

# Wife's Perception of Intimacy in Marriage after having Children

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## ABSTRACT

Intimacy is one of the most important aspect in marriage. There are seven types of intimacy namely emotional intimacy, social intimacy, intellectual intimacy, sexual intimacy, spiritual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and aesthetic intimacy. From the existing phenomena, it is seen that there are many factors that could affect couples' intimacy after having children. The aim of this research study is to explore the wife's perception of intimacy in marriage after having children. This research was conducted in November 2020. Participants were searched by purposive sampling technique. Participants in this study were four young adult married women with children. In-depth interviews were conducted through Zoom and Whatsapp. The result of this study, it was found that there are changes in three out of seven types of intimacy which are emotional intimacy, sexual intimacy and spiritual intimacy. It can also be found that intimacy in marriage after having child will not diminish if the couple communicate and have efforts to spend some time together.

**Keywords:** *intimacy, marriage, wife, after having children*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In young adulthood, individuals begin to look for a life partner to build a family by establishing romantic relationships with other individuals. When individuals are sure of their partner, marriage becomes one of several legitimate options for regulating relationships and reproduction [1]. Marriage is defined as an emotional commitment between two individuals who share emotional and physical intimacy, various tasks, and economic resources [2]. One important aspect of marriage is intimacy [3].

Intimacy refers to a sense of closeness, connectedness, and attachment in a love relationship, involving deep feelings such as mutual understanding, trust, and mutual support that can lead to warmth [4], [5]. Olson [6] describes seven types of intimacy, namely: (a) emotional intimacy; (b) social intimacy; (c) intellectual intimacy; (d) sexual intimacy; (e) recreational intimacy; (f) spiritual intimacy; (g) aesthetic intimacy.

Most married couples want to have children and parenthood is one of their goals. When a couple already has children, they must pay more attention and focus on the child so that it can develop properly. Complaints about changes in married couples after having children were obtained from the results of informal discussions on Instagram, Quora, and Kumparan.

It can be described about the phenomenon in society that the relationship between married couples can change after having children. The overall phenomenon obtained is

reduced time with a partner, difficulty in dividing time for sex, and reduced desire to have sex due to decreased wife libido, reduced communication and changed priorities [7]–[9]. Liza Djaprie [10], an Indonesian clinical psychologist, said that factors such as lack of time together, lack of communication, and too busy in raising children and taking care of housework so that they forget about the relationship between partners, if there are problems that are not resolved it will make the marriage tasteless and allow for divorce. It involves intimacy. If not addressed, it will lead to estrangement in the relationship between husband and wife.

### 1.1. Related Work

Stavdal et al. [11] concluded that, couples after giving birth to their first child become a challenge, but not necessarily weakened if couples who want to always be intimate will try to take the time. In the study of Stavdal et al. [11], does not discuss from the perspective of each husband or wife regarding intimacy in marriage, and only focuses on couples who have just given birth to their first child. Therefore, related to the existing phenomena, this study will explore the wife's perception of intimacy in marriage after having children and look for any changes that occur in intimacy after having children.

**1.2. Our Contribution**

Regarding the phenomenon in Indonesia, there are many complaints from the wife's side about the ups and downs in raising children, the difficulty of spending time with her husband, reduced communication with her husband, changes in priorities, worries due to physical changes after giving birth and a sense of lack of support from her husband. This can affect relationships, one of which is intimacy which is an important aspect of marriage. In this study, we will focus on things that were not included in previous research, namely the wife's perception of intimacy. With this research, it can also be a means of education for couples in maintaining intimacy after having children, and also as a reference for further research that wants to explore the intimacy of married couples.

**1.3 Paper Structure**

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses about participants, research methods, research procedures, and results. Section 3 discusses conclusion. Finally, section 4 discusses conclusion and followed with acknowledgement.

**2. BACKGROUND**

**2.1 Participants**

The participants of this study were four young adult wives aged 18-35 years, married, had children and lived in together

**Table 1** Overview of Research Participants

Initial	Ages	Job	Years of Marriage	Number of children	helpers
A	27	Housewife	2 years	1	Family
S	28	Employee	3 years	1	Family
I	28	Employee	3 years	1	Babysitter
U	29	Product Specialist	5 years	2	Family and House Assistant

**2.2 Research Methods**

The research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach which is a description of an individual's life experience of a concept or phenomenon experienced [12]. The researcher focused on the wife's perception of intimacy in marriage after having children. The data collection process is obtained through in-depth interviews to add more detailed information and will be carried out in a semi-structured manner so that when the questions asked develop along with the conversation [13]

**2.3 Research Procedures**

The research was conducted in the Greater Jakarta area so that researchers could reach participants easily. Research equipment used in the interview process is informed consent, interview guide, recorder, writing instruments and paper for notes. This research was conducted online via the Zoom and/or Whatsapp application. Researchers searched for participants through Twitter and your acquaintances. After the participants agreed to be involved in the study, the researcher and the participants made an appointment for an interview. Before the interview begins, participants will fill out an informed consent. he results of the interviews were then processed in verbatim form. Then, categorized according to the theme. The results of the categorization are then analyzed using the theory

**2.4 Result**

**Emotional Intimacy**

The four participants with partners still showed affection, such as hugging and or encouraging, but there was less attention from their partners. In participant A, they felt a change in the attention of their husbands, because they focused on playing games so they forgot about their children and wives, compared to when they did not have children. In participants S and I, the husband's attention was reduced at the beginning of having children. Especially in I, because I live in the house of my in-laws temporarily, so it becomes one of the obstacles. In participant U, husbands became more attentive after having children. A and S resolved it by communicating with their husbands, while I decided to return to a private home. Participants S and I were very open with their partners, while participants A and U limited their openness with their partners.

**Social Intimacy**

All three participants shared the same circle of friends, and gathered with friends although it became rare after having children.

**Intellectual Intimacy**

The four participants were still talking and discussing with their partners apart from household matters, such as work, investment, stocks and also sharing opinions.

#### Sexual Intimacy

The three participants felt a change in the frequency of having sex, participant I currently did not feel a change in the frequency of having sex, it's just that at the beginning of the birth of the child, there were obstacles in having sex because of staying at the in-laws' house. However, the four participants did not feel the desire to have sex. Time and physical conditions become obstacles in having sex. So that the four participants took the time to have sex at the time after the child fell asleep or in the morning. The three participants still showed affectionate touch with their partner, but in participant I, they felt that their husbands showed less affectionate touch after having children.

#### Recreational Intimacy

The four participants continued to do hobbies together, such as playing games and sports, going to places of reflection, celebrating wedding anniversaries, birthdays or traveling. Sometimes doing recreation together with a partner or taking children. If you are traveling alone, the child is entrusted to the family or there is a babysitter who helps look after the child.

#### Spiritual Intimacy

The four participants have the same principles of life after having children. Participants I and S choose to live life as it is according to the situation, Participants A and U have the principle of wanting to have pious children and a harmonious family, and become healthy parents.

#### Aesthetic Intimacy

The four participants had some tastes in common with their partners, some were different.

In marriage there are commitments, affections, friendships, fulfilling sexual needs, emotional growth and intimacy [14]. One important aspect of marriage is intimacy [3]. Intimacy involves openness, caring, closeness and having sex which can promote a healthy marriage [2], [5], [15]. This definition can be related to the perceptions of the four participants who stated that intimacy is closeness, knowing each other deeply, openness, communication, telling stories to each other and having sex. As seen from the perceptions of the four participants, after having children there were changes in emotional intimacy, sexual intimacy and spiritual intimacy.

In emotional intimacy, A, S, I experience changes after having children, namely the lack of attention from the husband. Meanwhile, U felt that the husband's communication and attention had increased. S and I felt a lack of attention from their husbands at the beginning of the birth of their children, and also at that time experienced the baby blues so they needed more attention from their husbands. I had experienced difficulties in communicating because at the beginning of the birth of the child, I and my husband lived in the house of I-in-law. The way the four participants dealt with it was by communicating with their husbands.

Experiencing and performing sexual activities of physical closeness, touch and affection is sexual intimacy [6], [16]. It can be seen that from the perceptions of the four participants, there is a change in sexual intimacy. As stated by De Judicibus & McCabe [17] and Woolhouse et al. [18] that after giving birth to children, many women lose their desire to have sex or experience dyspareunia, namely pain in having sex. The four participants did not feel a decrease in desire or pain in having sex, it's just that time and physical conditions such as fatigue were obstacles so that there was a decrease in the frequency of having sex. At the beginning of the birth of the child, I experienced difficulties in having sex with my husband because at that time they were living at my father-in-law's house and sleeping in separate rooms. But at this time, I have not felt a change in the frequency of sex. These changes can be overcome by participants by taking time to have sex such as when the child is asleep or in the morning.

Carolyn and Philip Cowan [19] identify five changes in couples after having children, one of which is identity and inner-life changes, namely changes in priorities and values. From the perception of the four participants, there is a change in the principle of life after having children, namely choosing to live as is, adjusting to conditions and or making new principles. This change refers to spiritual intimacy.

Other forms of intimacy, such as social intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy and aesthetic intimacy have not changed, because from the perceptions of the four participants, they are still talking, discussing, exchanging ideas, can still do hobbies together and still have the same taste in some things, and occasionally hanging out with friends. Although having children requires more time and attention, the type of intimacy that was lost was not found in the relationships of the four participants with their husbands.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the general perception of the four participants towards intimacy is closeness, knowing each other deeply, openness, communication, telling stories to each other and having sex.

There are changes in emotional intimacy, sexual intimacy, intellectual intimacy and spiritual intimacy. Based on the wife's perception, these changes are caused by time, physical condition and priorities. These changes did not strain the relationship between participants and their partners because they could overcome them by communicating with their husbands and spending time alone. There is help from family or babysitters in raising children so that they can help couples maintain intimacy in marriage.

#### 4. FUTURE RECCOMENDATIONS

Suggestions for further research are expected to increase intimacy theory and literacy so that knowledge about intimacy is wider. In this study, the characteristics of the participants became a limitation because the researchers did not control for the type of work, length of marriage and number of children. Thus, further research is recommended to control the characteristics of the participants. Practical advice

for married couples after having children to maintain intimacy with their partners. In addition to communication and spending time, intimacy can be maintained when partners show affection for each other, seek recreation to unwind, take time to have sex, talk, and have the same principles. Help from family and/or babysitters in parenting can also help when couples want to spend time together.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Tarumanagara, Jakarta, Indonesia.

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