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A Comparative Study of Marital Incompatibility, Coping Strategies and Emotional Schemas in Applicants for Divorce with and without Marital Infidelity History

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to compare marital incompatibility, coping strategies and emotional schemas in applicants for divorce with and without marital infidelity history in Tehran. The research is an applied causal-comparative study. The statistical population of the research included all applicants for divorce with and without marital infidelity history in the city of Tehran who visited counseling centers in different areas of Tehran during the last three months of 2021. Participants were 60 people selected by accessible sampling method. The selected people were divided and matched into two groups of 30 people (15 women and 15 men) with a history of infidelity and 30 people (15 women and 15 men) without a history of infidelity. Research data were collected by Leahy Emotional Schema Questionnaire, Lazarus and Folkman coping strategies questionnaire and Beier-Sternberg Discord Questionnaire (DQ). The results showed that there is a difference between the two groups with and without a history of marital infidelity in emotional schema, coping strategies and marital incompatibility. The findings have useful implications for psychologists and family counselors in counseling cases of marital infidelity.

Keywords: Emotional schema, coping strategies, marital incompatibility, marital infidelity

Introduction

The status of the family has changed in developing countries. These changes have led to conflict and conflict in many marriages. Sociologists and psychologists believe that in recent years, the feeling of security, peace and harmony between men and women has decreased and the destruction of families has increased (Heckhausen & Dweck, 1998). Family problems have increased significantly and women in this cell of society are more vulnerable (Ahmadloo & Zeinali, 2018). Marriage is one of the most prominent examples of interpersonal relationships experienced by most adults (Kelly et al., 2003). Unfortunately, statistics show an increase in divorce rates. In the United States, nearly 50% of first marriages end in divorce (Faust & McKibben, 1999). Various factors such as negative attitudes, conflicts, anger, and pandemic-related stressors such as social isolation, financial pressure, and fear of the future can affect people's mental health and acceptance capacity, influence communication processes, and ultimately lead to increased internal instability of the family and decreased marital

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satisfaction (Rusu et al., 2020). In addition, research has shown a significant negative relationship between occupational stress and marital satisfaction (Mohammadi & Maghsodi, 2012). Divorce is one of the issues that has been the focus of most intellectuals' minds, even the public in recent years. Currently, this phenomenon is causing many problems for families going through divorce in Iran (Rashidi et al., 2017). However, divorce or not, it reduces the physical and mental health, treatment, general health and life satisfaction of the spouse, depression, anxiety, obsession, coercion, as well as loneliness, emptiness, low self-esteem, psychological distress, and parenting. and feelings of difficulty in social functioning (Danesh, 2010).

Infidelity is considered one of the most destructive acts in marriage and cohabitation, causing serious harm to others, families, children and people, destroying self-confidence and respect for others. Reports indicate that marriage can undermine trust between spouses, leading to marital discord, separation and divorce (Najarzadegan & Farhadi, 2019). At the same time, there are no feelings or conflicts that prevent the family from being affected. Marital conflict affects many aspects of personal and social life. In fact, it is the foundation of family success, contributes to care, extends the life of the spouse (Coombs, 1991), promotes health (Demo & Acock, 1996), supports economic development and increases life satisfaction (Headey et al., 2010), reduces psychological problems, better conflict management, communication skills and problem solving (Johnson et al., 2005), and better problem solving (Hosseini-Nasab et al., 2009). Marriage within the family is one of the most important factors affecting family performance (Sinha & Mukerjee, 1990). Marriage relationships, parenthood, longevity, health, life satisfaction, loneliness, parenting and development, positive relationships and emotional effects for the relationship (MehrabizadehHonarmand et al., 2010). However, if marriage makes life difficult to meet the different needs of the spouses, the good side of marriage may not be known, and it may also have negative and sometimes negative effects. These negative effects not only affect spouses, but also cause problems such as withdrawal, depression, bad relationships, lack of education and mild communication problems in children (Danesh, 2010). People in marriage generally spend time and energy to find satisfaction in marriage, and they also face many difficulties in marriage (Bodenmann et al., 2006).

Research emphasizes the importance of individual coping strategies for each spouse and the degree to which these strategies focus on problem-solving and on emotions and being either coordinated or different from each other (Spanier, 1976). Without coping abilities and skills, many marital relationships are at risk of separation and divorce (Bradbury et al., 2000). Inability to cope with difficult situations, along with limited resources and social support, is a key reason for increasing divorce rates. Couples face a range of challenges when confronted with new circumstances and changes in their lives, which affect their level of compatibility. According to Bowen's theory, couples react in particular ways to

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marital conflicts and dissatisfaction with the marital situation, and these coping strategies typically become a dominant behavioral pattern throughout their marital life. As problems become more serious and important to couples, their coping strategies become more visible and recognizable (Courtney & Heuring, 2005). Coping strategies are dynamic and ongoing processes and are generally of two types: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-oriented coping strategies are behaviors aimed at changing or reducing stressful situations (Ospina et al., 2007). Another important factor related to marital compatibility is emotional schemas (Leahy, 2012). Emotional schemas models are a novel approach that has emerged in recent years. Numerous studies show that these emotional patterns are associated with many psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, marital inconsistency, personality disorders, and chronic pain. Given that marital harmony is associated with high levels of stress and negative emotions, it is important to understand the emotional characteristics, relationships, underlying patterns and coping strategies that people use to regulate their emotions and cope with stress (Hemmati Sabet et al., 2021; Leahy, 2012). In psychotherapy, especially cognitive behavioral therapy, the concept of emotions has become more important in recent years, as evidenced by evidence.

Attitudes and approaches to emotions can lead to various changes in a person. Based on her concept of emotion processing and inspired by the cognitive-emotional model, Lisa Feldman Barrett came up with her own emotion schema model. She believes that her emotional disorders often stem from a person's interpretation of her own feelings and coping strategies. Emotional schemas refer to the patterns, methods, and strategies that individuals use in response to emotions (Barrett, 2012; Dehgani, 2021). Lisa Feldman Barrett's Emotion Schema Model employs a set of interpretation strategies and processes while experiencing an emotion. The first step when an emotion arises is to pay attention to it, which can include both attention and labeling of emotions. The second step in Barrett's model is cognitive and emotional avoidance of the emotion, which can occur naturally or pathologically, such as through pleasure-seeking or addiction (Barrett, 2012). The particular value of Lisa Feldman Barrett's model of emotional schemata is that it directly targets a person's conceptualization and measures regarding pleasant and unpleasant emotions. Generally, this model is a problem-solving approach for cognitive therapy (Barrett, 2012). In general, emotional schemata are defined as a set of organized principles or thought content that are intertwined with emotions, goals, conflicts, and behavioral tendencies. Emotional schemata arise as a result of the mutual influence of a person's early learning history and innate temperament. Activation of emotional circuits is associated with many cognitive disorders, anxiety, alcohol abuse, marital conflict, and personality disorders (Barrett, 2012). Given that no research has been conducted on the subject of this study and given the research gap in this area, this study aims to address key questions about marital

incompatibility, coping strategies, and emotional schemas in applicants for divorce with and without a history of infidelity.

Material and Methods

The present study is an applied study in terms of its nature, which has been conducted using a causal comparative type that aims to identify the cause or factor behind the occurrence of the event or phenomenon to be studied. In the descriptive section of the study, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution tables, and graphs were used based on the level of measurement of the variables and the hypotheses under investigation. In the inferential section, independent t-test and analysis of variance were used. The statistical data were analyzed using the SPSS-24 software. The statistical population of this study consisted of all incompatible couples with a history of infidelity and incompatible couples without a history of infidelity in Tehran who had referred to counseling centers and offices in different parts of Tehran in 2021. Sampling was done by convenience sampling, and a sample size of 60 individuals was selected. The participants were divided into two groups of 30 (15 women and 15 men) with a history of infidelity and 30 (15 women and 15 men) without a history of infidelity, and were categorized using a matching method. After completing the questionnaires, the two groups were compared to each other. Before participating in the study, the participants completed an informed consent form and were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information.

Instruments

The Leahy Emotional Schema Scale: This scale was developed to determine beliefs and attitudes towards emotions in individuals. The emotional schema scale was developed by Leahy (2019) based on his own emotional schema model to measure 14 schemas. This scale has 50 items that are scored using a 5-point Likert scale from completely disagree (0) to completely agree (4) (Leahy, 2019). Leahy (2019) reported the internal consistency of this scale to be 0.81 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In Iran, Khanzadeh et al. (2013) examined the factor structure and psychometric properties of this questionnaire and obtained a 37-item scale with a Likert rating. The reliability of this scale was reported to be 0.78 using the test-retest method after two weeks, and its internal consistency was reported to be 0.81 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Khanzadeh et al., 2013). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha method was utilized to determine the reliability of the tool, resulting in a coefficient of 0.89.

Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Strategies Questionnaire: To measure coping strategies based on Lazarus and Folkman's theory, these two psychologists developed the Lazarus and Folkman Coping Strategies Questionnaire (Lazarus, 1986). This questionnaire consists of 66 questions and 8 subscales,

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including direct coping, avoidance or distancing, self-care, seeking social support, responsibility, escape-avoidance, planned problem-solving, and positive reappraisal. These 8 subscales are summarized in two broader subscales of emotion-focused coping strategies and problem-focused coping strategies. The validity of the questionnaire has been demonstrated through internal stability testing of coping measures using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Ryan-Wenger (1990) also analyzed the revised coping strategies questionnaire and confirmed its validity. Since the described coping strategies are strategies that individuals report using in coping with stressful situations, the coping strategies questionnaire has face validity. In this study, Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and the coefficient resulted as 0.78.

Beier-Sternberg Discord Questionnaire (DQ): The DQ is a 10-item scale designed to measure two dimensions of marital distress: level of conflict or conflict and conflict-related unhappiness (Beier & Sternberg, 1977). Items of the DQ were selected based on a review of the literature showing that these items are significant predictors of marital conflict. Each participant first rated each item according to the extent of marital conflict and then rated the extent to which this conflict led to unhappiness. Each item is scored separately on a 7-point scale, with higher scores indicating more conflict and unhappiness. Individual items can be added together to get a total score. In the study by Beier and Sternberg (1977), Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.90. Additionally, this questionnaire has a relative concurrent validity because the conflict ratings have a significant correlation with the dissatisfaction ratings, and there is a correlation between the scores of the questionnaire and a range of intimacy behavior ratings. Furthermore, a significant change in couples was observed during one year of marriage (the total mean changed from 19 to 25.33), indicating a degree of predictive validity for DQ. To determine the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach's alpha method was used in this study and the coefficient resulted as 0.82.

Results

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of research variables. Additionally, the results of the variance homogeneity test are presented in Table 2. The Levene's test results indicate that the variance homogeneity assumption is met. Therefore, to examine the hypotheses, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) can be used.

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Table 1. Mean of marital incompatibility, coping strategies, and emotional schemas in applicants for divorce with and without marital infidelity history

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD
Emotional schemas	With Marital Infidelity History	30	84.56	4.20
	Without Marital Infidelity History	30	86.80	4.93
Coping strategies	With Marital Infidelity History	30	117.56	9.37
	Without Marital Infidelity History	30	125.30	8.61
Marital incompatibility	With Marital Infidelity History	30	20.96	3.07
	Without Marital Infidelity History	30	15.33	2.25

Table 2. Test of Variance Homogeneity

Variables	F value	DF1	DF2	p
Emotional schemas	0.32	1	58	0.57
Coping strategies	2.33	1	58	0.09
Marital incompatibility	2.90	1	58	0.094

Hypothesis : There is a significant difference between applicants for divorce with and without marital infidelity history in marital incompatibility, coping strategies, and emotional schemas.

Table 3 shows the results of the MANOVA test to compare the differences in the means of the main research variables. Additionally, the results of the ANOVA embedded in MANOVA are provided in Table 4.

Table 3. Results of MANOVA

Test	Value	F value	Hypothesis DF	Error DF	p	Eta
Pillai's trace	0.603	28.38	3	56	0.001	0.603
Wilks' lambda	0.397	28.38	3	56	0.001	0.603
Hotelling's trace	1.520	28.38	3	56	0.001	0.603
and Roy's largest root	1.520	28.38	3	56	0.001	0.603

Table 4. Results of ANOVA embedded in MANOVA

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F value	p	Eta
Emotional schemas	299.26	1	299.26	15.24	0.001	0.603
Coping strategies	897.067	1	897.067	14.92	0.001	0.603
Marital incompatibility	528.067	1	528.067	72.58	0.001	0.603

As per Table 3, the differences between the means of three variables of emotional schema, coping strategies, and marital dissatisfaction have been examined in two groups - applicants for divorce with a history of marital infidelity and those without a history of marital infidelity. According to the results of MANOVA, the linear combination of the dependent variables is significant ($p<.001$, $F=28.38$, Wilks' lambda= 0.397). In other words, there is a significant difference between the two groups in at least one of the variables under consideration. Table 4 presents the results of ANOVA embedded in MANOVA. According to Table 4, there is a significant difference between the two groups in all three variables. Therefore, there is a significant difference in emotional schema between applicants for divorce with a

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history of marital infidelity and those without such history in Tehran, and the level of emotional schema in divorce applicants without a history of marital infidelity is higher than that of divorce applicants with a history of marital infidelity. Moreover, there is a significant difference between the two groups in coping strategies, and the level of coping strategies in divorce applicants without a history of marital infidelity is higher than that of divorce applicants with a history of marital infidelity. Finally, based on the findings, there is a significant difference between the two groups in marital incompatibility, and the level of marital incompatibility in divorce applicants without a history of marital infidelity is less than that of divorce applicants with a history of marital infidelity.

Discussion

The present study showed that there is a significant difference in marital dissatisfaction, coping strategies, and emotional schemas between individuals who have a history of marital infidelity and those who do not among divorce applicants. Divorce applicants without a history of marital infidelity have higher levels of positive emotional schemas and adaptive coping strategies, while divorce applicants with a history of marital infidelity experience higher levels of marital incompatibility. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Danesh, 2010; Khanzadeh et al., 2013; Porjorat, 2016; Raftar Aliabadi & Shareh, 2022).

One of the problems that has attracted the attention of psychologists today is extramarital relationships, which have involved many couples (Charny & Parnass, 1995). Infidelity is considered one of the most damaging problems in marital relationships and mutual life, which often leads to irreparable damage to the other person, family, children, and ultimately society, and also destroys self-confidence and trust in others. Reports show that extramarital relationships can seriously damage trust between couples and cause marital conflicts, separation, and even divorce (Fincham & May, 2017). According to some theorists such as Helen Fisher, multiple psychological factors lead to people's tendency to infidelity. Some people are looking to solve their marital and sexual relationship problems, while others are looking for more attention, revenge, or excitement in their current relationship. In addition, according to Fisher, the tendency to infidelity also has biological roots.

Numerous studies have shown that marital dissatisfaction and the lack of appropriate coping skills are among the main reasons for the collapse of marital relationships and infidelity (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004). (Alitabar et al., 2014) compared the attitudes towards infidelity in married men with and without premarital sexual history with current wife or a person other than the current wife and the number of experienced sexual partners before marriage. Results confirmed that married men with a

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history of premarital sexual relations with future spouse or other(s) have more permissive attitudes toward infidelity. Also, it was found that the greater number of premarital sexual partners more tendency towards out of wedlock sexual affaires.

Recent studies also show that if married life creates unfavorable conditions for satisfying the various needs of spouses, it not only fails to achieve the positive aspects of marriage, but also leaves a negative and sometimes irreparable effect. These negative effects are not only for spouses, but create a wide range of disorders in their children, including separation anxiety, depression, social incompetence, academic underachievement, and communication problems (Danesh, 2010). In marital adaptation, the process of the two-person relationship is important, and compromise is necessary in cases present in married life to have peace and achieve desirable outcomes in a family, so that both parties are equipped with skills to manage disagreements, deficiencies, differences, needs, important decisions, and all matters that may occur between two people in married life (Heinicke et al., 1997).

Recent research emphasizes the importance of individual coping strategies for each spouse and the level of focus on problem-solving and emotion and being in harmony or different from each other (Spanier, 1976). Without coping skills, many marital relationships are at risk of separation (Bradbury et al., 2000). Inability to cope with difficult situations, along with minimal resources and social support, is a key reason for the increase in divorce rates. Couples face a range of challenges when confronted with new situations and changes in their lives that affect their adaptability.

The sample of this study was limited to incompatible couples with a history of marital infidelity and incompatible couples without marital infidelity in Tehran, and its results are not generalizable to other stages and regions. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings of this research. Finally, it is suggested that a training course on emotional coping strategies be offered for couples before marriage to prevent marital problems and that educational channels be created on social media for couples, under the supervision of psychologists, to help repair and rebuild relationships between spouses.

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