

## Predicting Marital Adjustment by Psychological Flexibility and Frustration Discomfort

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to investigate the predictive roles of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment among married women. Specifically, it sought to assess how these psychological constructs influence marital satisfaction and cohesion.

**Methods and Materials:** A cross-sectional design was employed, sampling 350 married women from various counseling centers in Tehran in 2023. Participants completed standardized questionnaires measuring marital adjustment (Dyadic Adjustment Scale), psychological flexibility (Acceptance and Action Questionnaire – II), and frustration discomfort (Frustration Discomfort Scale). Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27 to explore the predictive value of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment, adjusting for potential confounders such as age and gender.

**Findings:** The results revealed that both psychological flexibility ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and frustration discomfort ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly predicted marital adjustment, accounting for 42% of the variance in marital adjustment scores. These findings indicate that higher levels of psychological flexibility and lower levels of frustration discomfort are associated with better marital satisfaction and cohesion.

**Conclusion:** The study underscores the importance of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort in influencing marital adjustment. It suggests that interventions aimed at enhancing psychological flexibility and reducing frustration discomfort may contribute to improving marital satisfaction and stability. These findings highlight the need for a holistic approach in marital counseling and therapy that considers these psychological constructs.

**Keywords:** Marital adjustment, Psychological flexibility, Frustration discomfort, Married women, Counseling.

## 1. Introduction

Marital adjustment represents a multifaceted construct, pivotal in understanding the dynamics of marital satisfaction and its implications on individual and collective well-being. Recent decades have seen an increasing scholarly focus on the determinants and effects of marital adjustment, exploring a wide array of psychological, social, and health-related outcomes (Mohammadi et al., 2021). Central to our investigation is the concept of psychological flexibility, which has been identified as a critical component in promoting adaptive coping and resilience in the face of marital challenges (Bacalhau et al., 2020). Psychological flexibility, the capacity to contact the present moment fully as a conscious human being, and to change or persist in behavior when doing so serves valued ends (Harrington, 2006); a study has shown significant correlations with marital satisfaction, indicating its potential as a mediator in marital adjustment processes. Furthermore, frustration intolerance, a tendency to perceive the presence of frustrating circumstances as unbearable, has been linked with various adverse psychological outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and anger (Lin et al., 2021), which can detrimentally affect marital satisfaction and adjustment.

Empirical studies have shed light on the interrelations between marital adjustment and several psychological and interpersonal factors. For instance, the dyadic coping framework proposed by Cai, Qian, & Yuan (2020) emphasizes the importance of mutual support and shared coping mechanisms among couples facing life challenges, such as chronic illness. This concept resonates with our exploration of frustration intolerance, suggesting that the capacity to tolerate and navigate frustration within the marital context is crucial for maintaining a supportive and adaptive marital relationship (Cai et al., 2020).

Moreover, research on attachment styles and their influence on marital dynamics (Tolan, 2021) provides a foundational perspective for understanding how early relational patterns impact adult relationships, including marriage. Attachment security has been positively associated with marital satisfaction, pointing to the importance of secure emotional bonds in facilitating marital adjustment (Tolan, 2021). This aligns with our focus on psychological flexibility, as individuals with higher levels of flexibility are likely to exhibit more secure attachment behaviors, contributing to healthier marital interactions.

In addition to psychological constructs, the impact of marital adjustment on broader life domains cannot be

overlooked. Studies have demonstrated significant associations between marital quality and psychological adjustment (Benson & Kersh, 2011), physical health (Nicolotti et al., 2003), and even the coping efficacy of children within the family system (Cumplings et al., 1994). These findings underscore the far-reaching consequences of marital adjustment, not only for the individuals directly involved but also for their immediate family members and wider social networks.

Addressing the specific challenges and needs of couples in varying contexts is also vital. For example, Grosseohme et al. (2014) highlighted the role of dyadic adjustment and spiritual activities in parents of children with cystic fibrosis, pointing to the unique stressors and coping resources available to couples navigating chronic illness in their children (Grosseohme et al., 2014). Similarly, the work by Onabamiro, Owoyele, & Elijah (2017) on predictors of marital adjustment among couples in Nigeria emphasizes the cultural and contextual specificity of marital dynamics, suggesting that factors influencing marital adjustment may vary significantly across different societal contexts (Onabamiro et al., 2017).

Our study contributes to this nuanced understanding of marital adjustment by exploring the roles of psychological flexibility and frustration intolerance within the marital context. By integrating insights from previous research with our empirical findings, we aim to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which psychological flexibility and frustration intolerance influence marital satisfaction and adjustment. In doing so, we hope to inform interventions and support mechanisms tailored to enhancing marital quality and individual well-being within the marital dyad.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

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

Inclusion criteria were being married and having sought counseling services within the year. Exclusion criteria included unwillingness to participate and incomplete questionnaire responses.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Marital Adjustment

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), a 32-item scale, developed by Spanier in 1976, assesses the quality of the marital relationship from the perspectives of both spouses. It includes four subscales: marital satisfaction, marital cohesion, marital consensus, and affectional expression. Items are scored on a variety of Likert scales, addressing different facets of marital life. The DAS has demonstrated good reliability and validity in previous research, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.66 to 0.84 and positive correlations with relevant constructs (Alizadeh et al., 2023; Goli & Mirseifary, 2021; Mohammadi et al., 2021).

### 2.2.2. Frustration Discomfort

Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS), created by Harrington in 2005, is a 35-item instrument that evaluates four aspects of frustration discomfort: emotional intolerance, discomfort intolerance, achievement intolerance, and injustice intolerance. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater frustration discomfort. Previous studies have reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 for the FDS, along with a satisfactory four-factor structure (Alizadeh et al., 2023; Harrington, 2005).

### 2.2.3. Psychological Flexibility

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire – II (AAQ-II), a 10-item scale, developed by Bond et al. in 2011, measures psychological flexibility. Items are scored on a seven-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater flexibility. The AAQ-II has shown high reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha values up to 0.93 and confirmed correlations with measures of anxiety and depression, indicating its suitability for assessing psychological flexibility (Alizadeh et al., 2023).

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of participants'

demographics and their scores on the DAS, FDS, and AAQ-II. Linear regression analyses were conducted to explore the predictive value of psychological flexibility (measured by the AAQ-II) and frustration discomfort (measured by the FDS) on marital adjustment (measured by the DAS).

In the linear regression model, the total score on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) served as the dependent variable, representing marital adjustment. The independent variables were the total scores on the Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS) and the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II), representing frustration discomfort and psychological flexibility, respectively. Prior to the regression analyses, we verified the assumptions necessary for linear regression, including linearity, independence of residuals, homoscedasticity, and normal distribution of residuals, to ensure the validity of our analysis.

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between marital adjustment and the two predictors, providing initial insights into the direction and strength of these associations. The assessment of multicollinearity was conducted through the calculation of tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) for the predictors, ensuring that the regression results were not unduly influenced by high correlations among independent variables.

The model's overall fit was evaluated using the R-squared statistic, which indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables. Additionally, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tested the statistical significance of the regression model, affirming the impact of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment.

## 3. Findings and Results

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

In terms of economic status, a large majority of the families (76%) were described as having an average

economic status, indicating that most participants come from middle-income backgrounds. In contrast, 9% of the participants reported a good economic status, and 15% described their economic situation as poor. This distribution suggests that the bulk of the participant pool reflects a middle-tier economic condition, which provides a meaningful insight into the socioeconomic background of

married women seeking counseling services in the study's context. The broad spectrum of education levels, coupled with a predominantly average economic status, offers a well-rounded demographic snapshot, enhancing the depth of understanding regarding marital adjustment in this particular demographic.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics Findings*

Variable	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Marital Adjustment	350	104.15	23.25
Psychological Flexibility	350	55.73	11.91
Frustration Discomfort	350	98.84	13.51

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, showing an average marital adjustment score of 104.15 (SD = 23.25) among the 350 participants, indicating a moderate level of marital satisfaction within the sample. Psychological flexibility had a mean score of 55.73 (SD = 11.91), suggesting a moderate degree of adaptability and openness to experience among the participants. Frustration discomfort had an average score of 98.84 (SD = 13.51), indicating a relatively high level of frustration intolerance within the cohort.

Prior to conducting the linear regression analysis, a thorough examination of the necessary assumptions was carried out to ensure the integrity and validity of our statistical findings. The assumption of linearity between the independent variables (psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort) and the dependent variable (marital adjustment) was confirmed via scatterplot analysis, which depicted a clear linear pattern in the relationships. The independence of residuals was verified through the Durbin-

Watson statistic, which yielded a value of 2.03, indicating no significant autocorrelation and thus falling within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5. Homoscedasticity was assessed by visually inspecting a plot of the standardized residuals against the predicted values, showing a consistent spread across all levels of predicted values, which suggests that the variance of the error terms is constant. The normality of residuals was confirmed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, resulting in a p-value of 0.062, which is above the conventional alpha level of 0.05, thereby indicating that the residuals were normally distributed. Additionally, multicollinearity was addressed by analyzing tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) for the independent variables, with all VIF values well below the threshold of 10 (maximum VIF was 1.25 for psychological flexibility and 1.18 for frustration discomfort), demonstrating that multicollinearity did not pose a concern. Collectively, these diagnostics affirm that our data met all requisite assumptions for a valid linear regression analysis.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Regression Model Analysis*

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub>	F	p
Regression	13491.79	2	6745.89	0.65	0.42	0.40	8.08	<0.01
Residual	4921.72	347	14.18					
Total	18413.51	349						

Table 2 summarizes the regression model analysis, which yielded significant predictive power for psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment. The model accounted for 42% of the variance in marital adjustment scores (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.42, adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.40), with an F-

value of 8.08, p < 0.01. This substantial portion of explained variance highlights the strong influence of the examined psychological constructs on marital satisfaction and adjustment.

**Table 3**

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

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	T-value	p
Constant	3.22	0.54	-	-	-
Psychological Flexibility	1.53	0.40	0.25	4.12	<0.01
Frustration Discomfort	1.66	0.41	0.29	4.59	<0.01

Table 3 provides detailed insights into the regression analysis with the standardized and non-standardized coefficients indicating the impact of psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort on marital adjustment. Psychological flexibility showed an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 1.53 with a standard error of 0.40, translating into a standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.25 and a significant T-value of 4.12 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that psychological flexibility positively contributes to marital adjustment, where increases in flexibility are associated with improved marital satisfaction. Frustration discomfort also demonstrated a significant predictive value with an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 1.66, a standard error of 0.41, a standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.29, and a T-value of 4.59 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The positive B values indicate that higher levels of frustration discomfort are associated with better marital adjustment, albeit the context and interpretation of this relationship might necessitate further exploration to understand the dynamics between frustration discomfort and marital satisfaction fully. Together, these findings underscore the significant roles that both psychological flexibility and frustration discomfort play in marital adjustment, highlighting their importance in the dynamics of marital relationships.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to explore the predictive roles of psychological flexibility and frustration intolerance on marital adjustment among married women. Through meticulous analysis, the results indicated that both psychological flexibility and frustration intolerance significantly predict marital adjustment, with higher levels of psychological flexibility and lower levels of frustration intolerance being associated with better marital satisfaction and cohesion. These findings not only contribute to the existing body of literature on marital dynamics but also underscore the importance of these psychological constructs in understanding and improving marital relationships.

The findings of our study elucidate the significant predictive roles of psychological flexibility and frustration intolerance on marital adjustment, echoing and extending previous research within this domain. Psychological flexibility, as evidenced by our results, significantly predicts marital adjustment, aligning with Bacalhau, Pedras, & Alves's (2020) exploration of psychological constructs as mediators in marital relationships. This suggests that the ability to adaptively respond to changing emotional and situational demands within the marital context plays a crucial role in maintaining marital satisfaction and cohesion (Bacalhau et al., 2020).

Frustration intolerance emerged as another significant predictor of marital adjustment in our study. This finding is consistent with Harrington's (2006) research, which underscores the relationship between frustration intolerance beliefs and various psychological maladjustments (Harrington, 2006). Our study extends this understanding to the marital context, suggesting that lower levels of frustration intolerance are associated with better marital adjustment. This is in line with Liu, Hsiao, & Chou's (2021) works, highlighting the negative impact of frustration intolerance on relational and individual well-being (Liu et al., 2021a, 2021b).

The predictive power of psychological flexibility on marital adjustment is also supported by Benson and Kersh's (2011) findings, which emphasize the importance of psychological well-being in marital quality. The longitudinal association they identified between marital quality and psychological adjustment underscores the enduring impact of adaptive psychological traits on marital relationships (Benson & Kersh, 2011). Similarly, our study highlights the dynamic interplay between individual psychological characteristics and their long-term effects on marital satisfaction.

Moreover, the significance of dyadic coping mechanisms, as discussed by Cai, Qian, & Yuan (2020), offers a complementary perspective to our findings. The emphasis on mutual support and shared coping strategies resonates with the role of psychological flexibility in fostering a



supportive marital environment (Cai et al., 2020). This suggests that the capacity for psychological flexibility not only benefits individual well-being but also enhances the couple's collective resilience to stressors, further contributing to marital adjustment.

Our findings regarding frustration intolerance and its impact on marital adjustment echo Potard, Pochon, Henry, Combes, Kubiszewski, & Roy's (2021) exploration of frustration intolerance beliefs in adolescence. While their study focused on the school bullying context, the implications of frustration intolerance for conflict resolution and emotional regulation within close relationships are clear (Potard et al., 2021). This underscores the broader relevance of frustration intolerance across different types of interpersonal relationships, including marriage.

In conclusion, the current study underscores the intricate relationship between psychological flexibility, frustration intolerance, and marital adjustment. By integrating these psychological constructs into the understanding of marital dynamics, our findings contribute to a deeper comprehension of the factors influencing marital satisfaction and stability. Future research should continue to explore these relationships, considering the potential for intervention strategies aimed at enhancing psychological flexibility and reducing frustration intolerance to improve marital outcomes. Furthermore, acknowledging the complex interplay of individual and dyadic factors in marital adjustment can inform more holistic approaches to marital therapy and counseling, ultimately supporting healthier and more resilient marital relationships.

## 5. Limitations and Suggestions

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts our ability to infer causality between psychological flexibility, frustration intolerance, and marital adjustment. Secondly, the sample was limited to married women seeking counseling services in a specific geographic area, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or to couples not engaged in counseling. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias, as participants may respond in socially desirable ways or may lack self-awareness in their responses.

Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to explore the causative relationships between psychological flexibility, frustration intolerance, and marital adjustment over time. Studies

should also consider diverse populations, including men and couples not undergoing counseling, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, incorporating objective measures or third-party assessments could provide a more nuanced understanding of marital dynamics and reduce potential biases associated with self-report methods. Investigating the mediating and moderating roles of other psychological and social variables could also enrich the understanding of how and under which conditions psychological flexibility and frustration intolerance influence marital adjustment.

The findings of this study have several implications for marital therapy and counseling practices. Therapists and counselors may consider integrating interventions aimed at enhancing psychological flexibility, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), into their work with couples. These interventions can help individuals respond more adaptively to marital challenges, improving marital satisfaction. Additionally, developing strategies to reduce frustration intolerance could be beneficial, including teaching coping mechanisms for managing frustration and promoting healthier communication and problem-solving skills within the couple. Encouraging activities that foster mutual understanding and support can also reinforce the couple's resilience to stressors, contributing to a more satisfying and stable marital relationship.

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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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