



Developing and Validating a Sexual Intelligence Training-Counseling Package for Women with Marital Conflicts

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Abstract

Introduction: Marital conflicts rooted in emotional dysregulation and sexual misunderstandings threaten intimacy. Although sexual intelligence provides an integrative framework, standardized and culturally adapted interventions, especially for women, remain limited in contexts such as Iran. Therefore, this study aimed to develop and validate a sexual intelligence training-counseling package for women experiencing marital conflicts.

Methods: This qualitative study employed deductive content analysis based on Klein's theoretical framework, using the analytic approach proposed by Brown and Clarke. Scientific literature related to sexual intelligence, women's sexual issues, and educational interventions was reviewed through purposive sampling. Ultimately, the content validity of the package was evaluated using the content validity ratio (CVR) and Cohen's Kappa coefficient.

Results: The finalized package had three core components, including sexual awareness and information (35.36%), emotion management skills (34.46%), and intelligence in sexual relationships (29.18%). CVR values for the components ranged from 0.40 to 1.00, and expert agreement was high (Cohen's Kappa = 0.928), indicating strong content validity.

Conclusion: The developed sexual intelligence training-counseling package demonstrated high content validity and strong conceptual coherence, offering a theory-based and culturally sensitive framework that is suitable for educational and counseling settings for women with marital conflicts.

Keywords: Counseling, Educational intervention, Marital conflict, Cultural adaptation, Sexual intelligence

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Introduction

Marital conflict, a common relational phenomenon arising from incompatibilities in expectations, needs, or goals (1), becomes particularly detrimental when couples lack the emotional and relational capacities required for constructive management. In addition, unresolved conflicts can gradually erode emotional security and intimacy, thereby increasing vulnerability to marital instability (2). Moreover, such conflicts frequently involve difficulties in emotional regulation, sexual communication, and mutual understanding (3), where emotional reactivity and avoidance patterns contribute to chronic relational distress (4). Accordingly, effective interventions must address both the emotional and sexual dimensions of marital relationships.

Intimacy, a central relational mechanism fostering emotional closeness, authenticity, and empathy (5), plays a critical role in emotional regulation and marital stability. Conversely, reduced intimacy diminishes

emotional attunement and heightens relational distance, thus increasing the likelihood of conflict escalation (6). Although intimacy is influenced by individual traits, it also depends on relational capacities that can be cultivated through structured developmental processes (6). However, existing interventions aimed at enhancing intimacy frequently focus solely on communication or emotional expression while overlooking the dynamic interplay among intimacy, emotional regulation, and sexual meaning-making within marital conflicts. This has resulted in fragmented approaches lacking a unified theoretical base (7).

As a theoretical construct, sexual intelligence provides an integrative framework that connects sexual awareness, emotional self-regulation, mutual respect, and meaning-making dimensions frequently implicated in marital conflicts. Sexual intelligence, defined as the capacity for adaptive and respectful sexual interactions through awareness, emotional maturity, self-regulation, and

meaning-making (8), extends beyond factual sexual knowledge. It emphasizes intentionality, mindfulness, and relational insight within sexual experiences (9). Limited sexual intelligence can manifest as difficulty expressing needs, misunderstandings of boundaries, or emotional withdrawal, thereby exacerbating both sexual and relational difficulties (10, 11). Conversely, enhancing sexual intelligence may support individuals in clarifying boundaries, regulating emotions, and constructing shared meanings, thereby facilitating healthier relational patterns (11). Its multidimensional nature makes it well suited to structured educational-counseling interventions (9).

Despite the conceptual relevance of sexual intelligence, a critical review of previous studies indicates that most empirical and intervention studies have narrowly operationalized the construct, often reducing it to sexual knowledge, attitudes, or communication while neglecting deeper emotional and meaning-making components. This conceptual reductionism has limited the creation of comprehensive interventions capable of addressing marital conflicts in a multidimensional and sustainable manner (12). Moreover, despite the need for progressive frameworks that integrate awareness, emotional regulation, intimacy, respect, meaning-making, and goal-setting, existing interventions frequently lack a cohesive theoretical foundation and a standardized developmental sequence (13). Sociocultural factors further shape sexual beliefs, emotional expression, and relational expectations, restricting the relevance of non-indigenous programs in specific cultural contexts (14).

The literature reveals that most available intervention programs are short-term, skill-specific, or psychoeducational, and seldom follow a theoretically grounded progression of components. Additionally, researchers have highlighted a number of challenges, such as insufficient cultural adaptation, limited attention to gendered emotional roles, and the absence of validated program structures, indicating the need for culturally sensitive, theory-driven, and systematically structured interventions (15).

Within the Iranian sociocultural context, women frequently play a central role in emotional regulation and relational maintenance. Their sexual awareness, emotion management, and meaning-making processes are closely tied to marital commitment and stability (16), underscores the importance of developing culturally adapted, theory-based interventions that address women's relational and sexual experiences within marital conflicts. Nevertheless, prior Iranian studies have mainly focused on isolated variables, such as communication skills, emotion regulation, or sexual satisfaction, while not integrating them into a coherent sexual intelligence framework. Moreover, few studies have developed indigenous, structured programs grounded in a comprehensive theoretical model, while none of them have systematically connected Klein's sexual intelligence theory to the lived experiences of women facing marital conflicts.

Given the high prevalence of marital conflicts and their

profound consequences for emotional well-being, sexual satisfaction, and family stability, there is a clear need for integrated, theory-based interventions that address both emotional and sexual domains. It is noteworthy that sexual intelligence provides a conceptually strong framework for developing such interventions by linking sexual awareness, emotion regulation, and relational meaning-making through structured educational-counseling processes. Despite this conceptual importance, the existing literature lacks a standardized, validated, and culturally adapted intervention framework grounded in a unified theoretical model. Some prior studies have addressed isolated components. However, to the best of our knowledge, no research has so far developed or psychometrically validated a structured, theory-driven program based on Klein's sexual intelligence framework, particularly for women experiencing marital conflicts in socioculturally specific contexts, including Iran. This absence of standardization, validation, and cultural adaptation defines a clear gap that the present study seeks to address.

Accordingly, this study aims to operationalize the theoretical construct of sexual intelligence by developing and validating a sexual intelligence training-counseling package for women experiencing marital conflicts, grounded in Klein's (8) sexual intelligence theory. By integrating conceptual definitions, a theoretically grounded progression of components, and expert validation, this study seeks to construct a structured and culturally appropriate intervention framework. The central research question guiding this work is as follows:

What are the components, structure, content, and content validity of a sexual intelligence training-counseling package for women with marital conflicts?

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative methodological design to develop and validate a sexual-intelligence-based training-counseling package for women experiencing marital conflicts. The study was theoretically grounded in Klein's sexual intelligence framework (8) and implemented using a deductive qualitative content analysis approach.

Documentary data were collected through purposive sampling of 62 relevant sources. They included 43 peer-reviewed scientific articles and books published between 2010 and 2025 focusing on sexual intelligence, women's sexuality, and marital conflict, as well as 19 applied, clinical, and educational references published between 2006 and 2025 addressing intervention strategies and counseling techniques. The inclusion criteria required (a) conceptual relevance to sexual intelligence, (b) applicability to marital or sexual relationship dynamics, and (c) utility for intervention development.

Intervention Structure and Thematic Organization

The structure of the educational--counseling package was directly derived from the thematic categories extracted during qualitative analysis. Each session was

aligned with one or more core domains identified in the literature, including sexual awareness, emotional regulation, relational-sexual skills, sexual beliefs, and conflict-resolution competencies. This process ensured that session content was theoretically coherent and responsive to the documented needs of women navigating marital conflicts.

Data Extraction

Data were extracted using a researcher-designed content-analysis checklist developed based on the core dimensions of Klein's sexual intelligence theory. The checklist contained predefined categories for identifying relevant concepts, skills, exercises, and counseling strategies related to sexual awareness, emotion management, relational-sexual meaning, and conflict-related dynamics. In addition, a maximum-information recording strategy was used to ensure comprehensive documentation of relevant materials from each source.

Data Analysis

Deductive qualitative content analysis was conducted following Klein's theoretical framework and the thematic analysis procedures recommended by Braun and Clarke (17). Moreover, the analysis proceeded through the following steps to enhance transparency and replicability.

Definition of Coding Units

The unit of analysis was defined as any meaningful textual segment, ranging from a word or phrase to a full sentence or short paragraph, conveying a concept relevant to sexual intelligence, marital conflicts, or intervention development. The units were selected based on conceptual relevance to research questions and the theoretical framework.

Initial (Deductive) Coding

The initial codes were generated deductively based on predefined categories derived from Klein's model and the study objectives. These categories included sexual awareness, emotional regulation, relational-sexual meaning, and intervention-based strategies. The researcher systematically reviewed extracted data, applying these codes to all relevant segments.

Emergent (Inductive) Coding

An inductive coding procedure was also employed to avoid overlooking important insights not captured by the initial framework. Text segments were assigned new emergent codes if they did not fit the existing categories but were conceptually relevant.

Categorization

Both deductive and emergent codes were then grouped into broader subcomponents based on semantic similarity and theoretical coherence. For example, codes related to identifying personal sexual needs and expressing sexual desires were categorized under the subcomponent

"Sexual Awareness." Subsequently, subcomponents were organized into main components aligned with the overarching dimensions of sexual intelligence.

Theme Development

The main components and subcomponents were iteratively reviewed to identify and refine overarching themes. This review involved synthesizing similar components, clarifying conceptual boundaries, and ensuring that each theme represented a distinct dimension of sexual intelligence relevant to marital conflicts. The themes were finalized based on theoretical alignment with Klein's model and the frequency and richness of supporting data. This iterative analytic process ultimately formed a structured framework used to design the final 10-session training-counseling package.

Trustworthiness and Resolution of Disagreements

To enhance trustworthiness, a second researcher independently reviewed approximately 30% of the extracted data and coding. Then, coding discrepancies, category assignments, and theme interpretations were compared and discussed in depth. When disagreements arose, the researchers revisited the raw data and coding definitions until full consensus was reached. Finally, necessary modifications were applied to ensure analytic rigor and minimize subjectivity in theme development.

Content Validity Assessment

The content validity of the initial components was assessed using Lawshe's method. A panel of ten experts independently rated the essentiality of each component using a three-point scale ("essential," "useful but not essential," and "not necessary"). Content validity ratio (CVR) was calculated for each component, and items with a CVR of 0.40 or higher were retained.

Following qualitative refinement, the structured session framework was evaluated by a second panel of five experts. Then, inter-rater agreement regarding session-content matching, sequencing appropriateness, adequacy of allocated time, sufficiency of exercises, and overall structural coherence was assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. This step ensured the clarity, feasibility, and operational validity of the package prior to pilot implementation.

Results

A total of 62 sources were included in the two-phase qualitative content analysis. In Phase 1, forty-three sources (published between 2010 and 2025) were purposively selected to extract women's sexual issues, needs, and challenges within the context of marital conflicts. In Phase 2, nineteen additional sources (published between 2006 and 2025) were analyzed to identify and refine relevant educational and counseling techniques. Sampling proceeded purposively until informational saturation was achieved.

The qualitative thematic analysis yielded one

overarching theme, namely, sexual intelligence in marital relationships, which had several main categories, including sexual awareness, sexual health knowledge, sexual beliefs and schemas, emotional management skills, relational-sexual skills, conflict resolution in sexual relationships, sexual meaning and identity, and mindful sexual awareness. Table 1 presents the hierarchical structure of themes, categories, subcategories, representative open

codes, and meaning units. The relative contribution of each of the main themes to the overall content of the training-counseling package was calculated based on the frequency of extracted semantic units and open codes. The largest proportion of extracted content was associated with emotion management skills (46.34%), sexual awareness and information (35.36%), and sexual relationship intelligence (18.29%), respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. Thematic Structure of the Qualitative Content Analysis

Main Theme	Main Categories	Subcategories	Examples of Open Codes	Examples of Meaning Units
Sexual intelligence in marital relationships	Sexual awareness	Knowledge of sexual intelligence	Lack of familiarity with sexual intelligence; purely biological understanding of sexuality	Sexual intelligence as an internal capacity enables awareness, emotional connection, and adaptive sexual responses.
		Knowledge of sexual anatomy	Lack of knowledge about body organs and their functions	Couples may experience sexual dissatisfaction due to insufficient understanding of their own or their partner's body.
		Awareness of internal and external sexual stimuli	Internal stimuli; external stimuli	Sexual thoughts and feelings are natural and should be consciously understood and managed.
		Sexual attitudes and beliefs	Personal attitudes toward sexuality; couple attitudes toward sexual relations	Attitudes toward sexuality shape the quality and awareness of sexual relationships.
		Sexual autonomy	Sexual self-awareness exercises	Autonomous sexual behavior enhances sexual satisfaction and relationship quality.
		Body image awareness	Misconceptions about body image	Negative body image influences sexual satisfaction and confidence
	Sexual health knowledge	Basic knowledge of sexual health	Misinterpretation of sexual relations	Sexual relationships should not be reduced only to physiological performance.
		Comprehensive sexual health education	Sexual health education	Sexual health education includes physical, emotional, ethical, and relational aspects.
		Maintaining physical and psychological health	Preventive health behaviors	Sexual hygiene contributes to both physical and psychological wellbeing.
	Sexual beliefs and schemas	Identification of sexual myths	Negative sexual beliefs	Maladaptive sexual schemas can lead to sexual dysfunction and marital conflicts.
		Modification of dysfunctional beliefs	Sexual myth correction	Correcting distorted beliefs improves sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment.
	Emotional management skills	Emotion recognition and expression	Difficulty expressing emotions	Ability to recognize and express emotions improves sexual and relational quality.
		Emotional reaction management in sexual relationships	Misinterpretation of emotional issues	Emotional misunderstandings may intensify marital conflicts.
		Sexual self-management	Management of sexual behaviors and emotions	Differences in sensation seeking may influence marital conflicts.
	Relational-sexual skills	Sexual communication	Difficulty expressing sexual needs	Couples who openly discuss sexual expectations experience higher satisfaction.
		Intimacy enhancement	Sexual intimacy strengthening	Sexual intimacy is closely related to marital satisfaction.
		Sexual desire regulation	Low sexual desire	Reduced sexual desire may be a major source of marital dissatisfaction.
	Conflict resolution in sexual relationships	Sexual conflict resolution	Negative emotional responses; stress	Ineffective conflict resolution leads to decreased intimacy.
		Empathy and forgiveness	Low forgiveness	Forgiveness reduces marital conflicts while improving relationship quality.
		Problem solving	Rumination; inability to resolve conflicts	Rumination interferes with effective problem-solving skills in marital relationships.
	Sexual meaning and identity	Spiritual and psychological dimensions of sexuality	Spiritual connection in sexual relationships	Sexual relations involve emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions.
		Sexual values and identity	Sexual identity and relational meaning	Sexual values shape personal and relational identity.
	Mindful sexual awareness	Sexual mindfulness	Mental distractions during sexual activity	Being mentally present enhances sexual satisfaction.
		Sexual intelligence development	Long-term development of sexual intelligence	Sustainable sexual intelligence requires continuous education and social support.

The main components and subcomponents derived from the two-phase thematic analysis for the development of the sexual-intelligence training-counseling package are summarized in Table 2. The components include sexual awareness and information (e.g., introduction to sexual intelligence, sexual awareness skills, and sexual learning patterns), emotion management skills (e.g., sexual self-management, conflict regulation, sexual communication), and sexual relationship intelligence (e.g., meaning and future design, mindfulness).

Moreover, each subcomponent is accompanied by a conceptual description grounded in the qualitative findings.

To operationalize the content priorities identified in the thematic analysis, the proportional weight of each major theme was translated into a structured ten-session training-counseling program. Accordingly, 5 (50%), 3 (35%), and 2 (15%) sessions were allocated to emotion management skills (1), sexual awareness and information

(2), and sexual relationship intelligence (3), respectively. The objectives and core content of each session are provided in Table 3.

Content Validity Ratio Calculated Based on Lawshe's Method (10 Experts)

Content validity was assessed using the Lawshe's method. Based on the results (Table 4), all retained components achieved the minimum acceptable threshold ($CVR \geq 0.40$). CVR values ranged from 0.40 to 1.00. Subcomponents not meeting the threshold, such as sexual myths ($CVR = 0.20$), were eliminated during revision.

Inter-rater agreement regarding the structure, content, and adequacy of the finalized training-counseling package was evaluated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. Kappa values for content compliance, structural suitability, time adequacy, and overall adequacy ranged from 0.90 to 0.98, indicating excellent agreement among experts (Table 5). The overall agreement coefficient was 0.93, confirming

Table 2. Concepts and Subcomponents Extracted for Designing the Sexual Intelligence Training-Counseling Package

Main Component	Subcomponent	Description
Sexual awareness and information	Introduction to sexual intelligence	Biological definition; anatomy of self and partner; internal and external stimuli; personal and couple attitudes toward sexuality
	Sexual awareness	Recognition of needs, preferences, boundaries; sexual self-awareness exercises; identification of sexual learning patterns
	Sexual health information	Correction of misconceptions; principles of healthy and satisfying sexual relationships
	Sexual myths	Identification and correction of dysfunctional sexual beliefs
Emotion management skills	Sexual self-management	Emotional regulation in sexual behavior; relationship quality; conflict resolution
	Sexual intimacy	Distinction between intercourse and intimacy; building emotionally close and meaningful relationships; sexual empathy and nonverbal communication
	Sexual communication and reciprocity	Sexual dialogue skills; management of sexual differences; attachment pattern recognition; problem-solving skills
Sexual relationship intelligence	Meaning of the sexual relationship	Exploration of spiritual, psychological, and cultural dimensions; clarification of sexual goals and values
	Designing sexual life	Visualization of a healthy future sexual relationship; planning for sustainable development of sexual intelligence
	Mindfulness	Mindfulness strengthening in sexual relationships

Table 3. Expert Panel Evaluation of Package Components (Content Validity)

Main Component	Subcomponent	Very Essential (n)	Useful (n)	Not Needed (n)	CVR	Agreement (%)
Sexual awareness and information	Introduction to sexual intelligence					
	Anatomy and stimuli recognition					
	Attitudes toward sexuality					
	Sexual awareness skills					
	Sexual learning patterns					
	Sexual health principles					
	Sexual myths					
Emotion management skills	Sexual self-management					
	Relationship quality					
	Conflict resolution					
	Sexual intimacy					
	Sexual communication					
Sexual relationship intelligence	Meaning and future design					
	Mindfulness					

Note. CVR: Content validity ratio.

Table 4. Structure and Content of the Sexual Intelligence Training-Counseling Package

Session	Objective	Core Content
1	Introduction to sexual intelligence	Group orientation; rules; concept of sexual intelligence; anatomy; internal and external stimuli
2	Sexual awareness	Identification of sexual problems, needs, preferences, and boundaries; self-awareness exercises
3	Sexual health knowledge	Correction of cognitive distortions; healthy sexual relationships
4	Sexual myths	Identification and evaluation of dysfunctional sexual myths
5	Emotion management	Primary and secondary emotions; sexual self-management; conflict regulation
6	Sexual intimacy	Distinction between intercourse and intimacy; emotional closeness; sexual empathy
7	Sexual communication	Respectful sexual dialogue; managing differences; problem-solving skills
8	Meaning in sexual relationships	Spiritual, psychological, and cultural dimensions; values and goals
9	Designing sexual life	Visualization of desired sexual future; sustainable sexual development
10	Mindfulness and integration	Mindfulness training; review; evaluation; integrated practices

Table 5. Inter-Rater Agreement for Validation of the Training-Counseling Package

Evaluation Domain	Mean Cohen's Kappa
Content compliance	0.93
Structural suitability	0.98
Time adequacy	0.94
Overall adequacy	0.92
Overall agreement	0.93

the strong content validity and practical suitability of the training-counseling package.

Discussion

The present study developed and validated a sexual intelligence training-counseling package for women with marital conflicts based on Klein’s sexual intelligence theory (8). The findings of the deductive qualitative content analysis and expert evaluations revealed that the package has acceptable content and structural validity. The identification of three key components, namely, sexual awareness and information, emotion management skills, and intelligence in sexual relationships, reflects a coherent theoretical structure consistent with Klein’s conceptual framework.

Sexual awareness and information emerged as a fundamental component, highlighting the role of the cognitive understanding of sexual beliefs, needs, and boundaries in marital dynamics. Previous research demonstrated that limited sexual knowledge and dysfunctional sexual beliefs are associated with reduced marital satisfaction and increased conflicts (10). In culturally sensitive contexts, enhancing sexual awareness has similarly been linked to greater marital commitment and satisfaction among women (16).

Emotion management skills constituted the most content-rich component, which aligns with evidence indicating that difficulties in emotional regulation significantly contribute to marital conflicts and sexual dissatisfaction (18). Research suggests that cognitive and emotional regulation strategies mediate the association between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction, emphasizing the necessity of integrating emotion-focused strategies into sexual counseling programs (19).

Likewise, systematic reviews support the effectiveness of communication-based and emotion-based interventions in reducing marital conflicts while improving relationship quality (13, 20).

The third component, intelligence in sexual relationships, encompasses meaning making, personal values, and future-oriented planning within intimate relationships. Consistent with Klein’s model, it integrates the psychological, emotional, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality (8). Some studies reported that shared values, attitudes toward fidelity, and the personal meaning attributed to sexual relationships are strongly associated with marital stability and adjustment (6, 14).

Moreover, the structured, hierarchical organization of the ten counseling sessions, from sexual awareness to emotional regulation, intimacy, mutual respect, meaning making, and goal setting, reflects a developmental approach to skill acquisition. The session-based interventions of this kind are known to facilitate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes in marital and family counseling contexts (21, 22). The high level of expert agreement, as reflected in the content validity indices and Cohen’s kappa, further supports the internal coherence and applicability of the developed package.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on women attending counseling centers in Shahrekord, which may have restricted the generalizability of our findings to other settings or cultural contexts. Additionally, due to the qualitative and methodological nature of the study, it is impossible to confirm the practical effectiveness of the intervention. Nonetheless, the study has provided a validated educational-counseling framework suitable for clinical use. Accordingly, it is recommended that future research evaluate the intervention’s effectiveness through quantitative or quasi-experimental designs and assess outcomes such as marital satisfaction, intimacy, commitment, and sexual well-being.

Conclusion

This study developed and validated a sexual intelligence training-counseling package for women experiencing marital conflicts, grounded in Klein’s theoretical model.

The results confirmed acceptable content validity, strong expert agreement, and a coherent three-part structure encompassing sexual awareness, emotion management skills, and intelligence in sexual relationships. Overall, the package offers a structured and culturally sensitive framework that may support counsellors and mental health professionals in addressing the cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions of sexuality among women facing marital challenges. It is noteworthy that although clinical effectiveness was not evaluated, the validated structure provides a foundation for further empirical research. It is suggested that future studies use quantitative or quasi-experimental methods to assess its impact and explore its applicability across diverse populations, including men and couples at various stages of marital relationships.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests to disclose.

Ethical Approval

This study was derived from a PhD dissertation approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Isfahan Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch (IR.IAU.KHUISF.REC.1400.353).

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