

Structural Equation Modeling of Emotional Divorce Based on Personality Maladjustments and Emotional Maturity: Examining the Mediating Role of Marital Intimacy

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to develop and test a structural equation model of emotional divorce based on personality maladjustments and emotional maturity, with the mediating role of marital intimacy among married university students.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a descriptive–correlational design using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of all married students of Islamic Azad University, Khoy Branch, during the 2025–2026 academic year, from whom 300 participants were selected through purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria. Data were collected using the Gottman Emotional Divorce Questionnaire, the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 Brief Form (PID-5), the Bagarozzi Marital Intimacy Needs Questionnaire, and Singh's Emotional Maturity Scale. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and SmartPLS software through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Findings: The findings demonstrated that personality maladjustment had a significant positive effect on emotional divorce ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.001$) and a significant negative effect on marital intimacy ($\beta = -0.44$, $p = 0.001$). Emotional immaturity also had a significant positive effect on emotional divorce ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.001$) and a significant negative effect on marital intimacy ($\beta = -0.49$, $p = 0.001$). In contrast, marital intimacy showed a significant negative effect on emotional divorce ($\beta = -0.52$, $p = 0.001$). Furthermore, the indirect effects indicated that marital intimacy significantly mediated the relationship between personality maladjustment and emotional divorce ($\beta = 0.23$, $p = 0.001$), as well as the relationship between emotional maturity and emotional divorce ($\beta = 0.27$, $p = 0.001$). Model fit indices confirmed an acceptable and satisfactory fit of the proposed structural model.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that maladaptive personality traits and emotional immaturity contribute to emotional divorce both directly and indirectly through the reduction of marital intimacy. Marital intimacy plays a significant protective and mediating role in couples' emotional relationships by reducing emotional distancing and strengthening emotional bonding.

Keywords: Emotional Divorce, Emotional Maturity, Marital Intimacy, Personality Maladjustments, Structural Equation Modeling

1. Introduction

Emotional divorce is recognized as one of the most important hidden crises in marital relationships and family systems, referring to a condition in which spouses continue their formal marital life while emotional connection, affection, intimacy, and effective interpersonal interaction between them gradually deteriorate (Al-Moselhy et al., 2023; Al-Shahrani & Hammad, 2023a). In emotional divorce, couples often experience emotional coldness, psychological distancing, loneliness, and the absence of meaningful communication despite sharing the same living environment (Al-Shahrani & Hammad, 2023b; Najafi et al., 2026). Unlike legal divorce, emotional divorce usually develops gradually and silently, making it more difficult to identify and intervene in its early stages. Research has shown that emotional divorce is associated with a wide range of negative psychological and social consequences, including depression, anxiety, reduced marital satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, impaired family functioning, and weakened psychological well-being among spouses and children (Adriana, 2024; Daneshfar & Keramat, 2023). Furthermore, emotional divorce may significantly increase the likelihood of legal separation, family instability, and social maladjustment if preventive and therapeutic interventions are not implemented in time (Ghaibi et al., 2022; Shayesteh-Parto et al., 2023).

Recent investigations indicate that emotional divorce is influenced by multiple interpersonal, emotional, and personality-related factors. One of the most important determinants identified in the literature is personality maladjustment, which refers to dysfunctional and inflexible patterns of cognition, emotion, and behavior that interfere with adaptive interpersonal functioning (Baravardeh et al., 2025; Krueger et al., 2012). Maladaptive personality traits such as emotional instability, antagonism, detachment, impulsivity, and negative affectivity may impair individuals' capacity to maintain healthy emotional communication and constructive marital interaction (Alhajaj, 2025; Sahranavard et al., 2025). According to personality pathology theories, individuals with maladaptive personality characteristics are more vulnerable to interpersonal conflicts because they often demonstrate poor emotional regulation, low frustration tolerance, heightened sensitivity to rejection, and ineffective coping strategies in stressful relational situations (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025; Mohandes et al., 2023). These dysfunctional patterns gradually undermine emotional intimacy and emotional security within marriage and increase the

likelihood of emotional withdrawal and relational dissatisfaction.

Theoretical perspectives grounded in attachment theory and emotional regulation frameworks further explain the role of personality maladjustment in emotional divorce. Individuals with maladaptive personality traits often struggle to establish secure emotional bonds with their spouses and tend to respond to marital tensions through emotional avoidance, hostility, passive aggression, or emotional disengagement (Davarinejad et al., 2022; Mykhalchuk et al., 2025). Such maladaptive responses interfere with empathy, mutual understanding, and emotional support between partners, thereby weakening the quality of the marital relationship. Research findings have consistently demonstrated that maladaptive personality characteristics are significantly associated with reduced marital satisfaction, increased marital conflict, psychological distress, and emotional divorce (Marvi et al., 2026; Sahranavard et al., 2025). In addition, studies have shown that personality dysfunctions contribute to poor interpersonal adjustment and diminished relationship quality through impaired emotional communication and deficient conflict-management abilities (Baravardeh et al., 2025; Mohandes et al., 2023). Consequently, personality maladjustment appears to function as a major psychological vulnerability factor in the development of emotional divorce among couples.

Another important variable associated with the quality and stability of marital relationships is emotional maturity. Emotional maturity refers to the capacity to understand, regulate, and appropriately express emotions while maintaining emotional balance and adaptive functioning in interpersonal relationships (Purba & Kusumiati, 2024; Putri & Pertiwi, 2024). Emotionally mature individuals generally demonstrate higher self-awareness, emotional stability, empathy, responsibility, and flexibility in dealing with stressful situations and interpersonal disagreements. In contrast, emotionally immature individuals tend to exhibit impulsive reactions, emotional instability, dependency, poor anger management, and ineffective emotional expression (Agustina et al., 2024; Motlagh, 2025). These maladaptive emotional patterns may create persistent relational tensions and contribute to emotional disconnection between spouses.

Emotion regulation theory and psychosocial development approaches emphasize that emotional maturity plays a protective role in marital relationships because it enables individuals to manage emotional conflicts constructively and maintain emotional closeness under stressful conditions

(Gholami Gherashiran et al., 2022; Hedayatimoghadam & Bakhsipour, 2022). Individuals with lower levels of emotional maturity often struggle to tolerate frustration and interpersonal stress, resulting in emotional withdrawal, hostility, or maladaptive dependency patterns during marital conflicts. Over time, such dysfunctional emotional responses reduce trust, empathy, and intimacy within the relationship and may lead to emotional divorce (Ali Cheshmeh Alaei et al., 2023; Zakizadeh et al., 2024). Empirical evidence supports these assumptions by showing that emotional immaturity is associated with increased marital instability, emotional burnout, depression symptoms, and relationship dissatisfaction (Gholami Gherashiran et al., 2022; Zakizadeh et al., 2024). Additionally, emotionally mature individuals are more likely to demonstrate effective communication skills, emotional understanding, and adaptive coping strategies that strengthen marital bonds and reduce relational distress (Purba & Kusumiati, 2024; Putri & Pertiwi, 2024).

Among the interpersonal variables influencing emotional divorce, marital intimacy has received substantial attention in contemporary family and relationship research. Marital intimacy refers to the emotional, cognitive, psychological, and behavioral closeness experienced between spouses and is characterized by affection, trust, empathy, emotional support, and mutual understanding (Khamseh A & S, 2008; Shafiq & Naz, 2023). Intimacy constitutes one of the fundamental dimensions of healthy marital functioning because it allows couples to share emotions, thoughts, needs, and experiences within a secure relational environment. High levels of marital intimacy are associated with greater relationship satisfaction, psychological well-being, and emotional security, whereas reduced intimacy contributes to emotional distancing, loneliness, and relational dissatisfaction (Jahanbakhshie et al., 2025; Pouragha & Sotoodeh Navroodi, 2023).

Communication theories and intimacy-based perspectives suggest that intimacy serves as an essential emotional resource that protects couples against relational deterioration and emotional disengagement. When emotional intimacy decreases, couples often experience weakened emotional bonding, reduced affection, and impaired communication patterns, all of which increase vulnerability to emotional divorce (Al-Shahrani & Hammad, 2023b; Najafi et al., 2026). Empirical findings also confirm that couples experiencing emotional divorce generally report significantly lower levels of emotional intimacy compared to non-distressed couples (Besharat Qaramaleki et al., 2024;

Pouragha & Sotoodeh Navroodi, 2023). Moreover, interventions aimed at improving emotional intimacy and emotional communication have demonstrated positive effects on reducing relationship distress and improving marital adjustment among emotionally divorced couples (Bazyari et al., 2024; Besharat Qaramaleki et al., 2024). Therefore, marital intimacy appears to be a central mechanism in preserving emotional connection and preventing relational breakdown in marital life.

The literature further indicates that personality maladjustment and emotional maturity may exert their influence on emotional divorce through their effects on marital intimacy. Individuals with maladaptive personality traits often experience difficulty establishing emotionally secure and empathic relationships because emotional instability, impulsivity, and interpersonal distrust weaken the quality of emotional interaction with their spouse (Alhajaj, 2025; Hashemi et al., 2024). Similarly, emotional immaturity reduces individuals' ability to manage emotions adaptively, understand their partner's emotional needs, and maintain emotionally supportive communication patterns (Agustina et al., 2024; Motlagh, 2025). Consequently, both maladaptive personality characteristics and emotional immaturity may reduce marital intimacy, which in turn contributes to emotional distancing and emotional divorce.

Previous studies provide empirical support for these assumptions. Research has shown that maladaptive personality traits and insecure attachment patterns are associated with lower intimacy and poorer marital adjustment (İyiyaydn & Sümer, 2023; Mohandes et al., 2023). Likewise, emotional maturity has been identified as a significant predictor of marital stability, emotional bonding, and relationship satisfaction (Gholami Gherashiran et al., 2022; Putri & Pertiwi, 2024). Furthermore, marital intimacy has been found to mediate the relationship between emotional and interpersonal variables and marital outcomes, including emotional divorce and marital dissatisfaction (Besharat Qaramaleki et al., 2024; Jahanbakhshie et al., 2025). Despite these findings, most previous studies have examined pairwise associations among these constructs and have paid relatively limited attention to integrated structural models that simultaneously evaluate the direct and indirect relationships among personality maladjustment, emotional maturity, marital intimacy, and emotional divorce.

Another important issue concerns the increasing prevalence of relational distress and emotional disconnection among young married couples and university students. Married students often encounter multiple

stressors, including academic demands, economic difficulties, role conflicts, and psychological pressures that may negatively affect marital functioning and emotional well-being (Habibi et al., 2022; Shayesteh-Parto et al., 2023). Under such stressful circumstances, maladaptive personality characteristics and emotional immaturity may intensify interpersonal tensions and reduce the ability of couples to maintain emotional intimacy and relational stability. Accordingly, understanding the structural mechanisms underlying emotional divorce in this population may contribute to the development of preventive and therapeutic interventions targeting emotional regulation, personality functioning, and marital intimacy.

From a methodological perspective, structural equation modeling provides a comprehensive analytical framework for examining complex direct and indirect relationships among psychological and interpersonal variables (Kline, 2023). By simultaneously assessing multiple pathways and mediating mechanisms, structural equation modeling enables researchers to develop integrated conceptual models explaining emotional divorce in marital relationships. Given the multidimensional nature of emotional divorce and the interconnected influence of personality maladjustment, emotional maturity, and marital intimacy, the use of structural equation modeling appears particularly appropriate for understanding these relational processes.

Despite the growing body of literature on emotional divorce, important research gaps remain. Specifically, limited studies have simultaneously examined the direct effects of personality maladjustment and emotional maturity on emotional divorce while also investigating the mediating role of marital intimacy within a unified structural model. In addition, few studies have focused on married university students as a distinct population facing unique developmental and psychosocial challenges. Therefore, the present study aimed to develop and test a structural equation model of emotional divorce based on personality maladjustment and emotional maturity with the mediating role of marital intimacy among married students.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of its purpose and descriptive–correlational in terms of nature and method of implementation, based on structural equation modeling (SEM). It aimed to examine the role of personality maladjustment and emotional maturity in predicting

emotional divorce, with marital intimacy as a mediating variable. The statistical population included all married students of Islamic Azad University, Khoy Branch, during the academic year 2024–2025 (1404–1405), which was reported to be 3,500 individuals according to university records. The sample was selected using purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria; accordingly, married students were first identified, and those who met the study criteria and agreed to participate were included after providing informed consent. Based on Kline's (1998, 2023) recommendations, regarding sample size adequacy in structural equation modeling—which suggests a minimum of 200 participants and, in more complex models, a ratio of 10 to 20 participants per estimated parameter—the sample size of this study was set at 300 participants, which was considered sufficient for SEM-based analyses. The inclusion criteria were enrollment at Islamic Azad University, Khoy Branch, being married, willingness and informed consent to participate in the study, and the ability to complete the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

2.2. Measures

Emotional Divorce Questionnaire: In this study, emotional divorce was measured using the Emotional Divorce Questionnaire developed by Gottman (2008). This questionnaire consists of 24 items, each with two response options: “No” scored as 0 and “Yes” scored as 1. The total score is calculated by summing all item scores, with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 24. Higher scores indicate a higher level of emotional divorce. Gottman (2008) reported content validity confirmed by experts and a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.83. In an Iranian study, Habibi et al. (2022/1401) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.92 for this questionnaire.

Maladaptive Personality Traits Questionnaire: Maladaptive personality traits were assessed using the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5) developed by Krueger et al. (2012). This questionnaire consists of 25 items across five dimensions: Negative Affectivity, Detachment, Antagonism, Disinhibition, and Psychoticism (5 items per dimension). Each item is rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“Completely false or often false”) to 3 (“Completely true or often true”). Scores for each dimension are obtained by summing the relevant items, with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 15 per dimension, where higher scores indicate greater personality

maladjustment. Krueger et al. (2012) confirmed construct validity using exploratory factor analysis, identifying the five-factor structure, and reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for the overall scale and between 0.73 and 0.95 for its subscales. In an Iranian study, Baravardeh et al. (2025/1404) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 for the overall scale and between 0.60 and 0.84 for its subscales.

Bagarozzi Marital Intimacy Needs Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed and designed by Bagarozzi (1990). It consists of 41 items and is intended to assess dimensions of marital intimacy, including emotional intimacy (items 1–5), psychological intimacy (items 6–10), intellectual intimacy (items 11–15), sexual intimacy (items 16–20), physical intimacy (items 21–25), spiritual intimacy (items 26–31), aesthetic intimacy (items 32–36), and social–recreational intimacy (items 37–41). The response scale for each item ranges from 1 to 10. Therefore, there is no need for separate scoring of response options. Participants rate each need from 1 (“not present at all”) to 10 (“very high need”). The maximum score for each subscale is 50, except for the spiritual intimacy subscale, which has a maximum score of 60. The total score for each subscale (except emotional intimacy) ranges from 5 to 50, while for emotional intimacy it ranges from 6 to 60. Higher scores in each dimension indicate a greater perceived need for that aspect of intimacy from one's spouse, and vice versa. In the original study by Bagarozzi (1990), acceptable validity and reliability indices were reported. In an Iranian study, Khamseh and Hosseinian (2008) assessed test–retest reliability for each subscale and reported coefficients of 0.89 for emotional intimacy, 0.82 for psychological intimacy, 0.81 for intellectual intimacy, 0.91 for sexual intimacy, 0.80 for physical intimacy, 0.65 for spiritual intimacy, 0.76 for aesthetic intimacy, and 0.51 for social–recreational intimacy, indicating acceptable reliability for the scale.

Emotional Maturity Questionnaire: The Emotional Maturity Scale was developed by Singh (1991) to assess individuals' level of emotional maturity or immaturity and has been widely used in developmental and clinical psychology research. This is a self-report instrument and, in its commonly used version, consists of 48 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree (1)” to “Strongly agree (5)”. Accordingly, the total score ranges from 48 to 240. In this scale, higher scores indicate lower emotional maturity (i.e., greater emotional immaturity), whereas lower scores reflect higher emotional maturity. In many studies, no universal cut-off score has been established for interpretation; therefore, scores are typically interpreted

based on sample-specific means or relative classifications (e.g., low, moderate, and high levels of emotional immaturity). The questionnaire includes five main subscales, each containing 9 or 10 items: emotional stability (items related to intense emotional reactions, irritability, and mood fluctuations), emotional regression (items related to inadequate emotional development, childish behaviors, and emotional dependency), social maladjustment (items related to communication difficulties, interpersonal conflicts, and social withdrawal), personality disintegration (items related to behavioral inconsistency, poor decision-making, and weak self-control), and independence (items related to dependency on others and inability to make independent decisions). Regarding psychometric properties, the original study reported a test–retest reliability coefficient of 0.75. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) ranged from 0.73 to 0.86 for the subscales and was 0.81 for the total scale. In Iran, Ali Cheshmeh Alai et al. (2023/1402) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83, indicating acceptable reliability in Iranian samples.

2.3. Data Analysis

After data collection and initial coding, the data were entered into SPSS and SmartPLS software and analyzed at both descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, indices such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were calculated to describe the demographic characteristics and the main study variables. At the inferential level, in order to test the conceptual model and examine the relationships among variables, structural equation modeling based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) was conducted using SmartPLS. In this analysis, the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Convergent and discriminant validity were examined through standardized loadings, the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the HTMT ratio. The significance of direct and indirect paths was tested using bootstrapping procedures. In addition, R^2 was used to determine the explanatory power of the endogenous variables, while f^2 and Q^2 were employed to assess effect size and predictive relevance, respectively. To evaluate the structural model fit within the PLS-SEM framework, several indices were used, including SRMR (with an acceptable threshold of less than 0.08 or, in some sources, less than 0.10), NFI (greater than 0.90), d_{ULS} and d_{G} (with lower values indicating better fit), Chi-square as

a supplementary and non-central index, and RMS_theta (with a recommended threshold of less than 0.12 for reflective models). The significance level for all tests was set at 0.05.

3. Findings and Results

Based on the results presented in Table 1, out of 300 participants, 168 individuals (56%) were female and 132 (44%) were male, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution in the sample. Regarding age, the highest frequency belonged to the 25–30 age group with 111 participants (37%), while the lowest frequency was related to participants over 35 years old with 48 individuals (16%). In addition, 87 participants (29%) were in the 31–35 age

range, and 54 participants (18%) were younger than 25 years. In terms of education level, the majority of participants held a bachelor's degree (62%), while 38% were enrolled in a master's degree program. Regarding duration of marriage, the highest frequency was observed among couples with 5–10 years of marital life (45%), followed by those with less than 5 years of marriage (34%). Furthermore, descriptive findings indicated that the mean scores for emotional divorce, personality maladjustment, marital intimacy, and emotional maturity were 11.42, 36.58, 247.83, and 128.64, respectively. The skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within the acceptable range (± 2), indicating a relatively normal distribution of the data and their suitability for subsequent statistical analyses.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the sample and study variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	
Gender	Female	168	56	
	Male	132	44	
	Total	300	100	
Age	Under 25	54	18	
	25–30	111	37	
	31–35	87	29	
	Over 35	48	16	
Education level	Bachelor's degree	186	62	
	Master's degree	114	38	
Duration of marriage	Under 5 years	102	34	
	5–10 years	135	45	
	Over 10 years	63	21	
Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional divorce	11.42	4.83	0.41	-0.52
Personality maladjustment	36.58	10.14	0.36	-0.47
Marital intimacy	247.83	29.24	-0.61	0.38
Emotional maturity	128.64	19.37	0.29	-0.41

The results presented in Table 2 indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between personality maladjustment and emotional divorce ($r = 0.53$), meaning that as personality maladjustment increases, the level of emotional divorce also increases. In addition, a significant negative relationship was found between marital intimacy and emotional divorce ($r = -0.61$), indicating that higher levels of marital intimacy are associated with lower emotional divorce. The findings also showed a significant

negative relationship between personality maladjustment and marital intimacy ($r = -0.48$). Furthermore, emotional maturity had a significant positive relationship with emotional divorce ($r = 0.46$) and a significant negative relationship with marital intimacy ($r = -0.57$). Finally, a significant positive relationship was observed between emotional maturity and personality maladjustment ($r = 0.39$). Overall, the direction of the correlation coefficients was consistent with the conceptual model of the study.

Table 2

Pearson correlation matrix among study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional divorce	1			
2. Personality maladjustment	0.53**	1		
3. Marital intimacy	-0.61**	-0.48**	1	
4. Emotional maturity	0.46**	0.39**	-0.57**	1

**p < 0.01

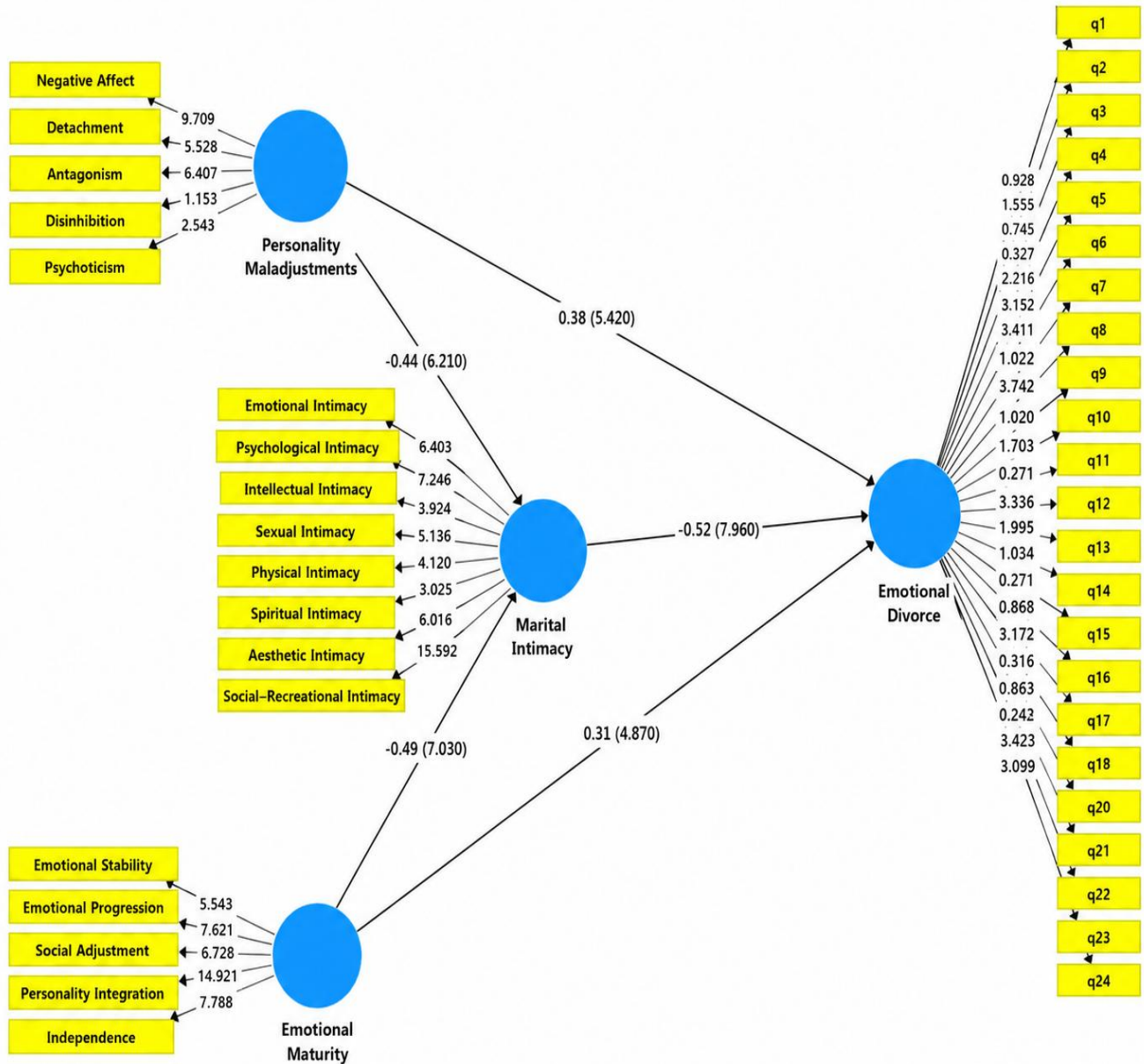
At the outset, statistical assumptions including normality of data distribution and absence of multicollinearity among variables were examined, as meeting these assumptions enhances the accuracy, stability, and validity of estimated coefficients in model analysis. To assess normality, in addition to skewness and kurtosis indices, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was also conducted on the total scores of the study variables. The results indicated that skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within the acceptable range of ± 2 , and the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test also confirmed the normal distribution of the data. Furthermore, to examine multicollinearity among predictor variables, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance indices were calculated. The findings showed that VIF values for all variables were below 5 and tolerance values were above 0.10, indicating no multicollinearity issues among the variables. Prior to testing the structural model and running bootstrapping, the measurement model was evaluated to assess the adequacy of the measurement instruments through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. In this regard, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs—emotional divorce, personality maladjustment, marital intimacy, and emotional maturity—was above 0.50 (emotional divorce: 0.58, personality maladjustment: 0.61, marital intimacy: 0.64, emotional maturity: 0.57), indicating acceptable convergent validity.

Additionally, Composite Reliability (CR) values for all variables were above 0.70 (emotional divorce: 0.87, personality maladjustment: 0.90, marital intimacy: 0.92, emotional maturity: 0.88), reflecting good internal consistency and reliability of the instruments. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients also fell within the acceptable range (emotional divorce: 0.84, personality maladjustment: 0.86, marital intimacy: 0.91, emotional maturity: 0.83). For discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was applied. The results showed that the square root of AVE for all constructs (emotional divorce: 0.76, personality maladjustment: 0.78, marital intimacy: 0.80, emotional maturity: 0.75) was higher than their correlations with other constructs in the model. Moreover, the HTMT ratios for all relationships were below 0.90, indicating adequate discriminant validity and confirming that the constructs are distinct from one another. Overall, the findings indicated that the research instruments had satisfactory validity and reliability, allowing for further analysis of the structural model using SmartPLS.

Finally, the significance of the structural paths was tested using the bootstrapping method with 2,000 resamples. In addition, to better illustrate the structural relationships and the conceptual model of the study, the final model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Structural Equation Model of the Study



The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the structural model fit indices are at an acceptable and desirable level. Overall, the global model fit indices suggest a good alignment between the data and the conceptual framework of the study. In addition, the explanatory power indicators show that the endogenous variables possess moderate to strong explanatory capability. Furthermore, the predictive relevance indices indicate that the model has adequate

predictive power for the dependent constructs. The effect size also falls within a favorable range, demonstrating the meaningful contribution of the structural relationships in the model. Overall, based on the results in Table 3, it can be concluded that the research model has an acceptable structural fit and is sufficiently robust for explaining the relationships among the study variables.

Table 3

Structural model fit indices

Fit index	Obtained value	Recommended value	Status
SRMR	0.063	< 0.08	Good
NFI	0.914	> 0.90	Good
d_ULS	0.812	Lower is better	Acceptable
d_G	0.437	Lower is better	Good
RMS_theta	0.082	< 0.12	Good
R ² (Emotional divorce)	0.66	0.50–0.75 (strong)	Strong
R ² (Marital intimacy)	0.57	0.50–0.75 (moderate–strong)	Good
Q ² (Emotional divorce)	0.42	> 0	Predictive relevance
Q ² (Marital intimacy)	0.35	> 0	Predictive relevance
Effect size (f ²)	0.28	0.02 small – 0.15 medium – 0.35 large	Medium to strong

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that all direct paths in the model were statistically significant, and therefore the research hypotheses in this section were confirmed. According to Table 4, personality maladjustment had a positive and significant effect on emotional divorce ($\beta = 0.38$), while its effect on marital intimacy was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.44$). Similarly, emotional maturity showed a positive and significant effect on emotional divorce ($\beta = 0.31$) and a negative and significant effect on marital intimacy ($\beta = -0.49$). In contrast, marital intimacy had a negative and significant effect on emotional divorce ($\beta = -0.52$), indicating its protective role within the model. In the indirect relationships section, the results showed that mediating pathways were also significant. Specifically, the

indirect effects of personality maladjustment and emotional maturity on emotional divorce through marital intimacy were significant ($\beta = 0.23$ and $\beta = 0.27$, respectively). These findings confirm the mediating role of marital intimacy in the relationship between the predictor variables and emotional divorce. Furthermore, the total effects of both personality maladjustment ($\beta = 0.61$) and emotional maturity ($\beta = 0.58$) on emotional divorce highlight the strong importance of these constructs in explaining the conceptual model of the study. Overall, the results of Table 4 confirm all direct and indirect hypotheses and demonstrate the significant mediating role of marital intimacy in the research model.

Table 4

Direct, indirect, and total path coefficients

Path	β	t-value	p-value
Direct effects			
Personality maladjustment → Emotional divorce	0.38	5.42	0.001
Personality maladjustment → Marital intimacy	-0.44	6.21	0.001
Emotional maturity → Emotional divorce	0.31	4.87	0.001
Emotional maturity → Marital intimacy	-0.49	7.03	0.001
Marital intimacy → Emotional divorce	-0.52	7.96	0.001
Indirect effects			
Personality maladjustment → Marital intimacy → Emotional divorce	0.23	4.58	0.001
Emotional maturity → Marital intimacy → Emotional divorce	0.27	5.11	0.001
Total effects			
Personality maladjustment → Emotional divorce	0.61	8.34	0.001
Emotional maturity → Emotional divorce	0.58	7.89	0.001

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the structural model of emotional divorce based on personality maladjustment and emotional maturity with the mediating role of marital

intimacy among married students. The findings demonstrated that personality maladjustment had a positive and significant effect on emotional divorce. This finding indicates that individuals with higher levels of maladaptive personality characteristics are more vulnerable to emotional

disengagement, emotional coldness, and relational dissatisfaction in marital life. In fact, maladaptive personality traits such as emotional instability, antagonism, impulsivity, detachment, and negative affectivity may impair couples' ability to establish effective communication patterns and maintain emotional closeness. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies that identified maladaptive personality traits as significant predictors of marital conflict, emotional instability, and emotional divorce (Alhajaj, 2025; Marvi et al., 2026; Sahranavard et al., 2025). Likewise, Mohandes et al. demonstrated that maladaptive personality characteristics and insecure attachment patterns are associated with poorer post-divorce adjustment and impaired interpersonal functioning (Mohandes et al., 2023). Baravardeh et al. also reported that dysfunctional personality traits are strongly related to emotional dysregulation and psychological maladjustment, which may negatively influence close relationships (Baravardeh et al., 2025).

This finding can be explained through attachment theory and emotional regulation approaches. Individuals with maladaptive personality traits often experience difficulties in managing emotional responses and establishing stable emotional bonds with their spouses. In stressful marital situations, they may react through emotional withdrawal, hostility, impulsive behaviors, or avoidance patterns rather than constructive communication. Such maladaptive interaction styles gradually weaken trust, emotional safety, and empathy within the relationship, thereby increasing emotional distance between spouses. Mykhalchuk et al. emphasized that maladaptive interpersonal relationships are characterized by dysfunctional emotional interactions and poor psychological adjustment, both of which contribute to relational instability (Mykhalchuk et al., 2025). Similarly, Çelik and Nazlı argued that psychological maladjustment and ineffective coping patterns reduce emotional adaptation and increase psychological distress in interpersonal relationships (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025). Therefore, maladaptive personality functioning appears to undermine the emotional foundation of marriage and contribute significantly to emotional divorce.

Another important finding of the present study showed that emotional maturity had a significant positive effect on emotional divorce. Considering the scoring direction of the emotional maturity scale, this finding suggests that greater emotional immaturity is associated with higher levels of emotional divorce. This result implies that individuals who experience difficulty regulating emotions, managing interpersonal tensions, and responding adaptively to marital

stress are more likely to encounter emotional disengagement and dissatisfaction within marriage. Emotionally immature individuals often demonstrate impulsive emotional reactions, low frustration tolerance, dependency, irritability, and weak emotional understanding, all of which may negatively influence marital interactions. This finding is in agreement with previous studies indicating that emotional immaturity contributes to marital instability, emotional burnout, and relational dissatisfaction (Gholami Gherashiran et al., 2022; Zakizadeh et al., 2024). Furthermore, Ali Cheshmeh Alaei et al. found that lower emotional maturity significantly predicts marital burnout and relational exhaustion among couples (Ali Cheshmeh Alaei et al., 2023). Similarly, Putri and Pertiwi reported that emotional maturity plays an essential role in marital readiness and adaptive relationship functioning (Putri & Pertiwi, 2024).

The findings may be interpreted through psychosocial development theory and emotion regulation perspectives. Emotional maturity enables individuals to regulate emotions effectively, communicate emotional needs constructively, and tolerate interpersonal frustrations within close relationships. In contrast, emotionally immature individuals often struggle with empathy, emotional awareness, and emotional self-control. Consequently, marital conflicts become more emotionally intense and difficult to resolve, which gradually damages emotional closeness and marital satisfaction. Agustina et al. emphasized that emotional immaturity increases ineffective conflict-management strategies and impulsive emotional reactions among married women (Agustina et al., 2024). Likewise, Motlagh demonstrated that emotional maturity is strongly influenced by family emotional atmosphere and perceived stress, suggesting that emotional functioning plays a central role in interpersonal adjustment (Motlagh, 2025). Purba and Kusumiati also found that emotional maturity predicts marriage readiness and adaptive emotional functioning in intimate relationships (Purba & Kusumiati, 2024). Therefore, emotional maturity appears to serve as a protective psychological factor that enhances emotional stability and strengthens relational functioning among couples.

The findings further revealed that marital intimacy had a negative and significant effect on emotional divorce. This result indicates that higher levels of emotional, psychological, and interpersonal intimacy between spouses are associated with lower levels of emotional divorce. Marital intimacy strengthens emotional bonding, mutual understanding, emotional support, and empathy between

couples and therefore acts as a protective factor against emotional disengagement. Couples who experience intimacy in their relationship are more likely to communicate openly, share emotional experiences, and provide psychological support for one another during stressful situations. This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting the central role of intimacy in marital adjustment and emotional stability (Jahanbakhshie et al., 2025; Pouragha & Sotoodeh Navroodi, 2023). Similarly, Besharat Qaramaleki et al. demonstrated that interventions aimed at increasing marital intimacy significantly improve marital adjustment and reduce emotional distress among emotionally divorced couples (Besharat Qaramaleki et al., 2024). Shafiq and Naz also emphasized that marital intimacy reflects emotional closeness, trust, and relational connection between spouses and plays a critical role in relationship quality (Shafiq & Naz, 2023).

This finding can be explained through communication theories and intimacy-based approaches to marital functioning. Emotional intimacy facilitates effective communication, emotional disclosure, empathy, and psychological security between spouses. When intimacy decreases, couples may experience loneliness, emotional coldness, and diminished emotional support despite physical proximity. Over time, this emotional distancing contributes to emotional divorce and relational dissatisfaction. Al-Shahrani and Hammad reported that emotional divorce is strongly associated with alexithymia and impaired emotional expression among married women, suggesting that reduced emotional intimacy contributes to psychological distress and relational dysfunction (Al-Shahrani & Hammad, 2023a, 2023b). Additionally, Al-Moselhy et al. identified emotional intimacy as one of the strongest protective factors against emotional divorce in marital relationships (Al-Moselhy et al., 2023). Therefore, marital intimacy appears to function as a critical emotional resource that preserves relational stability and emotional attachment between spouses.

Another important finding of the study was that marital intimacy significantly mediated the relationship between personality maladjustment and emotional divorce. This result suggests that maladaptive personality characteristics not only directly increase emotional divorce but also indirectly contribute to emotional divorce through reducing marital intimacy. In other words, individuals with maladaptive personality traits often experience difficulties in maintaining emotional closeness and constructive communication with their spouses, which subsequently

weakens marital intimacy and increases emotional distancing. This finding aligns with previous studies demonstrating that maladaptive personality functioning disrupts interpersonal adjustment and emotional communication in close relationships (Hashemi et al., 2024; Mohandes et al., 2023). Similarly, İyiyaydın and Sümer found that psychological adjustment and partner acceptance mediate the relationship between controlling interpersonal behaviors and marital adjustment (İyiyaydın & Sümer, 2023). Furthermore, Alhajaj emphasized that maladaptive personality patterns contribute to relational instability through impaired emotional interaction and interpersonal maladjustment (Alhajaj, 2025).

The mediating role of marital intimacy can be theoretically explained through emotional regulation and attachment frameworks. Individuals with maladaptive personality traits may demonstrate heightened emotional reactivity, distrust, emotional withdrawal, and ineffective conflict-management strategies that reduce emotional bonding within marriage. These dysfunctional interaction patterns gradually diminish intimacy, empathy, and emotional support between spouses. As intimacy declines, emotional loneliness and relational dissatisfaction increase, thereby facilitating emotional divorce. Davarinejad et al. highlighted that insecure attachment and poor emotional adjustment significantly influence relational maladjustment and emotional difficulties among divorced individuals (Davarinejad et al., 2022). Likewise, Mykhalchuk et al. emphasized that maladaptive interpersonal relationships are associated with poor emotional communication and reduced emotional closeness (Mykhalchuk et al., 2025). Therefore, marital intimacy serves as a central relational mechanism through which maladaptive personality traits influence emotional divorce.

The final major finding demonstrated that marital intimacy significantly mediated the relationship between emotional maturity and emotional divorce. This finding indicates that emotional immaturity contributes to emotional divorce indirectly by weakening marital intimacy. Emotionally immature individuals often struggle with emotional awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and adaptive communication, which negatively affects their ability to establish emotionally supportive and intimate marital relationships. Consequently, reduced emotional intimacy increases emotional distancing and emotional dissatisfaction between spouses. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that emotional maturity enhances relationship quality, emotional bonding, and

marital adjustment (Purba & Kusumiati, 2024; Putri & Pertiwi, 2024). Furthermore, Hedayatimoghadam and Bakhshipour found that emotional schema therapy improves emotional maturity and reduces emotional divorce among couples seeking divorce (Hedayatimoghadam & Bakhshipour, 2022). Likewise, Zakizadeh et al. reported that emotional maturity and dysfunctional attitudes are significantly associated with emotional divorce among married students (Zakizadeh et al., 2024).

This result may be interpreted through emotion regulation theory and interpersonal development approaches. Emotional maturity enables individuals to express emotions appropriately, tolerate frustration, understand their spouse's emotional needs, and resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively. These emotional capacities strengthen emotional intimacy and increase relationship stability. In contrast, emotionally immature individuals often display impulsivity, emotional instability, and poor emotional understanding, which reduce emotional security and intimacy within marriage. As emotional closeness deteriorates, couples become increasingly vulnerable to emotional disengagement and relational dissatisfaction. Hashemi et al. emphasized that emotional communication and psychological adjustment are among the most important factors associated with marital adjustment and relational quality (Hashemi et al., 2024). Similarly, Bazyari et al. demonstrated that interventions focused on improving emotional regulation and emotional connection significantly reduce relationship distress among emotionally divorced couples (Bazyari et al., 2024). Therefore, emotional maturity appears to strengthen marital intimacy and protect couples against emotional divorce through adaptive emotional functioning and effective interpersonal communication.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the present study demonstrated that personality maladjustment and emotional immaturity play significant roles in increasing emotional divorce among married students, both directly and indirectly through reducing marital intimacy. Marital intimacy emerged as a key protective and mediating factor that strengthens emotional bonding, emotional security, and relational stability between spouses. The results suggest that maladaptive personality traits and poor emotional regulation impair effective communication, empathy, and emotional closeness, thereby increasing emotional distancing and relational dissatisfaction. Conversely, emotional maturity

and strong marital intimacy contribute to healthier interpersonal functioning and greater marital adjustment. Overall, the present study highlights the importance of psychological and emotional factors in understanding emotional divorce and emphasizes the necessity of developing preventive and therapeutic interventions focused on improving emotional regulation, emotional maturity, personality adjustment, and marital intimacy in order to promote healthier and more stable marital relationships.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

The present study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a correlational cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish definitive causal relationships among the variables. Second, the statistical population consisted only of married students of Islamic Azad University, Khoy Branch; therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to other cultural groups, occupational populations, and age categories. Third, the study relied exclusively on self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by response bias, social desirability, and subjective perceptions. In addition, potentially influential variables such as socioeconomic status, attachment styles, family background, communication patterns, and mental health conditions were not directly controlled in the present study.

Future studies are recommended to employ longitudinal and experimental designs in order to examine causal relationships among personality maladjustment, emotional maturity, marital intimacy, and emotional divorce more accurately. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate these variables in different cultural contexts and among diverse demographic groups to enhance the generalizability of findings. Moreover, future research may benefit from incorporating additional variables such as attachment style, communication skills, psychological flexibility, coping strategies, and marital satisfaction into more comprehensive structural models. The use of mixed-method approaches combining quantitative and qualitative methods may also provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of emotionally divorced couples.

Based on the findings of the present study, it is recommended that counselors, psychologists, and family therapists develop intervention programs aimed at improving emotional regulation, emotional maturity, and adaptive interpersonal functioning among couples. Couple

therapy and family counseling centers may also benefit from implementing educational workshops focused on strengthening marital intimacy, empathy, communication skills, and conflict-resolution strategies. Universities and community mental health organizations should provide preventive psychological services for married students and young couples to reduce emotional distress and enhance relationship quality. Furthermore, interventions targeting maladaptive personality traits and emotional functioning may contribute significantly to reducing emotional divorce and promoting healthier and more stable marital relationships.

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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

S.M. contributed to the study design, sampling coordination, questionnaire administration, and initial manuscript preparation. R.M. supervised the research process, guided the SEM-based methodological framework, and critically revised the manuscript. M.H. conducted statistical analyses using SPSS and SmartPLS and contributed to interpretation of the mediation findings. A.Z. assisted in literature organization, data screening, and final

manuscript editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version for publication.

Declaration

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

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