

# An Investigation into Components of Female Attractiveness in Couple Relationships from the Perspective of Expert Family Therapists: A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

**Background:** The escalating number of visits to family therapy centers and the increasing divorce rates indicate a profound crisis in relationship status, resulting in family discord and divorce. This study endeavored to scrutinize the elements of female attractiveness in couple relationships as perceived by family therapists with expertise in the field.

**Methods:** This was a qualitative study employing a content analysis design. The statistical population encompassed all expert family therapists in Ahvaz, Iran in 2022. From this pool, eight therapists who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected as the sample. The research methodology employed content analysis, and data were collected through quasi-experimental interviews.

**Results:** The outcomes revealed that the central and organizing categories consist of:

1. Personality Attractiveness (comprising self-esteem, agreeableness, stability, and conscientiousness as organizing codes).
2. Emotional attractiveness (with organizing codes related to positive emotional inhibition and positive emotional manifestation).
3. Cognitive attractiveness (characterized by cognitive capabilities and cognitive development as organizing codes).
4. Physical attractiveness (divided into sexual physical Attractiveness and non-sexual physical Attractiveness).
5. Relationship Attractiveness (encompassing family attractiveness, family relation attractiveness, emotional relation attractiveness, and spousal praise).

**Conclusion:** Female Attractiveness is a multifaceted construct, and the absence of any of its dimensions can undermine its role in couple relationships. Therefore, adhering to these five dimensions can fortify marital bonds.

**Keywords:** Beauty, Personality, Marriage, Family therapy, Women

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## 1. Introduction

Women, as the pillars of contemporary families, grapple with various challenges. They reside in a society where men are exposed to various feminine behaviors in the media and society, potentially resulting in various shifts and alterations in their expectations (1,2). Conversely, women are confronted with emerging patterns exhibited by married and single men and women, as depicted in mass media, virtual spaces, and society. This situation sometimes casts doubt on their assumptions regarding a healthy married life, leading to emotional fluctuations that impact family boundaries, resilience, and intimacy (3). The disruption of these three vital facets of family life can have dire consequences, including a waning interest in both men and women. Unquestionably, a deficiency in the intimacy shared by couples and the inability to enhance it can breed marital ennui (4).

In the present day, the sense of security, tranquility, and companionship within couples appears to be declining, with families increasingly exposed to destructive influences (5). The escalating number of visits to family therapy centers and the surging divorce rates underscore a grave relationship status crisis characterized by familial discord and separation (6). In light of Iran's societal shift from tradition to modernity, family issues, fractured relationships, and roles are significant challenges to family mental well-being (7). Moreover, the preservation and sustainability of families to mitigate social harm is a paramount concern for numerous social planners (8). In this context, women's unique role in the preservation and sustainability of families has perennially captured the attention of family researchers (9). Ghafarollahi and colleagues (10) illustrated that augmenting marital intimacy can alleviate marital tedium.

Marital tedium is a distressing condition characterized by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that afflicts individuals who perceive marriage as a source of romantic love—a factor that imbues their lives with purpose (11). Boredom takes root when couples realize that, despite their best efforts, their relationship fails to infuse meaning into their lives (12). The accumulation of daily frustrations and tensions leads to psychological erosion, culminating in heartache. Individuals' emotional sentiments toward their spouses can influence marital tedium, often skewing towards negative rather than positive emotional experiences (13).

Nonetheless, there remain contented and prosperous families in which both men and women maintain their allure to each other despite years of matrimony. This factor is a formidable bulwark against marital ennui or infidelity and is pivotal in fostering affirmative emotional encounters with one's spouse. Meanwhile, it appears that the attractiveness of women and men to each other and their respective kinsfolk has garnered more attention within psychology than in family psychology. Researchers demonstrated that physical attractiveness continues to wield significance in marital contentment after enduring years of marriage (14-16). However, certain studies attributed female attractiveness to personality traits. For instance, Zhang and colleagues (17) posited that beauty is influenced by personality attributes, implying that one's facial allure fluctuates in tandem with one's personality traits. Nevertheless, this field still grapples with a research gap, leaving the question of which characteristics render women attractive in couple relationships unanswered.

Certain studies highlighted the correlation between marital satisfaction and feminine traits. Rajabi and co-workers (18) established that verbal and nonverbal empathy can forecast positive sentiments toward one's spouse. Saeidi and colleagues (19) revealed that a sense of gratitude is intertwined with marital satisfaction and augments the quality of marital relationships. McWhirter and McIntyre (20) uncovered that adhering to rights and responsibilities, fostering effective communication, and upholding spiritual values all factor into family stability.

Despite the abundant research on marital satisfaction, family stability, and dyadic adjustment, exploring female attractiveness in

couple relationships holds the potential to cultivate a vibrant and joyful family environment. While attractiveness varies from individual to individual, a general blueprint seems to govern this attribute (21). Therefore, this study examined the constituents of female attractiveness in couple relationships, as perceived by expert family therapists. Identifying these components not only preserves a repository of experiential wisdom and enriches the knowledge of expert family therapists in the sphere of female attractiveness but also lays the groundwork for developing a training program centered on female attractiveness in couple relationships. Consequently, these teachings aspire to enhance marital intimacy and family stability. Thus, this study addressed the following inquiry: What are the elements of female attractiveness in couple relationships, as perceived by family therapists?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Setting and Participants

This study was a qualitative investigation employing a content analysis design. Following interviews with experts and an analysis of the qualitative data, initial theoretical constructs derived from their perspectives were formulated, leading to the development of the final model. The statistical population encompassed all family therapists in Ahvaz, Iran, with expertise in female attractiveness.

The participating family therapists were meticulously selected from eligible specialists using purposive and snowball sampling. The primary criterion for inclusion was the reputable standing of the counseling center in Ahvaz, Iran, with participants being recommended by the center's head. Additionally, selected participants were requested to refer another therapist until the data collected reached a state of saturation. Data saturation was achieved after eight experienced therapists in the field of family therapy had been enrolled.

Inclusion criteria were as follows: willingness to participate in research interviews, the ability to recall the content of their therapy sessions and an endorsement from at least one other accomplished family therapist. Exclusion criteria comprised having less than ten years of experience in family therapy and a lack of expertise in female attractions

within couple relationships. Prior to conducting the research, written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

To enhance the accuracy and robustness of the data, the study focused on assessing its credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability, as outlined in reference (22). To gauge the credibility of the data, the analysis results underwent scrutiny by other members of the research team, who provided supplementary and critical feedback, which was duly incorporated. Furthermore, the transcribed interviews and the extracted themes were shared with the interviewees to verify whether the transcripts and themes accurately mirrored their experiences.

To bolster transferability, the study meticulously selected a fitting sample of expert family therapists specializing in female attractiveness in couple relationships. The study participants and various stages were exhaustively described, and provisions for auditing the study documents were available. To validate the findings, two qualitative studies and family therapy experts were enlisted to review the reports and manuscripts and offer their perspectives to assess the degree of alignment in the conclusions.

To ensure the reliability and consistency of the data, it underwent examination by a family therapist well-versed in qualitative studies. Importantly, this therapist had no prior knowledge of the research and was blinded to its objectives. Their findings were subsequently compared with those of the primary researcher.

Data collection employed an unstructured interview approach. The interview questions were developed based on the existing expertise of family therapists in the domain of female attractiveness

within couple relationships. Subsequently, these questions underwent review by three experts and underwent a pilot assessment. The topics and issues discussed closely aligned with the components of female attractiveness in couple relationships. Sample interview questions included inquiries about self-esteem among attractive women and the presence of conscientiousness and responsibility in such individuals. Exploratory questions were also posed to encourage participants to provide additional insights.

Upon securing the requisite permissions from the university and establishing contact with counseling centers, expert family therapists were approached, and research permissions were granted. All interviews were meticulously recorded and subsequently transcribed. These interviews took place within the confines of the counseling center and typically span 40 to 65 minutes.

Given that the study entailed content analysis, a six-stage methodology was employed for data analysis. These stages encompassed the following: (1) gaining familiarity with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) identifying categories, (4) scrutinizing these categories, (5) delineating and labeling the categories, and (6) preparing the final report.

2.3. Trustworthiness

Four criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, were used to ensure data trustworthiness (23).

3. Results

The present study involved eight family therapists whose average age was 49.25 years. The demographic details of the participating family therapists are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

Case	Age (years)	Education
1	36	PhD
2	44	PhD
3	46	PhD
4	52	PhD
5	55	PhD
6	56	PhD
7	55	PhD
8	50	PhD

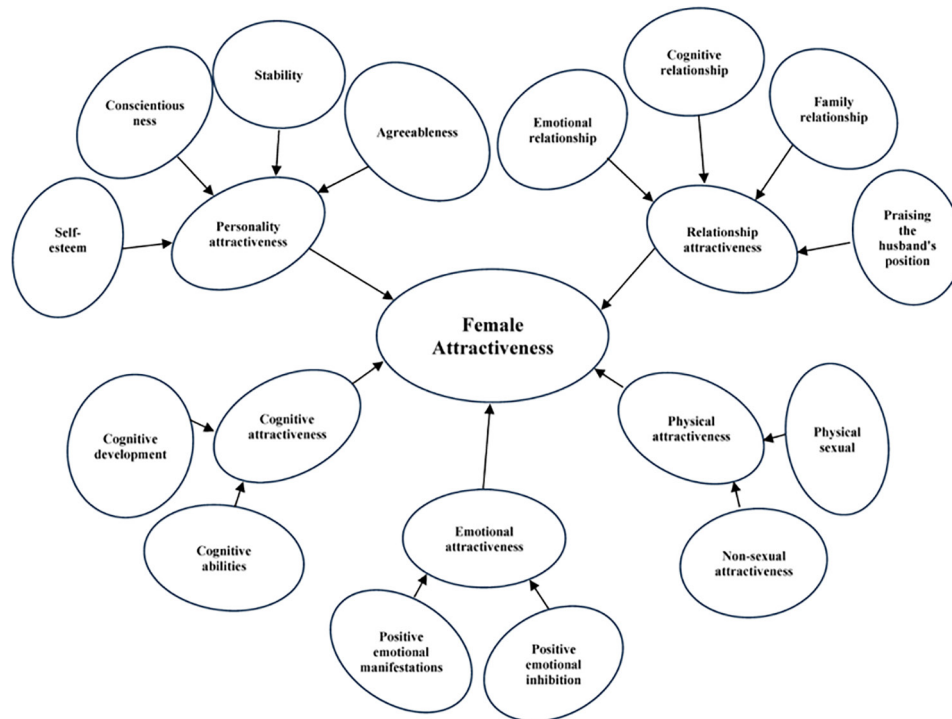


Figure 1: The figure shows the categorization of components of female attractiveness.

This study focused on exploring the respondents’ perspectives and adhered to the principles of inductive research. Moreover, the analysis employed a semantic approach to identify themes that emerged from the “evident or surface-level meanings of the data.” Subsequently, the structure of the components contributing to female attractiveness was constructed based on the classification of these themes, utilizing content analysis (24). The analysis findings are presented in Figure 1, which illustrates a central and organized categorization.

Model 1 comprises five organizing categories:

**3.1. The Core Category of Personality Attractiveness:** This category encompasses the organizing codes of (A) self-esteem, (B) agreeableness, (C) stability, (D) conscientiousness, and (E) accountability. The rationale for selecting this label is that participants believed that women possessing these attributes in a couple’s relationship demonstrate progress toward achieving personal maturity.

**3.1.1. Self-esteem:** Five initial codes emerged from the interviews, encapsulating beliefs in one’s capabilities, a sense of inner worth, selfless service, agency, and subjectivity. For instance, a participant remarked, “Attractive married women are those

whose value is intrinsic; they do not tether their worth to external factors like wealth, car models, or similar matters.” Another participant noted, “What I have observed in attractive married women is their ability to make decisions autonomously and act on their judgment. They do not react passively and do not bend themselves to please others; instead, they exhibit self-regulation.”

**3.1.2. Agreeableness:** This category implies that these women are inclined to cooperate rather than being obstinate, self-centered, self-absorbed, or complicated. Initial codes drawn from the transcribed interviews included simplicity, compassion, the capacity for companionship and friendship, trust in others, the ability to view oneself from an external perspective, and internal attentiveness to others. For example, a participant observed, “Although these women may display steadfastness and resilience, they are not obstinate; they are compassionate, avoid making simple matters complex, and maintain composure.” Another participant added, “Understanding others and their subjective worlds, comprehending why others react to you in certain ways, although challenging, fosters cognitive flexibility and prevents fixation on trivial issues.”

**3.1.3. Stability:** Stability suggests that these women can navigate life’s highs and lows without

becoming disoriented, even when facing life's challenges. Primary codes extracted from the transcribed interviews that contributed to this category included stress management in demanding situations, predictability, modest expectations, a sense of gratitude, forgiveness, appreciation of positive qualities in individuals, quick and easy contentment, adherence to ethical principles, and resistance to temptations. A participant commented, "While it may be appealing to a man for a woman to seek some support from him, an attractive woman, in general, is one who can handle her daily life." Another participant emphasized, "Through my years of professional experience, I have realized that an attractive woman who contributes to the endurance and sustainability of life may have expectations from her partner, but she is not excessively demanding. She is easily pleased, forgiving, and focuses more on the positives than the negatives."

#### **3.1.4. Conscientiousness and Responsibility:**

This organizing category underscores that women who exhibit conscientiousness and responsibility create fewer opportunities for turning differences into conflicts. Primary codes extracted from the transcribed interviews that informed this category included responsiveness to duties, a balanced emphasis on discipline, task completion, and persistence. A participant pointed out, "Regardless of how attractive you are, if others cannot rely on your promises, and you remain indifferent to the suffering caused by your negligence in fulfilling your duties and responsibilities, it is evident that people will avoid you."

3.2. A core category of emotional attractiveness with organizational codes of positive emotional inhibition and other positive emotional manifestations were among the main categories extracted. The reason behind selecting this title was that the participants believed that attractive women in couple relationships have characteristics that create special emotional conditions for them.

3.2.1. In this core category, four initial codes were extracted from the transcribed interviews: lack of rudeness, anger management, little jealousy, little feeling of loneliness, and less negative emotional experiences. They were coded in the organizing code of positive emotional inhibition. For example, one of the participants said: "Attractive women have something called positive energy. Their

jealousy, anger, or loneliness is very little."

3.2.2. Another organizing category was having positive emotional manifestations, which showed that these women vitalize family life by having positive emotional manifestations. The primary codes extracted from the transcribed interviews that led to this organizing code were Playfulness, playing, being smiley, welcoming new experiences, maintaining harmony in life, spontaneity, being funny, and providing a fun atmosphere. For example, a participant said: "Female Attractiveness is not limited to intellectual and physical matters. Creating a happy atmosphere, smiling, seeing the funny parts in serious and painful issues, being playful, and making suitable jokes all make those around you lively."

3.3. Other cognitive attractiveness was a core category extracted from the data, which included organizing codes of cognitive abilities and cognitive development. The reason behind selecting this title was that the participants believed that these women have outstanding cognition and brain cell function conditions, making them more attractive.

3.3.1. Cognitive abilities were among the organizing codes, formed by a set of primary codes extracted from the interviews: Problem-solving ability, high learning ability, strong positive memory, strong positive attention, intense positive concentration, prioritization, and having a plan and purposefulness. According to a participant: "It is evident that attractive women have positive cognitive abilities. For example, some women have strong negative intelligence and cognition, but attractive women have the positive form of these characteristics that use cognitive abilities in a positive direction and have optimistic brains. "Another participant said: "I must say that an attractive woman has more positive judgments than negative judgments. She is a good learner and can memorize the best data. I think the cognition of these women has the least contamination with neurotic defense mechanisms and the most robust problem-solving ability, so these women are more or less free of hatred."

3.3.2. The second organizing code among these women was cognitive development, which was the result of a set of primary codes that indicated these women are constantly developing their daily brain skills: Studying, listening to podcasts, critical

thinking, paying attention to literature and art, and participating in personal skills improvement courses. According to a participant: “What I have realized over the years is that an attractive woman is not limited to what she knows, and is up-to-date and moves forward.”

3.4. Physical attractiveness was another code extracted from the data. This code includes organizing codes of physical sexual and non-sexual attractiveness. The reason for selecting this title was that the participants believed the body of wives and physical intimacy was a way for men to understand being loved.

3.4.1. Physical and sexual attractiveness was one of the organizing categories in this core category, which consisted of a set of primary codes that were extracted after analyzing the participants' interviews: sexual desire, spending money on underwear and giving importance to it, positive creativity in sex, trying different sexual positions, wearing sexy clothes, paying attention to the bedroom space, knowing kissing skills, flirting and caressing, and sending direct and indirect sexual messages with body language. According to a participant: “An attractive woman, compared to a good woman, knows very well how to keep life sexually; They know how to make sexual eye contact; They wear sexy clothes, show their sexual enthusiasm, and although they are accessible, sexual access to them requires effort on the part of the man.”

3.4.2. Another organizing core category of physical attractiveness was non-sexual physical attractiveness, indicating that these women value their bodies, health, and freshness. A set of initial codes from the interview led to the formation of this organizing category: Appropriate clothing for the situation, exercising, drinking much water, paying attention to appearance details, tidy appearance, maintaining body posture without hump and with high shoulders, little make-up, and being agile. According to a participant: “Naturally, an attractive person has a neat physical appearance and an appropriate style; undoubtedly, an attractive woman has a good condition in terms of appearance.”

3.5. Relationship attractiveness was another core category extracted from the data, which showed that the participants believed attractive

women have characteristics that respond positively to their spouse's psychological needs, such as independence, attention, respect, security, identity, and credit. This category includes three categories: family, cognitive-communication, and emotional-communication attractiveness.

3.5.1. One of the organizing categories in this core category is family attractiveness. This showed that these women are in families where the aforementioned psychological needs of men are a positive response. This organizing category is the collection of some primary codes: Having a family that accepts the spouse, praising the son-in-law, giving opportunities for marital decisions without intervening, not taking sides in marital conflicts, providing fun opportunities for couples, having a solid treasure for stability, friendship, and tolerance in the family, few divorces, providing services, support, and respect, and paying attention to the son-in-law's family. According to a participant: “Experience has shown that one of the most important factors in attractiveness is a suitable, non-interventionist, supportive, and fun-loving family.”

3.5.2. Another organizing category in this core category was cognitive relationship attractiveness. According to the participants, attractive women move intelligently in everyday life. This code was the result of a combination of primary codes: Resolving conflicts in a way that is acceptable to both sides, supporting the goals of the spouse, maintaining family values, the ability to solve marital problems, thinking about the future in married life, preparing the optimal challenge for the spouse, having positive beliefs about marriage and family, and recognizing the boundaries. According to a participant: “My experience and studies show that an attractive woman acts intelligently, solves conflicts well so that relationship trade-offs are respected, life with them is not boring because they have expectations from their spouses that make their efforts dynamic. They generally think about the future and understand the past, present, and future well.”

3.5.3. Another organizing category in this core category was emotional relationship attractiveness, which showed that the participants believe that these women observe emotional details in their relationship, contributing to the happiness and vitality of the relationship and

making the relationship with them attractive. The primary factors that led to the formation of this category were Having empathy and compassion towards the spouse, making eye contact, showing sympathy during grief, joking with the spouse, communing with the spouse, trying to make the spouse feel safe, avoiding the spouse's sensitivities, asking for support and help from spouse, watching favorite movies of the spouse, going to nature, and telling memorable jokes to the spouse. According to a participant: "Emotions always liven up the relationships, of course, (I mean) the compatible emotions. However, these women know well how to keep relationships alive with empathy and sympathy, doing fun things as couples, paying attention to their husband's sensitivities, and winning their trust."

3.5.4. Praising the husband's position as a man was another organizing category in this core category. According to expert family therapists, these women give value to their husbands, which is a positive response to their security needs. A series of primary codes led to the formation of this organizing code: Talking with the husband about individual activities, expressing the need for the husband's support, prioritizing the husband over others, being trustworthy, accepting the husband's positive and negative characteristics, and getting along with husband's differences.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study aimed to analyze the components of female attractiveness in couple relationships from the perspective of family therapists. The qualitative results from thematic analysis led to the extraction of 106 primary codes, 14 organizing categories, and five core categories. The core and organizing categories were:

**1. Personality Attractiveness:** This category encompassed self-esteem, agreeableness, stability, and conscientiousness.

**2. Emotional Attractiveness:** It included positive emotional inhibition and positive emotional manifestation.

**3. Cognitive Attractiveness:** This category revolves around cognitive capabilities and cognitive development.

**4. Physical Attractiveness:** This comprised sexual and non-sexual physical attributes.

**5. Relation Attractiveness:** Subcategories included family attractiveness, family relation attractiveness, emotional relation attractiveness, and praising the spouse.

No research was found on female attractiveness in couple relationships among the published studies in different databases; however, some studies on the variables influencing marital satisfaction or marriage longevity were identified. For instance, Rajabi and co-workers (18) demonstrated that empathy, both in verbal and non-verbal forms, could predict pleasant feelings toward the spouse. Saeidi and colleagues (19) established a connection between the spirit of gratitude and marital satisfaction, improving marital relationship quality.

To expound on personality attractiveness, it can be posited that personality traits play a pivotal role in various aspects of life, including learning styles, defense styles, communication styles, service styles, well-being, anger management, impulse control, activity style, and attitude towards life (25). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that personality traits contribute to female attractiveness. In this research, stability, agreeableness, and responsibility were identified as traits that enhance personality attractiveness in women. These findings aligned with Dehghani Sheshdeh and Yousefi's (26) results, who suggested that agreeableness could be a barrier to divorce.

Regarding cognitive attractiveness in women, participants believed cognitive abilities and development significantly impact female attractiveness. Cognitive abilities were seen as influential in organizing daily affairs, reacting appropriately to situations, problem-solving, and adopting a mature perspective on life (27). Hence, women with more robust cognitive capabilities were perceived as more attractive.

Exploring emotional attractiveness in women in couple relationships, which involves positive emotional inhibition and positive emotional manifestation, it can be noted that individuals with positive emotional inhibition exhibit reduced negative emotions such as jealousy, loneliness, insecurity, and anxiety (28). This positive emotional inhibition allows them to express gratitude and

positive emotions socially, leading to social rewards and empowerment, ultimately contributing to greater happiness (29). Consequently, individuals who experience better emotions are considered more attractive.

In terms of physical attractiveness, both sexual and non-sexual dimensions play vital roles in marital satisfaction. Women who value their physical appearance tend to be satisfied with their bodies, which can extend to their overall life satisfaction. A healthy, fit, and well-groomed appearance can offer a visually pleasing perspective to their spouses, enhancing female attractiveness (30).

Effective communication within the family was emphasized regarding the role of relationship attractiveness, including family relationship attractiveness, cognitive relationship attractiveness, emotional relationship attractiveness, and praising the husband in shaping female attractiveness. Good communication skills were a cornerstone in preventing family problems (31). Women with such skills were considered attractive. These women often came from families with strong family values and beliefs, enabling them to navigate marital challenges effectively. Cognitive attraction plays a crucial role in regulating power dynamics within the family, thereby preventing hidden anger, disruption, and stubbornness in marital relationships. Emotional communication attractiveness fostered vitality in relationships and contributed to more positive emotional experiences among couples.

#### 4.1. Limitation

This study had some limitations, including the omission of married men and women's opinions on female attractiveness.

## 5. Conclusion

Female attractiveness encompasses five facets, and its presence in couple relationships is pivotal. Adhering to these five aspects can strengthen marital bonds significantly. This significant insight was derived from experienced family therapists specializing in family research, and this study aimed to document and categorize their experiences. It is recommended that training programs for divorce prevention and family intervention be developed based on these findings.

## Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran with the code of IR.IAU.KHUISF.REC.1402.160. Also, written informed consent was obtained from the participants.

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## Authors' Contribution

Afsaneh Hosseini Geravandi: Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work, acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work, drafting the work. Parviz Asgari: Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work, acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work, drafting the work. Zahra Yousefi: Substantial contributions to the conception of the work, drafting the work and reviewing it critically for important intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work, such that the questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work.

**Conflict of Interest:** None declared.

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