

The Mediating Role of Relational Ethics in the Relationship Between Emotional Maturity and Marital Burnout with Divorce Tendency in Young Couples

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of relational ethics in the relationship between emotional maturity and marital burnout with divorce tendency among young couples.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a descriptive correlational design using structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of young married individuals residing in Isfahan, from whom 300 participants were selected through cluster sampling; 298 complete questionnaires were analyzed. Inclusion criteria included residency in Isfahan, marriage duration of less than five years, and willingness to participate. Data were collected using standardized instruments including the Emotional Maturity Scale (Singh & Bhargava), the Marital Burnout Questionnaire (Pines), the Relational Ethics Scale (Hargrave et al.), and the Divorce Tendency Scale (Roselet et al.). Data were analyzed at descriptive and inferential levels using SPSS and AMOS software. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated, and structural equation modeling was applied.

Findings: Structural equation modeling demonstrated acceptable model fit. Emotional maturity had a significant negative direct effect on divorce tendency. Marital burnout had a significant positive direct effect on divorce tendency. Relational ethics had a significant negative direct effect on divorce tendency. The direct path from emotional maturity to relational ethics was not significant, and the indirect effect of emotional maturity on divorce tendency through relational ethics was also non-significant, indicating no mediation. In contrast, marital burnout had a significant negative effect on relational ethics, and its indirect effect on divorce tendency through relational ethics was significant, indicating partial mediation. The total effect of marital burnout on divorce tendency was positive and significant.

Conclusion: Emotional maturity and relational ethics function as protective factors against divorce tendency, whereas marital burnout increases divorce proneness among young couples. Relational ethics partially mediates the association between marital burnout and divorce tendency but does not mediate the relationship between emotional maturity and divorce tendency.

Keywords: Emotional maturity, Marital burnout, Relational ethics, Divorce tendency, Young couples, Structural equation modeling

1. Introduction

Marital stability in early years of marriage has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to rising divorce rates and the complex psychosocial dynamics affecting young couples. Early marriage is often characterized by developmental transitions, economic pressures, identity consolidation, and role negotiation, all of which may amplify vulnerability to marital dissatisfaction and divorce tendency. Contemporary research emphasizes that divorce tendency is not a sudden decision but rather the culmination of emotional, cognitive, ethical, and relational processes unfolding over time. Among the psychological predictors of marital stability, emotional maturity has emerged as a central construct influencing communication quality, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and long-term commitment. Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that emotional maturity significantly predicts marital satisfaction and adaptive communication patterns in young women undergoing early marriage, highlighting its protective function in marital adjustment (Puspitasari et al., 2025). Emotional maturity reflects the capacity to regulate impulses, tolerate frustration, manage affective responses, and engage in constructive relational behaviors. When underdeveloped, it can exacerbate misunderstandings, emotional volatility, and maladaptive reactions to stressors, potentially increasing vulnerability to marital burnout and divorce proneness.

Theoretical and empirical studies consistently underscore the structural role of emotional maturity within marital dynamics. Structural modeling research shows that emotional maturity mediates the relationship between marital justice and marital infidelity tendency, suggesting that emotionally mature individuals are better equipped to respond constructively to perceived injustice (Matoureh Moshrefi et al., 2022; M. Moshrefi et al., 2022). Similarly, structural modeling examining self-compassion and marital infidelity identifies emotional maturity as a critical mediating mechanism linking intrapersonal regulation to relational outcomes (Niknam, 2024). Emotional maturity also plays a mediating role in the relationship between self-differentiation, familism, and marital conflict, indicating its centrality in maintaining relational balance within culturally embedded family systems (Mirzaei, 2022). Furthermore, marital satisfaction has been modeled based on marital expectations, emotional maturity, and aspects of love, with findings suggesting that emotional maturity significantly predicts relational harmony and buffers against conflict

escalation (Kakolian et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings position emotional maturity not only as a personal developmental attribute but also as a relational competence that shapes marital resilience and decreases the likelihood of divorce tendency.

Parallel to emotional maturity, marital burnout has been conceptualized as a progressive state of emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, and psychological disengagement arising from chronic relational stress. Marital burnout is closely linked to unresolved conflicts, maladaptive communication beliefs, and deteriorating emotional intimacy. Empirical findings reveal that marital conflicts and dysfunctional communication beliefs significantly predict marital burnout among couples applying for divorce (Hosseini et al., 2024). Moreover, emotional divorce has been shown to be structurally associated with personality factors through the mediating role of marital burnout, indicating that burnout serves as a pathway linking intrapersonal vulnerabilities to relational dissolution (Payam et al., 2023). Emotion regulation deficits further intensify couple burnout, and marital satisfaction mediates this association, demonstrating that inadequate emotional management can indirectly increase divorce proneness through relational exhaustion (Kocyigit, 2025; Kocyiğit & Uzun, 2024). Additionally, neuroticism influences divorce proneness through a chain mediation involving negative partner support and couple burnout, underscoring burnout as a pivotal mechanism in the trajectory toward divorce (Liu et al., 2023). Interventions targeting irrational beliefs and burnout among parents of couples seeking divorce further highlight the role of cognitive-emotional processes in marital discord (Omeje et al., 2023). These findings collectively suggest that marital burnout is not merely an outcome of dissatisfaction but a dynamic state that amplifies divorce tendency by eroding emotional investment and relational ethics.

Beyond individual emotional competencies and burnout processes, relational ethics provides a systemic framework for understanding fairness, loyalty, trust, and accountability within intimate partnerships. Rooted in contextual family therapy, relational ethics emphasizes justice, reciprocity, and balanced give-and-take in relationships. Ethical imbalances—such as perceived injustice, betrayal, or lack of trust—can destabilize marital bonds and increase divorce inclination. Research examining relational ethics indicates that social problem solving mediates the relationship between relational ethics and marital intimacy, suggesting that ethical reciprocity strengthens emotional closeness and

mitigates conflict (Moradi et al., 2020). A contextual perspective also demonstrates that parental infidelity is associated with adult children's relational ethics, illustrating the intergenerational transmission of ethical expectations and relational norms (Kawar et al., 2018). Ethical frameworks grounded in Islamic perspectives further highlight forgiveness, mutual support, and moral responsibility as protective factors enhancing marital satisfaction (Nihayah et al., 2023). Reflections on family law similarly emphasize the central role of ethics in resolving marital conflicts and sustaining relational stability (Taromi, 2020). In addition, mindfulness and spiritual experiences have been identified as predictors of marital quality, reinforcing the idea that ethical awareness and moral consciousness enhance relational well-being (Afzood et al., 2024). These studies collectively demonstrate that relational ethics functions as a stabilizing mechanism that fosters trust and mitigates tendencies toward emotional disengagement and divorce.

Despite the documented importance of emotional maturity and marital burnout, fewer studies have examined how relational ethics mediates their association with divorce tendency, particularly among young couples in early marriage. Existing literature suggests that emotional maturity strengthens relational justice and reduces infidelity tendencies (M. Moshrefi et al., 2022; Niknam, 2024), while marital burnout undermines satisfaction and increases proneness to divorce (Kocyigit, 2025; Liu et al., 2023). However, the ethical dimension of relationships may serve as a critical intermediary process linking emotional and experiential factors to divorce inclination. Ethical perceptions influence how partners interpret conflicts, assign responsibility, and evaluate fairness, which in turn shapes commitment decisions. Young couples may be especially sensitive to ethical imbalances due to shorter shared histories and evolving relational identities. Therefore, examining relational ethics as a mediator offers a more integrative understanding of how personal maturity and relational exhaustion translate into divorce tendency. This integrative perspective aligns with structural modeling approaches that emphasize multi-path relational processes (Kakolian et al., 2024; Payam et al., 2023) and contextual ethical frameworks highlighting justice and reciprocity (Kawar et al., 2018; Moradi et al., 2020).

In light of rising divorce rates among young couples and the multifaceted determinants of marital instability, a comprehensive structural model integrating emotional maturity, marital burnout, and relational ethics is warranted.

Emotional maturity contributes to adaptive regulation and conflict management (Mirzaei, 2022; Puspitasari et al., 2025), marital burnout reflects accumulated relational strain (Hosseini et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023), and relational ethics represents the moral foundation of fairness and reciprocity within marriage (Nihayah et al., 2023; Taromi, 2020). Understanding the interplay among these constructs can inform preventive interventions and couple therapy approaches aimed at strengthening ethical commitment, emotional regulation, and relational resilience. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to examine the mediating role of relational ethics in the relationship between emotional maturity and marital burnout with divorce tendency among young couples.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was conducted using a descriptive, non-experimental research design of a correlational type based on the method of data collection. In terms of purpose, the study falls within the category of applied fundamental research and, with respect to its theoretical foundation, is classified as a quantitative investigation. The hypothesized model was tested through structural equation modeling (SEM) in order to examine both direct and indirect relationships among emotional maturity, marital burnout, relational ethics, and divorce tendency. The statistical population consisted of all young couples residing in the city of Isfahan. Considering the methodological requirements of structural equation modeling, a minimum sample size of 200 participants is generally recommended to ensure stable parameter estimation and adequate statistical power. In the present study, a sample of 300 individuals was determined to enhance statistical power, improve sampling adequacy, and ensure the robustness of model estimation. Sampling was conducted using a cluster sampling method. Inclusion criteria comprised willingness and informed consent to participate in the study, residency in Isfahan, and a marital duration of less than five years. Participants were required to complete all questionnaires carefully and thoroughly. Exclusion criteria included incomplete or careless responses to the questionnaires. The study adhered to ethical standards, and participation was voluntary and confidential.

2.2. Measures

Divorce tendency was measured using the Divorce Tendency Scale originally developed by Roselet and colleagues in 1986. This instrument consists of 28 items designed to assess spouses who are susceptible to and inclined toward divorce. The scale includes four dimensions, each comprising seven items: tendency to exit (inclination toward divorce), tendency to tolerance, expression of feelings, and loyalty. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The score of each dimension is calculated by summing the responses to its respective items. A higher total score on the primary construct of divorce tendency indicates a stronger inclination toward divorce. For the subscales of expression of feelings and loyalty, items are reverse scored when computing the overall divorce tendency score. Reported internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the original instrument were .91 for the tendency to exit dimension, .76 for expression of feelings, .63 for loyalty, and .86 for tolerance. In Iranian samples, the overall Cronbach's alpha has been reported as .88 (.89 for women and .87 for men), with alpha values of .89 for the tendency to exit subscale and .88 for tolerance. Test-retest reliability and additional psychometric evaluations in Iranian populations have also demonstrated acceptable reliability.

Emotional maturity was assessed using the Emotional Maturity Scale developed by Singh and Bhargava in 1990. The scale consists of 48 items distributed across five dimensions: emotional instability, emotional regression, personality disintegration, social maladjustment, and lack of independence. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very much). Total scores range from 48 to 240, with higher scores indicating greater emotional maturity and lower scores reflecting lower levels of emotional maturity. Test-retest reliability measured over a six-month interval yielded a correlation coefficient of .75, and reported validity was .77. Internal consistency coefficients for the subscales were reported as .75 for emotional instability, .63 for emotional regression, .58 for social maladjustment, .86 for personality disintegration, and .42 for lack of independence. In more recent Iranian research, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale has been reported as .80, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Marital burnout was measured using the Marital Burnout Questionnaire developed by Pines in 1996. This instrument consists of 20 items assessing three principal components:

physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, and psychological depletion. Physical exhaustion includes symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, and sleep disturbances; emotional exhaustion includes feelings of depression, hopelessness, and entrapment; and psychological depletion encompasses feelings of worthlessness, despair, and anger toward one's spouse. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). Total scores range from 20 to 140, with higher scores indicating greater marital burnout. Test-retest reliability coefficients have been reported as .89 over a one-month interval, .76 over two months, and .66 over four months. Internal consistency coefficients have ranged between .91 and .93. In Iranian samples, Cronbach's alpha has been reported as .86, and construct validity has been reported at .89. More recent research has reported internal consistency of .87 for this instrument, confirming its reliability in local populations.

Relational ethics was assessed using the 24-item Relational Ethics Scale developed by Hargrave and colleagues in 1991. The scale is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It comprises two main components: vertical relational ethics and horizontal relational ethics. Vertical relational ethics refers to ethical experiences within the family of origin during childhood, whereas horizontal relational ethics pertains to current ethical dynamics in marital relationships. Each component includes three factors. Vertical relational ethics encompasses vertical justice and trust, vertical loyalty, and vertical entitlement. Horizontal relational ethics includes horizontal justice and trust, horizontal loyalty, and horizontal entitlement. Reported reliability coefficients for the original instrument were .91 for the vertical component, .94 for the horizontal component, and .93 for the total scale. Construct validity was supported through correlations with measures of marital adjustment and personal authority in the family system. Iranian adaptations of the scale have also reported satisfactory psychometric properties.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted at both descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, statistical indices including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and main study variables. At the inferential level, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine bivariate relationships among emotional maturity,

marital burnout, relational ethics, and divorce tendency. To test the proposed mediational model and evaluate direct and indirect effects, structural equation modeling with path analysis was performed. The analyses were conducted using SPSS for preliminary descriptive statistics and correlation analyses, and AMOS for structural equation modeling. Model fit was evaluated using standard goodness-of-fit indices, and the significance of direct and indirect paths was assessed to determine the mediating role of relational ethics in the relationship between emotional maturity and marital burnout with divorce tendency in young couples.

3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 298 young married individuals residing in Isfahan. In terms of gender

distribution, 159 participants (53.4%) were women and 139 participants (46.6%) were men, indicating a relatively balanced representation of both spouses. Regarding educational attainment, 39 participants (13.1%) had less than a high school diploma, 72 participants (24.2%) held a high school diploma, and the majority, 187 individuals (62.8%), had university-level education, reflecting a predominantly higher-educated sample. With respect to age, 127 participants (42.6%) were between 20 and 25 years old, 108 participants (36.2%) were between 26 and 30 years old, and 63 participants (21.1%) were between 31 and 35 years old, suggesting that most respondents were in early adulthood. The mean duration of marriage was 6.33 years ($SD = 4.12$), with a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 8 years, indicating variability in marital experience within the early years of marriage.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Subscale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Divorce Tendency	Total Score	80.72	27.35	0.565	0.859
Emotional Maturity	Total Score	175.68	29.92	0.959	-0.430
	Emotional Instability	34.65	6.94	1.098	-0.144
	Emotional Regression	36.31	8.56	-0.428	1.708
	Personality Disintegration	35.92	6.93	-0.193	-0.231
	Social Maladjustment	39.86	7.68	0.681	1.173
	Lack of Independence	28.94	4.44	-0.154	1.256
Marital Burnout	Total Score	68.80	27.36	0.004	0.726
Relational Ethics	Total Score	70.59	9.02	-0.740	0.464
	Vertical Relational Ethics	35.94	5.65	-0.548	0.196
	Horizontal Relational Ethics	34.66	5.23	-0.068	0.098

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that the mean score for divorce tendency was 80.72 ($SD = 27.35$), suggesting moderate variability among participants. Emotional maturity showed a relatively high mean total score of 175.68 ($SD = 29.92$). Among its subscales, social maladjustment had the highest mean ($M = 39.86$, $SD = 7.68$), whereas lack of independence had the lowest mean ($M = 28.94$, $SD = 4.44$). Marital burnout demonstrated a mean of 68.80 ($SD = 27.36$), reflecting considerable dispersion in

burnout levels among young couples. The total mean score of relational ethics was 70.59 ($SD = 9.02$), with vertical relational ethics ($M = 35.94$, $SD = 5.65$) slightly higher than horizontal relational ethics ($M = 34.66$, $SD = 5.23$). Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within acceptable ranges (± 2), indicating that the assumption of normal distribution was satisfied and that the data were suitable for parametric analyses, including structural equation modeling.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Research Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	1										
2		-0.633**	1								
3			-0.461**	0.867**	1						
4				-0.537**	0.912**	0.831**	1				
5					-0.548**	0.851**	0.623**	0.678**	1		

6	-0.640**	0.923**	0.724**	0.794**	0.749**	1					
7	-0.546**	0.697**	0.448**	0.483**	0.593**	0.659**	1				
8	0.311**	-0.336**	-0.378**	-0.433**	-0.135*	-0.330**	-0.055	1			
9	-0.658**	0.705**	0.629**	0.650**	0.526**	0.667**	0.542**	-0.360**	1		
10	-0.558**	0.544**	0.507**	0.462**	0.422**	0.522**	0.421**	-0.243**	0.843**	1	
11	-0.531**	0.628**	0.536**	0.622**	0.450**	0.585**	0.479**	-0.359**	0.814**	0.373**	1

1. Divorce Tendency; 2. Emotional Maturity (Total); 3. Emotional Instability; 4. Emotional Regression; 5. Personality Disintegration; 6. Social Maladjustment; 7. Lack of Independence; 8. Marital Burnout (Total); 9. Relational Ethics (Total); 10. Vertical Relational Ethics; 11. Horizontal Relational Ethics; *p < .05, **p < .01.

The correlation matrix presented in Table 2 demonstrates significant relationships among the main study variables. Divorce tendency showed a strong negative correlation with overall emotional maturity ($r = -0.633$, $p < .01$) and with all its subscales, indicating that higher levels of emotional maturity were associated with lower inclination toward divorce. Divorce tendency was also negatively correlated with relational ethics ($r = -0.658$, $p < .01$), as well as with its vertical ($r = -0.558$, $p < .01$) and horizontal ($r = -0.531$, $p < .01$) components, suggesting that stronger relational ethics are linked to reduced divorce tendency. In contrast, divorce tendency demonstrated a positive correlation with marital

burnout ($r = 0.311$, $p < .01$), meaning that higher burnout is associated with greater inclination toward divorce. Emotional maturity was negatively correlated with marital burnout ($r = -0.336$, $p < .01$), while relational ethics also showed a negative association with marital burnout ($r = -0.360$, $p < .01$). Additionally, emotional maturity and relational ethics were strongly and positively correlated ($r = 0.705$, $p < .01$), indicating conceptual and empirical alignment between these constructs. Overall, the pattern of correlations supports the theoretical assumptions of the proposed mediational model and justifies proceeding with structural equation modeling to test indirect effects.

Table 3*Fit Indices of the Revised Structural Model*

Fit Index	Observed Value	Critical Value	Fit Status
Chi-Square (χ^2)	258.63	—	—
Degrees of Freedom (df)	22	—	—
Significance Level (p)	0.001	> 0.05	Not Acceptable
χ^2 / df	2.875	< 3	Acceptable
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	0.918	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.934	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.906	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.903	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.079	≤ 0.08	Acceptable

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the revised structural model demonstrated an overall acceptable fit to the data. Although the chi-square statistic was significant ($\chi^2 = 258.63$, $df = 22$, $p = 0.001$), which is common in large samples and often leads to rejection of the exact-fit hypothesis, the relative chi-square index ($\chi^2/df = 2.875$) fell below the recommended threshold of 3, indicating a good model fit. The incremental and absolute fit indices were all within acceptable ranges, with $GFI = 0.918$, $CFI = 0.934$, $TLI = 0.906$, and $NFI = 0.903$, each exceeding the

recommended cutoff value of 0.90. Furthermore, the RMSEA value of 0.079 was below the maximum acceptable threshold of 0.08, suggesting a reasonable approximation of the model to the population covariance matrix. Taken together, these indices confirm that the modified model of the mediating role of relational ethics in the relationship between emotional maturity and marital burnout with divorce tendency demonstrates satisfactory goodness of fit and is suitable for interpretation of structural paths.

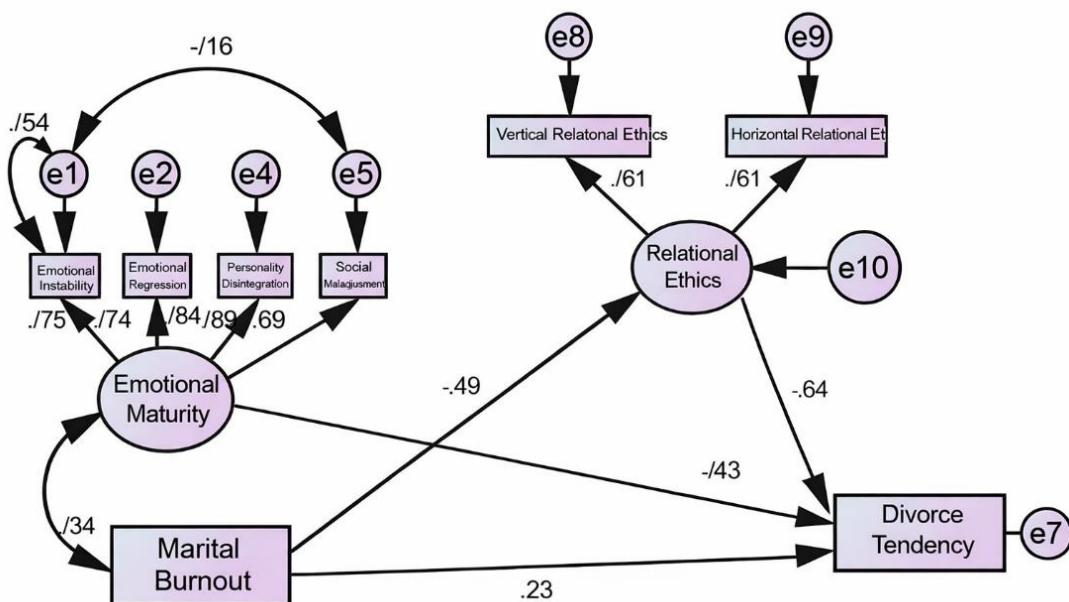
Table 4

Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Emotional Maturity, Marital Burnout, and Relational Ethics on Divorce Tendency

Effect Type	Path	Unstandardized Estimate	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	Significance	Result
Direct	Emotional Maturity → Divorce Tendency	-2.055	-0.431	0.075	0.001	Confirmed (negative, significant)
Direct	Marital Burnout → Divorce Tendency	0.209	0.219	0.205	0.035	Confirmed (positive, significant)
Direct	Relational Ethics → Divorce Tendency	-4.620	-0.638	0.237	0.002	Confirmed (negative, significant)
Direct	Emotional Maturity → Relational Ethics	0.001	0.001	0.001	>0.05	Rejected (not significant)
Indirect	Emotional Maturity → Divorce Tendency (via Relational Ethics)	0.001	0.001	0.001	>0.05	Rejected (no mediation)
Total	Emotional Maturity → Divorce Tendency	-2.055	-0.431	0.075	0.001	Confirmed (negative, significant)
Direct	Marital Burnout → Relational Ethics	-0.062	-0.492	0.102	0.001	Confirmed (negative, significant)
Indirect	Marital Burnout → Divorce Tendency (via Relational Ethics)	0.287	0.314	0.208	0.031	Confirmed (positive, significant)
Total	Marital Burnout → Divorce Tendency	0.496	0.533	0.093	0.001	Confirmed (positive, significant)

Figure 1

Final Model of the Study



The results presented in Table 4 indicate that emotional maturity had a significant direct negative effect on divorce tendency ($\beta = -0.431$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that higher emotional maturity reduces the inclination toward divorce among young couples. However, emotional maturity did not have a significant direct effect on relational ethics ($p > 0.05$), and its indirect effect on divorce tendency through relational ethics was also non-significant, indicating the absence of a

mediating role of relational ethics in this relationship. Marital burnout showed a significant direct positive effect on divorce tendency ($\beta = 0.219$, $p = 0.035$), meaning that increased burnout is associated with greater divorce tendency. Additionally, marital burnout had a significant negative effect on relational ethics ($\beta = -0.492$, $p = 0.001$), and its indirect effect on divorce tendency through relational ethics was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.314$, $p = 0.031$).

demonstrating partial mediation. The total effect of marital burnout on divorce tendency was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.533$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that both direct and indirect pathways contribute to its impact. Furthermore, relational ethics exerted a strong direct negative effect on divorce tendency ($\beta = -0.638$, $p = 0.002$), highlighting its protective role in reducing divorce inclination among young couples. Overall, the findings reveal that relational ethics functions as a mediator in the relationship between marital burnout and divorce tendency, but not in the relationship between emotional maturity and divorce tendency.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of relational ethics in the relationship between emotional maturity and marital burnout with divorce tendency among young couples. The structural model demonstrated an acceptable overall fit, and the findings revealed several significant pathways. First, emotional maturity had a significant negative direct effect on divorce tendency, indicating that higher levels of emotional maturity were associated with lower inclination toward divorce. Second, marital burnout showed a significant positive direct effect on divorce tendency, suggesting that increased emotional exhaustion, psychological depletion, and physical fatigue within marriage heighten divorce proneness. Third, relational ethics exerted a strong negative direct effect on divorce tendency, underscoring its protective function in marital stability. With respect to mediation, relational ethics did not mediate the relationship between emotional maturity and divorce tendency, as the indirect path was not significant. However, relational ethics partially mediated the relationship between marital burnout and divorce tendency, indicating that marital burnout reduces relational ethics, which in turn increases divorce tendency.

The significant negative relationship between emotional maturity and divorce tendency aligns with prior research emphasizing the central role of emotional regulation and affective stability in marital adjustment. Emotional maturity enables individuals to tolerate frustration, manage interpersonal conflicts constructively, and regulate impulsive reactions that may otherwise escalate relational tensions. Empirical findings demonstrate that emotional maturity significantly predicts marital satisfaction and effective communication in early marriages, thereby reducing vulnerability to relational breakdown (Puspitasari et al., 2025). Similarly, structural models have shown that

emotional maturity mediates the association between marital justice and marital infidelity tendency, suggesting that emotionally mature individuals respond to perceived injustices with greater balance and less destructive behavior (Matoureh Moshrefi et al., 2022; M. Moshrefi et al., 2022). Research on self-compassion and marital infidelity further identifies emotional maturity as a key mediating variable linking internal emotional capacities to relational loyalty (Niknam, 2024). In addition, emotional maturity has been found to mediate the relationship between self-differentiation, familism, and marital conflict, reinforcing its systemic role in promoting adaptive relational functioning (Mirzaei, 2022). Modeling studies of marital satisfaction also confirm that emotional maturity is a significant predictor of positive relational outcomes (Kakolian et al., 2024). Therefore, the present findings extend previous literature by demonstrating that emotional maturity directly reduces divorce tendency among young couples.

The positive association between marital burnout and divorce tendency is also consistent with prior theoretical and empirical evidence. Marital burnout reflects a chronic depletion of emotional resources resulting from unresolved conflict, communication dysfunction, and unmet relational expectations. When burnout intensifies, emotional disengagement and dissatisfaction may evolve into cognitive contemplation of separation. Studies show that marital conflicts and maladaptive communication beliefs significantly predict marital burnout among couples seeking divorce (Hosseini et al., 2024). Moreover, emotional divorce has been structurally linked to personality factors through the mediating role of marital burnout, indicating that burnout acts as a bridge between internal vulnerabilities and relational dissolution (Payam et al., 2023). Research on emotion regulation further demonstrates that deficits in regulating emotions contribute to couple burnout, with marital satisfaction serving as a mediating mechanism (Kocyigit, 2025; Koçyigit & Uzun, 2024). Additionally, neuroticism influences divorce proneness via a chain mediation involving negative partner support and couple burnout, highlighting burnout as a pivotal pathway toward marital instability (Liu et al., 2023). Intervention research addressing burnout and irrational beliefs among parents of couples seeking divorce also underscores the psychological dimensions of marital exhaustion (Omeje et al., 2023). The current findings therefore confirm that marital burnout is a critical predictor of divorce tendency, particularly in early marriages characterized by developmental and economic pressures.

Relational ethics emerged as a strong negative predictor of divorce tendency, emphasizing the importance of fairness, trust, loyalty, and accountability in sustaining marital commitment. Relational ethics provides a moral framework guiding how partners evaluate reciprocity and justice in their relationship. When partners perceive ethical balance and mutual responsibility, they are more likely to remain committed despite conflicts. Prior research demonstrates that relational ethics is positively associated with marital intimacy and that social problem solving mediates this relationship (Moradi et al., 2020). From a contextual perspective, relational ethics is also influenced by intergenerational experiences, as parental infidelity has been shown to shape adult children's ethical expectations in intimate relationships (Kawar et al., 2018). Ethical constructs grounded in Islamic perspectives similarly highlight forgiveness, social support, and moral commitment as protective factors enhancing marital satisfaction (Nihayah et al., 2023). Legal-ethical reflections further stress the role of ethical principles in resolving marital conflicts and preventing relational breakdown (Taromi, 2020). Moreover, mindfulness and spiritual experiences have been identified as predictors of marital quality, suggesting that ethical awareness strengthens relational bonds (Afzood et al., 2024). The present study contributes to this body of research by demonstrating that relational ethics significantly reduces divorce tendency among young couples.

A key contribution of this study lies in clarifying the mediating role of relational ethics. Contrary to expectations, relational ethics did not mediate the relationship between emotional maturity and divorce tendency. Although emotional maturity and relational ethics were correlated, the structural pathway from emotional maturity to relational ethics was not significant. This suggests that while emotional maturity directly reduces divorce tendency, it may not necessarily translate into enhanced ethical perceptions within marriage in a way that produces an indirect effect. Emotional maturity may operate through other mechanisms, such as improved communication, empathy, or problem-solving abilities, rather than primarily through ethical restructuring. This finding invites further investigation into alternative mediators linking emotional maturity and marital stability.

In contrast, relational ethics partially mediated the relationship between marital burnout and divorce tendency. Marital burnout significantly predicted lower relational ethics, and this reduction in ethical perceptions, in turn,

increased divorce tendency. This finding is theoretically coherent, as chronic exhaustion and resentment may undermine perceptions of fairness, reciprocity, and loyalty within marriage. When partners feel emotionally depleted, they may interpret relational exchanges as unjust or imbalanced, thereby weakening ethical commitment. This mediation pattern aligns with research demonstrating that burnout is intertwined with relational dissatisfaction and erosion of supportive dynamics (Kocayigit, 2025; Liu et al., 2023). The findings also resonate with contextual ethical frameworks emphasizing reciprocity and justice as foundational to marital continuity (Kawar et al., 2018; Moradi et al., 2020). Thus, relational ethics appears to function as a psychological mechanism through which marital burnout translates into divorce inclination.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the results support a multidimensional understanding of divorce tendency in young couples. Emotional maturity directly strengthens marital stability, marital burnout directly undermines it, and relational ethics serves both as an independent protective factor and as a mediator linking burnout to divorce proneness. These findings underscore the importance of integrating emotional development, burnout prevention, and ethical cultivation in marital interventions.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, as the directionality of relationships cannot be definitively established. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce response bias, including social desirability effects. Third, the sample was limited to young couples in a specific urban context, which may reduce the generalizability of findings to other cultural or age groups. Finally, potential moderating variables such as economic stress, duration of marriage, or personality traits were not examined.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine causal pathways among emotional maturity, marital burnout, relational ethics, and divorce tendency over time. Investigating additional mediators and moderators, such as attachment styles, communication skills, or socioeconomic status, may provide a more comprehensive model. Comparative studies across cultural contexts would clarify the universality of relational ethics as a mediating

mechanism. Experimental and intervention-based research evaluating programs aimed at enhancing emotional maturity and relational ethics could also provide practical insights into divorce prevention strategies.

From a practical perspective, premarital and marital counseling programs should emphasize the development of emotional maturity skills, including emotion regulation, impulse control, and adaptive communication. Interventions aimed at reducing marital burnout through stress management and constructive conflict resolution are also essential. Finally, cultivating relational ethics—by strengthening perceptions of fairness, reciprocity, trust, and mutual accountability—may serve as a powerful preventive strategy to reduce divorce tendency among young couples and promote long-term marital resilience.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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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.

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