

Individual Psychological Factors Associated with Marital Adjustment: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Marital adjustment is a fundamental psychological process that contributes to relationship stability, marital satisfaction, and divorce prevention. Although numerous studies have identified factors associated with marital adjustment, evidence regarding individual psychological determinants remains fragmented and lacks comprehensive synthesis. This study aimed to synthesize empirical evidence on individual factors influencing marital adjustment. A systematic review was conducted following Kitchenham's guidelines, the PRISMA reporting framework, and the SPIDER approach for formulating the research question. Literature was retrieved from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases, covering publications from 2016 to 2025. Of the 350 records identified, 17 empirical studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review. The synthesis identified four major categories of individual factors influencing marital adjustment: personality traits and intrapersonal regulation, psychological well-being, emotional competence, and individual life circumstances. Personality characteristics and self-regulation emerged as the most consistent predictors of marital adjustment. These findings demonstrate that marital adjustment is a multidimensional construct shaped by the interaction of various individual psychological resources and provide an evidence-based foundation for developing psychological interventions, premarital education, and marital counseling programs.

Keywords: marital adjustment; psychological factors; systematic review; emotion regulation

Abstrak

Penyesuaian pernikahan merupakan proses psikologis yang berperan penting dalam menjaga stabilitas hubungan, meningkatkan kepuasan pernikahan, dan mencegah perceraian. Meskipun berbagai penelitian telah mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang berkaitan dengan penyesuaian pernikahan, bukti mengenai faktor psikologis individual masih tersebar dan belum tersintesis secara komprehensif. Penelitian ini bertujuan mensintesis bukti empiris mengenai faktor-faktor individual yang memengaruhi penyesuaian pernikahan. Penelitian menggunakan metode systematic review dengan mengikuti tahapan Kitchenham, pedoman PRISMA, dan kerangka SPIDER dalam perumusan pertanyaan penelitian. Penelusuran literatur dilakukan melalui basis data Scopus dan Google Scholar pada publikasi tahun 2016–2025. Dari 350 artikel yang teridentifikasi, sebanyak 17 artikel memenuhi kriteria inklusi dan dianalisis. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan empat kelompok faktor utama yang memengaruhi penyesuaian pernikahan, yaitu karakteristik kepribadian dan regulasi intrapersonal, kesejahteraan psikologis, kompetensi emosional, serta kondisi kehidupan individu. Karakteristik kepribadian dan regulasi diri merupakan faktor yang paling konsisten berhubungan dengan

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penyesuaian pernikahan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa penyesuaian pernikahan merupakan konstruk multidimensional yang dipengaruhi oleh interaksi berbagai sumber daya psikologis individu, serta memberikan dasar ilmiah bagi pengembangan intervensi psikologis, pendidikan pranikah, dan program konseling pernikahan.

Kata kunci: penyesuaian pernikahan; faktor psikologis; systematic review; regulasi emosi.

Introduction

Entering early adulthood, individuals encounter a series of developmental tasks that require psychological maturity, one of which is establishing intimate relationships through marriage. Marriage is regarded not only as a legal and social institution but also as a developmental transition in which individuals adapt to new roles as spouses, family members, and future parents (Hurlock, 1980). From the perspective of family development, the success of this transition largely depends on individuals' ability to adjust to changing roles, shared responsibilities, communication patterns, and conflict resolution throughout married life (Santrock, 2011; Riansa et al., 2023). Consequently, marital adjustment has been recognized as a critical indicator of relationship stability and long-term marital functioning.

Marital adjustment refers to the continuous psychological process through which individuals or couples adapt to the demands, changes, and challenges of married life (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Unlike marital satisfaction, which primarily reflects individuals' subjective evaluations of their relationship, marital adjustment emphasizes an ongoing adaptive process involving effective communication, flexibility, conflict management, mutual support, and the ability to maintain relational balance under various life stressors (Ünal & Akgün, 2020). Schneiders (1964) further explained that successful marital adjustment involves multiple psychological capacities, including emotional regulation, minimizing defensive reactions, reducing frustration, rational thinking, learning from experience, utilizing previous experiences constructively, and developing realistic attitudes toward one's partner and married life. Therefore, marital adjustment reflects not only the quality of a marital relationship but also individuals' psychological capacity to establish and sustain healthy, adaptive partnerships.

The importance of marital adjustment has become increasingly evident in light of rising divorce rates worldwide, including in Indonesia. According to the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency, there were 1,478,302 registered marriages and 394,608 divorce cases in 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that poor marital adjustment is associated with increased marital conflict, lower relationship satisfaction, and a greater likelihood of divorce (Heryana & Ramadhan, 2023; Ünal & Akgün, 2020). Furthermore, inadequate marital adjustment extends beyond the marital relationship itself, affecting family psychological well-being, parenting quality, children's development, and overall family functioning (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Understanding the determinants of marital adjustment is therefore essential for developing preventive strategies aimed at strengthening marital relationships and promoting family well-being.

Existing empirical studies indicate that marital adjustment is influenced by a wide range of determinants that can generally be categorized into relational,

contextual, and individual factors. Relational factors include communication patterns, partner support, relationship quality, and conflict-resolution strategies (Ünal & Akgün, 2020; Lashari, 2016). Contextual factors encompass economic conditions, occupational stress, cultural influences, and involvement of extended family members, all of which shape marital dynamics (Heryana & Ramadhan, 2023). In contrast, individual factors refer to personal psychological characteristics, including personality traits, emotional regulation, attachment styles, psychological well-being, coping abilities, and emotional competence, which influence how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to marital challenges (Ahmadi et al., 2020; Lashari, 2016). Collectively, these findings suggest that individual psychological resources constitute a fundamental basis for successful marital adjustment because they determine individuals' capacity to regulate emotions, manage conflicts, and maintain adaptive interpersonal relationships.

Despite the growing body of research, evidence regarding individual factors influencing marital adjustment remains fragmented and inconsistent. Some studies identify personality traits as the strongest predictors of marital adjustment, whereas others emphasize the roles of emotional regulation, psychological well-being, emotional competence, attachment, or life experiences. This variation has resulted in the absence of a comprehensive conceptual understanding regarding which individual psychological factors consistently contribute to marital adjustment. Moreover, previous review studies have primarily focused on determinants of divorce, marital satisfaction, or relational factors (Mauliddina et al., 2021), while systematic syntheses specifically addressing individual psychological determinants of marital adjustment remain scarce. Consequently, there is a significant knowledge gap that warrants a comprehensive systematic review integrating existing empirical evidence.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to systematically synthesize empirical evidence regarding the individual factors influencing marital adjustment. Unlike previous studies that have focused primarily on divorce determinants or isolated psychological variables, this review integrates findings from diverse empirical studies to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework of the individual psychological factors most consistently associated with marital adjustment. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of marital psychology literature while providing an evidence-based foundation for designing psychological interventions, premarital education, and marital counseling programs aimed at strengthening individual psychological resources and promoting healthier marital relationships.

Methods

This systematic review was conducted following the three main stages proposed by Kitchenham (2004): review planning, review execution, and review reporting. During the planning stage, the research question was formulated using the SPIDER framework (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, and Research Type). The research question guiding this review was: What individual factors have been identified in empirical studies as influencing marital adjustment among married individuals?

A search protocol was subsequently developed by identifying search terms derived from the research question and expanding them into a comprehensive list of keywords, including marital adjustment, marital satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, individual factors, psychological factors, personal factors, married couples, spouses, and marriage. Literature searches were conducted using the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. The initial search identified 200 records from Google Scholar and 150 records from Scopus, yielding a total of 350 articles. All retrieved records were imported into Rayyan to identify and remove duplicate studies, resulting in the exclusion of 19 duplicate records. The remaining articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts, leading to the exclusion of 269 studies that did not meet the eligibility criteria. Consequently, 62 articles were retained for full-text assessment.

Following a comprehensive eligibility assessment, 17 empirical studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. The study selection process is presented in Figure 1. The inclusion criteria comprised studies involving married individuals as participants, focusing on individual factors influencing marital adjustment, employing marital adjustment as the primary outcome, published in English, and appearing in peer-reviewed journals between 2016 and 2025. The exclusion criteria included studies focusing primarily on relational or contextual factors, studies with outcomes unrelated to marital adjustment, non-empirical publications (e.g., reports, books, literature reviews, dissertations, and theses), studies with inadequately described methodologies, and articles for which the full text was unavailable.

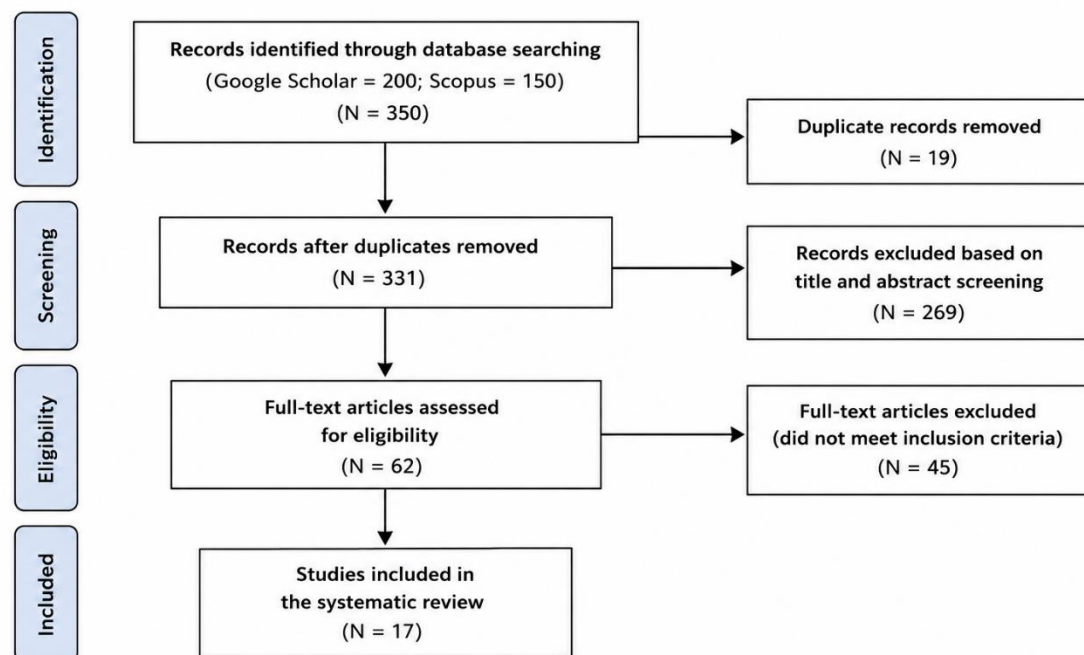


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process.

Note. PRISMA = Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses.

Results

The systematic review identified that marital adjustment is influenced by a wide range of multidimensional individual factors, with the majority of empirical studies emphasizing internal psychological characteristics, particularly personality traits and intrapersonal regulatory capacities. Across the reviewed literature, personality-related variables including neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and self-directedness were consistently reported as significant predictors of marital adjustment, suggesting that stable individual dispositions play a central role in facilitating successful adaptation within marriage.

Beyond personality, psychological resources such as self-esteem, self-compassion, differentiation of self, action flexibility, forgiveness, and attachment security emerged as important protective factors associated with higher levels of marital adjustment. Individuals possessing stronger positive self-evaluations, greater emotional acceptance, and secure attachment patterns tended to report healthier marital relationships than those characterized by emotional instability or insecure attachment.

The review also demonstrated that emotional competence represents another prominent domain influencing marital adjustment. Emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptive humor styles, and subjective well-being consistently showed positive associations with marital functioning across different cultural contexts. These findings indicate that the ability to understand, regulate, and express emotions effectively contributes substantially to relationship satisfaction and adaptive marital interactions. Although less frequently investigated, several studies highlighted the importance of individual life-condition variables, including body image, sexual satisfaction, physical health, age, educational level, and socioeconomic status. Among these variables, body image and sexual satisfaction appeared to be particularly strong predictors of marital adjustment, emphasizing that physical and sexual well-being remain integral components of marital quality.

Overall, the reviewed studies predominantly involved married adults ranging from early adulthood to middle adulthood, with considerable variation in marital duration. Although most studies reported relatively consistent findings across age groups, several investigations suggested that developmental stage may influence how individuals experience stress, emotional regulation, and marital adaptation throughout the marital life cycle.

Methodologically, all seventeen eligible studies employed correlational research designs, reflecting the predominance of cross-sectional quantitative approaches in this field. While these studies consistently identified significant associations between individual characteristics and marital adjustment, they provide limited evidence regarding causal mechanisms or developmental changes over time. This indicates a need for future longitudinal and prospective studies capable of explaining how individual psychological resources influence marital adjustment across different stages of marriage.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that individual psychological characteristics remain the primary explanatory framework for understanding marital adjustment. Nevertheless, the literature has largely focused on isolated

predictors rather than integrating multiple psychological mechanisms into comprehensive explanatory models. Future research should therefore adopt more sophisticated analytical approaches, such as mediation, moderation, or longitudinal structural equation modeling, to better understand the dynamic interplay among personality, emotional competence, psychological well-being, and relational processes in shaping marital adjustment.

Table 1 summarizes the 17 empirical studies that met the predefined inclusion criteria and identifies the principal individual factors associated with marital adjustment.

Table 1. Individual Factors Influencing Marital Adjustment

No.	Author(s) & Year	Participants	Individual Factors	Main Findings
1	Zhi et al. (2025)	456 married individuals (pregnant women and their partners)	Self-esteem	Self-esteem was positively associated with marital adjustment among both husbands and wives.
2	Ahmadi et al. (2020)	300 married couples (married for more than one year)	Family-of-origin health status and personality traits (NEO-FFI: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness)	Neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness significantly influenced marital adjustment.
3	Cirhinlioglu et al. (2017)	466 married individuals	Psychological distress, self-esteem, emotional dependency	Psychological distress was negatively associated with marital adjustment, whereas self-esteem and emotional dependency were positively associated with marital adjustment.
4	McDonald et al. (2018)	829 married individuals	Religiosity, forgiveness, and spousal empathy	Spousal empathy and forgiveness significantly enhanced marital adjustment.
5	Işık et al. (2020)	226 individuals (113 married couples)	Differentiation of self	Differentiation of self was positively associated with marital adjustment.
6	Babayan et al. (2018)	330 married women	Body image, sexual satisfaction, age, income, education, and health	Body image and sexual satisfaction emerged as strong predictors of marital adjustment.
7	Bibi et al. (2017)	263 married individuals	Self-compassion	Self-compassion was positively associated with marital adjustment.
8	Mousavi (2017)	154 married individuals	Personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness, loyalty)	Neuroticism was negatively associated with marital adjustment, whereas extraversion and agreeableness showed positive associations.

9	Kaloom & Kamal (2018)	222 married individuals	Emotional intelligence and multitasking ability	Emotional intelligence was identified as a strong predictor of marital adjustment.
10	Koruk (2017)	178 married individuals	Attachment styles (secure, dismissing, fearful, preoccupied) and gender	Secure attachment was positively associated with marital adjustment.
11	Onabamiro et al. (2017)	330 married individuals	Self-esteem and emotional intelligence	Both self-esteem and emotional intelligence were positively associated with marital adjustment.
12	Öztürk & Arkar (2018)	402 married individuals (couples with and without sexual dysfunction)	Personality dimensions: temperament (novelty seeking, harm avoidance, reward dependence, persistence) and character (self-directedness, cooperativeness, self-transcendence)	Lower self-directedness and higher harm avoidance were associated with poorer marital adjustment.
13	Demirci & Odacı (2020)	698 married individuals	Subjective well-being, humor styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, self-defeating), and satisfaction of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness)	Subjective well-being and adaptive humor styles (self-enhancing and affiliative) significantly predicted marital adjustment.
14	Costa & Mosmann (2021)	462 married individuals	Big Five personality traits (neuroticism, socialization, achievement)	Socialization and achievement were positively associated with marital adjustment, whereas neuroticism showed a negative association.
15	Pan et al. (2024)	354 married individuals (patients with Crohn's disease and their partners)	Age, distress self-disclosure, and subjective well-being	Subjective well-being, distress self-disclosure, and age significantly influenced marital adjustment.
16	Suri & Kochhar (2021)	80 married individuals (married for less than seven years)	Emotional intelligence	Emotional intelligence demonstrated a weak but statistically significant relationship with marital adjustment.
17	Abbasi & Taher (2022)	400 married university students	Action flexibility and personality traits (HEXACO: extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience)	Action flexibility, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience were positively associated with marital adjustment.

Discussion

This systematic review aimed to synthesize empirical evidence regarding individual factors influencing marital adjustment. The findings demonstrate that marital adjustment is a multidimensional psychological process shaped by the interaction of personality characteristics, psychological resources, emotional competence, and contextual life conditions. Rather than being determined by a single predictor, successful marital adjustment appears to result from the integration of relatively stable individual characteristics with dynamic psychological processes that enable spouses to adapt to changing marital demands.

One of the most consistent findings across the reviewed studies is the prominent role of personality characteristics in predicting marital adjustment. Traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and self-directedness were consistently associated with higher levels of marital adjustment, whereas neuroticism showed a robust negative association. These findings suggest that emotionally stable individuals are more likely to manage marital conflicts constructively, regulate emotional reactions effectively, and maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships. Conversely, individuals high in neuroticism tend to perceive marital stressors more negatively, experience stronger emotional reactivity, and display maladaptive coping strategies that undermine relationship quality. These results are consistent with the Five-Factor Model of Personality (Costa & McCrae, 2012), which proposes that stable personality traits influence individuals' cognitive appraisal, emotional regulation, and interpersonal behavior throughout adulthood.

Beyond personality, this review highlights the importance of psychological resources as internal mechanisms supporting marital adjustment. Self-esteem, self-compassion, differentiation of self, subjective well-being, and action flexibility consistently emerged as protective factors associated with healthier marital functioning. Individuals possessing positive self-evaluations and greater psychological resilience demonstrated stronger capacities to cope with marital stress and interpersonal conflict. These findings align with the principles of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which emphasize that psychological strengths contribute substantially to adaptive functioning and overall well-being. Likewise, Self-Compassion Theory suggests that individuals who treat themselves with kindness during stressful situations are better able to regulate emotions and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. Consequently, psychological resources not only reduce vulnerability to marital distress but also promote adaptive responses during relational challenges.

Another important finding concerns emotional competence, which emerged as one of the strongest psychological domains explaining marital adjustment. Emotional intelligence, empathy, forgiveness, adaptive humor, and secure attachment consistently demonstrated positive associations with marital adjustment across diverse populations. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to recognize, understand, regulate, and appropriately express emotions during interpersonal interactions, thereby facilitating constructive conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. These findings support Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, which emphasizes emotional regulation and interpersonal competence as fundamental

components of successful social relationships. Similarly, Attachment Theory provides additional theoretical support by suggesting that secure attachment facilitates trust, emotional security, and effective communication between partners, ultimately enhancing marital adjustment.

Although psychological variables dominated the literature, contextual life conditions also contributed significantly to marital adjustment. Body image, sexual satisfaction, physical health, age, education, and socioeconomic status were identified as important contextual predictors, although they were investigated less frequently than personality-related variables. Sexual satisfaction and body image, in particular, consistently emerged as strong predictors of marital adjustment, suggesting that marital quality depends not only on psychological functioning but also on physical and relational well-being. Furthermore, studies involving couples coping with chronic illness demonstrated that subjective well-being, stress disclosure, and partner support remain important determinants of marital adjustment. These findings indicate that contextual factors interact dynamically with psychological characteristics rather than functioning independently.

Despite the overall consistency of the reviewed evidence, several inconsistencies deserve attention. While emotional intelligence was generally identified as a strong predictor of marital adjustment (Kalsoom & Kamal, 2018; Onabamiro et al., 2017), Suri and Kochhar (2021) reported only a weak relationship. Such discrepancies may reflect differences in measurement instruments, cultural backgrounds, marital duration, sample characteristics, or analytical approaches. Similarly, although personality traits consistently predicted marital adjustment, the relative importance of specific traits varied across studies conducted in different cultural contexts. These variations suggest that sociocultural values may moderate the relationship between individual characteristics and marital functioning, an issue that remains insufficiently explored in the current literature.

A major contribution of this review lies in synthesizing diverse empirical findings into a unified conceptual framework. Previous studies have generally examined personality, emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, self-compassion, or attachment separately. In contrast, the present review demonstrates that these factors should be understood as interconnected psychological domains operating simultaneously throughout the marital adjustment process. Personality characteristics provide relatively stable dispositional tendencies; psychological resources strengthen adaptive coping capacities; emotional competence facilitates effective interpersonal functioning; and contextual life conditions shape the environment within which marital adjustment occurs. This integrated perspective extends existing theories of marital adjustment by emphasizing the interaction between stable individual characteristics and dynamic psychological resources rather than treating these variables as isolated predictors.

From a theoretical perspective, this review contributes to marital psychology by proposing an integrative framework that combines perspectives from personality psychology, positive psychology, emotional intelligence theory, and attachment theory. Such integration provides a more comprehensive explanation of why some couples successfully adapt to marital challenges whereas others experience persistent

relationship difficulties. Emotional competence appears to function as a central psychological mechanism linking personality characteristics and psychological resources with adaptive marital functioning.

The findings also have important practical implications. Marriage counselors, clinical psychologists, family therapists, and premarital education providers should not focus exclusively on communication skills but also strengthen individual psychological capacities before and during marriage. Programs designed to improve self-esteem, self-compassion, emotional regulation, empathy, forgiveness, and emotional intelligence may substantially enhance marital adjustment. Premarital education should likewise incorporate personality assessment and psychological preparedness as important components of marital readiness. Such interventions may reduce the risk of marital dissatisfaction, conflict escalation, and divorce while promoting healthier and more resilient marital relationships.

Nevertheless, several limitations within the existing literature should be acknowledged. Nearly all reviewed studies employed cross-sectional correlational designs, preventing conclusions regarding causal relationships among variables. Most studies also relied heavily on self-report instruments, which may introduce response bias and common method variance. Furthermore, empirical evidence remains concentrated in particular cultural settings, limiting the generalizability of findings across different societies. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal and dyadic research designs, including the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM), multilevel modeling, and longitudinal structural equation modeling, to better understand reciprocal influences between spouses and the developmental dynamics of marital adjustment over time.

Overall, this review demonstrates that marital adjustment is best understood as a multidimensional psychological phenomenon resulting from the continuous interaction among personality characteristics, psychological resources, emotional competence, and contextual life conditions. By integrating these domains into a comprehensive conceptual framework, the present study advances current knowledge in marital psychology and provides a stronger theoretical foundation for future empirical research and evidence-based interventions aimed at improving marital quality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the results of this systematic review show that marital adjustment is influenced by a complex interaction among personality, psychological well-being, emotional competence, and individual life conditions. Personality factors and interpersonal regulation serve as the foundation of adaptation, psychological well-being functions as an internal resource, emotional competence acts as a relational mechanism, and contextual factors also influence the process of marital adjustment. This synthesis confirms that marital adjustment is a dynamic process that cannot be understood through a single factor, but rather through the integration of various interrelated individual aspects.

The findings of this systematic review offer theoretical implications by strengthening the understanding that marital adjustment is a multidimensional psychological construct primarily influenced by individual factors, such as personality, psychological well-being, and emotional competence. This synthesis enriches marital psychology by presenting a more integrated conceptual framework that positions individual factors as an important foundation in the marital adjustment process.

Practically, the results of this review provide an empirical basis for developing psychological interventions, counseling, and premarital education programs that focus on strengthening individuals' psychological resources, such as emotion regulation, positive self-evaluation, and interpersonal skills. Such efforts may improve the quality of marital adjustment and help prevent the risk of disharmony and divorce. Future research is recommended to use longitudinal designs and dyadic approaches so that the dynamics of marital adjustment can be understood more comprehensively. Future studies should also involve diverse cultural contexts and more varied measurement methods to strengthen empirical findings.

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