



Predicting Marital Identity Fusion Based on Spiritual Closeness and Life Goals Alignment

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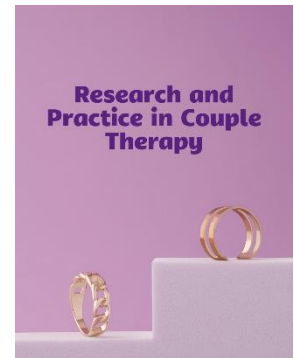
ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the predictive roles of spiritual closeness and life goals alignment in marital identity fusion among married individuals in Egypt. A correlational descriptive design was employed with a sample of 400 married participants selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie sampling table. Standardized instruments were used to measure marital identity fusion, spiritual closeness, and life goals alignment. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression via SPSS version 27. All assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were tested and met prior to conducting inferential analyses. Pearson correlation analysis showed that marital identity fusion was positively and significantly correlated with both spiritual closeness ($r = .64, p < .001$) and life goals alignment ($r = .59, p < .001$). The multiple regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 397) = 182.71, p < .001$, explaining 48% of the variance in marital identity fusion ($R^2 = .48$). Both spiritual closeness ($\beta = .44, t = 7.83, p < .001$) and life goals alignment ($\beta = .38, t = 7.14, p < .001$) were significant predictors, indicating that higher levels of these relational dimensions are associated with stronger psychological identity integration between spouses. The findings underscore the importance of spiritual closeness and life goals alignment in fostering marital identity fusion. These variables contribute significantly and independently to the psychological merging of partners in marital relationships. The results highlight the value of integrating spiritual and aspirational congruence into marital counseling and educational interventions to enhance marital cohesion and stability.

Keywords: Marital Identity Fusion; Spiritual Closeness; Life Goals Alignment; Marriage; Relational Psychology

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Introduction

Spiritual closeness represents one of the most profound shared experiences that can unite partners at a transcendent level. Religious or spiritual connection within marriage has been found to influence how individuals make sense of suffering, resolve conflict, and share meaning. According to (Handayani et al., 2025), preparation for family life increasingly includes fostering spiritual awareness as a foundation for long-term relational success. This aligns with Islamic marital jurisprudence, where spiritual partnership is not just encouraged but considered a prerequisite for marital compatibility or *kafa'ah* ((Amrozi & Rizal, 2025)). In the context of interfaith and faith-based marriages, shared spiritual practices and closeness have been cited as buffers against relational dissolution, especially when legal ambiguities and cultural pressures are present ((Amin & Huda, 2024); (Megawati, 2022)).

In societies where religion and law are tightly interwoven, the centrality of shared spiritual life within marriage becomes more than just a matter of personal values—it can shape access to legal protections, moral legitimacy, and societal acceptance. For example, spiritual congruence has been emphasized in rulings around early or polygamous marriages in Islamic courts,



where judges are often guided by *maqāshid al-sharī'ah* to preserve emotional and spiritual harmony within families ((Baihaki & Adawiah, 2024); (Muaidi & Azizi, 2024)). Further, spiritual closeness has been linked with decreased risk of sexual dissatisfaction and emotional withdrawal, particularly when spouses engage in prayer, worship, or rituals together ((Harun & Ismail, 2023); (Suaidi, 2023)). Thus, exploring spiritual closeness as a predictor of marital identity fusion provides not only psychological insights but also legal and ethical relevance.

Parallel to spiritual alignment, life goals alignment—defined as the congruence between partners' aspirations for career, family, values, and lifestyle—has been increasingly recognized as a determinant of relational longevity. In a longitudinal study, (Dupuis et al., 2025) found that the trajectory of relationship satisfaction and subjective well-being before and after marriage is largely moderated by how well couples align on future-oriented goals. When spouses have divergent or conflicting life paths, relational fatigue and identity conflict are likely to emerge. Conversely, shared goal pursuit facilitates a sense of joint mission, which is central to identity fusion.

This is particularly salient in collectivist and transitional societies, where familial and cultural expectations often influence personal choices. In such contexts, alignment on life goals also intersects with economic stability, reproductive decisions, and broader social roles ((Kurpejović et al., 2022)). For example, (Lioe, 2023) demonstrated that even in childless marriages, alignment in long-term goals—such as career development, caregiving priorities, and social contribution—could compensate for unmet societal expectations and enhance marital satisfaction. Further evidence from studies on polygamous and early marriages in Indonesia suggests that mismatches in goals (e.g., education vs. early parenthood) are significant predictors of marital breakdown ((Sukadi et al., 2024); (Setyawan, 2024)).

From a psychological standpoint, alignment in goals supports the internalization of the relationship into one's self-concept, a core mechanism of identity fusion. This is echoed in studies of university students and young adults, where fear of marriage was tied not only to emotional immaturity but also to fears of being unable to align life purposes with a potential spouse ((Ren, 2022)). Moreover, metaphorical representations of marriage among Iranian youth reveal that marriage is increasingly conceptualized as a "contractual journey of mutual vision," rather than a static obligation—further underlining the role of goal congruence in relational meaning-making ((Dehdast, 2022)).

The importance of identity fusion within marriage is also visible in contemporary reflections on post-marital change. (Jaro'ah, 2023) found that divorced young mothers often described their marital failure as the consequence of never fully integrating with their partner's identity or goals. Similarly, in qualitative studies on marital education, participants expressed a desire to develop shared life scripts as a way to avoid fragmentation and conflict ((Hidayah et al., 2023)). These narratives confirm that beyond compatibility or satisfaction, psychological union—a hallmark of marital identity fusion—remains a relational ideal.

Legally, the failure to achieve identity-level cohesion may have real-world implications. For instance, in legal assessments of divorce petitions in Indonesia, irreconcilable differences in values and goals are often cited as grounds for dissolution ((Rikmadani & Suprobo, 2024)). Furthermore, policy studies underscore the need for marital education programs to explicitly focus on values alignment and spiritual development to foster long-term marital resilience ((Riyantika et al., 2024); (Ryabikina & Vasilchenko, 2024)). These considerations are particularly urgent in rapidly urbanizing societies where evolving norms around marriage, cohabitation, and gender roles are reshaping the expectations of young couples.

Research on disability and social roles within marriage has also highlighted the complex interface between personal identity and spousal roles. For example, (Goodwin, 2023) explored how the presence of disability within a marital dyad challenged conventional narratives of masculinity and relational contribution in Nazi-era policies. While this study is historical, it

illuminates how deviations from perceived role alignment can threaten relational unity and, by extension, marital identity fusion.

In Muslim-majority countries, where both *sharī'ah* and civil law coexist, the alignment of spiritual and practical goals becomes even more critical. Legal analyses have shown that legal governance in family life must increasingly support not just the legality but also the legitimacy and psychological flourishing of marriage ((Riyantika et al., 2024)). This includes recognizing psychological constructs like identity fusion as important factors in evaluating marital stability. Likewise, procedural legal analyses of marriage dispensations and underage marriage rulings have highlighted how judges consider not only formal criteria but also the interpersonal and psychological dynamics between spouses ((Baihaki & Adawiah, 2024); (Megawati, 2022)).

Finally, educational and institutional environments also play a role in shaping marital expectations and relational maturity. A study by (Shomoossi et al., 2022) on married students in Iran found that despite romantic ideals, many couples lacked the skill and insight necessary for deep relational integration. The study recommended structured premarital counseling programs focused on spiritual, emotional, and aspirational alignment as means of preparing couples for long-term bonding. This study aims to investigate the predictive roles of spiritual closeness and life goals alignment in shaping marital identity fusion.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a correlational descriptive design to investigate the predictive roles of spiritual closeness and life goals alignment in marital identity fusion. The target population comprised married individuals residing in Egypt. A sample of 400 participants was selected based on the sample size recommendation table by Morgan and Krejcie (1970), ensuring sufficient statistical power for correlation and regression analyses. Participants were recruited using a stratified random sampling method from diverse urban regions to capture variation in socio-demographic backgrounds. Eligibility criteria included being legally married for at least one year and aged between 20 and 60 years. Informed consent was obtained, and ethical protocols were observed throughout the data collection process.

Measures

To measure the dependent variable, marital identity fusion, the study employed an adapted version of the Identity Fusion Scale developed by Gómez et al. (2011). This scale is designed to assess the visceral sense of oneness individuals feel with a target group—in this case, a marital partner. The adapted version includes 7 items specifically worded to reflect fusion with one's spouse (e.g., "I feel one with my spouse"). Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale is unidimensional and does not contain subscales. Higher scores indicate stronger marital identity fusion. Validity and reliability of the original and adapted versions have been confirmed in multiple studies, with internal consistency coefficients typically exceeding 0.85 and strong evidence of construct and convergent validity in relational and psychological functioning domains.

Spiritual closeness was measured using items adapted from the "Centrality of Religiosity Scale" (CRS) developed by Huber and Huber (2012), which evaluates the centrality of spiritual or religious experiences in one's personal life. For this study, a subset of 5 items was adapted to specifically assess perceived spiritual closeness between partners (e.g., "We experience our spiritual beliefs together"). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true). The adapted scale functions as a single-factor measure without subscales. Previous research has supported the psychometric soundness of

the CRS and its derivatives, reporting Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 and good construct validity when adapted for relational contexts.

Life goals alignment between partners was assessed using an adapted version of the Aspirations Index originally developed by Kasser and Ryan (1996). This index measures intrinsic and extrinsic life goals; for the current study, items were rephrased to evaluate the perceived alignment of personal and spousal life goals across domains such as intimacy, personal growth, financial success, and community involvement. The adapted scale contains 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (not aligned at all) to 7 (completely aligned). Though the original instrument includes intrinsic and extrinsic goal subscales, the present adaptation is used as a unidimensional measure of alignment. Numerous studies have verified the reliability and validity of the Aspirations Index and its derivatives, often reporting Cronbach's alpha above 0.85 and strong convergent validity with relationship satisfaction and long-term goal congruence.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics were calculated for demographic variables and scale items. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the strength and direction of relationships between marital identity fusion (dependent variable) and the two independent variables: spiritual closeness and life goals alignment. To assess the predictive power of the independent variables, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. All statistical assumptions including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were examined and satisfied before conducting inferential analyses. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all tests.

Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 400 married individuals from Egypt, including 226 females (56.5%) and 174 males (43.5%). Participants ranged in age from 21 to 59 years, with a mean age of 37.82 years ($SD = 9.17$). In terms of education, 142 participants (35.5%) held a bachelor's degree, 118 (29.5%) had completed postgraduate education, 94 (23.5%) had a high school diploma, and 46 (11.5%) reported other forms of education. Regarding marital duration, 103 participants (25.8%) had been married for 1–5 years, 129 (32.3%) for 6–10 years, 84 (21.0%) for 11–15 years, and 84 (21.0%) for more than 15 years. Most participants (67.8%) reported living in urban areas, while the remaining 32.2% resided in rural settings.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Study Variables (N = 400)

Variable	M	SD
Marital Identity Fusion	5.78	0.81
Spiritual Closeness	5.63	0.76
Life Goals Alignment	5.49	0.89

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 show that the average score for Marital Identity Fusion was 5.78 ($SD = 0.81$), indicating a high level of psychological merging between spouses in the sample. Similarly, the mean score for Spiritual Closeness was 5.63 ($SD = 0.76$), and for Life Goals Alignment, it was 5.49 ($SD = 0.89$), both suggesting generally strong agreement and closeness among participants across these relational dimensions.

All necessary assumptions for conducting Pearson correlation and linear regression were tested and confirmed. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test indicated that the distributions of marital identity fusion ($p = 0.087$), spiritual closeness ($p = 0.064$), and life goals alignment ($p = 0.072$) did not significantly deviate from normality. Scatterplots revealed linear relationships between the dependent and independent variables. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values for spiritual closeness (1.28) and life goals alignment (1.34) were well below the cutoff of 5, indicating no multicollinearity. Homoscedasticity was confirmed

through visual inspection of residual plots and Levene's test ($p = 0.297$), supporting the assumption of equal variance across residuals. Thus, the data met all assumptions for reliable interpretation of correlation and regression outcomes.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Marital Identity Fusion and Predictor Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Marital Identity Fusion	–		
2. Spiritual Closeness	.64** ($p < .001$)	–	
3. Life Goals Alignment	.59** ($p < .001$)	.52** ($p < .001$)	–

As shown in Table 2, Marital Identity Fusion was significantly and positively correlated with both Spiritual Closeness ($r = .64$, $p < .001$) and Life Goals Alignment ($r = .59$, $p < .001$). Additionally, Spiritual Closeness and Life Goals Alignment were moderately correlated ($r = .52$, $p < .001$), indicating interrelatedness but not redundancy between the predictors.

Table 3. Summary of Regression Model Predicting Marital Identity Fusion

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p
Regression	78.46	2	39.23	.69	.48	.48	182.71	<.001
Residual	85.53	397	0.22					
Total	163.99	399						

Table 3 shows that the overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 397) = 182.71$, $p < .001$. The model accounted for 48% of the variance in Marital Identity Fusion ($R^2 = .48$), with an adjusted R^2 of .48, indicating a strong predictive relationship between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Coefficients for Predicting Marital Identity Fusion

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	1.32	0.18	–	7.33	<.001
Spiritual Closeness	0.47	0.06	.44	7.83	<.001
Life Goals Alignment	0.39	0.05	.38	7.14	<.001

As detailed in Table 4, both Spiritual Closeness ($\beta = .44$, $t = 7.83$, $p < .001$) and Life Goals Alignment ($\beta = .38$, $t = 7.14$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of Marital Identity Fusion. This indicates that each predictor independently contributes to the fusion of identities in marital relationships. The unstandardized coefficients suggest that for every one-unit increase in Spiritual Closeness, the Marital Identity Fusion score increases by 0.47 units, and by 0.39 units for Life Goals Alignment.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary goal of this study was to investigate the predictive roles of spiritual closeness and life goals alignment in marital identity fusion among married individuals in Egypt. The findings demonstrated statistically significant and positive relationships between both independent variables and the dependent variable. The Pearson correlation coefficients indicated that higher levels of spiritual closeness and alignment in life goals are associated with higher levels of identity fusion within marital relationships. Moreover, the results of linear regression revealed that both predictors jointly explained a substantial portion of the variance in marital identity fusion, confirming their combined and unique contributions.

These results suggest that spiritual closeness plays a critical role in deepening the psychological integration between spouses. This aligns with the findings of (Handayani et al., 2025), who emphasized the importance of shared spiritual preparation and religious values in fostering marital readiness and unity. Similarly, the concept of kafa'ah in Islamic marital jurisprudence stresses spiritual compatibility as essential for long-term harmony in marriage, as discussed by (Amrozi & Rizal, 2025). When spouses share spiritual practices—such as prayer, ritual worship, or faith-based discussions—they create opportunities for transcendental bonding, which contributes to the fusion of identities. In line with this, (Amin & Huda, 2024) and (Suaidi, 2023)

noted that spiritual intimacy often acts as a protective factor against relational fragmentation, especially in culturally conservative societies where religious alignment reinforces commitment.

Furthermore, the positive association between life goals alignment and marital identity fusion confirms that shared aspirations and mutual vision play a central role in fostering psychological unity in marriage. According to (Dupuis et al., 2025), alignment in values and future goals can buffer against the decline in relationship satisfaction and personal well-being over the marital lifespan. The results of this study substantiate that when spouses pursue life trajectories that are complementary—such as shared career plans, child-rearing philosophies, or financial objectives—they are more likely to internalize the marital relationship as part of their self-concept. This is reinforced by (Lioe, 2023), who demonstrated that even in the absence of children, couples with high goal alignment maintain strong marital satisfaction due to a sense of shared mission and purpose.

The psychological relevance of goal congruence is not limited to well-functioning relationships. As (Jaro'ah, 2023) highlighted, young divorced mothers often describe their previous marriages as lacking a sense of shared direction or vision. Their narratives reflect that the absence of life goals alignment impedes relational cohesion, and ultimately weakens identity-level bonding. Similarly, (Hidayah et al., 2023) emphasized that one of the major outcomes of financial planning education for families is the development of shared priorities and mutual understanding—precursors to deeper marital identity integration. These observations are mirrored in the current study's findings, showing that life goals alignment is not just a practical necessity but a psychological catalyst for marital identity fusion.

From a legal and structural standpoint, these findings offer insight into how marital dissolution may often be rooted not merely in conflict, but in a deeper absence of shared existential alignment. Legal scholars such as (Rikmadani & Suprobo, 2024) and (Riyantika et al., 2024) have documented how irreconcilable differences in value systems and future aspirations often underlie legal separations. Therefore, these results advocate for the inclusion of spiritual and goal-oriented compatibility assessments in premarital counseling and legal marriage proceedings. (Ryabikina & Vasilchenko, 2024) also notes that the design of personal space and home environments often reflects joint identity and coordinated life planning, thereby reinforcing how external environments reflect internal identity fusion.

The role of spirituality in legal contexts is also underscored by studies such as (Muaidi & Azizi, 2024) and (Sukadi et al., 2024), who explored the function of *maqāshid al-sharī'ah* in marriage law. These frameworks aim to preserve not only the formal aspects of marriage but also the spiritual and emotional well-being of spouses. In this light, the current study's results lend empirical support to the argument that legal policies should consider psychological constructs such as identity fusion when evaluating marital success or failure.

Moreover, the relevance of shared spiritual life and goal alignment has been highlighted in the context of interfaith or early marriages, where discrepancies in these domains often predict instability. For instance, (Megawati, 2022) pointed to the consequences of inadequate regulation in interfaith marriages in Indonesia, particularly when couples lack shared existential or religious frameworks. Likewise, (Setyawan, 2024) emphasized the legal and moral complexities of marriage registration and validation in situations lacking spiritual coherence. These challenges directly relate to the findings of this study, where spiritual closeness emerged as a significant predictor of marital identity fusion—underscoring that legal recognition alone is insufficient without internal alignment.

Interestingly, the findings of this study also resonate with qualitative research on marital fear among youth. (Ren, 2022) found that contemporary Chinese youth often cite the inability to find a partner with aligned values and goals as a major source of marital anxiety. This reflects the broader psychological apprehension that without mutual vision, one's identity may be compromised or diluted in marriage. Similarly, (Dehdast, 2022) illustrated how Iranian youth conceptualize marriage as a

metaphorical journey that demands alignment at every step. The fusion of identities, in this context, is not accidental—it is a conscious, shared construction over time.

The legal system and religious courts in many Muslim-majority countries appear to be increasingly aware of these psychological dynamics. (Baihaki & Adawiah, 2024) found that judges consider spiritual and psychological compatibility in their rulings on marriage dispensations, while (Harun & Ismail, 2023) explored how disorders that prevent emotional or spiritual intimacy may render marriages invalid under *sharī'ah*. These studies align with the current research in suggesting that psychological constructs such as identity fusion have significant legal implications and must be addressed in counseling, litigation, and religious rulings.

Finally, broader social roles, gender dynamics, and family structures also intersect with the findings of this study. (Kurpejović et al., 2022) emphasized the role of the modern family in stabilizing economic and emotional structures in transitional societies. The results of this study contribute to that discourse by suggesting that the internal psychological harmony between spouses—facilitated by spiritual closeness and life goals alignment—strengthens family units as economic, emotional, and moral institutions. (Goodwin, 2023) further illustrated, through a historical lens, how deviations from expected roles (e.g., due to disability) can strain marital fusion, particularly when shared meaning and mutual support systems are absent.

In educational contexts, (Shomoossi et al., 2022) showed that university students in Iran often struggle to integrate relational ideals with real-world demands, leading to surface-level commitments and hidden dissatisfaction. The current study's findings reiterate the need for comprehensive marital preparation programs that emphasize the importance of identity-level integration through shared goals and spiritual synergy.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, its correlational design restricts causal inference. Although significant associations were identified between variables, it is not possible to determine the directionality or temporality of the observed relationships. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires introduces the potential for social desirability and response biases, particularly given the culturally sensitive nature of marital and spiritual topics. Third, the sample was drawn exclusively from Egypt, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or religious contexts. The specific sociocultural dynamics of Egyptian marital life may not fully reflect those in other Islamic or secular societies.

Future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to explore how spiritual closeness and goal alignment develop over time and how they affect identity fusion at different stages of marriage. Additionally, comparative cross-cultural studies would help assess the universality of the findings and determine how cultural norms, legal systems, and religious doctrines interact with the predictors of marital identity fusion. It would also be valuable to examine potential mediating or moderating variables, such as communication patterns, attachment style, or conflict resolution strategies, which may enhance or inhibit the development of identity fusion between spouses.

In practical terms, marital counseling programs should place greater emphasis on spiritual and aspirational alignment during premarital and marital interventions. Counselors should assess the depth of spiritual intimacy and goal congruence between partners and provide tools to facilitate deeper integration in these areas. Religious leaders and legal professionals can benefit from training in psychological constructs like identity fusion, enabling more holistic support for couples. Lastly, educational systems should incorporate modules on relational visioning and shared life planning in youth and adult education to prepare individuals for psychologically and spiritually integrated marital relationships.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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