



## The Structural Relationships between Romantic Jealousy , Marital Stability and Marital Satisfaction Mediated by Marital Control and Emotional Expression: An Evolutionary Perspective

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to present an evolutionary model of the role of romantic jealousy in marital stability and marital satisfaction mediated by marital control and emotional expression. The research method was descriptive and path analysis. To this end, 302 married people were selected by random sampling. The instruments used included the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS), Marital Controlling Scale (MCS), Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire (EEQ), Marriage Instability Index (MII) and Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS). Data analysis was done using Pearson correlation and path analysis in SPSS-22 and AMOS-23 software packages. The results indicated that romantic jealousy directly affects marital control (0.482) and emotional expression (-0.173) but has no direct impact on marital stability and satisfaction. Also, marital control directly affected marital stability (0.425) and marital satisfaction (0.290). In addition, emotional expression directly affects marital stability (-0.175) and marital satisfaction (-0.192). The results of indirect effects revealed that romantic jealousy has a statistically significant effect on marital stability (0.26) and marital satisfaction (0.14) through marital control. Also, romantic jealousy significantly affects marital stability (0.3) and marital satisfaction (0.3) through emotional expression. According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that romantic jealousy cannot explain marital stability and satisfaction directly, but can indirectly affect marital stability and satisfaction. Consequently, in the presence of romantic jealousy, using marital control can lower the health of the relationship, but emotional expression can enhance the health of the relationship.

**Keywords:** Romantic Jealousy, Marital Control, Emotional Expression, Marital Stability, Marital Satisfaction, Evolutionary Psychology

### Introduction

The evolutionary psychology assumes that individuals invest different amounts of money into marriage and use different strategies to maintain it when these investments are at risk. Accordingly, when a marital relationship is compromised, their evolutionary warning systems may be triggered (Buller, 2005). Jealousy is one of the emotional triggering systems that are activated when a person feels that his investment is at risk (Buss et al., 1992). Thus, jealousy plays a prominent role in the health of the individual, spouse, and relationship, the management of which is essential (Martínez-León et al., 2017; Güçlü et al., 2017). Romantic jealousy is a set of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses that occur when a relationship is threatened by a third party (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). In other words, romantic jealousy is a complex emotion that arises in the face of a real or perceived threat (Martínez-León et al., 2017). Shackelford & Buss (1997) also suggest that apathetic communication can also cause jealousy. This can lead to jealousy when the relationship is not

emotionally warm. In fact, when a relationship moves in a direction that makes the person feel threatened, the jealousy system may begin to warn.

If jealousy is not properly managed in a marital relationship, it can be damaging. Jealousy can become pathological and even lead to the murder of a spouse (Mužinić et al., 2003). Cano & O'leary (1997) believe that jealousy in a marital relationship can cause feelings of anger, fear, and sadness, which could have a detrimental effect on the relationship. White (2008) shows that jealousy causes many problems in the marital relationship and it was the main problem of about one third of clients that sought counseling and psychotherapy. In contrast, Elphinston et al. (2013) believe that although jealousy may have negative effects on the marital relationship, it has positive aspects on the relationship. Dandurand and Lafontaine (2014) also showed that jealousy could have positive results in a marital relationship. If it is accepted that when a third person threatens the relationship or the relationship is emotionally cold and this state causes jealousy, jealousy may act as a defensive state and a warning that the relationship is imbalanced from an evolutionary point of view (Madran, 2008; Shackelford & Buss, 1997). In the meantime, a person may perform behaviors due to the experience of jealousy, and these behaviors affect the relationship (Martínez-León et al., 2017). Therefore, jealousy in a marital relationship may affect various aspects of the relationship and its health. A relationship's health does not simply indicate the absence of marital problems and conflicts, but also indicates the existence of stability and satisfaction in the relationship (Salimi et al., 2019). In the meantime, marital stability refers to the state in which couples live together and do not seek separation (Orathinkal & Vansteenwegen, 2006). In contrast, marital satisfaction expresses a one's evaluation and feeling about different aspects of the relationship and its entity (Lenthall, 1977). Although satisfaction and stability may be correlated, some factors may stabilize the relationship but have no effect on satisfaction (Salimi et al., 2020). Therefore, if a person feels that the relationship is threatened and s/he becomes jealous, it may trigger behaviors that have different effects on marital stability and satisfaction, which needs to be investigated.

According to Brauer et al. (2021), jealousy itself may not affect the health of the relationship, and its different effect on the marital relationship may be due to the existence of mediating variables between jealousy and marital health. Therefore, jealousy can have both negative and positive effects on the relationship. Elphinston et al. (2013) believe that jealousy can cause a person to try to monitor or control his/her spouse's behavior. When a person feels that, the relationship is threatened or out of control, he or she may try to eliminate the threat by controlling the spouse and the relationship. Marital controlling is a state in which one of the sides tries to restrain the other person and lead him/her in a direction that is in accordance with his/her needs and desires (Amini et al., 2019). A jealous person may make repeated verbal accusations, repeated demands for reassurance, intermittent harassment (seeking to know the inner thoughts and fantasies), and attempts to control their spouse's freedom of movement. S/he may also use various methods of espionage, including searching pockets, listening to the telephone, spying on the spouse's messages and pages on virtual networks, violence, and intimidation (Kingham & Gordon, 2004). Marital controlling threatens the victim's physical and

mental health. S/he may always feel threatened even when the situation seems calm, the victim is still frightened. Therefore, different forms of marital controlling can affect the relationship and the individual and have different results on different types of relationships (Amini et al., 2019). However, romantic jealousy may not just cause negative behaviors, and the jealous person may adopt positive strategies against it. Andersen et al. (1995) believe that if a person can express his emotions and his feelings to his spouse, such a state may reduce the negative effects of jealousy on the relationship. Emotional expression is one of the main dimensions of emotion, meaning the external display of emotion, regardless of its value (positive or negative) or the way it manifests (facial, verbal, physical or behavioral) (Kring & Gordon, 1998). When couples express their emotions or feelings to each other, they build an effective and satisfying relationship with each other. Emotional expression can make the couple aware of each other's inner states and cause the couple to try to improve negative emotions and strengthen positive emotions (Salimi et al., 2019). Research shows that expressing negative emotions such as jealousy create a space between couples so that they improve the relationship by eliminating the reasons and supporting each other (Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015; Salimi et al., 2019).

Accordingly, it seems that romantic jealousy can have different effects on the marital relationship, in which some variables can play a mediating role and change the effects of jealousy on the marital relationship. Given the different results of research on the effects of jealousy on the relationship, it is necessary to identify the factors that change its effects to develop appropriate educational programs to deal with jealousy. Therefore, the present study was conducted to investigate the role of romantic jealousy on marital stability and satisfaction through the mediation of marital controlling and emotional expression.

### **Material and Methods**

The method of the present study was descriptive based on path analysis. The statistical population of the study included all married women in the country in 2020. To perform path analysis, the minimum sample size should be 200 people (Habibi & Adanvar, 2017). Therefore, in this study to increase the validity of the research, a sample of 302 people was selected by the random sampling method. The sampling method was web-based, the link of which was published on various social networks so that the samples could respond to it online. After data collection, the responses of individuals who did not meet the inclusion criteria (but answered the questions) were excluded in the data analysis. It should be noted that the inclusion criteria included being female, being married, having lived together for at least one year, and being willing to participate in the study. To observe the ethical aspects, the participants received the necessary information about volunteering and not being forced to respond to research tools, not mentioning the name and main details, confidentiality of responses, how to respond to tools, honesty in answering to validate the study at the beginning of responding the questionnaire. In this way, people who wanted to participate in this study responded to the research tools.

**Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS):** This 24-item scale was developed by Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) and it has three subscales of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional jealousy. The scoring of this scale is based on seven-point Likert scale from never (score 1) to always (score 7) and higher scores mean more jealousy in the relationship. Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale as 0.91. The results of factor analysis confirmed the existence of three subscales in Iran. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha coefficient with a value of 0.85 showed that this scale has a proper validity (Rahimi and Sanatnama, 2021). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83.

**Marital Controlling Scale (MCS):** This scale was created by Amini et al. (2019) with 21 items. It has five subscales of emotional inhibition, inattention, verbal violence, isolation and secrecy. The scoring of this scale is based on six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (zero point) to strongly agree (score 5). Higher scores mean more marital controlling. While confirming the content and structural validity of this scale, Amini et al. (2019) reported its validity as 0.93 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.88.

**Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire (EEQ):** This 16-item questionnaire was developed by King and Emmons (1990). It has three subscales of positive emotional expression, intimacy expression and negative emotional expression. The scoring of this questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert method, ranging from strongly disagree (score 1) to strongly agree (score 5), and higher scores mean more excitement. King and Emmons (1990) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire of 0.70. Hasani and Bemani Yazdi (2015) while confirming the validity of the content of the questionnaire reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.76. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.79.

**Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS):** Cheung and Hudson (1982) developed the index of marital satisfaction. This questionnaire is a 25-item tool designed to measure the severity or extent of marital problems in a marital relationship. The scoring of this scale is based on 7-point Likert questionnaire from never (1 point) to always (7 points), and higher scores mean less satisfaction and a more unhealthy relationship. This index has high standards with suitable content validity and the mean alpha coefficient of 0.96 (Salimi et al., 2020). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.82.

**Marriage Instability Index (MII):** Booth et al. (1983) developed this 14-item questionnaire. The scoring of this scale is based on yes (score 1) and no (score zero) answers and higher scores mean more marital instability and the possibility of divorce. While confirming the content validity of this tool, Reyhani et al. (2016) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.74. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83.

Pearson correlation test, simultaneous multiple regression, and path analysis were used to analyze the data. Data were analyzed by SPSS-22 and AMOS-23 software.

**Results**

In this study, the mean age of the research samples was 36.81±9.88. The results of descriptive indicators of research variables are as follows:

**Table 1.** Results of mean and Correlation between research variables

| Variables               | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4     | Mean  | SD    |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Romantic jealousy    | 1        |          |          |       | 86.01 | 12.83 |
| 2. Marital satisfaction | 0.243**  | 1        |          |       | 90.20 | 15.14 |
| 3. Marital stability    | 0.332**  | 0.456**  | 1        |       | 5.28  | 4.18  |
| 4. Marital controlling  | 0.482**  | 0.323**  | 0.473**  | 1     | 39.75 | 8.72  |
| 5. Emotional expression | -0.173** | -0.202** | -0.189** | 0.009 | 42.17 | 7.43  |

P<0.01\*\*, p<0.05\*

According to the table 1, there were a significant correlation between romantic jealousy with marital satisfaction (0.243), marital stability (0.332), marital controlling (0.482) and emotional expression (-0.173). There were a significant correlation between marital controlling with marital satisfaction (0.323) and marital stability (0.473) and also there is a significant correlation between emotional expression with marital satisfaction (-0.202) and marital stability (-0.189).

**Table 2.** Direct effects results

| Dependent variable   | Predictor variable   | Beta   | Sig.  |
|----------------------|----------------------|--------|-------|
| Marital satisfaction | Romantic jealousy    | 0.069  | 0.336 |
|                      | Marital controlling  | 0.290  | 0.001 |
|                      | Emotional expression | -0.192 | 0.001 |
| Marital stability    | Romantic jealousy    | 0.094  | 0.152 |
|                      | Marital controlling  | 0.425  | 0.001 |
|                      | Emotional expression | -0.175 | 0.001 |
| Marital controlling  | Romantic jealousy    | 0.482  | 0.001 |
| Emotional expression | Romantic jealousy    | -0.173 | 0.028 |

Based on the results of the table 2, marital controlling with a 0.290 and emotional expression with -0.192 can predict marital satisfaction. Also, marital controlling with 0.425 and emotional expression with -0.175 can predict marital stability, but romantic jealousy cannot predict marital satisfaction and stability. Other results show that romantic jealousy can predict marital controlling and emotional expression with -0.482 and -0.173.

**Table 3.** Indirect effects results

| Dependent variable   | Mediator variable    | Effect | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|----------------------|----------------------|--------|--------|----------|----------|
| Marital satisfaction | Marital controlling  | 0.140  | 0.038  | 0.077    | 0.228    |
|                      | Emotional expression | 0.033  | 0.016  | 0.001    | 0.066    |
|                      | Total effect         | 0.173  | 0.039  | 0.105    | 0.259    |
| Marital stability    | Marital controlling  | 0.206  | 0.046  | 0.126    | 0.307    |
|                      | Emotional expression | 0.030  | 0.015  | 0.001    | 0.060    |
|                      | Total effect         | 0.237  | 0.046  | 0.151    | 0.335    |

In the method of Preacher and Hayes (2008), the effect size is significant when zero is not between BootLLCI and BootULCI. Hence, since zero are not between BootLLCI and BootULCI in the above variables, the indirect effects is significant. Therefore, romantic jealousy can indirectly predict marital

satisfaction through the mediation of marital controlling and emotional expression with the values of 0.40 and 0.033 and in total with the value of 0.173. Romantic jealousy can indirectly predict marital stability through the mediation of marital controlling and emotional expression with a value of 0.206 and 0.030 and a total of 0.237.

**Table 4.** Results of model fit summary

| Model fit indices  | CMIN   | P     | CMIN/ DF | GFI   | RMSEA | RFI   |
|--------------------|--------|-------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| Recommended values | p>0.05 |       | < 3      | >0.9  | <0.1  | >0.9  |
| Result             | 3.56   | 0.063 | 3.46     | 0.995 | 0.091 | 0.871 |
| Model fit indices  | CFI    | TLI   | IFI      | NFI   | PNFI  | PCFI  |
| Recommended values | >0.9   | >0.9  | >0.9     | >0.9  | >0.5  | >0.5  |
| Result             | 0.990  | 0.905 | 0.991    | 0.987 | 0.099 | 0.099 |

In the first model, the results showed that the model does not have a good fit, for this purpose, the modification index was used that provided by the software. As a result, CMIN (CMIN= 3.56, p> 0.001), CFI (0.990), NFI (0.987), TLI (0.905), IFI (0.991), GFI (0.995) and REMSEA (0.091) showed that the model has a good fit.

### Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of romantic jealousy on marital stability and satisfaction through the mediating role of marital controlling and emotional expression. The results showed that romantic jealousy has no direct effect on marital stability and satisfaction. Therefore, it is inconsistent with Elphinston et al. (2013) who showed that romantic jealousy could have a direct effect on marital satisfaction. Guerrero & Eloy (1992) also showed that romantic jealousy could reduce marital satisfaction. According to the research literature, jealousy can reduce the health of the marital relationship, but the results of the present study were not consistent with this literature. People may feel jealous because the relationship is threatened, but just feeling jealous may not disturb the relationship. Many people may feel jealous in a relationship but take no action. Also, some people may manage and control their negative emotions such as jealousy and therefore not harm the relationship. Therefore, the actions that people adopt out of jealousy can affect the marital relationship.

According to the results, jealousy could affect marital stability and satisfaction indirectly rather than directly. Thus, it could affect the health of the marital relationship through marital controlling indirectly. This result is consistent with some studies (Elphinston et al., 2013; Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2014; Martínez-León et al., 2017). According to the evolutionary psychology, when a person experiences jealousy in a marital relationship, this jealousy is a warning that the relationship is threatened (Buss et al., 1992). When a person feels that the relationship is threatened and s/he becomes jealous, he or she may try to take steps to control the spouse and the marital relationship to maintain the relationship. According to the present study, romantic jealousy can significantly increase marital controlling and then marital controlling can reduce marital stability and satisfaction. Hence, one tries to eliminate the threat and return the relationship to balance by controlling the marriage. However, this

strategy could have a devastating effect and reduce the health of the relationship. Marital controlling can create a negative distance from dysfunctional interactions between couples and create conditions for couples to engage in aggressive behaviors by increasing negative emotions, which directs the relationship towards dissatisfaction and breakdown.

Other results of this study showed that the marital relationship does not move towards dissatisfaction and breakdown just because of jealousy. Romantic jealousy can indirectly affect the health of the marital relationship by emotional expression. Accordingly, romantic jealousy can be a predictor of emotional expression and this emotional expression can increase marital satisfaction and stability. However, if the person does not express his emotion, it can cause marital instability and dissatisfaction. When a person experiences jealousy in a marital relationship because he or she is psychologically disturbed and experiences destructive emotions (Cano & O'leary, 1997), he or she may not be able to express his or her emotions easily, which weakens his or her emotional expression. However, a person may express his or her emotions, share his or her feelings of jealousy with his or her spouse, and talk about why and how they affect him or her. If this emotional expression occurs, it can cause the other person to be aware of the effects of third party behaviors and him/her, and s/he would take steps to improve the relationship and reduce the spouse's feelings of jealousy by confirming his spouse's feelings. In this regard, Yedirir and Hamarta (2015) showed that emotional expression create an atmosphere in which couples form an effective relationship and improve satisfaction and stability by supporting each other. Therefore, emotional expression is an effective strategy to deal with jealousy. When negative emotions are properly expressed and accepted by the spouse, it creates positive behaviors to improve the health of the relationship (Mirgain & Cordova, 2007).

Generally, the results of this study show that romantic jealousy predicts marital stability and satisfaction indirectly. Accordingly, romantic jealousy makes couples try to control the marital relationship, which in turn reduces marital stability and satisfaction. On the other hand, some couples may increase the stability and satisfaction of the relationship through emotional expression. The important point is that with the emergence of romantic jealousy, it is possible to perform negative behaviors more than positive behaviors; because with the emergence of jealousy, the likelihood of emotional expression decreases and the person is more likely to take control of the marriage. Therefore, it is recommended that counselors and psychologists inform couples about the effects of jealousy in their clinical interventions and try to provide couples with stability and marital satisfaction by training more emotional expression and reducing marital controlling. However, the limitations of this study include the mere use of questionnaire to collect data, the biases that the subjects may have in response to it, and the lack of face-to-face communication with the subjects. Therefore, researchers are advised to investigate the effects of romantic jealousy on other marital variables such as marital intercourse and infidelity through the mediation of marital controlling and emotional expression. It is hoped that this research will take a small step towards increasing the marital health of couples.

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