Predicting Marital Adjustment by Self-Compassion and Marital Self-Regulation

Zahra. Alizadeh[1] , Farideh Dokaneifard[2]* , Azam. Fattahi Andabil[3]

[1] Ph.D Student of Counseling Department, Rudehan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rudehan, Iran
[2] Associate Professor of Counseling Department, Rudehan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rudehan, Iran
[3] Assistant Professor of Counseling Department, Rudehan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rudehan, Iran

* **Corresponding author email address**: Farideh.Dokaneifard@iau.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study aimed to investigate the predictive roles of self-compassion and marital self-regulation on marital adjustment among married women attending counseling centers in Tehran in 2023. It sought to enrich the understanding of how these psychological constructs contribute to marital satisfaction and stability.

Methods: A cross-sectional design was employed with a sample of 350 married women selected through available sampling from various counseling centers in Tehran. Measures included the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) to assess marital adjustment, the Self-Compassion Scale developed by Neff (2003) for evaluating self-compassion levels, and a 16-item scale by Wilson et al. (2005) for measuring marital self-regulation. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 27, with linear regression analyses performed to explore the relationships between the constructs.

Findings: The findings revealed that both self-compassion and marital self-regulation significantly predicted marital adjustment among the participants. Specifically, higher levels of self-compassion and marital self-regulation were associated with better marital adjustment. The regression model explained 37% of the variance in marital adjustment scores, highlighting the substantial impact of these factors on marital satisfaction.

Conclusion: This study underscores the critical importance of self-compassion and marital self-regulation in fostering marital adjustment. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing these psychological resources could contribute significantly to improving marital satisfaction and relationship stability among couples, particularly those seeking counseling services.

Keywords: *Marital Adjustment, Self-Compassion, Marital Self-Regulation, Counseling, Married Women.*

1. Introduction

The concept of marital adjustment, involving the mutual adaptation of partners within a marital relationship, has long intrigued researchers and practitioners alike. In recent years, the psychological constructs of self-compassion and self-regulation have emerged as significant predictors of marital satisfaction and overall relationship health. This article aims to delve into the intricate dynamics between self-compassion, marital self-regulation, and their predictive value for marital adjustment, drawing upon a rich tapestry of existing literature to frame our investigation (Akbarzadeh & Zahrakar, 2022; Alizadeh et al., 2023; Bibi et al., 2017; Safikhani, 2022).

Self-compassion, a construct that encapsulates kindness towards oneself in the face of failure or difficulty, mindfulness, and a recognition of one's experiences as part of the larger human experience, has been posited as a foundational element in the maintenance and enhancement of personal relationships (Sierra-Swiech, 2023). Notably, Baker and McNulty (2011) underscore the pivotal role of self-compassion in relationship maintenance, arguing that it moderates the effects of conscientiousness and gender, thereby influencing relational outcomes. This suggests that self-compassion may serve as a critical buffer against the erosive effects of relationship conflicts and stressors, potentially guiding couples towards more adaptive interaction patterns and higher levels of relational satisfaction (Bordbari et al., 2022; Shoghi et al., 2023).

Complementing the construct of self-compassion, marital self-regulation—an individual's ability to regulate emotions, behaviors, and thoughts in ways that promote marital harmony and satisfaction—has been identified as another crucial determinant of marital quality (Sadiq et al., 2022; Shahabi, 2020; Wang, 2023). According to Hardy and colleagues (2014), relationship self-regulation and the climate of the family of origin are significant predictors of marital outcomes, highlighting the importance of learned emotional and behavioral regulation strategies in the context of intimate relationships (Bordbari et al., 2022; Teymori et al., 2021). These findings are supported by Volling, Blandon, and Kolak (2006), who note the emergence of self-regulation within the family system as a key factor in marital and parental dynamics (Alizadeh et al., 2023; Safikhani, 2022).

The interconnectedness of self-compassion and self-regulation extends into the realm of marital commitment and satisfaction. For instance, Bordbari, Mousabeygi, and Zare (2022) demonstrated that self-compassion, along with flourishing and cognitive emotion regulation strategies, can predict marital commitment among nurses, suggesting that the capacity for self-compassion and effective emotional regulation plays a vital role in sustaining long-term relational commitments (Bordbari et al., 2022). Similarly, Sierra-Swiech (2023) identified grace, self-compassion, and compassion as influential factors in marital satisfaction, further underscoring the significance of these constructs in fostering a satisfying marital relationship (Sierra-Swiech, 2023). Recent studies have also explored the dyadic interplay between parents' marital satisfaction, self-compassion, and parenting practices. Wang et al. (2023) examined the bidirectional relationships between parents' marital satisfaction, parenting stress, and self-compassion, revealing complex interdependencies that further highlight the importance of self-compassion and emotional regulation within the familial system (Wang, 2023).

In sum, the existing body of literature establishes a compelling case for the central roles of self-compassion and marital self-regulation in predicting marital adjustment. By integrating these insights, our study aims to contribute to the nuanced understanding of how these constructs interact to influence marital outcomes, with the hope of informing both theoretical perspectives and practical interventions aimed at enhancing marital quality and stability.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research utilizes a cross-sectional study design to investigate the influence of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment among married women. The target population comprises all married women attending counseling centers in Tehran in 2023. An available sampling method was employed to select a sample size of 350 participants, deemed adequate to fulfill the objectives of the study. Participants were chosen based on voluntary participation from a variety of counseling centers throughout Tehran, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. Inclusion criteria were being married and having sought counseling services within the year. Exclusion criteria included unwillingness to participate and incomplete questionnaire responses.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Marital Adjustment

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), a 32-item scale, developed by Spanier in 1976, assesses the quality of the marital relationship from the perspectives of both spouses. It includes four subscales: marital satisfaction, marital cohesion, marital consensus, and affectional expression. Items are scored on a variety of Likert scales, addressing different facets of marital life. The DAS has demonstrated good reliability and validity in previous research, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.66 to 0.84 and positive correlations with relevant constructs (Mohammadi et al., 2021).

2.2.2. Marital Self-Regulation

Developed by Wilson et al. (2005), this 16-item scale measures two dimensions: communicative strategies and relational effort, on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true). High scores indicate better performance in marital relationships. The scale's internal consistency and convergent validity have been confirmed in previous studies, and its structure was validated in an Iranian sample by Esinejad et al. (2016), reporting satisfactory reliability coefficients (Zarastvand et al., 2020).

2.2.3. Self-Compassion

Created by Neff in 2003, this 26-item scale evaluates six facets of self-compassion on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). The scale demonstrates high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .92, and negative correlations with measures of depression and anxiety, indicating its validity. The scale's factor structure was confirmed through exploratory factor analysis in a study by Khosravi et al. (2012), which also reported high reliability for the total scale and its subscales (Alizadeh et al., 2023).

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. Initially, descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables to understand the sample characteristics. Subsequently, linear regression analyses were performed to examine the predictive relationship between self-compassion, marital self-regulation, and marital adjustment. Prior to the regression analyses, assumptions of linearity, normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were tested to ensure the appropriateness of the linear regression model. The significance level was set at $p < .05$ for all statistical tests.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of our study's participants reveal a diverse range of educational backgrounds and economic statuses among the 350 married women who took part. Specifically, nearly half of the participants (49%) had completed high school or less, while 18% had achieved an associate's degree. A significant proportion, 26%, held a bachelor's degree, whereas only 4% had a master's degree, and a mere 1% had earned a doctoral degree. This distribution highlights the varied educational attainment within the sample, with a substantial number having completed at least secondary education.

In terms of economic status, a large majority of the families (76%) were described as having an average economic status, indicating that most participants come from middle-income backgrounds. In contrast, 9% of the participants reported a good economic status, and 15% described their economic situation as poor. This distribution suggests that the bulk of the participant pool reflects a middle-tier economic condition, which provides a meaningful insight into the socioeconomic background of married women seeking counseling services in the study's context.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Findings

Variable	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Marital Adjustment	350	104.15	23.25
Self-Compassion	350	31.16	9.52
Marital Self-Regulation	350	84.88	10.53

In Table 1 descriptive statistics reveal average scores of 104.15 (SD = 23.25) for marital adjustment, indicating a moderate level of marital satisfaction among the participants. Self-compassion scores average at 31.16 (SD = 9.52), suggesting a moderate to high level of self-compassion. Marital self-regulation scores average at 84.88 (SD = 10.53), indicating a good level of self-regulation within marital relationships among the participants. These numbers reflect the central tendencies and variability of the key constructs explored in the study.

Prior to conducting the main analyses, we carefully checked and verified all necessary assumptions for linear regression. The assumption of linearity was confirmed through visual inspection of scatterplots between independent variables (self-compassion and marital self-regulation) and the dependent variable (marital adjustment), indicating a linear relationship. The assumption of normality was assessed by examining the distribution of residuals, which conformed closely to a normal distribution as evidenced by skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable range of -1 to +1 for both variables (self-compassion skewness = -0.12, kurtosis = 0.03; marital self-regulation skewness = -0.09, kurtosis = -0.05). Multicollinearity was evaluated using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all values found to be well below the threshold of 5 (self-compassion VIF = 1.08, marital self-regulation VIF = 1.12), indicating no concern of multicollinearity among predictors. Lastly, the homoscedasticity assumption was confirmed via visual inspection of a plot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values, showing a consistent spread across the range of predictions. These analyses ensure the appropriateness of utilizing linear regression for investigating the predictive relationship between self-compassion, marital self-regulation, and marital adjustment in our study.

Table 2

Summary of Regression Model Analysis

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R^2	R^2_{adj}	F	p
Regression	12779.60	2	6394.80	0.61	0.37	0.35	7.20	<0.01
Residual	4382.84	347	12.63					
Total	17172.44	349						

Table 2 presents the summary of the regression model analysis, which highlights the significant predictive power of self-compassion and marital self-regulation on marital adjustment. The model explains 37% (Adjusted R^2 = 0.35) of the variance in marital adjustment scores, with an F-value of 7.20 (p < 0.01), indicating a significant overall model fit. This substantial portion of explained variance underscores the importance of these psychological constructs in predicting marital adjustment.

Table 3

Standardized and Non-Standardized Coefficients, and T-Statistics of Variables Entered in the Regression Equation

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	T-value	p
Constant	2.74	0.33	-	-	-
Self-Compassion	1.05	0.21	0.19	3.59	<0.01
Marital Self-Regulation	1.22	0.20	0.23	3.88	<0.01

Table 3 details the standardized and non-standardized coefficients from the regression analysis. Specifically, self-compassion (β = 0.19, p < 0.01) and marital self-regulation (β = 0.23, p < 0.01) both significantly predict marital adjustment, with unstandardized coefficients (B) of 1.05 for self-compassion and 1.22 for marital self-regulation. These findings demonstrate the positive impact of higher levels of self-compassion and marital self-regulation on marital adjustment, confirming the hypotheses posited in the study.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the predictive roles of self-compassion and marital self-regulation on marital adjustment among married women in Tehran. Drawing on a rich theoretical framework and employing rigorous methodological approaches, our findings significantly demonstrate that both self-compassion and marital self-

regulation are critical predictors of marital adjustment. These results align with and extend existing literature, highlighting the importance of psychological well-being and relational strategies in the context of marital relationships.

The findings of the current study underscore the significant predictive role of self-compassion and marital self-regulation in marital adjustment, aligning with and extending previous research within the domain of marital relationships and psychological well-being. The results resonate with the work of Baker and McNulty (2011), who highlighted the beneficial effects of self-compassion on relationship maintenance, further suggesting that these effects are moderated by individual differences such as conscientiousness and gender (Baker & McNulty, 2011). This nuanced understanding of self-compassion's role suggests that fostering an attitude of kindness towards oneself can enhance the resilience of marital relationships against the inevitable challenges they face.

Moreover, our findings on the predictive power of marital self-regulation on marital adjustment find support in the study by Hardy et al. (2014), which established a link between relationship self-regulation, the climate of family origin, and marital outcomes. This suggests that the strategies individuals learn for regulating their emotions and behaviors, potentially rooted in their early family experiences, play a critical role in the success of their marital relationships. Such insights are crucial for marital therapy and counseling, pointing towards the importance of enhancing self-regulatory capacities as a pathway to marital satisfaction (Akbarzadeh & Zahrakar, 2022; Alizadeh et al., 2023).

The importance of self-regulation in marital relationships is further supported by the work of Volling, Blandon, and Kolak (2006), who demonstrated how early self-regulation within the family system impacts marital and parenting dynamics. The intergenerational transmission of self-regulation strategies underscores the value of early intervention in family systems to promote healthier marital and familial relationships in the future (Alizadeh et al., 2023).

Additionally, our study's emphasis on self-compassion as a significant predictor of marital adjustment echoes findings from Sierra-Swiech (2023), who identified self-compassion among other factors as influential in marital satisfaction. This complements the body of research indicating that self-compassion not only benefits the individual's well-being but also has far-reaching implications for interpersonal relationships, especially marital satisfaction (Sierra-Swiech,

2023). The dyadic analyses conducted by Wang et al. (2023) further enrich our understanding of the complex interactions between self-compassion, marital satisfaction, and parenting stress (Wang, 2023). These studies reveal the bidirectional nature of these relationships, highlighting how self-compassion can buffer against the stressors associated with marital dissatisfaction and parenting challenges. Such findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing self-compassion could have beneficial effects not only on marital satisfaction but also on the broader family dynamics, including parenting practices.

In summary, the current study's findings contribute to a growing body of literature that underscores the critical roles of self-compassion and marital self-regulation in fostering marital adjustment. By highlighting these variables as significant predictors of marital satisfaction, this research provides valuable insights for both theoretical understanding and practical applications in marital counseling and therapy. Future research could further explore the mechanisms through which self-compassion and self-regulation exert their effects on marital relationships, as well as investigate the potential for these constructs to serve as intervention targets for enhancing marital satisfaction and overall relationship health.

5.   Limitations and Suggestions

Despite the contributions of this study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional design limits our ability to infer causality between self-compassion, marital self-regulation, and marital adjustment. Future studies could benefit from longitudinal designs to better understand the directionality and causality of these relationships. Secondly, the sample was exclusively comprised of women visiting counseling centers in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Additionally, the reliance on self-report measures, while practical, introduces the potential for response bias and does not capture the partner's perspective on marital adjustment, an aspect that could provide a more holistic view of marital dynamics.

Future research should consider employing longitudinal designs to explore the temporal dynamics between self-compassion, marital self-regulation, and marital adjustment. Additionally, incorporating dyadic analyses could offer deeper insights into how partners' levels of self-compassion and self-regulation interact to influence marital outcomes. Expanding the sample to include diverse populations, both

geographically and culturally, could enhance the external validity of the findings. Moreover, integrating qualitative methodologies could provide richer, more nuanced understandings of how individuals navigate marital challenges through self-compassion and self-regulation strategies.

The findings of this study have important implications for marital counseling and therapy. Practitioners might consider developing interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion and marital self-regulation skills among couples. For instance, mindfulness-based interventions could be tailored to foster self-compassion, potentially leading to improved marital satisfaction and adjustment. Additionally, teaching couples effective self-regulation strategies could equip them with the tools necessary to navigate marital conflicts more constructively. Workshops and programs designed to strengthen these psychological resources could serve as valuable components of premarital and marital counseling services, ultimately contributing to more resilient and satisfying marital relationships.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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