

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

Presenting the findings and discussion of the qualitative research on the lived experiences of couples in adventure-based therapy, specifically focusing on hiking, the analysis elaborates on major themes and sub-themes identified from the data. These findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and relevant theories. Each finding is critically examined to assess its alignment or divergence from previous studies. Additionally, the research questions and objectives outlined in earlier chapters are addressed, providing a detailed comparison of participant experiences. This comprehensive approach highlights both unique and common elements across cases, ensuring a thorough understanding of the impact of adventure-based therapy on couples' relationships.

4.2 Demographic Information of the Respondents

The respondents of this study comprised three couples who participated in adventure-based therapy through hiking. Each couple shared their experiences, highlighting the impact of hiking on their relationship dynamics. The demographic information of the respondents is summarized to provide context to the qualitative data analyzed. The table below summarizes the demographic information of all study participants.

4.2.1 Summary of Respondents

Table 2: Demographic information of the Respondents

Couple	Age		Period of Marriage	Years of Experience	Level of Involvement
	Husband	Wife			
CP1	38	48	5 years	15 years	International
CP2	31	27	2 years	5 years	National
CP3	48	38	9 years	21 years	International

Couple 1

The first couple, referred to as CP1, has an extensive background in hiking with 15 years of experience on an international level. The husband is 38 years old and has three children from a previous marriage, while the wife is 48 years old with one son from a previous marriage. They have been married for five years and have been hiking together for three years. Their diverse backgrounds and previous family experiences add a unique dimension to their participation in adventure-based therapy.

Couple 2

The second couple, CP2, has been actively involved in hiking at a national level for the past five years. The husband is 31 years old and the wife is 27 years old. They have a six-month-old baby boy and have been married for two years. With four years of hiking experience together, their involvement in

adventure-based therapy is marked by balancing their roles as new parents while maintaining an active outdoor lifestyle. Their experiences highlight the challenges and rewards of integrating adventure-based activities into their family life.

Couple 3

The third couple, CP3, also participates in hiking on an international level and brings 21 years of experience to the study. The husband is 48 years old, and the wife is 38 years old. They have a two children and have been married for nine years. With eight years of shared hiking experience, this couple illustrates the long-term benefits and deepening relational bonds that can result from sustained participation in adventure-based activities. Their story provides valuable insights into the dynamics of maintaining a strong relationship through continuous shared adventures.

4.3 Research Findings

This section presents the detailed findings of the research based on the lived experiences of couples who have participated in adventure-based therapy through hiking. The findings are organized into main themes and their respective sub-themes, with interpretations supported by direct statements from the couples and contextualized with relevant literature and theories.

4.3.1 Findings of Research Questions 1

What are the lived experiences of couples who have participated in adventure-based therapy?

The lived experiences of couples in adventure-based therapy through hiking reveal profound impacts on their relationship dynamics, highlighting the significant role of teamwork, mutual support, and communication in overcoming challenges.

The primary finding is the significant impact of hiking experiences on strengthening relationships. Couples consistently highlighted the importance of teamwork, mutual support, and communication during challenging hikes. These elements were crucial in overcoming various obstacles, such as sudden weather changes and childcare needs which required couples to rely on each other and work collaboratively.

This finding aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of concrete experiences (CE) in learning and relationship enhancement (Kolb, 1984). The shared experiences of overcoming hiking challenges led to reflective observation (RO), allowing couples to process their experiences, ultimately leading to abstract conceptualization (AC) and active experimentation (AE) in their relationship dynamics. Moreover, the experiences fostered a deeper emotional connection, as couples learned to navigate difficulties together.

This reinforced the importance of shared activities in maintaining and enhancing relational bonds.

Table 3: Major Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question 1

Major Theme	Sub-Themes
Significant Impact of Hiking Experience on Relationship Strengthening	Teamwork
	Mutual Support

CP1: "During one of our hikes, we faced a sudden storm. It was terrifying, but we had to stick together, trust each other, and communicate effectively to find our way back safely. That experience brought us closer than ever."

CP2: "Hiking has taught us the value of mutual support. There were times when we had to carry each other's load, literally and figuratively. It made us realize how much stronger we are as a team."

Teamwork was a central element in the couples' hiking experiences. For instance, Couple 1 noted, "We had to work together to deal with unexpected weather changes. It brought us closer as we relied on each other." Similarly, Couple 2 emphasized the significance of mutual support during challenging moments, stating, "Both of us had to be there for each other, especially when dealing with our baby's needs while hiking." This mutual reliance and cooperation illustrate the Concrete Experience stage of Kolb's model, where couples face real-life challenges that require collaborative effort.

These findings are supported by Gass and Priest (2017), who found that outdoor activities like ropes courses and wilderness expeditions foster teamwork and trust among participants. Through Reflective Observation, couples process these experiences, leading to Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation, where they apply these insights to strengthen their relationship dynamics. This iterative process enhances their problem-solving skills and relational resilience, as suggested by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

Mutual support during hiking challenges further strengthened the couple bonds. Couple 3 described how overcoming physical exhaustion together deepened their connection: "Facing the tough terrains together made us realize how much we support and rely on each other." These findings corroborate Social Learning Theory, suggesting that individuals learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses through observing and interacting with others (Bandura, 1977). The supportive behaviours modelled during hiking experiences reinforce the couples' commitment to each other, enhancing their resilience and trust.

Studies by Russell (2001) affirm these findings, indicating that shared challenging experiences in nature lead to increased reliance and trust among participants. The mutual support observed among couples during hikes contributes to their emotional and relational resilience, validating the benefits of adventure-based therapy in enhancing couple relationships.

The physical and emotional challenges of hiking, such as navigating difficult terrains or dealing with physical exhaustion, were reported to bring couples closer through shared awe and achievement. Couple 1 reflected, "The toughest hikes were the most rewarding. We came out stronger together." This

supports the framework of Kolb's stages of Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation, where couples face and reflect on these challenges, leading to deeper connections and improved problem-solving abilities.

Research by Priest and Gass (2005) corroborates these findings, showing that overcoming physical challenges in outdoor settings fosters stronger relational bonds and enhances problem-solving skills among participants. Thus, the challenges faced during hiking not only test but also strengthen couples' relationships, corroborating with previous studies. These experiences also provide opportunities for couples to practice resilience, enhancing their ability to cope with future challenges together.

4.3.2 Findings of Research Question 2

How does adventure-based therapy influence couples' relationships and their overall life?

Hiking was found to significantly enhance family bonds, providing couples with meaningful ways to connect with each other and their children. Couples reported that hiking together, often with their children, was more engaging and fulfilling than typical family activities such as watching TV or shopping. This is in harmony with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which outlines that real-life activities (Concrete Experience) provide opportunities for reflective observation and bonding (Abstract Conceptualization) (Kolb, 1984). Shared hiking

experiences allowed families to create lasting memories and deepen their connections.

Table 4: Major Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question 2

Major Theme	Sub-Themes
Enhancing Family Bonds through Shared Hiking Adventures	Family Bonding
	Quality Time

CP3: "Hiking as a family has given us some of our most cherished memories. It's a time when we are all truly present with each other, away from the distractions of everyday life."

CP2: "The quality time we spend hiking together has significantly improved our communication. We talk more openly and feel more connected."

Couple 1 mentioned, "Hiking with our kids allowed us to bond in ways that we never could at home. It was a shared adventure." This is consistent with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, where real-life activities (Concrete Experience) provide opportunities for reflective observation and bonding (Abstract Conceptualization) (Kolb, 1984). The shared hiking experiences allowed families to create lasting memories and deepen their connections.

Blumenfeld et al. (1991) suggest that shared activities, especially in natural settings, significantly enhance interpersonal relationships and family bonding. The findings of this research align with this perspective, indicating that

hiking as a family activity promotes closer bonds and shared understanding. These shared experiences also contribute to a sense of unity and collective achievement, which are crucial for family cohesion.

Couples emphasized that hiking provided them with uninterrupted time away from daily distractions, fostering deeper connections. Couple 2 reflected, "Being away from our usual routines allowed us to focus on each other and our relationship." According to Social Learning Theory, this event can be explained where shared positive experiences in natural settings reinforce relational bonds and satisfaction (Bandura, 1977).

Neill and Giles (2013) support this finding, highlighting how outdoor activities facilitate open communication and deeper emotional connections among participants. The quality time spent hiking thus enhances couples' relational dynamics, agreeing with previous research on the benefits of nature-based activities for relationship building. This uninterrupted time allows couples to engage in meaningful conversations and reflect on their relationship, leading to improved understanding and empathy.

4.3.3 Findings of Research Question 3

What are the benefits and challenges of adventure-based therapy for couples?

Hiking provided couples with valuable opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth. The solitude and time spent in nature allowed for introspection and emotional regulation, leading to improved

communication and self-awareness. This finding resonates with Kolb's stages of Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualization, where couples reflect on their experiences and derive broader insights into their behaviours and emotions (Kolb, 1984). Studies by Gillis & Gass (2017) support this, indicating that outdoor activities enhance self-awareness and personal growth.

Table 5: Major Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question 3.1

Major Theme	Sub-Themes
Self-Reflection and Personal Growth Through Hiking	Emotional Regulation
	Self-Awareness

CP1: "Hiking gives us the space to reflect on our relationship and our individual selves. It's been a journey of self-discovery and growth."

CP3: "The time we spend in nature allows us to process our emotions better. We've become more patient and understanding with each other."

Couples observed improvements in their emotional regulation and communication styles because of hiking. Couple 3 noted, "Hiking gave us the space to reflect on our emotions and communicate better." This evidence underpins Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, particularly the Reflective Observation stage, where couples process their experiences and improve their emotional responses and communication skills (Kolb, 1984).

Russell and Phillips (2015) validate these observations, indicating that structured outdoor activities provide participants with opportunities to reflect on their behaviours and improve emotional regulation. The findings of this research agree with these studies, highlighting the therapeutic potential of hiking in enhancing emotional and relational skills. These reflective experiences also help couples develop empathy and active listening skills, which are crucial for effective communication.

Hiking also provided opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth. Couple 1 acknowledged, "We became more aware of our behaviours and how they affect our relationship during our hikes." This resonates with the stages of Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualization in Kolb's model, where reflecting on experiences leads to new insights and improved relational dynamics (Kolb, 1984).

Gillis and Gass (2017) emphasize the role of outdoor activities in fostering self-awareness and personal growth, supporting the findings of this research. The self-reflection facilitated by hiking contributes to enhanced relationship quality and personal development, aligning with previous literature. These experiences also encourage couples to set personal and relational goals, leading to continuous improvement and growth.

Another benefit that was discovered is that the natural environment played a significant role in enhancing relationship dynamics. Couples found that the serene and rhythmic nature of hiking facilitated engagement and meaningful conversations, providing a peaceful escape from daily stressors. In the context of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, this illustrates that natural surroundings

provide a conducive environment for reflection and engagement (Kolb, 1984). Research by Neill & Dias (2001) supports this, indicating that nature-based activities enhance relational engagement and communication.

Table 6: Major Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question 3.2

Major Theme	Sub-Themes
Role of Nature in Relationship Dynamics	Peaceful Escape
	Engagement and Reflection

CP2: "Nature has a way of calming our minds and opening our hearts. We talk about things we never discuss at home."

CP1: "The peacefulness of the forest helps us to connect on a deeper level. It's a beautiful way to strengthen our bond."

Couple 2 shared, "The tranquillity of nature allowed us to engage in deeper conversations and connect on a different level." This finding aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, where the natural surroundings provide a conducive environment for reflection and engagement (Kolb, 1984).

Neill and Dias (2001) substantiate this result, highlighting that nature-based activities enhance relational engagement and communication. The findings of this research corroborate with these studies, highlighting the importance of natural surroundings in promoting relational dynamics. The

calming effects of nature also help reduce stress and anxiety, creating a more conducive environment for open and honest communication.

Nature provided a peaceful escape from daily stressors, deepening emotional connections among couples. Couple 3 remarked, "Being in nature helped us escape our daily stresses and reconnect emotionally." Such outcomes reflect the predictions of Social Learning Theory, demonstrating that shared positive experiences in calming environments reinforce emotional bonds and relational satisfaction (Bandura, 1977).

Studies by Gillis (2005) emphasize the therapeutic benefits of nature, supporting the finding that natural surroundings enhance emotional connections and provide a peaceful escape from everyday life. The findings of this research parallel with these perspectives, validating the role of nature in fostering relational dynamics. These peaceful moments in nature also provide opportunities for couples to practice mindfulness and relaxation, further enhancing their emotional connection.

Hiking experiences also provided benefits to couples with new learning and insights into their relationships. Couples reported that hiking encouraged them to approach challenges as shared adventures, focusing on collaboration rather than competition. This finding is consistent with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that concrete experiences and reflective observations during hikes foster collaborative problem-solving and relational growth (Kolb, 1984). Research by Gass & Priest (2017) affirms this, indicating that outdoor activities promote teamwork and partnership among participants.

Table 7: Major Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question 3.3

Major Theme	Sub-Themes
New Learning and Insights Through Hiking	Partnership and Collaboration
	Survival Skills

CP3: "Hiking together has taught us to see challenges as opportunities for teamwork. We've learned to support each other better."

CP2: "The survival skills we've gained through hiking have not only helped us in the wilderness but also in our everyday lives. We communicate and collaborate much more effectively now."

Couple 1 stated, "Hiking taught us to work together and support each other through tough times, which we now apply to other areas of our relationship." These results are in accordance with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, indicating that concrete experiences and reflective observations during hikes foster collaborative problem-solving and relational growth (Kolb, 1984).

Previous research by Gass and Priest (2017) confirms this, indicating that outdoor activities promote teamwork and partnership among participants. The findings of this research agree with these studies, suggesting that hiking experiences provide valuable insights into effective collaboration and partnership. These experiences also highlight the importance of mutual respect and shared goals in maintaining a healthy relationship.

Couples emphasized the importance of mutual assistance, communication, and learning essential survival skills during hikes. Couple 2 noted, "Learning to navigate and survive in nature together strengthened our bond and taught us essential skills." In the context of Social Learning Theory, this illustrates that individuals learn and reinforce behaviours through shared experiences and mutual support (Bandura, 1977).

Studies by Russell (2001) highlight the role of outdoor activities in teaching survival skills and fostering teamwork, supporting the findings of this research. The development of survival skills through hiking not only enhances the couples' relationship but also equips them with valuable life skills. These skills are transferable to other areas of their lives, promoting resilience and adaptability.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The key finding that hiking experiences significantly strengthen relationships among couples underscores the importance of teamwork, mutual support, and effective communication. These elements are essential for overcoming the various challenges encountered during hiking, such as sudden weather changes and managing childcare needs. This finding aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of concrete experiences (CE) in facilitating learning and enhancing relationships. Couples' narratives revealed that the shared experience of overcoming these challenges fostered a sense of unity and mutual reliance, ultimately leading to deeper relational bonds and improved problem-solving abilities.

In real marriage life, these findings highlight how shared activities that require collaboration and support can significantly enhance relationship dynamics. Couples who engage in activities that present physical and emotional challenges may find that their ability to communicate and work together improves, which can translate to better handling of daily life stresses and conflicts.

The finding that hiking enhances family bonds through shared adventures situates well within the existing body of literature on family bonding and outdoor activities. This study adds to the literature by providing specific examples of how hiking facilitates quality time, away from daily distractions, fostering deeper connections among family members. Studies by Blumenfeld et al. (1991) and Neill & Giles (2013) support the idea that shared activities, especially in natural settings, enhance interpersonal relationships and communication.

In the context of real-life family dynamics, the importance of spending quality, distraction-free time together cannot be overstated. Families that engage in shared activities such as hiking may experience improved communication and stronger bonds, as these activities provide opportunities for meaningful interactions and shared experiences. This is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, where finding uninterrupted family time can be challenging.

An unexpected yet significant finding was the profound impact of the natural environment on relationship dynamics. Couples reported that the serene and rhythmic nature of hiking facilitated engagement and meaningful conversations, providing a peaceful escape from daily stressors. This finding aligns with the therapeutic benefits of nature emphasized by studies such as those by Gillis (2005). However, it challenges

the conventional understanding that relationship therapy primarily occurs in structured, clinical settings.

The tranquil environment provided by nature during hikes appears to create a conducive atmosphere for couples to reconnect and engage in deep, meaningful conversations. This suggests that incorporating natural settings into therapeutic practices could enhance the effectiveness of relationship therapy. For real marriage life, this finding implies that couples seeking to improve their relationships might benefit from spending time together in nature, which can help reduce stress and foster emotional connections.

The opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth provided by hiking were another significant finding. Couples reported that the solitude and time spent in nature allowed them to introspect, leading to improved communication and self-awareness. This aligns with Kolb's stages of Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualization, where individuals reflect on their experiences and derive broader insights into their behaviours and emotions.

In practical terms, these findings suggest that couples can benefit from incorporating regular reflective practices into their lives, whether through hiking or other reflective activities. The personal growth and enhanced self-awareness resulting from such practices can improve emotional regulation and communication within the relationship, making it easier to navigate conflicts and understand each other's perspectives.

The development of survival skills and the emphasis on mutual assistance and communication during hikes were other notable findings. Couples reported that these

experiences taught them to view challenges as shared adventures, fostering a collaborative rather than competitive approach to problem-solving. This aligns with Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn behaviours and attitudes through shared experiences and mutual support.

These findings have significant implications for real marriage life. Engaging in activities that require collaboration and the development of practical skills can enhance a couple's ability to work together effectively in various aspects of life. The skills and attitudes developed during such activities can be transferred to everyday situations, helping couples to navigate challenges more effectively and maintain a supportive, collaborative relationship dynamic.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the transformative potential of adventure-based therapy through hiking on relationship dynamics. The shared experiences, challenges, and reflective opportunities provided by hiking facilitate significant improvements in communication, emotional regulation, and mutual support among couples. These findings support the integration of adventure-based activities into therapeutic practices and suggest that couples can benefit from engaging in such activities to strengthen their relationships.

In summary, the results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of couples in adventure-based therapy, emphasizing the importance of shared challenges, quality time, and the therapeutic benefits of nature. These findings provide valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners, highlighting the potential of adventure-based therapy to enhance relationship dynamics and foster personal and relational growth in real marriage life.

4.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings from this research provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of couples participating in adventure-based therapy through hiking. The study identified key themes that highlight the transformative effects of shared outdoor experiences on relationship dynamics. The significant impact of hiking on relationship strengthening was evident through the elements of teamwork, mutual support, and effective communication, which were crucial in overcoming challenges such as sudden weather changes and childcare needs. These findings are supported by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Social Learning Theory, emphasizing the role of concrete experiences and mutual support in enhancing relational dynamics.

Moreover, hiking was found to significantly enhance family bonds, providing couples with meaningful ways to connect with each other and their children. The uninterrupted quality time spent away from daily distractions fostered deeper connections and improved communication, aligning with existing literature on family bonding and outdoor activities. This study adds to the body of knowledge by illustrating how hiking can serve as a powerful tool for family cohesion, promoting unity and collective achievement.

The natural environment also played a crucial role in enhancing relationship dynamics, providing a peaceful escape from daily stressors and facilitating engagement and meaningful conversations. This finding challenges the conventional understanding that relationship therapy primarily occurs in structured clinical settings, suggesting that incorporating natural settings into therapeutic practices could enhance their effectiveness. For real marriage life, spending time in nature can help reduce stress and

foster emotional connections, making it a valuable addition to traditional therapy methods.

Additionally, the opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth provided by hiking were significant. The solitude and time spent in nature allowed couples to introspect, leading to improved communication and self-awareness. These reflective practices are essential for emotional regulation and understanding each other's perspectives, contributing to better conflict navigation and overall relationship satisfaction.

The development of survival skills and the emphasis on mutual assistance and communication during hikes further strengthened the couples' bonds. Viewing challenges as shared adventures fostered a collaborative rather than competitive approach to problem-solving, enhancing their relational resilience. These skills and attitudes are transferable to everyday situations, helping couples navigate challenges more effectively and maintain a supportive, collaborative relationship dynamic.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of adventure-based therapy through hiking on relationship dynamics. The shared experiences, challenges, and reflective opportunities provided by hiking facilitate significant improvements in communication, emotional regulation, and mutual support among couples. These insights highlight the importance of integrating adventure-based activities into therapeutic practices, offering valuable implications for enhancing relationship quality and fostering personal and relational growth in real marriage life.