

The Mediating Role of Communication Skills in the Relationship Between Narcissistic Tendencies and Marital Satisfaction Among Married Individuals

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the mediating role of effective communication skills in the relationship between narcissistic tendencies and marital satisfaction among married individuals. The research utilized a descriptive-correlational design, and the statistical population consisted of 200 married couples residing in Tehran, selected through random sampling. Data were collected using standard questionnaires, including the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), the Couple Communication Skills Scale (Rajabi et al., 1999), and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Olson et al., 1985). Data analysis was conducted using LISREL 8.8 software. Results indicated that communication skills significantly mediate the relationship between narcissistic tendencies and marital satisfaction. Moreover, effective communication skills enhance the quality of marital interactions and can mitigate the negative effects of narcissistic tendencies. Findings highlight the importance of communication skills training in improving marital satisfaction.

Keywords: *Communication skills, narcissistic tendencies, marital satisfaction*

1. Introduction

The family, as one of the fundamental social institutions, is established based on marriage and serves as the primary foundation for human growth and social interactions. Marriage, as a social and emotional contract, has always played a vital role in individual and social life. Consequently, the quality of this bond and marital satisfaction are among the critical factors determining family and societal health. Relationships within the family, especially between spouses, are particularly significant due to their direct impact on attitudes, social behaviors, and the development of social skills (Hajilou et al., 2023).

Communication skills refer to a set of abilities that enable individuals to engage effectively in interpersonal interactions. These interactions involve the transmission of information, emotions, and thoughts through verbal and non-verbal means (Abagheri Meyari et al., 2024). Effective communication within the family not only fulfills individual and social needs but also fosters personal growth, increases self-confidence, and improves the social relationships of family members (Bilač et al., 2024; Tekel, 2023). Therefore, the development of communication skills within families is of great importance, as these skills enhance family life quality and reduce conflicts. Research indicates that couples with effective communication skills experience happier and more stable lives (Gonzalez, 2020). Skills such as active listening, emotional expression, and conflict management help couples address problems constructively through mutual understanding. Other studies have emphasized that communication beliefs and skills can be significant predictors of marital satisfaction (Esmailpour et al., 2013).

On the other hand, narcissism, as a personality trait, has substantial negative impacts on the quality of marital relationships. Narcissism, characterized by a tendency to focus on personal needs, may lead to neglecting a spouse's needs (Miller & Campbell, 2008). This trait can increase conflicts and reduce marital satisfaction. Narcissistic individuals often display behaviors such as egocentrism, materialism, deception, and control (Brunell & Campbell, 2011). Due to an unstable self-concept and a need for admiration to affirm their self-worth, narcissists idealize their partner when their expectations are met and overlook their flaws. However, when these expectations are unmet, they resort to criticism and devaluation of their partner. Additionally, a lack of empathy and genuine interest in others causes narcissists to perceive their partner as a tool for

fulfilling personal needs (Balzen et al., 2022; Pavanello Decaro et al., 2021).

Research suggests that the effects of narcissism on marital relationships can vary depending on its type, categorized as grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Grandiose narcissism is associated with entitlement and dominance, while vulnerable narcissism is characterized by low self-esteem and sensitivity to negative evaluations. Ultimately, traits of vulnerable narcissism are linked to low relationship satisfaction and sexual dysfunction, which may lead to more severe marital issues (Balzen et al., 2022; Pavanello Decaro et al., 2021). Various studies have shown that high levels of narcissism are associated with difficulties in expressing empathy and attending to others' emotions, negatively affecting marital relationship quality. Conversely, research has demonstrated that communication skills training can reduce the adverse effects of narcissism on marital life. For instance, Ahrari et al. (2020) showed that possessing communication skills helps reduce marital conflicts and increase satisfaction. These findings indicate that even in the presence of narcissistic tendencies, employing appropriate communication skills can mitigate these traits' negative effects and improve marital relationship quality (Ahrari et al., 2020).

Marital satisfaction is recognized as one of the key factors in the psychological and social well-being of couples, directly influencing the quality of life of married individuals. This satisfaction not only enhances happiness and reduces stress but also creates a positive environment for raising children (Aktaş & Bahar, 2022). Therefore, identifying and strengthening factors that contribute to marital satisfaction is of great importance. Marital satisfaction, as a central component of a shared life, directly impacts quality of life and overall satisfaction. Marriage is considered the most fundamental human relationship, providing a framework for forming families and raising future generations. According to Bowen's multigenerational theory (1976), individuals learn the foundations of interpersonal relationships within their family of origin, which affects their marital satisfaction (Nikzad, 2023).

When couples are satisfied with their marital life, the family achieves stability and resilience, enabling it to effectively face challenges and issues. Such families, characterized by healthy relationships, are protected from social and psychological harm. In these healthy family systems, open, flexible, and equitable relationships are consistently maintained, establishing a strong foundation for addressing life's challenges. In general, marital satisfaction

is a determining factor in family stability and influences all aspects of shared life and future generations' upbringing.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to address the question of how enhancing communication skills can reduce the impact of narcissistic tendencies on marital satisfaction and improve the quality of marital life. Ultimately, the findings of this study suggest that effective communication skills play a critical mediating role in the relationship between narcissistic tendencies and marital satisfaction among married individuals. Married individuals with higher communication skills, even in the presence of narcissistic tendencies, can maintain marital satisfaction by improving interaction quality and reducing tension from personality conflicts. These skills not only enhance understanding of a partner's messages and emotions but also foster problem-solving abilities, boosting self-confidence and reducing the likelihood of psychological and social issues. Conversely, a lack of these skills can lead to increased dissatisfaction and tension in marital relationships, threatening individuals' psychological well-being and family stability. Therefore, communication skills training should be considered a key factor in improving marital relationship quality and mitigating the adverse effects of narcissistic tendencies in couples' counseling and guidance programs.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employs a descriptive-correlational design aimed at examining the mediating role of effective communication skills in the relationship between narcissistic tendencies and marital satisfaction among married individuals. The statistical population includes married couples residing in Tehran who have sought counseling services. Using random sampling, 200 couples were selected as the study sample. Data were collected through standardized questionnaires.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Narcissism

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory developed by Raskin and Terry (1988) consists of 40 items designed to assess various dimensions of narcissism. This questionnaire contains seven subscales: authority, self-sufficiency, superiority, exhibitionism, exploitativeness, vanity, and entitlement. Respondents select one of two options for each paired statement. The validity and reliability of this

questionnaire have been reported as 0.85 and 0.90, respectively, in international studies, demonstrating its high reliability in evaluating narcissistic traits (Gonzalez, 2020; Miller & Campbell, 2008; Pavanello Decaro et al., 2021; Raskin & Terry, 1988). For this study, the validity and reliability were calculated as 0.75 and 0.80, respectively.

2.2.2. Communication Skills

This scale comprises 92 items and measures three dimensions of couples' communication skills: verbal and empathic skills, communication barriers, and sexual communication skills. According to Dastan, Rajabi, Khoshkonesh, and Khoshdeh Mehr (1999), the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for these dimensions were 0.94 (verbal and empathic skills), 0.96 (communication barriers), and 0.92 (sexual communication skills). Additionally, convergent validity coefficients between the Couple Communication Skills Scale and the Marital Quality Questionnaire (92 items for married individuals) indicate statistical significance for all three dimensions at the $P < 0.001$ level. It is important to note that a higher score on the communication barriers subscale indicates weaker communication skills (Nazarpour, 2020; Nikraves, 2022; Nikzad, 2023; Tajik, 2019). For this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.99. Subscale-specific coefficients were 0.96 (verbal and empathic skills), 0.16 (communication barriers), and 0.96 (sexual communication skills).

2.2.3. Marital Satisfaction

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Inventory, developed by Olson, Fournier, and Druckman in 1985, is a validated tool for assessing the quality of marital life. It is available in two versions: the full form (115 items, 12 subscales) and the short form (47 items, 9 subscales), covering areas such as personality issues, marital communication, conflict resolution, and financial management. Designed on a Likert scale, this instrument differentiates between happy and unhappy couples. Validity, assessed through correlations between subcomponents and overall marital satisfaction, ranges from 0.47 to 0.92. Reliability, evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, ranges from 0.81 to 0.92, indicating high validity and reliability. Overall, the ENRICH inventory serves as a valuable tool for identifying marital issues and improving couples' relationships (Ahangar et al., 2023; Rakhshan & Ghafouri, 2017).

2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis will be conducted using LISREL 8.8 software, which facilitates structural equation modeling and allows researchers to examine complex relationships between variables.

3. Findings and Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Narcissistic Tendencies	3.34	0.68	-0.26	0.17
Communication Skills	3.38	0.69	-0.11	-0.14
Marital Satisfaction	3.80	0.61	0.20	0.41

Another assumption for structural equation modeling is the significance of the correlation matrix among research

This section presents the descriptive statistics of the variables, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis (Table 1). Kline (2011) suggests that in causal modeling, the distribution of variables should be normal, recommending that the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis should not exceed 3 and 10, respectively.

variables. Table 2 presents the correlation matrix of the research variables.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Research Variables

No.	Variable	1	2	3
1	Narcissistic Tendencies	1		
2	Communication Skills	0.40*	1	
3	Marital Satisfaction	-0.34*	0.60*	1

*p<0.01

As shown in Table 2, significant relationships exist between the research variables. To analyze the research hypotheses, the path analysis method was used. The results of the analysis are presented below.

To test the hypothesis regarding the mediating role, the Sobel test was used. This test is a widely applied method for assessing the significance of the mediating effect of a variable in the relationship between two other variables. In the Sobel test, a Z-value is calculated using the following formula, and if this value exceeds 1.96, the mediating effect can be considered significant at a 95% confidence level.

Two hypotheses were tested using the Sobel test:

1. Narcissistic tendencies affect communication skills.
2. Communication skills affect marital satisfaction.

Since narcissistic tendencies have a negative and significant effect on communication skills, and

communication skills have a negative and significant effect on marital satisfaction, the mediating role was examined using the Sobel method.

Null and Alternative Hypotheses for the Sobel Test:

- H₀: The mediator variable has no role.
- H₁: The mediator variable has a role.

The Sobel test statistic was calculated as 3.17. Since this value is greater than 1.96, it can be concluded that the mediating effect of communication skills in the relationship between narcissistic tendencies and marital satisfaction is significant at the 95% confidence level.

Based on Figure 1, the effect of narcissistic tendencies on marital satisfaction (-0.25) with a *t* statistic of -4.35 is negative and significant at the 0.01 level. The effect of narcissistic tendencies on communication skills (-0.45) with a *t* statistic of -3.48 is also negative and significant at the 0.01 level. Table 3 reports the model fit indices.

Table 3

Model Fit Indices of the Tested Model

Index	X ² /df	RMSEA	P	RMR	NFI	CFI	GFI	AGFI
Obtained Value	2.88	0.07	0.24	0.88	0.98	0.98	0.93	0.93
Acceptable Threshold	<3	<0.08	>0.05	≤0.08	~1	~1	~1	~1

As shown in Table 3, all model fit indices meet the acceptable thresholds, indicating that the tested model has a good fit with the collected data.

Figure 1

Tested Model of the Research in Standardized Form

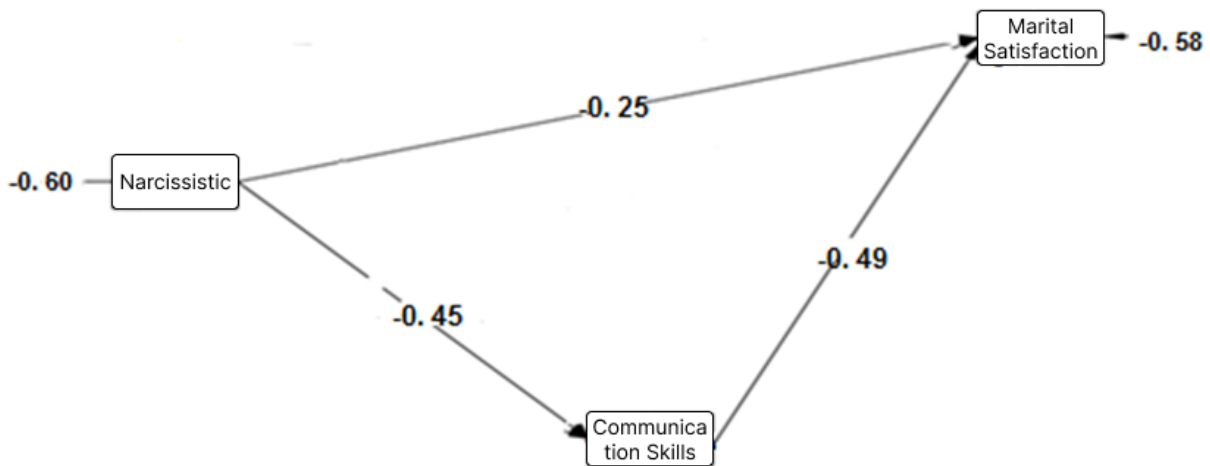
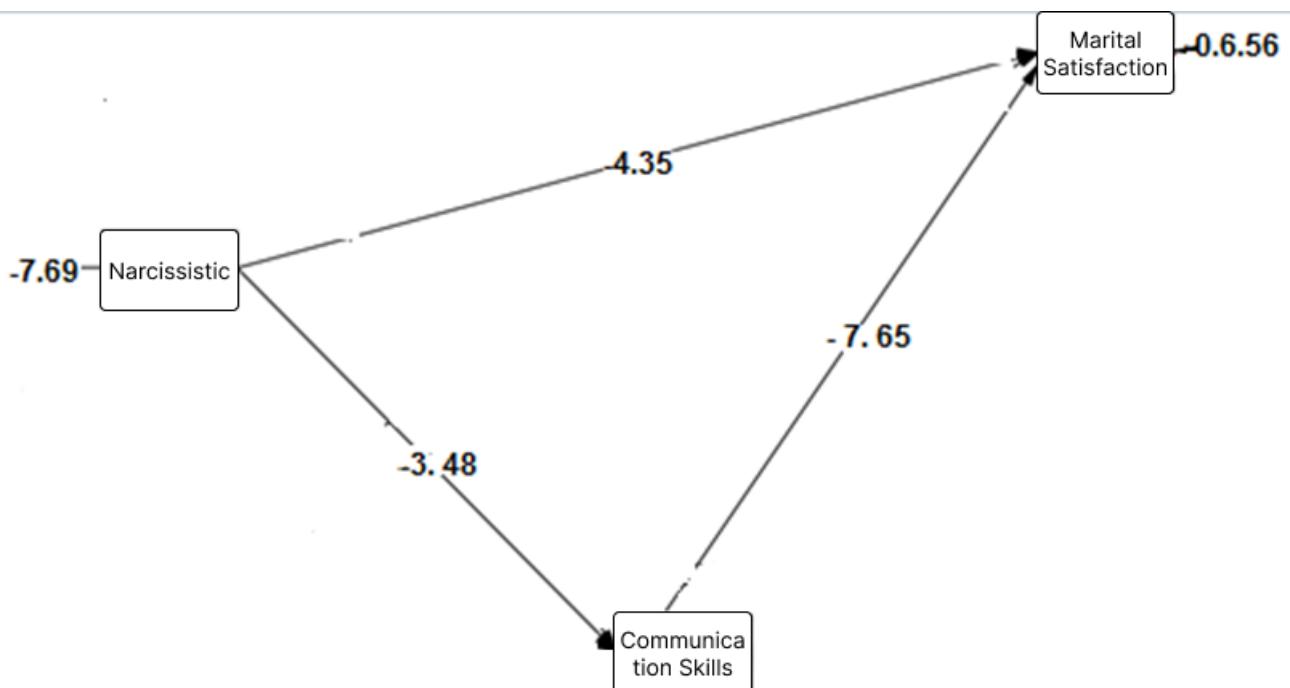


Figure 2

Tested Model of the Research in Significance Form



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of narcissistic tendencies on marital satisfaction and communication skills among couples. The findings reveal a negative effect of narcissistic tendencies on both marital satisfaction and communication skills. Results indicate that individuals with narcissistic behaviors generally exhibit weaker communication abilities, which in turn reduces marital satisfaction. This aligns with prior research, such as Esmailpour et al. (2020), which highlighted the role of communication beliefs and their influence on marital satisfaction. This study emphasized that incorrect beliefs about oneself and others, coupled with an inability to establish effective communication, particularly in marital relationships, lead to reduced communication quality and marital dissatisfaction (Esmailpour et al., 2013).

One of the key findings was the negative impact of poor communication skills on marital satisfaction. Overall, the results demonstrated that communication skills play a crucial role in marital satisfaction, and an inability to communicate effectively contributes to dissatisfaction and conflicts in marital relationships. These findings are consistent with research by Nikraves (2022), which investigated the effectiveness of communication skills training on marital adjustment and satisfaction among women. In these studies, communication skills training emerged as a primary factor in improving relationships and marital satisfaction, demonstrating that effective communication fosters stable marital relationships (Nikraves, 2022).

Additionally, the mediating role of communication skills in the effect of narcissistic tendencies on marital satisfaction was explored. The findings indicate that communication skills not only have a direct effect on marital satisfaction but also act as a mediating variable. This suggests that narcissistic tendencies can indirectly affect marital satisfaction by reducing communication skills. The Sobel test confirmed this hypothesis, showing that communication skills play a significant mediating role in the relationship between narcissistic tendencies and marital satisfaction. Research by Tajik (2019) similarly supported this relationship, highlighting the importance of developing communication skills to improve marital relationships (Tajik, 2019).

The mediating role of communication skills in the effect of narcissistic tendencies on marital satisfaction has been a

focal point in psychological research. Various theories provide insight into this relationship. For example, social exchange theory suggests that individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs in their relationships. From this perspective, communication skills act as a critical resource for enhancing the quality of marital interactions, helping couples achieve greater satisfaction in their relationships. Narcissistic behaviors, when exhibited by one partner, directly impact communication quality and, consequently, marital satisfaction.

Additionally, self-control theory emphasizes the importance of regulating emotions and behaviors in relationships. Effective communication skills enable individuals to respond appropriately to narcissistic behaviors, creating a positive communication environment that enhances marital satisfaction. Thus, communication skills not only mitigate the negative effects of narcissistic tendencies but also strengthen emotional and cognitive bonds between partners.

Findings from previous research suggest that individuals with strong communication skills are generally more successful in managing conflicts and establishing effective communication. This is particularly important when one partner displays narcissistic behaviors. For instance, Nikraves (2022) found that individuals with strong communication abilities are better equipped to manage their emotions, thereby increasing marital satisfaction (Nikraves, 2022). Similarly, Tajik (2020) emphasized that communication skills are directly linked to marital adjustment and satisfaction (Tajik, 2019).

Empathy and emotional interaction theories in marital relationships further explain this dynamic. Empathy theory, particularly the theory of compassion, underscores the importance of understanding and empathizing with a partner's emotions. Individuals with strong communication skills can easily comprehend each other's feelings and needs, responding effectively to enhance marital satisfaction. Therefore, communication skills not only improve interaction quality but also serve as a mediating factor in reducing the negative effects of narcissistic tendencies.

Overall, the findings suggest that communication skills not only contribute to marital satisfaction but can also reduce the negative impact of personality traits such as narcissistic tendencies. In other words, developing communication skills among couples can act as a protective factor against the adverse effects of traits like narcissism. Studies such as Nazarpour (2020) have also explored the relationship between empathy, marital adjustment, and communication

skills, demonstrating that enhancing communication skills and empathy can significantly improve marital quality.

Regarding the limitations of the study, the sample was restricted to one specific city, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other populations. Additionally, the use of self-report methods to measure variables may introduce measurement errors and biases stemming from individuals' subjective perceptions. Moreover, the exclusion of cultural and social factors that may influence marital relationships and communication poses another limitation. Future research is recommended to include larger samples from diverse cities and address cultural and social factors. Furthermore, examining the impact of communication skills training programs on improving marital relationships, particularly under varying marital conditions, can contribute to advancing knowledge in this area. Employing diverse evaluation methods, especially qualitative and observational approaches, could reduce measurement errors and improve the accuracy of the findings.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

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

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

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

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