



Predicting the Desire for Remarriage based on Self-Differentiation and Ego Strength Mediated by Irrational Beliefs in Divorced Youth

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study was to predict the desire for remarriage based on self-differentiation and ego strength mediated by irrational beliefs in divorced youth.

Methods and Materials: The research method was applied in terms of purpose, descriptive in nature, and correlational in type. The population included all divorced youth in District 6 of Tehran during the years 2022-2023. In this study, 400 individuals were selected through convenience sampling using the Kramers method (2006). For data collection, the Desire for Marriage Questionnaire: Pouretamad et al. (2004), the Differentiation of Self Inventory by Skowron and Friedlander (1998), the Ego Strength Scale (ESS), and the Irrational Beliefs Questionnaire by Jones (1986) were used. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and regression analysis).

Findings: The results indicated that based on self-differentiation, one can predict the desire for remarriage in divorced youth ($p < .01$). Similarly, based on ego strength, one can predict the desire for remarriage in divorced youth ($p < .01$). Additionally, based on irrational beliefs, one can predict the desire for remarriage in divorced youth ($p < .01$).

Conclusion: Therefore, it can be stated that excessive immutability and helplessness in the face of life's challenges among divorced youth can turn into a set of irrational beliefs, consequently reducing their inclination towards remarriage. Such that irrational beliefs about helplessness against change lead to a fear of marriage, preventing the individual from accepting the responsibility of such a commitment, thus impacting the desire for marriage in the long run.

Keywords: *Desire for remarriage, self-differentiation, ego strength, irrational beliefs.*

1. Introduction

Marriage is an important part of the social fabric of people's lives (Mahdinia et al., 2022; Nejatian et al., 2022; Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). A successful marriage is one

in which both parties fully respect each other's values and principles, consider each other's mutual interests (Cano et al., 2020), feel committed to each other, make decisions together, and cooperate with each other (Mahdinia et al.,

2022). In other words, a healthy marriage is characterized by the presence of several elements such as commitment, marital satisfaction, and the absence of elements like violence and infidelity (Farshchiyan Yazdi et al., 2021). It seems that both commitment to the spouse and commitment to the institution of marriage are important for a successful marriage (Haas & Levins, 2019). Successful marriage is a multifaceted process that requires psychological-emotional, economic, family, and socio-cultural compatibility (Akbarzadeh & Hashemianfar, 2022).

Marriage and family formation are among the oldest institutions in human life that have long been of interest to thinkers in the social sciences, ethical sciences, religious scholars, and other scientists (Hosseinian & Nooripour, 2019). It is evident that marriage, like any other social phenomenon, has norms that vary according to each society and also over time (Huang et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2022). Remarriage offers individuals who have lost their spouse a second chance to experience married life again. Remarriage can involve various circumstances. Couples who remarry in their late twenties, thirties, or early forties may each have one or more children from their first marriage with whom they live. Each party in a remarriage might have been single, divorced, or widowed before (Abdollahi et al., 2021; Ghanbari Barzain et al., 2023; Nejatian et al., 2022).

In Iran, remarriage rates are higher among men than women. However, women who decide to remarry know that choosing in remarriage is much harder than in a first marriage because if they face failure, it will leave damaging social and psychological effects. Starting a new life or remarriage, while having similarities with the first marriage, also has fundamental and qualitative differences. These differences manifest themselves in terms of concept, forms, barriers, success factors, individual situations, individual problems, etc., and lack of awareness of them can also pose challenges to remarriage (Ghanbari Barzain et al., 2023). With the definitions mentioned for marriage and remarriage, it must be said that an individual's personality and the way human relations are established, as well as internal psychological constructs like the level of differentiation and ego strength in individuals, can be factors in considering individuals' desire for marriage. Among the internal psychological issues widely researched and influenced by the dynamics and interactions between family members is self-differentiation. Self-differentiation is "the individual's ability to maintain individuality and independence" in close relationships with others and also represents the ability to balance reason and emotion (Rafezi & Saboori, 2022).

Self-differentiation, from Bowen's perspective, emphasizes early relationships in the family and considers their impact on subsequent relationships. The degree of self-differentiation emergence in each individual indicates the person's ability to separate cognitive processes from emotional (emotional) processes that the person experiences (Parsakia et al., 2023). Differentiation, in terms of internal psychological functioning, shows the ability to separate emotional processes from rational processes, and in terms of interpersonal functioning, the ability to experience intimacy with independence in interpersonal relationships and a proper balance between them (Hwidari et al., 2021; Kahrizi et al., 2021; Khosravi et al., 2021). It also examines the foundations of intimacy and mutual acceptance in marriage. It is expected that a man and woman with low levels of differentiation will have less emotional maturity and limited capacity for intimacy and unity at the time of marriage (Torkaman & Kashani, 2022; Vahidi et al., 2022). On the other hand, in differentiated marital systems, spouses allow each other to have a flexible role and a closer relationship, and tolerate differences in opinions and experience fewer emotional reactions, in other words, to have fewer problems in response to others' emotions, they maintain their composure. Another issue that can help maintain an individual's composure is ego strength (Arici-Ozcan et al., 2019).

Ego strength is a dynamic mechanism for coping with life stresses and is used to maintain psychological balance during difficult events (Mansouri & Besharat, 2019). Ego strength can mediate the relationship between adverse life conditions and psychological adjustment, emphasizing the need to increase optimism in stressful situations; therefore, ego strength may mediate the relationship between optimism and adaptation (Falavarjani & Yeh, 2019). Ego strength is described as an individual's ability to return to the previous state despite going through a stressful situation (Hosseini, 2019). Researchers have defined ego strength as an effective coping strategy that individuals, families, and communities can employ in stressful or high-risk situations (Arici-Ozcan et al., 2019). Ego strength is considered a "barrier" that protects individuals against the impacts and forces of adverse environmental effects. Although there is no universal definition (Abdi Zarrin & Nikkhhah Siruei, 2021; Basharpour & Estiri, 2024), ego strength considers an individual's capacity to overcome adversities that would otherwise be expected to have negative consequences (Akbari Ghamsari & Mehdizadeh Moghadam, 2019).

Among individual factors, irrational beliefs are considered important sources that significantly impact marriage (Falavarjani & Yeh, 2019). Individuals with high levels of resilience showed faster physiological and emotional recovery from life's stressful events (for example, heavy loads and stressful work conditions); among these, irrational beliefs can have negative effects on ego strength (Harker et al., 2016). One of the main areas of appearance and influence of irrational and ineffective thoughts is marital life (Gading, 2020). Although many experts believe that marriage is one of the universal foundations that significantly affect people's lives, it is not immune from various damages (Hosseini & Nooripour, 2019). Numerous studies focus on the relationship between such beliefs and other variables in marital relationships. For example, couples' ineffective communication beliefs are related to how they respond to conflict in marital relationships (Rafezi & Saboori, 2022). For instance, if maintaining their relationships involves not mentioning problems to avoid conflict, they will not find an appropriate solution to communication problems (Troy et al., 2023). According to the available evidence, the present research seeks to answer whether, based on self-differentiation and ego strength mediated by irrational beliefs in divorced youth, one can predict the desire for remarriage?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was descriptive-correlational in nature. The population included all divorced youth in District 6 of Tehran in the years 2022-2023. The sample size was determined using Kramer's (2006) method, considering 20 individuals per manifest variable, totaling 400 individuals for this study with 20 manifest variables. Convenience sampling was the method used for sample selection.

Necessary permissions were obtained from the university and the research deputy, and an introduction letter was issued for presentation to counseling centers. Informed consent forms were obtained in writing from the participants. Detailed explanations about the study's procedures were provided, allowing participants ample opportunity to ask questions.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. Emphasis was placed on the confidentiality of participant information and research findings, which were securely stored and archived by the project implementer.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Desire for Marriage

The Desire for Marriage Questionnaire, developed by Pouremad, Heidari, and Mazaheri in 2004, contains 24 items across four subscales, assessing attitudes toward marriage, readiness and desire for marriage, perceptions of marriage outcomes, and barriers to marriage. Its reliability was established through test-retest ($r = 0.77$) and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$). This questionnaire is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' Items 1, 2, 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 22, 23 are scored from 5 for 'strongly agree' to 1 for 'strongly disagree,' indicative of a lack of desire for marriage. Items 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21 are scored inversely. The total scores reflect the individual's overall desire for marriage (Abdollahi et al., 2021).

2.2.2. Differentiation of Self

The initial form of the Differentiation of Self Inventory was developed by Skowron and Friedlander in 1998 and revised in 2003 by Skowron and Smith. It consists of 45 items across four subscales evaluating emotional reactivity, I position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others. Scoring is based on a six-point Likert scale from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 6 ('strongly agree'), with the minimum and maximum possible scores being 45 and 276 respectively, indicating lower levels of differentiation at lower scores. Skowron and Smith (2003) reported overall inventory reliability of 0.92, and for the individual subscales, the reliabilities were 0.89 for emotional reactivity, 0.84 for emotional cutoff, 0.81 for I position, and 0.81 for fusion with others. In Iran, Yousefi (2006) confirmed these reliability coefficients. Aghajani, Shouqi, and Naeimi (2014) reported overall inventory reliability at 0.83 and test-retest reliability from 0.77 to 0.85 for the four components (Rabiei et al., 2023).

2.2.3. Ego Strength

The Ego Strength Scale (ESS), a 25-item measure derived from tools assessing my control, my resilience, defense mechanisms, and coping strategies, was standardized for measuring the ability to manage and navigate challenging life situations (Besharat, 2016). It assesses individual reactions to life's challenges on a five-point scale from 1 ('very little') to 5 ('very much'), across five subscales: my control, my resilience, mature defense mechanisms,

problem-focused coping strategies, and emotion-focused coping strategies. The minimum and maximum scores for each subscale range from 5 to 25, with total scores ranging from 25 to 125. Its psychometric properties were validated through research conducted between 2005 and 2014 in both clinical (n=372) and normative samples (n=1257) (Besharat, 2016). Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.73 to 0.93 across the subscales and overall scale reliability, indicating strong internal consistency (Basharpour & Estiri, 2024).

2.2.4. *Irrational Beliefs*

Developed by Jones in 1986, this test consists of 100 items assessing irrational beliefs. Each item is scored on a five-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree,' with higher scores indicating more irrational beliefs. Components include the need for approval, high self-expectations, tendency to blame, reactions to failure, emotional irresponsibility, anxiety with excessive worry, problem avoidance, dependence, helplessness towards

change, and perfectionism. Multiple studies have validated its validity, and its reliability was reported with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71, indicating satisfactory reliability. In the research by Saffari Nia et al. (2012), the reliability of this questionnaire was reported at 0.81 (Basharpour et al., 2019; Chan & Sun, 2021).

2.3. *Data analysis*

At the end of the study, participants were informed about the study results. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency percentage, mean, charts) and inferential statistics (correlation coefficient, multivariate regression analysis, path analysis).

3. **Findings and Results**

Statistical characteristics such as mean and standard deviation for the primary research variables of desire for remarriage, self-differentiation, ego strength, and irrational beliefs were calculated, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Statistical Indices of Primary Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Desire for remarriage	77.6	23.2
Self-differentiation	84.3	24.4
Ego strength	81.2	26.1
Irrational beliefs	72.7	19.1

The results in Table 1 indicate that the overall mean scores for the desire for remarriage is 77.6, self-

differentiation is 84.3, ego strength is 81.2, and irrational beliefs are 72.7.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix between Variables of the Current Hypothesis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Feedback on marriage	1	.490**	-.443**	.112	.218**	.119	.505**
2. Readiness for marriage	-.490**	1	.454**	.105	.577**	.041	.647**
3. Attitude to consequences	-.443**	.454**	1	.228**	.327**	.462**	.421**
4. Marriage barriers	-.112	-.105	.228**	1	.072	.176*	.008
5. Self-differentiation	-.218**	.577**	.327**	.072	1	.129	.295**
6. Ego strength	-.119	.041	.462**	.176*	.129	1	.168*
7. Irrational beliefs	-.505**	.647**	.421**	.008	.295**	.168*	1

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

As indicated in Table 2, all correlation coefficients between the variables (dimensions and subscales of the desire for, self-differentiation, ego strength, and irrational beliefs) are positive and significant at the .05 level. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to

concurrently test the presumed relationship constructs in the current hypothesis. Table 3 shows the structural model, paths, and their standardizations in the final hypothesis model.

Table 3

Structural Model, Paths, and Their Standardizations in the Current Hypothesis

From Variable	Path to Variable	β	p-Value
Feedback on marriage	Ego strength	.18	.005
Readiness for marriage	Ego strength	.16	.005
Attitude to marriage consequences	Ego strength	.04	.005
Marriage barriers	Ego strength	.14	.005
Feedback on marriage	Self-differentiation	.17	.005
Readiness for marriage	Self-differentiation	.16	.005
Attitude to marriage consequences	Self-differentiation	.11	.005
Marriage barriers	Self-differentiation	.41	.005
Feedback on marriage	Irrational beliefs	.28	.005
Readiness for marriage	Irrational beliefs	.19	.005
Attitude to marriage consequences	Irrational beliefs	.21	.005
Marriage barriers	Irrational beliefs	.33	.005
Irrational beliefs	Ego strength	.22	.005
Irrational beliefs	Self-differentiation	.24	.005

Table 3 data indicate that all direct paths in the final model are significant, such that 18% of ego strength is influenced by feedback on marriage, 16% by readiness for marriage, 4% by attitudes toward marriage consequences, and 14% by marriage barriers. Additionally, 17% of self-differentiation is influenced by feedback on marriage, 16% by readiness for marriage, 11% by attitudes toward marriage consequences, and 41% by marriage barriers. Furthermore, 28% of irrational beliefs stem from feedback on marriage,

19% from readiness for marriage, 21% from attitudes toward marriage consequences, 33% from marriage barriers, 22% of ego strength from irrational beliefs, and 24% of self-differentiation from irrational beliefs.

The results of Table 3 display and analyze other hypotheses of the research with direct effect coefficients. Table 4 shows the results obtained from the bootstrap method in the macro program for mediating relationships.

Table 4

Regression Model Summary for Self-Differentiation

Model	R	R2	Adjusted R2	SE	F	p
Intercept	0.433	0.224	0.207	0.9	27.8	<0.001

Table 5

Single Variable Regression Results and Regression Equation for Self-differentiation

Variable	Beta Coefficient	Standard Error	B Coefficient	t-value	Significance Level
Constant		0.1	1.4	13.7	<0.001
Self-differentiation	0.410	0.03	0.234	23.8	<0.001

The correlation coefficient in Table 4 shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between the desire for remarriage and self-differentiation ($p < .01$, $r = .433$). Additionally, the R2 value indicates that 22.4% of the variance in the desire for remarriage is related to self-differentiation.

The single variable regression results in Table 5 for predicting the desire for remarriage based on self-differentiation indicate a t-value of 23.8 ($p < .01$), thus showing that self-differentiation has a predictive power for the desire to remarry.

Table 6

Regression Model Summary for Ego Strength

Model	R	R2	Adjusted R2	SE	F	p
Intercept	0.271	0.133	0.247	0.6	18.2	<0.001

Table 7

Single Variable Regression Results and Regression Equation for Ego Strength

Variable	Beta Coefficient	Standard Error	B Coefficient	t-value	Significance Level
Constant		0.1	0.6	8.4	<0.001
Ego strength	0.211	0.2	0.174	12.1	<0.001

The correlation coefficient in Table 6 shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between the desire for remarriage and ego strength ($p < .01$, $r = .271$). Also, the R2 value indicates that 13.3% of the variance in the desire for remarriage is related to ego strength.

The single variable regression results in Table 7 for predicting the desire for remarriage based on ego strength show a t-value of 12.1 ($p < .01$), thereby indicating that ego strength has predictive power for the desire to remarry.

Table 8

Regression Model Summary for Irrational Beliefs

Model	R	R2	Adjusted R2	SE	F	p
Intercept	-0.482	-0.359	-0.287	0.8	34.3	<0.001

Table 9

Single Variable Regression Results and Regression Equation for Irrational Beliefs

Variable	Beta Coefficient	Standard Error	B Coefficient	t-value	Significance Level
Constant		0.1	0.9	10.1	<0.001
Irrational beliefs	-0.417	-0.04	-0.269	-28.2	<0.001

The correlation coefficient in Table 8 indicates that there is a significant negative relationship between the desire for remarriage and irrational beliefs ($p < .01$, $r = -.482$). Additionally, the R2 value shows that 35.9% of the variance in the desire for remarriage is related to irrational beliefs.

The single variable regression results in Table 9 for predicting the desire for remarriage based on irrational beliefs show a t-value of -28.2 ($p < .01$). This indicates that irrational beliefs have a predictive power for the desire to remarry.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In a comparative analysis concerning the hypothesis, namely the mediating role of irrational beliefs in predicting the desire for remarriage based on self-differentiation and ego strength, the findings of this research align with the results prior researchers (Abbaspour et al., 2021).

Khojesteher Mehr, Mohammadi, and Abbas Pour (2020) examined the theory of the formation process of attitudes towards marriage. Their study yielded a "paradigmatic pattern of relative change in attitudes towards marriage," indicating that changes in attitudes towards marriage, as a key motivating factor for youth to marry, occur through a general and systemic approach. The most significant impact on traditional marriage attitudes was religiosity, and for modern marriage attitudes, it was opportunity costs. The respondents primarily held traditional views on marriage. Furthermore, the results showed that youth with divorced parents did not have a negative attitude towards marriage. Overall, both genders indicated their intention to marry someday, but the intent was significantly stronger among women, with slight differences in attitudes between the two groups.

The results demonstrated that self-differentiation can predict the desire for remarriage. In comparative analysis regarding the hypothesis of predicting the desire for

remarriage based on self-differentiation, the findings of this research are consistent with prior research (Abdollahi et al., 2021; Ghanbari Barzain et al., 2023; Nejatian et al., 2022; Saqgezi & YazdaniEsfidvajani, 2020)

In interpreting these findings, it can be stated that in forming marital life, marital dissatisfaction, and the role of the family as the smallest social unit with its various functions can be very important and influential, both positively (creating a center of tranquility) and negatively (creating social harm). Families can provide suitable behavioral models and thereby help individuals to develop a logical attitude towards marriage and acquire realistic expectations about it. Self-differentiation in the context of marriage and family refers to an individual's ability to be independent from their family of origin. Predictors of the level of self-differentiation include emotional reactivity, which pertains to excessive sensitivity in responding to environmental stimuli; I position, which relates to a clear stance on defending one's beliefs under pressure to act differently; emotional cutoff, which refers to the fear of intimacy and feeling vulnerable in relationships; and fusion with others, which involves intense identification with others. Based on the results obtained, there is a significant relationship between the components of orientation and desire for marriage with self-differentiation in divorced youth.

The results also showed that ego strength can predict the desire for remarriage. Given the evidence, the research hypothesis is confirmed. The research findings are consistent with prior studies (Abdi Zarrin & Nikkhah Siruei, 2021; Basharpour & Estiri, 2024; Ghanbari Barzain et al., 2023; Mansouri & Besharat, 2019). Ego strength represents an internal commitment by an individual to adequately perform all duties incumbent upon them, stemming from within and enhancing morale and resilience against life's challenges, significantly aiding the desire for marriage among divorced youth.

In comparative analysis regarding the hypothesis of predicting the desire for remarriage based on irrational beliefs, the findings of this research are consistent with prior studies (Afsahi & Kachooei, 2020; Basharpour et al., 2019; Chan & Sun, 2021; Golestani et al., 2022; Karamiboldaji et al., 2021; Khorsandpour et al., 2021; Marjan & Sara, 2019; Mikaeili & Samadifard, 2021; Nili & Kazemi, 2019; Rabiei et al., 2023; Sabet et al., 2023; Saleh Abadi & Naemi, 2020; Sheykh et al., 2022).

In interpreting the results of this hypothesis, it can be stated that excessive immutability and helplessness in the

face of life's challenges among divorced youth can turn into a set of irrational beliefs, consequently reducing their inclination towards remarriage. Such that irrational beliefs about helplessness against change lead to a fear of marriage, preventing the individual from accepting the responsibility of such a commitment, thus impacting the desire for marriage in the long run.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This research focused on a specific demographic of divorced youth in District 6 of Tehran, which is a limitation of this study and requires caution in generalizing the results to divorced youth in other areas and cities. Another limitation is the reliance on self-report questionnaires without the use of other methods like interviews. It is recommended that future research should expand the scope of this investigation and consider including a broader array of variables in the conceptual model to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the relationships between variables. Given the findings in the field of marriage and family, it is suggested that psychologists and family counselors utilize these findings in clinical interventions related to marriage and family. It is recommended that university officials and youth affair managers encourage marriage and family formation among divorced youth by strengthening these psychological factors (ego strength, self-differentiation) and teaching strategies to combat irrational beliefs among this population. Considering the findings of this research and knowing that the study variables play an important role in addressing the psychological and psychological issues of divorced youth, appropriate educational programs can be planned to enhance their life satisfaction.

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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 equally contributed in this article.

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