

Compilation of the structural model of emotional divorce based on the dark triple traits of personality and conflict resolution styles

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present research was conducted in order to model structural equations of emotional divorce based on dark personality traits and conflict resolution styles.

Methods and Materials: The study used descriptive-correlational method based on structural equations. The statistical population of this research consisted of all married women in the age group of 25-50 years of Tehran Azad University, Yadgar Imam (RA), Abol Fattouh Razi and North Tehran units in the first half of 2021, which was available online through the sampling method. (due to the spread of the corona virus) were chosen. The research tools were Gottman's (1995) emotional divorce questionnaire, Johnson and Webster's (2010) dark personality triangle, and Rahim's (1983) conflict resolution styles. Analyzes were done using SPSS and AMOS software.

Findings: The results showed that there is a significant negative and positive relationship between constructive conflict resolution style ($\beta=0.188$) and non-constructive conflict resolution style ($\beta=0.170$) with emotional divorce, respectively ($p<0.01$). A significant positive relationship is observed between Machiavellianism trait and emotional divorce ($\beta=0.173$). Also, a significant positive relationship was found between antisocial trait ($\beta=-0.140$) and narcissism ($\beta=-0.153$) with emotional divorce ($p<0.01$).

Conclusion: Dark traits and constructive conflict resolution styles can predict emotional divorce in addition to having a direct effect on emotional divorce.

Keywords: Emotional divorce, dark personality traits, conflict resolution styles.

1. Introduction

In general, divorce is one of the most important factors that disrupts the path of life (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020). Divorce and separation have a lot of negative effects on couples, both psychologically and physically (Kanter, Proulx, & Monk, 2019). Sometimes couples continue their

lives completely apart without feelings and emotions towards each other (Goudarzi et al., 2022). Emotional divorce is a situation that preserves the appearance of the family structure but the family is empty from the inside. This phenomenon has unknown aspects that must be studied and understood in detail (Khosravi et al., 2021). Meanwhile,

social and cultural factors play a significant role in married life. Studies show that personality traits play a key role in the stability of married life (Yu et al., 2020). Recently, psychological research has drawn attention to the structure of dark personality in psychological studies (He et al., 2018). Three traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy have been proposed as dark personality traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits are defined as a tendency to deceitful behavior (Machiavellianism), a sense of entitlement (narcissism) and impulsiveness (psychopathy) (Womick, Foltz, & King, 2019). These three traits are based on emotional coldness (Pan et al., 2018).

Whether a relationship is healthy or unhealthy does not depend on the amount of conflict between the people involved, but rather on how the conflict resolution is distributed (Navabinejad, Rostami, & Parsakia, 2023). Conflict resolution skills are a key indicator in successful romantic relationships, and people with strong conflict resolution skills increase the length of their relationship (Mirzaie et al., 2018). In general, conflict resolution styles are divided into two types: constructive and non-constructive. The constructive style is based on compromise suitable, positive solutions, and the non-constructive style is based on threats and authoritarian and inappropriate solutions (Li et al., 2018). Conflict is usually considered negative; however, it can positively contribute to both the quality of relationships and personal growth, and this is the time to solve conflicts with correct and efficient methods (Darbani & Parsakia, 2022). The ability to manage and resolve conflicts constructively can form a strong relationship in a couple's relationship and help couples create an intimate and close relationship (Fallahian, Mikaeli, & Yousefi Moridani, 2019). Therefore, couples with a high ability to resolve conflict experience less coldness of relationship and emotional divorce.

On the one hand, the present research aims to investigate the following question with the following conceptual model design, considering the role of personality traits in the stability of joint life and conflict resolution styles in this field. Does the structural model of emotional divorce based on the dark trinity of personality and conflict resolution styles fit well with the mediation of marital conflicts?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The study used a descriptive-correlational method based on structural equations. The current research is quantitative

and cross-sectional in terms of execution time. The statistical population studied were married female students aged 25 to 50 studying in 2021 at Azad University of Tehran province with postgraduate education and above. According to the rule of Stevens (2012) which suggests selecting at least 15 to 20 items for each measured variable or indicator (Stevens, 2012), since there are 12 measurement variables in the presented model, and due to the dropout of some questionnaires, the sample size was determined to be 250 people. The sampling method was available. Thus, after declaring the willingness to cooperate, 463 questionnaires were collected online. From this number, the questionnaires that obtained the minimum score of 8 from the emotional divorce questionnaire were included in the research process. After checking due to the dropping of some questionnaires, the data from 239 questionnaires were finally analyzed. Inclusion criteria include 1. Married female students in Tehran Azad Universities 2. Being a resident of Tehran 3. Age group 25 to 50 years old 4. Obtaining a score above 8 on the Gottman Emotional Divorce Questionnaire. The exclusion criterion was the incomplete completion of the questionnaire.

Procedure due to the spread of Corona and the impossibility of accessing the samples in person, the questionnaires were designed as a press line. Then, the link of the questionnaires was placed on the channel of the students of Yadgar-e-Imam (RA), Abul Fattouh and North Tehran units, and eligible students (married women aged 25-50) were requested to complete it. The questionnaires were completely anonymous and the subjects were assured that their information would remain confidential.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Emotional Divorce

Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale (1995) is a 24-question scale that participants answer by choosing yes or no options. The items of this questionnaire often measure the person's feelings about the marital relationship and the level of intimacy between him and his wife. In this scale, zero points are given to no answers, and one point is given to yes answers, and finally, the higher the score of the people, the higher the emotional divorce rate in the marital relationship. The cut-off point of this questionnaire is 8, and if the score is higher than that, a person is at risk of emotional divorce and it is recommended to seek professional help (Gottman, Gottman, & Silver, 1995). The reliability and validity of this scale has been investigated and confirmed in several studies

(Khosravi et al., 2021; Narimani, Rahimi, & Sedaghat, 2021).

2.2.2. *Dark Triad Personality Traits*

The Dark Triad Scale was created by Johnson and Webster (2010) in order to prepare a short version to measure dark personality traits and has 12 items. This questionnaire includes three sub-components: narcissism (4 items), Machiavelli (4 items) and antisocial (4 items). This questionnaire is measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Its validity and reliability have been confirmed in many studies (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Yu et al., 2020).

2.2.3. *Conflict Resolution Styles*

Conflict resolution styles questionnaire was created by Rahim (1983) to measure conflict resolution styles. In this questionnaire, 5 conflict resolution styles were identified, which are: integration style (7 statements), dominant style (6 statements), obliging style (5 statements), compromise style (6 statements) and avoidant style (4 statements). The items of this scale are scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability and validity of this tool has been confirmed by many researchers (Henning, 2003; Rahim, 1983; Rahim & Magner, 1994).

2.3. *Data analysis*

In order to analyze the data, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used, including central tendency indices, dispersion, skewness and elongation indices and structural equation modeling through SPSS26 and AMOS24 software. In order to check the extent of the data collected with the assumed research model, (χ^2), (χ^2/df), (CFI), (GFI), (AGFI), (IFI) and (RMSEA) indices were checked. The significance level of statistical tests was considered 0.05.

3. Findings and Results

The mean age of the participants in this research was 36.39 years with a standard deviation of 10.22. The minimum age was 25 and the maximum age was 50.

In the Table 1, the descriptive indices of the main research variables are presented along with the degree of their relationship with each other through the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Table 1

Results of Pearson correlation test and descriptive statistics (N=293)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Dark Triad	27.306	6.688	1		
2. Constructive	47.13	6.14	-0.191**	1	
3. Non-constructive	50.40	5.82	0.189**	0.204**	1
4. Emotional Divorce	12.703	4.875	0.216**	-0.401**	0.141*

**p<0.01

The data in the above table shows that the mean score of emotional divorce equals 12.70, with a standard deviation of 4.87. Regarding conflict resolution styles, the mean for constructive style is (13/47) and for non-constructive conflict resolution style is (40/50). The mean of all personality traits is 27.30, with a standard deviation of 6.68. According to the data in the Table 1, the mean of marital conflicts in the research sample is 88.94, and the dispersion of the variable according to its standard deviation is 20.29. Based on the correlation coefficients reported in Table 1, all independent variables (dark personality traits and constructive and non-constructive conflict styles) have a significant correlation coefficient at the level of 0.01, with the main dependent variable, emotional divorce ($p < 0.01$). Constructive conflict style has a significant negative relationship with emotional divorce, but non-constructive styles, dark personality traits, and marital conflicts have a positive and significant relationship with emotional divorce.

Also, the results showed that the skewness and kurtosis indices are in the range between +2 and -2; this shows that the distribution of the variables is normal. If the skewness and kurtosis indices are in the range of +2 to -2, it indicates the normality of the distribution of scores. Mahalanobis index was used to check the assumption of multivariate normality. The minimum and maximum of this index was between 0.85 and 17.48, and considering that the maximum observed value was smaller than the critical value of this index with four predictive variables (18.47), the assumption of multivariate normality was confirmed. Also, the findings shows that the predictor variables tolerance coefficient index value is more than 0.1, and the value of their variance inflation factor is less than 10. These results show that the assumption of collinearity in the data is valid.

After confirming the existence of assumptions, in order to answer the main question of the research, is the structural model of emotional divorce based on the dark triad of personality and conflict resolution styles suitable for the

mediation of marital conflicts? The method of structural equation modeling with the maximum likelihood method was used. The suitability indices of the research model showed that all indices were acceptable. ($\chi^2/df=1.54$, $RMSEA=0.048$, $GFI=0.94$, $AGFI=0.90$, $IFI=0.96$, $CFI=0.96$). The value of the direct standard coefficients of these variables of the structural model and their significance are reported one by one in Table 2.

Table 2

Standard coefficients (direct effects)

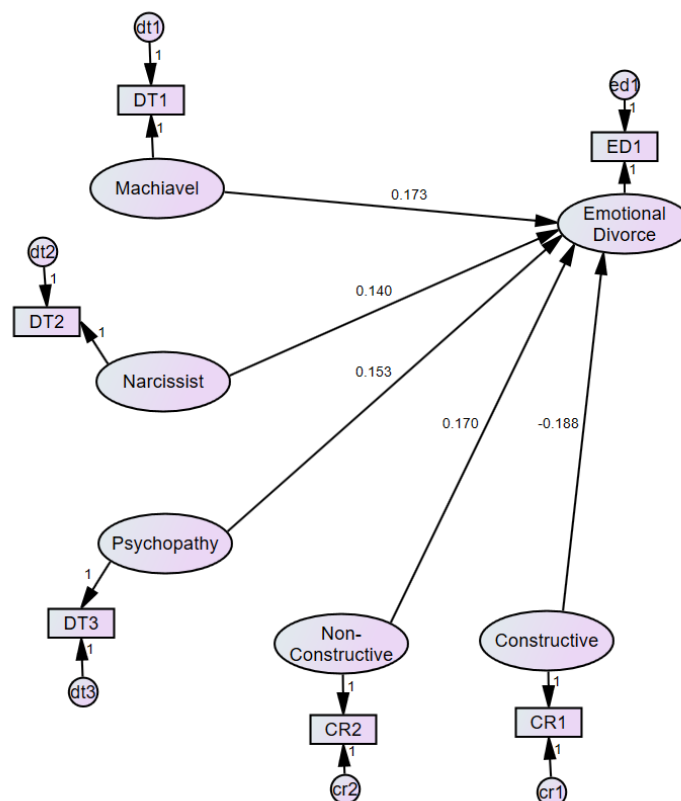
From variable	to	Variable	β	Sig
Machiavellianism	→	Emotional Divorce	0.173	0.007
Psychopathy	→	Emotional Divorce	0.140	0.009
Narcissism	→	Emotional Divorce	0.153	0.008
Constructive style	→	Emotional Divorce	-0.188	0.006
Non-constructive style	→	Emotional Divorce	0.170	0.007

According to the results reported in Table 2, a significant negative and positive relationship exists between constructive conflict resolution style ($\beta=0.188$) and non-constructive conflict resolution style ($\beta=0.170$) with emotional divorce, respectively. ($p>0.01$). A significant positive relationship is observed between Machiavellianism traits and emotional divorce ($\beta=0.173$). Also, a significant positive relationship was found between antisocial trait ($\beta=-0.140$) and narcissism ($\beta=-0.153$) with emotional divorce ($p<0.01$).

In the model shown in Figure 1, the sum of squared multiple correlations of the main dependent variable of emotional divorce is equal to 0.41, and this result shows that about 41% of the variance of this variable is explained through the predictor and mediator variables defined in the model.

Figure 1

Final model with path coefficients



4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, the structural model of emotional divorce was developed based on the dark triad traits of personality and conflict resolution styles in a sample of married women in Tehran. The results showed that the Machiavellian trait is related to emotional divorce and the indirect coefficient between the narcissistic trait and the dependent variable (emotional divorce) is significant. This finding is consistent with most previous studies (Basharpour, Farivar, & Ebadi, 2021; He et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2018; Womick, Foltz, & King, 2019; Yu et al., 2020).

Dark personality traits have negative and unhealthy characteristics that reduce people's psychological toughness and, as a result, reduce their ability to deal with life's problems (Brewer, Guothova, & Tsivilis, 2023). According to Yu et al.'s research (2020), dark traits have the greatest effect on the instability of married life (Yu et al., 2020), and also the results of He et al.'s research (2018) showed that personality traits play a key role in the stability of married life (He et al., 2018). Similarly, Basharpour et al. (2019) showed that dark personality traits positively and significantly affect emotional divorce (Basharpour, Farivar, & Ebadi, 2021). Therefore, in summary, it can be said that dark personality traits and the problems and disorders that these traits can have for a person in a marital relationship during marital conflicts cause people to face problems, which can increase emotional divorce in couples. In the current study, a relationship between dark personality traits and emotional divorce was confirmed, and the results of the research data analysis showed that women with more dark personality traits experience more emotional divorce.

Based on the obtained data, there is a significant relationship between the variable of constructive and non-constructive styles of conflict resolution and the dependent variable (emotional divorce). This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies (Fallahian, Mikaeli, & Yousefi Moridani, 2019; Li et al., 2018; Mirzaie et al., 2018). As shown by the current and previous research results, the relationship between constructive conflict resolution styles and emotional divorce is negative. This means that the more people use constructive conflict resolution styles, the less likely they will have an emotional divorce. Therefore, using the constructive conflict style despite the differences, the search for new solutions to the conflict will be resolved and certainly reduce the emotional divorce of couples. However, in a situation where marital conflict, which results in chronic

fatigue and physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion, can gradually reduce the use of constructive styles and this causes an increase in the incidence of emotional divorce (Fallahian, Mikaeli, & Yousefi Moridani, 2019; Li et al., 2018). So, finally, regarding the role of conflict resolution styles, using constructive styles for marital conflicts can reduce marital conflicts in couples. It can have an effect on reducing the level of emotional divorce in couples, which was also confirmed in the present study, and women who used constructive conflict resolution had a lower emotional divorce score.

5. Limitations

The current research was conducted during the outbreak of the Covid-19 disease. Due to special conditions, including quarantine, completing the questionnaires in person was impossible. For this purpose, online questionnaires were used. For this reason, bias in the self-reporting tools was possible. In addition, this research was conducted on married women in Tehran. Caution should be taken in generalizing these results to other cities and people because it is possible to obtain different results in other cities and regions and even in the sample of married men. The simultaneous implementation of questionnaires and the large number of questions in the questionnaires bring the possibility of fatigue in the subject, which can affect how the examinees answer.

6. Suggestions

It is suggested that in future studies, the individual differences of the subjects, especially the differences related to the socio-economic level, educational and social environment, and other variables that are effective on the research variables, including the emotional divorce of the sample group, should be investigated and controlled.

It is suggested that training be given to control these negative characteristics so that the relationship between couples can be improved and emotional divorce can be reduced. It is also suggested to help couples learn positive conflict resolution styles to use these styles effectively when differences arise in their marital relationships. This in itself can reduce marital conflicts in couples, and as a result, it will effectively reduce emotional divorce between them. It is suggested that counselors working in family counseling and marriage counseling if they detect psychological problems such as negative personality traits in couples referring to counseling centers, provide them with solutions to reduce

the problems that these characteristics can bring to people. This can help them control the negative characteristics caused by these traits and, as a result, it effectively reduces conflicts between couples, which also reduces emotional divorce in couples.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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