

## The Relationship Between Rumination and Coping Strategies with Marital Self-Disclosure

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between rumination and coping strategies with marital self-disclosure.

**Method:** This research is fundamental in terms of its objective and descriptive-correlational in terms of data collection. The statistical population of this study consisted of all married women at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, during the academic year 2022-2023. To this end, 385 women were selected using Cochran's formula and convenience sampling method. Participants responded to the Marital Self-Disclosure Questionnaire by Waring et al. (1998), the Ruminative Response Scale by Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (1993), and the Brief COPE Inventory by Endler and Parker (2008). After collecting the questionnaires, the data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and simultaneous multiple regression analysis.

**Findings:** The results indicated a significant negative correlation between rumination, avoidance-oriented coping strategies, and emotion-focused coping strategies with marital self-disclosure ( $p < .01$ ). There was a significant positive correlation between problem-focused coping strategies and marital self-disclosure ( $p < .01$ ).

**Conclusion:** The results of the multiple regression analysis also revealed that 71.6% of the variance in marital self-disclosure is explained by rumination and coping strategies. Therefore, it can be concluded that rumination and coping strategies can predict marital self-disclosure among married women.

**Keywords:** *personality, rumination, marital self-disclosure, coping strategies, married women.*

## 1. Introduction

The family, as a social (Giesbers et al., 2022), emotional, and character-shaping unit, is formed through the marital bond and marriage between a man and a woman (Bean et al., 2020). Accordingly, the need for communication filled with intimacy (Poletti et al., 2019) and love is one of the fundamental reasons that lead a man and a woman toward choosing and establishing a marital bond (Li et al., 2020). In other words, the family is the primary unit of any society and a hub for maintaining mental and psychological health (Buka et al., 2022), and it is the origin of human emotions and a core for the most intimate interpersonal relationships and interactions (Bakhtiari et al., 2021; Lysova et al., 2022).

A healthy and successful marriage plays a fundamental role in forming a healthy family, which is the cornerstone of societal well-being, and the criterion for a healthy family is a successful marriage (Kiani et al., 2021). Thus, marriage is a challenging institution and is not solely a matter concerning two individuals but also a significant event that impacts the family and society (Nabiyi et al., 2021). One of the marital functions that can strengthen the foundation of marital life is marital self-disclosure, which can predict the quality of interpersonal relationships between couples during their interactions (Naderi Nobandegani, 2022).

Marital self-disclosure not only reflects relationship adjustment but is also essential for achieving psychological well-being and maintaining close relationships with others. Higher marital self-disclosure is associated with better relationship adjustment and fewer concerns about relationships with others (Ardakhani & Seadatee Shamir, 2022; Schumm et al., 1981). Additionally, self-disclosure plays a crucial role in reducing distance between individuals and fostering intimate relationships. In a marital context, revealing and informing one's spouse about thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes has a decisive role in marital satisfaction. Marital self-disclosure is generally associated with marital adjustment and, specifically, with marital intimacy (Waring et al., 1998).

Furthermore, marital self-disclosure in couples is considered a means of enhancing well-being, self-esteem, and the ability to cope with difficulties. Moreover, the absence of self-disclosure is linked to a degree of spousal depression, and an imbalance in marital self-disclosure may relate to concerns about being blamed by the other spouse (Waring et al., 1998). Marital self-disclosure appears to be the most important determinant of intimate behavior with

one's spouse (Mitchell et al., 2008). Various factors can influence marital self-disclosure, one of which is rumination. Rumination is defined as repetitive and persistent thoughts revolving around a common theme (Çelikbaş & Yalçınkaya-Alkar, 2022). These thoughts enter consciousness abnormally, diverting attention from current goals and objectives. Characteristics of ruminative thoughts include being related to events or a depressed mood, lacking purpose, not guiding individuals to a particular plan or action, and causing social disengagement from the environment during ruminative episodes (Papageorgiou & Wells, 2001).

Research suggests that rumination can be a significant factor in marital life. Couples with higher levels of rumination have poorer sexual functioning and lower distress tolerance when facing difficulties (Dehghani et al., 2020). Another influential factor in marital self-disclosure could be coping strategies, although fewer studies have examined this variable's role. The concept of coping has a long history and originally evolved from Freud's theory of defense mechanisms (Parker & Sheinin, 2020). From a cognitive perspective, Lazarus and Folkman define coping as a set of efforts to change the environment to adapt optimally to a stressful event and to reduce or minimize it (Luca et al., 2020).

A study indicates that there is a positive and significant relationship between problem-focused coping and marital functions that contribute to strengthening the family unit. However, a negative and significant relationship is observed between these functions and emotion-focused coping (Ghorbani et al., 2018). In summary, rumination and coping strategies may theoretically and conceptually relate to marital self-disclosure. However, no study has examined the relationship between rumination and coping strategies with marital self-disclosure in a cohesive and unified research framework. Thus, to address this research gap, the present study seeks to answer the question: Is there a relationship between rumination and coping strategies with marital self-disclosure?

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study is fundamental and employed a descriptive-correlational method. Correlational research is a design used to analyze the relationships among variables based on the research objectives (Sarmad et al., 2019). The statistical population included all married women studying

at the Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, during the 2022-2023 academic year. Using Cochran's formula and considering a 5% margin of error, the sample size was estimated at 385 individuals. The study utilized a pencil-and-paper questionnaire method, where scales were prepared and distributed to participants, who then responded. The sample comprised married female students from the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology. The sampling method used was convenience sampling.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Rumination

Ruminative Response Scale (RRS) by Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (1993) includes 22 items and measures three subscales: reflection (items 7, 11, 12, 20, and 21), brooding (items 5, 10, 13, 15, and 16), and depression (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 17, 18, 19, and 22) (Asadi et al., 2021). It is scored on a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, and 4 = always, with scores ranging from 22 to 88, with higher scores indicating higher rumination. The scale was first translated and standardized in Iran by Yousefi (2004), with confirmed content validity and a Cronbach's alpha reliability ranging from .77 to .90. In other studies, Cronbach's alpha was used for reliability, yielding coefficients of .77 for ruminative responses and .68 for distraction responses. Internationally, Cronbach's alpha ranged from .78 to .86 (Hassannejad Emamchay & Zabihi, 2024). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for overall reliability was .81.

### 2.2.2. Marital Self-Disclosure

Marital Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (MSDQ) by Waring et al. (1998) contains 40 items and four subscales: relationship (items 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 33, and 37), sexual issues (items 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26, 30, 34, and 38), money (items 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27, 31, 35, and 39), and imbalance in marital self-disclosure (items 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36, and 40). Items are scored as 1 (correct) and 0 (incorrect), with negative items including 1, 2, 5, 9, 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 26, and 29, and positive items including the rest. The developers assessed the psychometric properties on 60 couples, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .91 for the total scale and .91, .92, .85, and .68 for the subscales (Mansouri et al., 2013). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for overall reliability was .92.

### 2.2.3. Coping Strategies

Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations - Short Form (CISS-SF) by Endler and Parker (2008) includes 21 items and three subscales: task-oriented coping (items 1, 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, and 14), emotion-oriented coping (items 2, 5, 7, 10, 14, 17, and 20), and avoidance-oriented coping (items 4, 8, 9, 15, 16, 19, and 21). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = a lot, and 5 = very much. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a reported coefficient of .80 in Iran. Validity was examined using correlations between total scores and subscale scores, yielding coefficients from .64 to .75, significant at  $p < .01$ . Another study reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .71, .81, .80, and .88 for task, emotion, avoidance coping, and overall scale, respectively (Miri & Zahiri, 2024). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for overall reliability was .70.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

Data were collected using library and field methods. The library method involved using scientific articles, websites, and journals. In the field method, data were collected using rumination, coping strategies, and marital self-disclosure questionnaires. The pencil-and-paper method was employed, where printed questionnaires were given to accessible married women, who were instructed to read and answer all items carefully without leaving any unanswered. Collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were used to assess variables, while inferential analyses included skewness and kurtosis tests for normality, Durbin-Watson test for error independence, and tolerance and variance inflation factor tests for multicollinearity. Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were performed using SPSS version 24.

## 3. Findings and Results

The sample size was 385 participants. The mean and standard deviation of the age of the participating women were 27.36 (SD = 6.55) years. The mean and standard deviation of the duration of marriage among the participants were 3.87 (SD = 1.98) years.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, including the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of the research variables.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables*

Research Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Standard Error	Kurtosis	Standard Error	Variance Inflation	Durbin-Watson
Rumination - Reflection	9.10	3.350	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rumination - Brooding	9.39	2.715	0.301	0.124	-1.635	0.248	2.526	-
Rumination - Depression	18.51	6.789	0.273	0.124	-1.502	0.248	3.286	-
Total Rumination Score	36.99	12.189	-0.012	0.124	-1.465	0.248	4.535	1.538
Task-Oriented Coping	9.71	1.885	0.122	0.124	-1.592	0.248	3.183	1.767
Emotion-Oriented Coping	11.36	2.581	0.237	0.124	-1.766	0.248	7.372	-
Avoidance-Oriented Coping	10.88	2.210	-0.101	0.124	-1.400	0.248	3.261	-
Relationship	5.21	3.048	-0.266	0.124	-1.583	0.248	-	-
Sexual Issues	5.03	2.755	-0.130	0.124	-0.654	0.248	-	-
Money	4.77	2.886	0.493	0.124	-0.276	0.248	-	-
Imbalance in Self-Disclosure	4.94	2.758	0.912	0.124	-0.123	0.248	-	-
Total Marital Self-Disclosure Score	19.94	10.916	-0.284	0.124	-1.657	0.248	-	-

Table 1 shows the results of skewness and kurtosis tests for normal distribution, indicating that all values lie within the acceptable range (-2 to 2), confirming the normal distribution of the variables. Therefore, the use of Pearson's correlation coefficient and simultaneous multiple regression analysis is justified, and the statistical results are reliable. As shown in Table 1, the Durbin-Watson statistic values

between 1.5 and 2.5 indicate independence of errors, validating the use of these parametric tests.

Table 1 results reveal that none of the tolerance values were below the critical threshold of 0.1, and no variance inflation factor (VIF) values exceeded 10, indicating no multicollinearity among predictor variables. Thus, the parametric tests, including Pearson's correlation and multiple regression, are valid and reliable.

**Table 2**

*Pearson's Correlation Coefficients Between Predictor Variables and Marital Self-Disclosure*

Predictor Variables	Criterion Variable: Marital Self-Disclosure
Rumination - Reflection	-0.729
Rumination - Brooding	-0.747
Rumination - Depression	-0.776
Task-Oriented Coping	0.568
Emotion-Oriented Coping	-0.203
Avoidance-Oriented Coping	-0.214

All  $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows the correlations between the research variables. There is a significant negative correlation between reflection ( $r = -0.729, p < .01$ ), brooding ( $r = -0.747, p < .01$ ), and depression ( $r = -0.776, p < .01$ ) with marital self-disclosure. Thus, the first hypothesis, indicating a relationship between rumination and marital self-disclosure, is confirmed.

Additionally, there is a significant positive correlation between task-oriented coping ( $r = 0.568, p < .01$ ) and marital self-disclosure. Negative correlations were found between emotion-oriented coping ( $r = -0.203, p < .01$ ) and avoidance-oriented coping ( $r = -0.214, p < .01$ ) with marital self-disclosure, confirming the second hypothesis about the relationship between coping strategies and marital self-disclosure.

**Table 3**

*Regression Model Summary for Marital Self-Disclosure Based on Rumination and Coping Strategies*

Index	Value
Multiple Correlation (MR)	0.846
R-Squared (Coefficient of Determination)	0.716
Adjusted R-Squared	0.712
Standard Error of Estimate	5.856
F Statistic	158.915
Significance of F	0.001

Table 3 shows a multiple correlation coefficient of 0.846 between rumination and coping strategies with marital self-disclosure, explaining 71.6% of the variance in marital self-disclosure. The one-way ANOVA results show that the F-

value of 158.915 is significant at  $p < .05$ , indicating that rumination and coping strategies significantly explain changes in marital self-disclosure.

**Table 4**

*Multiple Regression Coefficients for Marital Self-Disclosure Based on Rumination and Coping Strategies*

Model	B	Standard Error	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	Significance
Constant	56.586	4.631	-	12.219	0.001
Rumination - Reflection	-1.484	0.192	-0.455	-7.729	0.001
Rumination - Brooding	-0.635	0.283	-0.158	-2.246	0.025
Rumination - Depression	-0.927	0.115	-0.577	-8.059	0.001
Task-Oriented Coping	1.304	0.308	0.225	4.240	0.001
Emotion-Oriented Coping	-1.202	0.381	-0.284	-3.155	0.002
Avoidance-Oriented Coping	-0.093	0.433	-0.019	-0.214	0.830

Table 4 presents the standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients for marital self-disclosure based on rumination and coping strategies. Depression, with a beta coefficient of -0.577, was the strongest predictor. Avoidance-oriented coping did not have a significant contribution. Thus, the third hypothesis, suggesting that rumination and coping strategies predict marital self-disclosure, was only confirmed for reflection, brooding, depression, task-oriented coping, and emotion-oriented coping.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between rumination, coping strategies, and marital self-disclosure. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between rumination and coping strategies with marital self-disclosure, confirming the hypothesis that rumination is related to marital self-disclosure. This finding is consistent with the prior results (Dehghani et al., 2020; Min et al., 2022; Namdarpoor et al., 2018; Song et al., 2022; Waring et al., 1998).

Explaining this result, it can be said that rumination may cause various harms, with women being particularly vulnerable in this regard. Rumination is a mental pattern that plays a critical role in the etiology and recurrence of emotional disorders in marital life. It manifests in various thought forms, often described as cyclical and depressive thoughts in response to low mood. In essence, rumination is a mental habit and an automatic cognitive response conditioned to negative moods. It can be described as a maladaptive, unhealthy emotional strategy where individuals repetitively think about marital events and problems without using adaptive techniques or actively solving problems, attempting instead to gain deeper insight into their distressing mood caused by marital issues (Namdarpoor et al., 2018).

Rumination is characterized by constant preoccupation with a thought or subject, classified as conscious thoughts that revolve around a specific theme and recur independently of environmental demands. It can increase the effects of negative mood, leading to psychological and physiological problems, as well as negatively orienting individuals'



thinking and impairing their problem-solving abilities (Hubbard et al., 2015). At this stage, individuals may exaggerate the likelihood of negative events and their own responsibility for preventing or causing outcomes, striving to control these thoughts. Research by Silverstein et al. (2011) demonstrates a connection between rumination and marital and sexual functioning in women (Silverstein et al., 2011).

Therefore, married women who experience higher rumination also experience greater stress and exhibit poorer functioning compared to their peers with lower rumination. These women often bring their stress into sexual and marital interactions with their spouses, reducing marital functioning. Consequently, rumination causes married women to focus more on marital conflicts and issues, leading to lower marital self-disclosure. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a relationship between rumination and marital self-disclosure in married women.

In explaining the relationship between avoidance-oriented coping strategies and marital self-disclosure, it can be said that this style involves strategies aimed at eliminating stress sources and altering stressful situations. Individuals who use these strategies experience better mental health by removing stressors and changing stressful conditions. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress refers to situations where an individual faces environmental demands that exceed their current resources, causing an imbalance and internal conflict (Ghorbani et al., 2018; Naderi Nobandegani, 2022). Women who adopt ineffective, avoidance-oriented strategies to cope with stress have more difficulty managing life challenges, which increases their problems due to ineffective coping. These problems reduce their quality of life, decrease their tolerance and resilience, and lead to lower self-disclosure in marital relationships. Hence, it is reasonable to assert that there is a relationship between avoidance-oriented coping strategies and marital self-disclosure.

## 5. Suggestions and Limitations

One significant limitation of this study was the lack of comprehensive information about the current sample (i.e., married women at Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch). Since only age and education were specified as demographic characteristics, the generalizability of the findings may be questioned. Considering the results, the implications of this research can be discussed on both theoretical and practical levels. Theoretically, the findings

can contribute to the expansion of knowledge, concepts, and models of marital self-disclosure among married students by elucidating the role of rumination. Practically, the results may pave the way for future studies on factors influencing marital self-disclosure among married students. It is suggested that counseling and psychological service centers at universities administer rumination questionnaires to married students facing marital difficulties and address issues such as low marital self-disclosure.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript. In this study, the second author, as the supervising professor, provided oversight and guidance for the overall research and finalized the article revisions. The first author was responsible for designing the research plan, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and manuscript writing. The findings' interpretation and conclusions were jointly developed through discussions among all collaborators, with support from the third author, who served as the thesis advisor.

## 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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