns—such as active listening, emotional validation, and affectionate communication—are strong predictors of marital stability and happiness (Gottman & Gottman, 2017). Couples who engage in novel and engaging activities together also report increased relationship satisfaction, as such experiences promote emotional closeness and self-expansion (Girme et al., 2014).

The role of daily interactions in shaping marital outcomes has also been extensively examined. Research indicates that even brief, meaningful exchanges—such as sharing daily experiences or providing emotional support—significantly contribute to relationship satisfaction (Debrot et al., 2013). Perceived partner responsiveness, characterized by understanding, validation, and care, plays a crucial role in fostering intimacy and well-being (Reis et al., 2017). Work–family dynamics represent another critical domain influencing marital happiness, particularly among employed couples. Studies have consistently shown that work–family conflict is associated with reduced relationship quality and increased **तनाव**. However, supportive and meaningful interactions between partners can buffer these negative effects (Allen et al., 2020). Shared activities characterized by emotional engagement—such as meaningful conversations and joint leisure—are associated with greater relationship satisfaction than passive co-presence (Offer & Schneider, 2011). Intentional allocation of time for shared activities has also been linked to higher marital quality, highlighting the importance of purposeful engagement.

Theoretical perspectives further reinforce the importance of meaningful couple time. Social exchange theory posits that individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs in their relationships, with positive interactions serving as key relational rewards. Attachment theory emphasizes the role of emotional availability and responsiveness in fostering secure relational bonds. Empirical evidence suggests that securely attached individuals are more likely to engage in supportive and meaningful interactions, which contribute to higher marital satisfaction (Overall & Simpson, 2015). Additionally, the broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive shared experiences strengthen relational resilience over time (Fredrickson, 2013).

Notwithstanding the substantial body of research on marital satisfaction, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the specific role of meaningful couple time, particularly among employed couples in non-Western contexts. Cultural norms surrounding marriage, gender roles, and emotional expression differ significantly across societies. In India, marital relationships are influenced by extended family systems and socio-cultural expectations. Although recent studies have examined communication and work–family balance among Indian couples, the qualitative dimension of shared time remains underexplored. For instance, research has shown that emotional support and communication are significant predictors of marital happiness among Indian couples (Kaur & Kaur, 2018), yet limited attention has been given to how meaningful shared time contributes to these processes. This gap underscores the need for focused research on meaningful couple time as a distinct construct influencing marital happiness.

Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between meaningful couple time and marital happiness among employed couples.

H₀2: There is no significant difference between male and female participants in levels of meaningful couple time.

H₀3: There is no significant difference between male and female participants in levels of marital happiness.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between meaningful couple time and marital happiness among employed couples. A correlational design was considered appropriate as the primary objective of the study was to assess the degree and direction of association between the study variables without manipulating any conditions or establishing causal relationships. This design enables the systematic measurement of naturally occurring variables and facilitates statistical analysis of their interrelationships.

The sample for the study consisted of 100 employed individuals, comprising 50 males and 50 females. Participants were within the age range of 22 to 40 years, representing young and early middle adulthood, a period typically associated with active career engagement and marital adjustment. The mean age of the participants was 28.45 years, with a standard deviation of 5.68, indicating a moderate dispersion of age within the sample. The inclusion criteria required participants to be currently employed and legally married, ensuring relevance to the study objectives. Individuals who were unemployed or not currently in a marital relationship were excluded from the study. A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants for the study. This non-probability sampling technique was selected due to its practicality and accessibility, allowing the researcher to collect data from readily available participants who met the inclusion criteria. Although convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, it is widely used in exploratory and correlational research where access to specific populations is constrained.

In this study, Meaningful couple time was treated as the independent variable, while marital happiness was considered the dependent variable. Meaningful couple time was assessed using an adapted version of the Couple Leisure Activity Scale (CLAS), based on the family leisure framework proposed by Karen K. Zabriskie and Bryan P. McCormick. The scale consisted of 20 items that measured the frequency and quality of shared leisure activities between partners across four domains, namely home-based activities, social or outdoor activities, recreational activities, and emotional or meaningful interactions. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often), with total scores ranging from 20 to 100. Higher scores indicated greater involvement in meaningful couple time. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency in previous research, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.90.

Marital happiness was measured using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) developed by William R. Schumm and colleagues (1986). Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS), a concise self-report instrument designed to assess overall satisfaction within a marital relationship. The scale consists of three items that evaluate an individual's satisfaction with their spouse, their marriage, and the relationship as a whole. Participants rated their responses on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater marital satisfaction. The scale is widely used due to its high reliability ($\alpha > .90$) and strong validity across diverse populations.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic details along with the selected standardized scales. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. The questionnaire was administered either in an online format, such as Google Forms, or in paper form depending on accessibility. Participants were instructed to respond honestly based on their experiences with their spouse. The average time required to complete the questionnaire was approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were computed for all variables. To test the hypothesis, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to examine the relationship between meaningful couple time and marital happiness. A significance level of $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for psychological research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage of the study. Confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained, and no identifying information was collected.

4. RESULTS

The present study examined the relationship between meaningful couple time and marital happiness among employed couples, as well as gender differences in these variables. Descriptive statistics, Pearson’s correlation analysis, and independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to test the study hypotheses.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Meaningful Couple Time and Marital Happiness by Gender

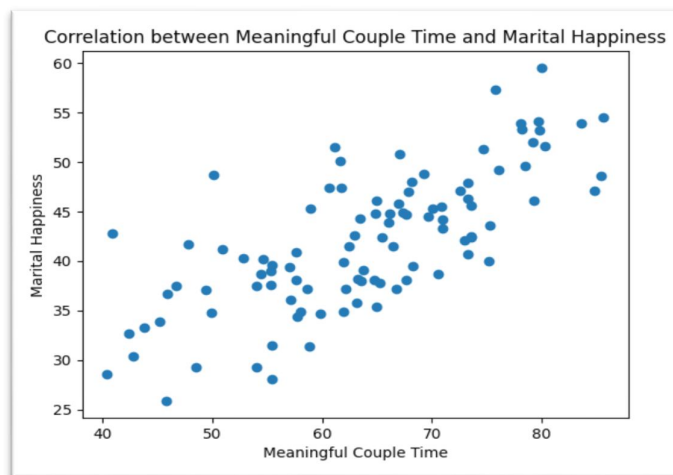
Variable	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation
Meaningful Couple Time	Male	57.75	9.34
Meaningful Couple Time	Female	70.18	8.74
Marital Happiness	Male	38.68	6.45
Marital Happiness	Female	45.51	5.69

Descriptive statistics were computed for meaningful couple time and marital happiness across the total sample and by gender. The overall results indicated moderate to high levels of both meaningful couple time and marital happiness among participants. Gender-wise comparisons revealed that female participants reported higher mean scores on both variables compared to male participants, suggesting greater engagement in meaningful interactions and higher perceived marital satisfaction among females.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Between Meaningful Couple Time and Marital Happiness

Variables	1	2
1. Meaningful Couple Time	1	
2. Marital Happiness	.73**	1

Figure 1
Scatter Plot Showing the Relationship between Meaningful Couple Time and Marital Happiness

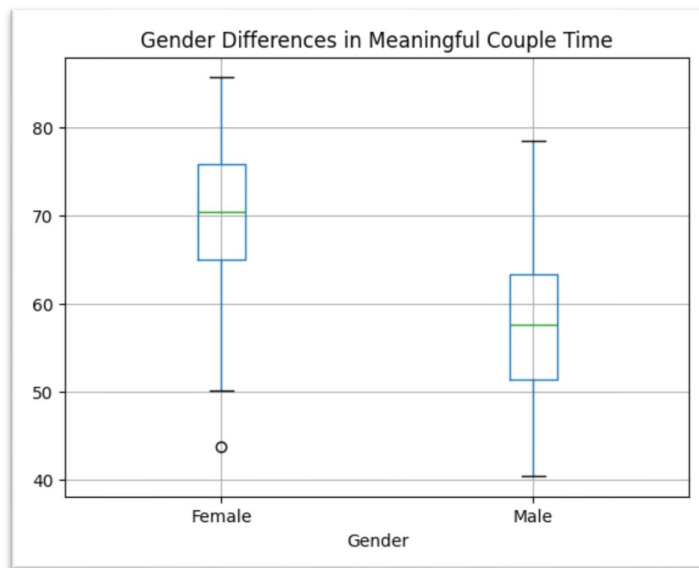


To examine the association between meaningful couple time and marital happiness, Pearson’s product–moment correlation coefficient was computed. The results indicated a strong positive correlation between the two variables, $r(98) = .73, p < .01$. This finding suggests that higher levels of meaningful couple time are significantly associated with higher levels of marital happiness among employed couples. Participants who reported greater engagement in shared leisure activities, emotional connectedness, and quality interactions with their partners also reported greater satisfaction and happiness in their marital relationships. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating no significant relationship between the variables was rejected.

Table 3
Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Meaningful Couple Time

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
Male	50	57.75	9.34			
Female	50	70.18	8.74	6.68	98	.000**

Figure 2
Box Plot Showing Gender Differences in Meaningful Couple Time

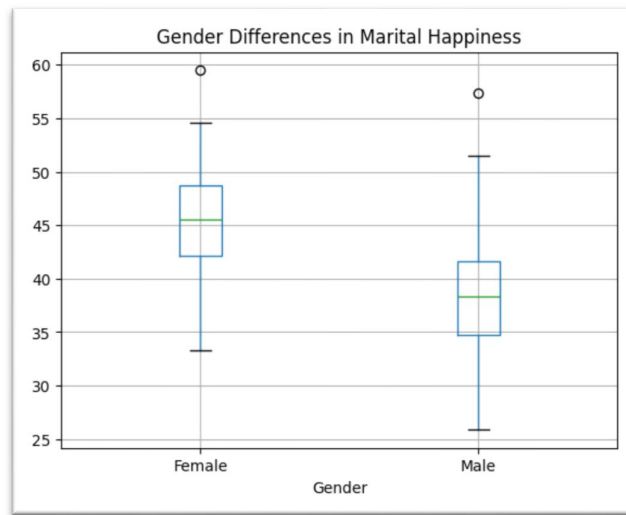


An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine gender differences in meaningful couple time. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between male and female participants, $t(98) = 6.68, p < .01$. Female participants ($M = 70.18, SD = 8.74$) reported significantly higher levels of meaningful couple time compared to male participants ($M = 57.75, SD = 9.34$).

Table 4
Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Marital Happiness

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
Male	50	38.68	6.45			
Female	50	45.51	5.69	5.63	98	.000**

Figure 3
Box Plot Showing Gender Differences in Marital Happiness



Similarly, gender differences in marital happiness were examined using an independent samples *t*-test. The results indicated a significant difference between males and females, $t(98) = 5.63, p < .01$. Female participants ($M = 45.51, SD = 5.69$) reported higher levels of marital happiness than male participants ($M = 38.68, SD = 6.45$). The findings of the study provide strong empirical support for the proposed hypotheses. Meaningful couple time was found to be positively and significantly associated with marital happiness, indicating that couples who spend more emotionally meaningful and engaging time together tend to experience higher levels of marital satisfaction. Additionally, significant gender differences were observed, with female participants reporting higher levels of both meaningful couple time and marital happiness than male participants. These results underscore the importance of quality interactions and emotional connectedness in enhancing marital well-being among employed couples.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between meaningful couple time and marital happiness among employed couples, as well as to explore gender differences in these variables. The findings of the study provide strong empirical support for the hypothesized relationship, indicating that meaningful couple time is positively and significantly associated with marital happiness. Additionally, significant gender differences were observed, with female participants reporting higher levels of both meaningful couple time and marital happiness compared to male participants.

The results of the correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between meaningful couple time and marital happiness. This finding suggests that couples who engage in more frequent and emotionally meaningful shared activities tend to experience greater satisfaction and happiness in their marital relationships. This result is consistent with contemporary research

emphasizing the importance of quality interactions in fostering relationship satisfaction. For instance, studies have shown that shared leisure activities and emotionally engaging interactions contribute to increased intimacy, better communication, and stronger relational bonds (Girme et al., 2014; Rauer & Volling, 2013; Williamson & Lavner, 2020). Further, research on daily couple interactions indicates that responsiveness, emotional support, and shared positive experiences significantly enhance relationship quality and well-being (Debrot et al., 2013; Reis et al., 2017). The present findings further support the notion that it is not merely the quantity of time spent together, but the quality and meaningfulness of that time that enhances marital well-being (Offer & Schneider, 2011; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2021).

The findings can be understood through the lens of social exchange theory and attachment theory. Meaningful couple time can be viewed as a relational resource that enhances perceived rewards within the relationship, thereby increasing satisfaction and commitment. Engaging in meaningful interactions may also fulfill emotional and attachment needs, promoting a sense of security and closeness between partners. Contemporary research supports this interpretation, indicating that emotionally supportive interactions and dyadic coping processes strengthen relationship satisfaction and resilience (Falconier et al., 2015; Overall & Simpson, 2015). In the context of employed couples, who often face time constraints and work-related stress, meaningful couple time may serve as a protective factor that buffers against the negative effects of these stressors on marital quality (Allen et al., 2020; Randall & Bodenmann, 2017).

The study also examined gender differences in meaningful couple time and marital happiness. The results indicated that female participants reported significantly higher levels of both variables compared to male participants. This finding may reflect gender-based differences in relational orientation and emotional engagement. Previous research suggests that women tend to place greater emphasis on emotional intimacy, communication, and relationship maintenance behaviors, which may contribute to their higher perception of meaningful interactions and marital satisfaction (Overall et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2022). Additionally, women may be more attuned to the emotional quality of shared experiences, leading to higher reported levels of both meaningful couple time and marital happiness (Reis et al., 2017; Debrot et al., 2013). A possible explanation for the observed gender differences lies in socio-cultural factors, particularly within the Indian context. Traditional gender roles and expectations may influence how men and women perceive and engage in marital relationships. Women may be more involved in maintaining relational harmony and investing in emotional aspects of the relationship, whereas men may focus more on instrumental roles such as financial provision. These differences may contribute to variations in how meaningful couple time is experienced and reported by each gender. Recent research in collectivistic and family-oriented societies supports this perspective, highlighting that gendered role expectations and cultural norms shape relationship behaviors, emotional expression, and marital satisfaction (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Batra & Reio, 2016; Raj et al., 2020).

The findings of this study have important practical implications. Given the significant association between meaningful couple time and marital happiness, interventions aimed at improving marital quality should emphasize the importance of intentional and emotionally engaging interactions between partners. Relationship counseling and psychoeducational programs can encourage couples to prioritize quality time together, even within the constraints of demanding work schedules. Organizations and policymakers may also consider promoting work-life balance initiatives that enable employed individuals to allocate sufficient time for their personal relationships.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the role of meaningful couple time in marital happiness among employed couples and examined gender differences in these variables. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between meaningful couple time and marital happiness, indicating that couples who engage in more meaningful and emotionally connected interactions tend to experience higher levels of marital satisfaction. Additionally, significant gender differences were observed, with female participants reporting higher levels of both meaningful couple time and marital happiness compared to male participants. These findings emphasize the importance of prioritizing quality time

and emotional engagement within marital relationships, particularly in the context of increasing work demands and time constraints faced by employed couples. Meaningful couple time emerges as a key factor in promoting relational well-being and sustaining marital happiness.

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