

**SEXUALITY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE MARITAL SATISFACTION: A SCOPING REVIEW**

Fatores da sexualidade que influenciam a satisfação conjugal: uma scoping review

Factores de sexualidad que influyen en la satisfacción marital: una revisión de alcance

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** sexuality is a central characteristic of the individual and essential for the couple's intimate relationship, functioning as an attribute of marital satisfaction, an area of attention of family health nursing. The perception of marital satisfaction by the members of the couple seems to be influenced by satisfaction with the pattern of sexuality. **Objective:** to identify the sexuality factors that influence the marital satisfaction of couples without sexual dysfunctions and whose members are healthy. **Methodology:** *Scoping review*, following the mnemonic P (participants), C (concept) and C (context) recommended by the Joanna Briggs Institute. It was considering the temporal space between 2017 and 2021 and the Portuguese, English and Spanish languages. **Results:** fourteen articles were analyzed and the following factors were identified: sexual self-disclosure, sexual communication, attachment, cohabitation, dating time, watching explicit content of sexual activity, sexual desire discrepancy, intrinsic and extrinsic sexual motivation, motivation to meet needs of the partner and sensitivity to sexual aversion. **Conclusion:** The identification of factors related to sexuality that influence marital satisfaction allowed cataloging essential domains that promote marital satisfaction. New reviews for each domain of factors will make it possible to deepen the theme, aiming to contribute to the development of family health nursing.

**Keywords:** sexuality; marital relationship; satisfaction; family

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**RESUMO**

**Enquadramento:** a sexualidade é uma característica central do indivíduo e essencial para a relação íntima do casal, funcionando como um atributo da satisfação conjugal, uma área de atenção da enfermagem de saúde familiar. A percepção da satisfação conjugal pelos membros do casal parece ser influenciada pela satisfação com o padrão de sexualidade. **Objetivo:** identificar os fatores da sexualidade que influenciam a satisfação conjugal dos casais sem disfunções sexuais e cujos membros sejam saudáveis. **Metodologia:** *Scoping review*, seguindo a mnemónica P (participantes), C (conceito) e C (contexto) recomendada pelo *Joanna Briggs Institute*. Foi considerando o espaço temporal entre 2017 e 2021 e os idiomas português, inglês e espanhol. **Resultados:** foram analisados catorze artigos e identificados os seguintes fatores: auto revelação sexual, apego, assistir a conteúdo explícito de atividade sexual, discrepância de desejo sexual, motivação sexual intrínseca e extrínseca, motivação para atender as necessidades do parceiro e sensibilidade à aversão sexual. **Conclusão:** a identificação de fatores relacionados com a sexualidade que influenciam a satisfação conjugal permitiu catalogar domínios essenciais promotores da satisfação conjugal. Novas revisões por cada domínio de fatores irão possibilitar o aprofundamento da temática, visando contribuir para o desenvolvimento da enfermagem de saúde familiar.

**Palavras-chave:** sexualidade; relação marital; satisfação; família

**RESUMEN**

**Marco contextual:** a sexualidad es una característica central del individuo y esencial para la relación íntima de la pareja, funcionando como un atributo de la satisfacción conyugal, área de atención de la enfermería en salud de la familia. La percepción de satisfacción conyugal por parte de los miembros de la pareja parece estar influenciada por la satisfacción con el patrón de sexualidad. **Objetivo:** identificar los factores de la sexualidad que influyen en la satisfacción conyugal de parejas sin disfunciones sexuales y cuyos miembros son sanos. **Metodología:** *Scoping review*, siguiendo los nemotécnicos P (participantes), C (concepto) y C (contexto) recomendados por el Instituto Joanna Briggs. Se consideró el espacio temporal entre 2017 y 2021 y los idiomas portugués, inglés y español. **Resultados:** se analizaron catorce artículos y se identificaron los siguientes factores: autorrevelación sexual, comunicación sexual, apego, convivencia, tiempo de noviazgo, ver contenido explícito de actividad sexual, discrepancia de deseo sexual, motivación sexual intrínseca y extrínseca, motivación para satisfacer necesidades de la pareja y la sensibilidad a la aversión sexual. **Conclusión:** La identificación de factores relacionados con la sexualidad que influyen en la satisfacción conyugal permitió catalogar dominios esenciales que promueven la satisfacción conyugal. Nuevas revisiones para cada dominio de los factores permitirán profundizar el tema, con el objetivo de contribuir al desarrollo de la enfermería en salud de la familia.

**Palabras clave:** sexualidad; matrimonio; satisfacción; familiar

### INTRODUCTION

The marital relationship arises from a process of continuous organization, complex and dynamic identity between two people with one of their own, that is, they present unique characteristics that come from meanings, values, emphasis and historical and cultural experiences, characteristics of their family structures and dynamics (Figueiredo, 2012; Goulart, 2019; Porreca, 2019; Rizzon, 2013). This relationship results in sensations and feelings of well-being, security, intimacy and understanding, resulting in marital satisfaction (Cerqueira-Santos, Silva, Rodrigues & Santos, 2016; Hernandez, 2020; Porreca, 2019).

Constant fluctuations arise in the marital relationship due to the influence of several factors, namely passion, intimidation, commitment, the real context for the people who form the couple and the internal resources to respond to pressures (Rizzon, 2013). Another factor that influences the quality of the relationship is sexual interaction, as it the results from the relationship of personal attributes that correlate with the values and behaviour of individuals and lead to the revelation of sexuality (Figueiredo, 2012).

Sexuality is a central characteristic of the individual that encompasses sex, identity, gender roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure and intimacy (Relvas, 2001). It is a cornerstone in the couple's intimate relationship, influencing the individual and the functioning of the couple, as it encompasses crucial issues of distance and closeness in the couple's relationship (Relvas, 2001). It is based on several dimensions that may not all be experienced and expressed (beliefs, values, desires, fantasies, practices, relationships and thoughts) and is influenced by the interplay of biopsychosocial, economic, political,

cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (Cáceres et al., 2010; World Health Organization, 2022).

Being sexuality one of the attributes to achieve marital satisfaction and having a strong connection and bidirectional influence, it is important to know the factors that influence sexuality and their implications for the quality of the relationship.

As a starting point, a preliminary search for reviews was conducted in MEDLINE (via Pubmed), CINAHL (via EBSCOhost), Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, JBI Evidence Synthesis, Scientific Repository of Open Access Portugal (RCAAP) and PROSPERO on April 14 2022. It did not reveal any reviews mapping the sexuality factors that influence marital satisfaction, which are scattered in the literature.

In light of the above, this study was conducted a Scoping Review with the aim of identifying the factors associated with sexuality that influence the marital satisfaction of couples without sexual dysfunctions and whose members are healthy.

### METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW PROCEDURES

The present study is a scoping review and was conducted following the methodology proposed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Peters et al., 2020). Before commencing the exploratory research on the topic, a provisional research design was developed, which included the study objectives, the review question and the research method. A preliminary search was conducted in the MEDLINE (via PubMed) and CINAHL Complete (via EBSCOhost) databases to identify the words commonly used in the titles and abstracts of the studies, as well as natural language terms. The research question was formulate as follows: "What are

the factors of sexuality that influence the marital satisfaction of couples without sexual dysfunctions and whose members are healthy?”. This question was based on the mnemonic PCC (Population, Concept and Context), which is specific to this type of reviews. Regarding the Population (P), couples consisting of individuals without sexual dysfunction, healthy, of any sexual orientation, married or in a domestic partnership, living together or not, aged between 18 and 65 years old, were considered. Concerning the Concept (C), studies focusing on sexuality, sex and sexual satisfaction were included, excluding those that focused on dysfunctional marital relationships. Finally, in Context (C) studies conducted within the context of the marital relationship were included. Data search was conducted in April 2022, using the following terms as natural language: “sexual satisfaction”, “sex satisfaction”, “sexual satisfaction”, “sexuality”, “marital satisfaction”, “relationship satisfaction”, “couple satisfaction”. The search strategies were adapted according to the databases, including MEDLINE via PubMed, CINAHL Complete via EBSCOhost, Scopus by Elsevier, Web of Science by Clarivate, Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection via EBSCOHost, MedicLatina via EBSCOHost and the Open Access Scientific Repository of Portugal. A time framed from 2017 to 2022 was set to acquiring updated evidence and the languages were considering were Portuguese, English and Spanish. The research did not include the adolescence age group because it is characterized by inherent instability due to

biopsychosocial changes, including those related to sexuality (Domingues, 2020). Additionally, individuals are experiencing the aging process undergo biological and psychological changes characteristic of this phase, which can interfere with sexuality (Mota, 2015). For this reason, only individuals between 18 and 65 years of age were included. In the final phase, a study selection process was carried out, followed by data extraction and synthesis. The extracted data, including article title, year of publication, country, authors, type of study, population, study objective and main results, were recorded in the Google Docs Program, Google Sheets. Finally, a descriptive analysis and thematic synthesis were conducted, which allowed the study's guiding questions to be answered.

## RESULTS

From the databases search, a total of 704 studies were found. 37 duplicate studies were excluded, leaving a total of 667 studies. Next, all titles and abstracts were read and 623 articles were excluded because they did not mention the population and context were not mentioned or because they did not meet the defined inclusion criteria. 44 studies were selected which had complete text and did not need to be recovered. After a full-text review of the articles, 30 articles were excluded for not meeting the eligibility criteria, as presented in Figure 1. A total of 14 articles were included in this review.

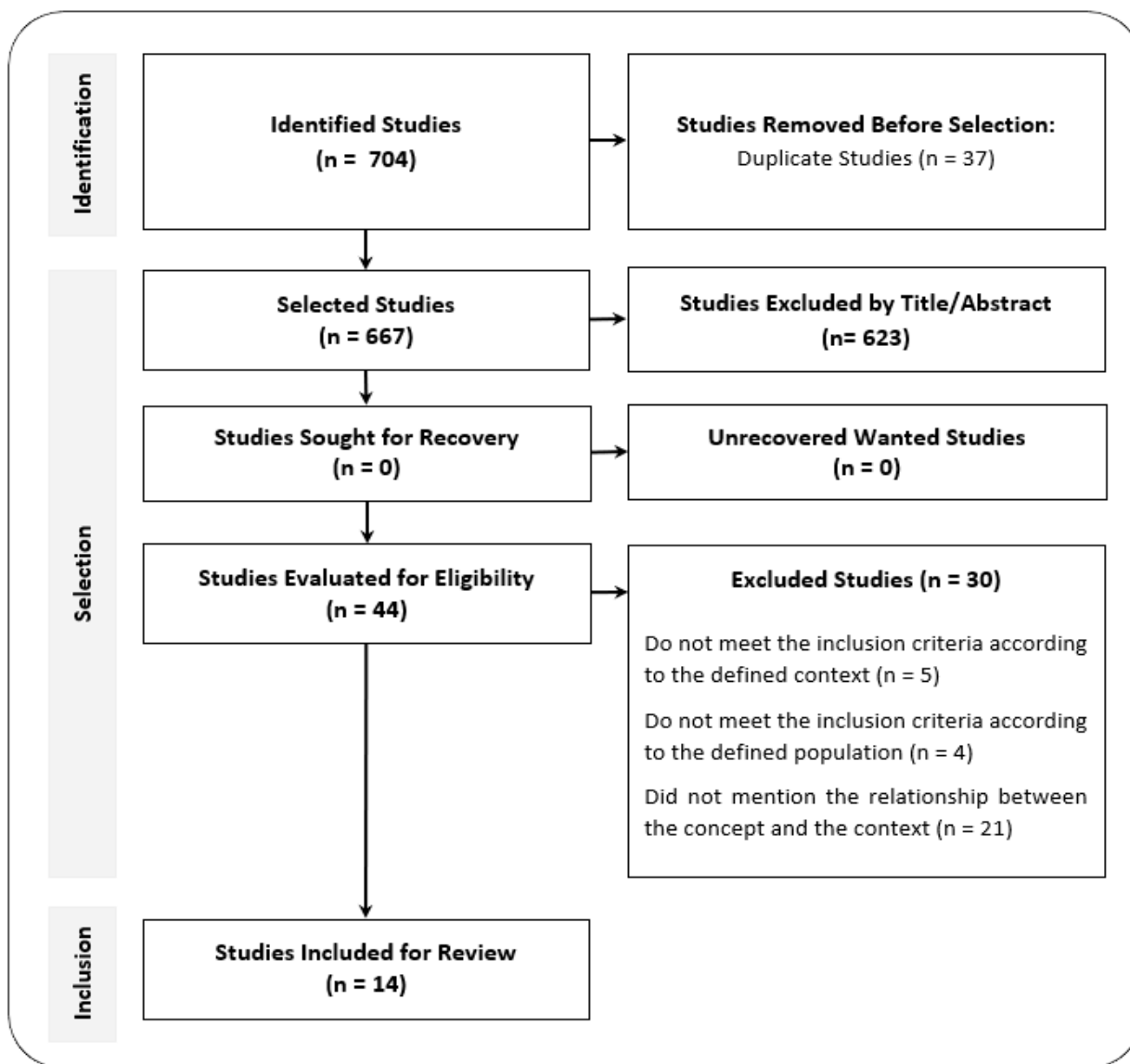


Figure 1

Process of selection and inclusion of studies - PRISMA Diagram Flow (Adapted from Page et al., 2021).

Next, the characteristics of the studies included are presented, including studies titles and respective authors, the year of publication, the

countries where they were conducted, the study population, the study type and the study objectives (Table 1).

Table 1

Data synthesis from the included studies.

Study Title	Author, Year (Country)	Population	Type of Study	Study Objective
"Newlywed couples own and partner Sexual disgust sensitivities interact to predict their marital Satisfaction through Their sexual satisfaction"	Peters & Meltzer, 2021 (U.S.A.)	104 newlywed couples	Quantitative	To examine whether individual's sensitivity to sexual aversion negatively affects sexual satisfaction with their partner.
"A dyadic examination of self-determined sexual motives, need fulfilment, and relational outcomes among consensually non monogamous partners"	Wood et al., 2021 (U.S.A.)	56 couples (122 individuals)	Quantitative	Test how intrinsic and extrinsic sexual motivation are linked to relational outcomes.
"Strategies for mitigating sexual desire discrepancy in relationships"	Vowels & Mark, 2020 (U.S.A.)	229 participants in a marital relationship	Mixed	Identify strategies that individuals have used in long-term relationships to mitigate sexual desire discrepancies; determine whether these strategies translated into sexual and relationship outcomes.
"An explanatory model of sexual satisfaction in adults with a same sex partner an analysis based on gender differences"	Calvillo et al., 2020 (Spain)	820 participants with the same sexual orientation and in a marital relationship	Quantitative	Develop an explanatory model of sexual satisfaction in people attracted to same-sex partners based on personal and interpersonal variables.
"The moderating influence of moral disapproval of pornography on couples sexual and relationship satisfaction"	Floyd et al., 2020 (U.S.A.)	493 participants in a marital relationship	Quantitative	To examine the possible mediating and moderating variables in the relationship between watching explicit content of sexual activity and marital satisfaction.
"Behind closed doors: individual and joint pornography use among romantic couples"	Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020 (U.S.A.)	240 couples	Quantitative	Explore associations of actors and partners between watching explicit content of sexual activity, sexual dynamics, and relational well-being.
"A typology of women with low sexual desire"	Sutherland et al., 2020 (Canada)	508 women in a long-term marital relationship	Qualitative	To verify whether women with low sexual desire are better conceptualized as a homogeneous group or as unique subtypes.
"Prevalence, patterns and self-perceived effects of pornography consumption in polish university students: a cross-sectional study"	Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019 (Poland)	6463 students of both sexes	Quantitative	To evaluate the prevalence of explicit content use of sexual activity, age at first exposure, patterns of consumption of explicit sexual activity content, attempts to cease its use and self-reported effects of such cessation, self-perceived effects, and prevalence of self-perceived addiction among female and male Polish university students.

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"Sexual and relationship satisfaction: the role of perceived (non) problematic sexual desire discrepancy in gay and heterosexual men"	Pereira et al., 2019 (Portugal)	346 men	Quantitative	To evaluate the differences in solitary and dyadic sexual desire between heterosexual and homosexual men; Assess the impact of perceived sexual desire discrepancy on relationship satisfaction and explore differences
"Exploring a contextual model of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction"	Brown & Weigel, 2018 (U.S.A.)	265 individuals in a marital relationship	Quantitative	To investigate the mechanisms that facilitate a person's involvement in sexual self-revelation in three contexts: relationship context, self-revelation context, and sexual self-revelation outcome
"The impact of attachment style on sexual satisfaction and sexual desire in a sexually diverse sample"	Mark et al., 2018 (Canada)	955 couples of different sexual orientations	Quantitative	Understanding attachment can affect sexual desire, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction in a sample of men and women with different sexual orientations.
"Degree and direction of sexual desire discrepancy are linked to sexual and relationship satisfaction in couples transitioning to parenthood"	Rosen et al., 2018 (U.S.A.)	255 couples	Quantitative	Understand whether the role of sexual desire discrepancies can help promote improvements in sexual and relationship satisfaction.
"Understanding when a partner is not in the mood: sexual communal strength in couples transitioning to parenthood"	Muise et al., 2017 (U.S.A)	185 Participants in a marital relationship	Quantitative	Testing whether a couple's willingness to have sex is associated with greater sexual satisfaction and relationship quality for couples who have recently had their first child, and whether a willingness not to have sex is also associated with satisfaction with their sex life and relationship
"Sexually explicit media use and relationship satisfaction: a moderating role of emotional intimacy"	Veit et al., 2017 (Croatia)	2284 adults in a marital relationship for at least 12 months	Qualitative	To investigate the association between sexually explicit media use and relationship satisfaction.

The selected studies are based on individuals in a marital relationship aged between 18 and 65 years with different sexual orientation, that is, homosexual (Calvillo et al., 2020; Sutherland et al., 2020), heterosexual (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019; Floyd et al., 2020; Muise et al., 2017; Peters & Meltzer, 2021; Rosen et al., 2018; Veit et al., 2017; Vowels & Mark, 2020; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020; Wood et al., 2021) or homosexual and heterosexual (Mark et al., 2018; Pereira et al., 2019). The studies developed by Peters & Meltzer (2021), Wood et al. (2021), Vowels & Mark (2020), Floyd et al. (2020), Willoughby & Leonhardt (2020), Brown & Weigel (2018), Rosen et al. (2018), and Muise et al.

(2017) originated in the United States of America. Two included studies were developed by Sutherland et al. (2020) and Mark et al. (2018) in Canada.

The remaining studies were conducted in Spain, Poland, Portugal and Croatia, developed respectively by Calvillo et al. (2020), Dwulit and Rzymiski (2019), Pereira et al. (2019) and Veit et al. (2017).

After the analysis and interpretation of the results of the included studies, it was possible to map seven factors of sexuality that influence marital satisfaction (Table 2).

In the study developed by Calvillo et al. (2020) two factors were identified, namely sexual self-revelation and attachment. Previously, the sexual self-disclosure

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factor had already been identified by Brown & Weigel (2018) and the attachment factor by Mark et al. (2018).

The explicit content of sexual activity was another factor distinguished by studies conducted by Dwulit and Rzymiski (2019), Floyd et al. (2020), and Willoughby and Leonhardt (2020). Other factors such as intrinsic and extrinsic sexual motivation, motivation to understand partner needs and sensitivity were highlighted by the studies developed by, respectively,

Table 2

Sexuality factors that influence marital satisfaction.

Wood et al., (2021), Muise et al., (2017) and Peters and Meltzer (2021).

The discrepancy factor of sexual desire has been recognized by a larger number of studies, notably by Pereira et al. (2019), Rosen et al. (2018), Vowels and Mark (2020), and Sutherland et al. (2020).

The following table represents the factors of sexuality that influence marital satisfaction associated with the studies that described them.

Author/Year	Sexuality factors that influence marital satisfaction
Brown & Weigel, 2018	Sexual Self-Revelation
Calvillo et al., 2020	
Mark et al., 2018	Attachment
Calvillo et al., 2020	
Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019	Watch explicit sexual activity content
Floyd et al., 2020	
Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020	
Pereira et al., 2019	Discrepancy of sexual desire
Rosen et al., 2018	
Vowels & Mark, 2020	
Sutherland et al., 2020	Intrinsic and extrinsic sexual motivation
Wood <i>et al.</i> , 2021	
Muise <i>et al.</i> , 2017	Motivation to meet partner needs
Peters & Meltzer, 2021	Sensitivity to sexual aversion

When the elements of the couple express feelings of low marital satisfaction and intimacy, they seek strategies to enhance sexual satisfaction. The use of explicit sexual activity content is one of the strategies and a factor of sexuality (Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019; Floyd et al., 2020; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020). This is approached in some cases as a negative influence on sexuality and

consequently in marital satisfaction, however, it all depends on context, individual characteristics, religion, body mass index, individual or joint use, and moral disapproval that leads to a sense of shame (Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019; Floyd et al. 2020; Willoughby et al., 2020). However, when it is used as a strategy accompanied with effective sexual communication

between the elements of the couple it has a positive influence on marital satisfaction (Willoughby et al., 2020).

Another factor of sexuality is the discrepancy in sexual desire between the members of a couple. When this discrepancy exists, the way individuals seek to provide a solution has implications for marital satisfaction (Muise et al., 2017; Pereira et al., 2019; Rosen et al., 2018; Sutherland et al., 2020). Vowels and Mark (2020) identified strategies to mitigate the sexual desire discrepancy between the elements of the couple and found that doing nothing as a strategy to reverse the sexual discrepancy promotes disconnection between the partners and a decrease in marital satisfaction. However, masturbation, the practice of a different activity and communication had a positive effect.

Muise et al. (2017) characterize another factor of sexuality: the motivation to meet the partner's needs. The authors mention an association between the motivation to understand and meet the partner's need for engaging in or abstaining from sex and higher levels of marital satisfaction.

Sexual self-elevation, another identified factor, pertains to communication and sharing between the members of the couple about their sexual preferences, promoting a positive influence on sexual interaction and marital satisfaction. However, this disclosure depends on a secure context and support that exists (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Cavillo et al., 2020). The emphasis placed communication in the relationship is essential in dyadic relationships and is a theme addressed across many of the studies (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Cavillo et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2019; Rosen, et al., 2018; Sutherland et al., 2020; Veit et al., 2017; Vowels et al., 2020).

Another factor identified was attachment which is

influential and significant in marital satisfaction (Mark et al., 2018). Couple elements experience higher levels of marital satisfaction when they have secure attachment, characterized by trust and intimacy (Cavillo et al. 2020; Mark et al., 2018). However, an anxious attachment (insecurity, the communication of negative feelings, need for attention, and feeling of ambivalence) and an avoidant attachment (emotional independence, difficulty distinguishing emotions, distress in intimacy) have a negative effect on marital satisfaction (Cavillo et al. 2020; Mark et al., 2018).

Sexual disgust sensitivity, which refers to the aversion various sexual concepts, acts, or situations (such as watching explicit content of sexual activity), was a factor of sexuality addressed by Peters and Meltzer (2021). Individuals who had a similar sexual disgust sensitivity maintained higher marital satisfaction (Peters & Meltzer, 2021).

Finally, the factor of intrinsic and extrinsic sexual motivation, which refers internal or external motivating reasons that encourage the person to engage in sexual activity (Wood et al., 2021). It was approached by Wood et al. (2021) as a driver for higher levels of sexual needs satisfaction and, consequently, greater marital satisfaction, as sexual motivation has positive effects on the partner's sexual needs.

## CONCLUSION

Marital satisfaction is considered a fundamental pillar in the mental, physical and social well-being of the members of the couple, with sexuality being one of the attributes to achieve quality in the relationship. Factors related to sexuality have implications on the couple's satisfaction at varying levels of intensity and



in different ways, depending on the each individual's characteristics and the interaction between the members of the couple. Therefore, it has become essential to deepen our understanding in this area.

The present scoping review has provides an answer to the research question, that is, to identify the various factors studied in the last five years that are associated with sexuality and that influence marital satisfaction.

In identifying the factors related to sexuality that impact marital satisfaction and, considering that marital satisfaction is a crucial area of focus, this study allows to improving the quality of care and enhancing family health nursing education.

For this reason, it is crucial to conduct further reviews that allow for deeper exploration of the implications of sexuality factors in the context of the marital relationship. Additionally, primary research studies should be undertaken with the aim of identifying new sexuality factors that influence marital satisfaction, taking into consideration the current state of affairs and the cultural context of Portuguese families.

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