

The Effect of Attitudes Toward Spouse Selection and Mate Selection Criteria on Marital Stability Among Married Women Referring to Counseling Centers in Tehran

Marzieh. Balali¹, Mahmoud. Goudarzi^{2*}, Farideh. Dokaneifard³

¹ PhD student in Counseling, Department of Counseling, Sa.C, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

² Associate Professor, Department of Family Counseling, Sa.C., Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

³ Associate Professor, Department of Counseling, RO.C. Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: Mahmoud.Goudarzi@iaou.ac.ir

Article Info

ABSTRACT

Article type:

Original Research

Section:

Family and Couple Therapy

How to cite this article:

Balali, M., Goudarzi, M., & Dokaneifard, F. (2026). The Effect of Attitudes Toward Spouse Selection and Mate Selection Criteria on Marital Stability Among Married Women Referring to Counseling Centers in Tehran. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 4, 1-12.

<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.fct.psynexus.4866>



© 2026 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

The present study aimed to examine the effect of attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria on marital stability among married women referring to counseling centers in Tehran. This applied, quantitative study employed a descriptive–correlational design using structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of all married women referring to licensed counseling centers in Tehran in 2023. A sample of 354 participants was selected based on the number of observed variables and a coefficient of 15 per variable, using a combination of cluster selection of counseling centers and convenience sampling of clients. Inclusion criteria included a minimum of three years of marriage, age range of 35–55 years, at least one child, and a minimum middle school education. Data were collected using the Attitudes Toward Mate Selection Questionnaire, the Attitudes Toward Marriage Questionnaire, and the Marital Instability Questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 23. Structural equation modeling results indicated that attitudes toward spouse selection had a positive and statistically significant direct effect on marital stability ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < .001$), whereas mate selection criteria had a negative and statistically significant direct effect on marital stability ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < .001$). Pearson correlation analyses further revealed significant associations between marital stability and pessimistic, optimistic, realistic, and idealistic attitudes toward marriage, as well as significant relationships between attitudes toward love and multiple components of marital attitudes. The findings suggest that positive, realistic, and flexible attitudes toward spouse selection enhance marital stability, while reliance on restrictive and rigid mate selection criteria undermines it, highlighting the critical role of pre-marital cognitive frameworks in long-term marital outcomes among married women.

Keywords: marital stability; spouse selection attitudes; mate selection criteria; married women; counseling centers

1. Introduction

Marriage is widely recognized as one of the most enduring and influential social institutions, playing a central role in individual well-being, family functioning, and social stability. In psychological and family studies, *marital stability* is conceptualized as the persistence, continuity, and functional integrity of the marital relationship over time, encompassing low levels of conflict, reduced risk of separation or divorce, and sustained emotional commitment between spouses. Stable marriages are consistently associated with higher psychological well-being, better physical health, and improved quality of life, particularly for women, who often bear disproportionate emotional and relational responsibilities within marital contexts (Batool et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025). Conversely, marital instability has been linked to psychological distress, reduced life satisfaction, and adverse outcomes for both spouses and children (Amato et al., 2023; Batool et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship emphasizes that marital stability is not solely a post-marital phenomenon but is deeply rooted in pre-marital processes, especially attitudes toward marriage, partner selection, and the criteria individuals employ when choosing a spouse. From a developmental and relational perspective, partner selection represents a critical decision-making stage that shapes later marital dynamics, communication patterns, and conflict resolution strategies. Empirical evidence suggests that mismatches between expectations formed during mate selection and lived marital realities can erode marital satisfaction and stability over time (Amato et al., 2023; Garcia-Hombrados & Özcan, 2024). Accordingly, understanding how attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria contribute to marital stability is essential for both preventive interventions and counseling practices.

Attitudes toward spouse selection reflect individuals' cognitive, emotional, and evaluative orientations regarding how a marital partner should be chosen, including beliefs about love, compatibility, timing, and the relative importance of rational versus emotional considerations. In the Iranian context, these attitudes are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural norms, religious values, family expectations, and modern individualistic tendencies (Rashvand Sorkhkoule et al., 2024; Saadat et al., 2023). Studies conducted among Iranian youth and women indicate that restrictive or idealized beliefs about spouse selection—such as the notion of a “perfect” partner or destiny-based

matching—can generate unrealistic expectations that undermine marital adjustment and stability (Mohammadian Khansari & Hosseinzadeh, 2023; Rashvand Sorkhkoule et al., 2024). Conversely, flexible, informed, and experience-based attitudes toward mate selection have been associated with greater marital resilience and satisfaction.

Mate selection criteria constitute another foundational component of marital formation and stability. These criteria include personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological attributes that individuals prioritize when choosing a spouse, such as education, personality traits, values, religiosity, and family background. Cross-cultural research demonstrates that the weighting of these criteria varies significantly across societies and historical periods, reflecting broader social and economic transformations (Billah et al., 2023; Shi & Lievens, 2023). In traditional societies, structural factors such as family approval and socioeconomic compatibility often dominate partner selection, whereas in more modernized contexts, emotional intimacy, personal compatibility, and self-actualization assume greater importance (Garcia Hombrados & Özcan, 2023; Ye et al., 2023).

Psychological theories of relationship formation suggest that excessively rigid or idealized mate selection criteria may paradoxically increase vulnerability to marital instability. When individuals prioritize narrow or unrealistic standards, they may experience chronic dissatisfaction, disillusionment, or conflict when inevitable discrepancies emerge in marital life. Empirical findings support this proposition, indicating that perfectionistic expectations and restrictive beliefs in partner choice are associated with lower marital adjustment and higher instability (Blanchard & Fino, 2023; Mohammadian Khansari & Hosseinzadeh, 2023). In contrast, adaptive criteria that emphasize mutual growth, emotional regulation, and compatibility rather than flawlessness appear to promote long-term marital stability (Brkljačić et al., 2024; Weidmann et al., 2023).

Personality factors further intersect with attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria in shaping marital outcomes. Research consistently shows that both individual personality traits and personality similarity between spouses play significant roles in marital satisfaction and stability (Brkljačić et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2023). Traits such as emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are positively associated with relationship quality, whereas maladaptive traits and mismatches in core values can increase relational strain (Rassaf et al., 2023; Weidmann et al., 2023). These findings underscore the

importance of realistic psychological appraisal during the mate selection process rather than reliance on idealized or socially imposed criteria.

Gender-specific dynamics are particularly salient in the study of marital stability among women. Women's experiences of marriage are often shaped by sociocultural expectations regarding caregiving, emotional labor, and marital endurance. In many contexts, including Iran and other collectivist societies, women may experience pressure to sustain marriages despite dissatisfaction, which can mask underlying instability until it manifests in psychological distress or counseling-seeking behavior (Batool et al., 2023; Sarfraz et al., 2023). Research focusing on married women indicates that attitudes toward marriage and spouse selection significantly influence their marital satisfaction, coping strategies, and perceived stability (Acquah et al., 2024; Okoie et al., 2025).

Educational level, age at marriage, and premarital preparation also interact with mate selection attitudes to influence marital stability. Large-scale studies demonstrate that later age at marriage and participation in premarital education programs are associated with higher marital quality and reduced divorce risk (Amato et al., 2023; Garcia-Hombrados & Özcan, 2024). These factors may facilitate more mature decision-making, realistic expectations, and informed spouse selection, thereby enhancing marital resilience. Conversely, early marriage or decisions driven primarily by external pressures may heighten vulnerability to instability (Billah et al., 2023; Garcia Hombrados & Özcan, 2023).

Contemporary relational research has also emphasized the role of psychological resources such as self-efficacy, self-love, willpower beliefs, and emotional regulation in sustaining marital stability. These intrapersonal factors influence how individuals interpret marital challenges and engage in problem-solving with their spouses (Deniz & Yıldırım Kurtuluş, 2023; Francis et al., 2023). Importantly, such resources are often implicitly shaped during the mate selection phase, as individuals who choose partners based on emotional safety and mutual support may be better equipped to mobilize these capacities within marriage (Cassepp-Borges et al., 2023; Stedje et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of international research on marital stability, there remains a relative paucity of integrative studies that simultaneously examine attitudes toward spouse selection, mate selection criteria, and marital stability among married women within the Iranian sociocultural context. Existing Iranian studies have tended

to focus either on attitudes toward marriage among unmarried youth or on post-marital variables such as adjustment and satisfaction, leaving a conceptual gap regarding how pre-marital cognitive frameworks translate into long-term marital outcomes (Mohammadi & Sadeghatifard, 2023; Rashvand Sorkhkoule et al., 2024). Addressing this gap is particularly important for counseling centers, where many married women seek support after relational difficulties have already emerged.

Furthermore, the increasing rate of marital strain and counseling utilization among urban populations highlights the need for evidence-based insights that can inform preventive education, premarital counseling, and therapeutic interventions. By identifying the specific attitudinal and cognitive dimensions of spouse selection that contribute to marital stability or instability, practitioners can better tailor interventions aimed at modifying maladaptive beliefs and promoting healthier relational expectations (Okoie et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Such knowledge is also valuable for policymakers and educators seeking to design culturally sensitive family life education programs.

In light of these theoretical considerations and empirical findings, a comprehensive examination of the effects of attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria on marital stability among married women is both timely and necessary. Integrating perspectives from personality psychology, family studies, and cultural psychology allows for a more nuanced understanding of how early relational cognitions shape long-term marital trajectories. This study responds to this need by focusing on married women referring to counseling centers in Tehran, a population that provides valuable insight into both stable and at-risk marital relationships within a contemporary urban Iranian context.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to examine the effect of attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria on marital stability among married women referring to counseling centers in Tehran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and quantitative in terms of data collection. The research design was descriptive–correlational and employed structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of all married women who referred to licensed counseling clinics in the city of Tehran (Hamrah Counseling Center, Better Life, Heijan Andisheh, Kowsar, Delsa, and

Ravansayeh Counseling Center), all operating under the authorization of the Iranian Psychological Association, in 2023.

Regarding optimal sample size estimation for modeling studies, different viewpoints exist. Klein (2010) and Loehlin (2004), cited in Ghasemi (2011), argue that sample sizes below 100 are inappropriate, whereas sizes above 200 are desirable. MacCallum (2001), cited in Ghasemi (2011), recommends a sample size between 300 and 400. Hair et al. (2008) also suggest a range of 200 to 400 participants. To ensure model fit, a sample size greater than 200 should be determined based on a coefficient relative to the number of observed variables (Stevens, 1994, cited in Hooman, 2014). Accordingly, in the present study, considering the number of observed variables and assigning a coefficient of 15 for each observed variable, a sample size of 354 participants was selected.

For random selection of centers, six counseling centers (Hamrah Counseling Center, Better Life, Heijan Andisheh, Kowsar, Delsa, and Ravansayeh Counseling Center) were chosen. Subsequently, using convenience sampling, 354 married women who referred to these centers were recruited to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria were a minimum marriage duration of 3 years, an age range of 35 to 55 years, having one or more children, possessing at least a middle school education, and obtaining the minimum required score on the marital stability questionnaire. Exclusion criteria included having a chronic or serious medical condition, presence of psychological disorders, substance use, or any form of addiction.

2.2. Measures

Larson's Attitudes Toward Mate Selection Questionnaire (1993): This questionnaire was originally developed by Cobb, Larson, and Watson under the title Attitudes Toward Romantic Relationships and Mate Selection Scale to assess restrictive and obligatory beliefs in Canada. The instrument consists of 32 items and 7 factors. Its theoretical foundation is based on Larson's (1993) restrictive beliefs regarding mate selection. In 1992, Larson reviewed the role of beliefs and identified seven restrictive beliefs commonly used by individuals during the mate selection process. Items are rated on a Likert scale with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and are scored from 1 to 4. The reliability of the questionnaire in the study by Cobb et al. (2003), based on Cronbach's alpha, was reported as .88 for the total scale, with subscale reliabilities ranging from

.64 to .98. In Iran, Farahbakhsh and Masripour reported reliability coefficients of .90 using Cronbach's alpha and .72 using the test-retest method, and divergent validity at the .99 level. In the present study, the reliability of this questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and was .79.

Marital Instability Questionnaire by Edwards et al. (1980): This questionnaire was developed by Edwards and colleagues in 1980 to measure marital instability, particularly proneness to divorce. The Marital Instability Index consists of two parts. The first part includes 14 items assessing marital stability and proneness to divorce, and the second part, titled Attractions and Barriers to Divorce, includes 8 items. Scores from both parts are summed to obtain an overall divorce probability score. Scoring is straightforward and can be conducted directly on the instrument. In the first part (Items 1–14), responses indicating proneness to divorce are summed, with items scored as 0 or 1. Higher scores indicate a higher likelihood of divorce, whereas lower scores indicate greater marital stability. Regarding discriminant validity, the developers administered the instrument in 1980 to a sample with no signs of marital instability and found in 1983 that only 3% of participants ended their marriages permanently, whereas 27% of individuals with high scores experienced marital separation. In Iran, Davoudian, cited in Sanaei, administered the questionnaire to couples seeking divorce in Qom Province and reported a predictive validity of .85 and a Cronbach's alpha of .90. Edwards et al. (1980) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93 for the index. The questionnaire demonstrated positive correlations with measures of marital conflict and negative correlations with measures of marital satisfaction. Reliability assessed using Cronbach's alpha was reported as .93. In Iran, Yaripour, cited in Sanaei et al., obtained a split-half reliability coefficient of .70. In the present study, the reliability of this questionnaire, calculated using Cronbach's alpha, was .77.

Bratton and Rosen's Attitudes Toward Marriage Questionnaire (1998): This questionnaire was developed by Bratton and Rosen to assess attitudes toward marriage. It consists of 23 items measuring four components: pessimistic attitudes toward marriage, optimistic attitudes toward marriage, realistic attitudes toward marriage, and idealistic attitudes toward marriage, based on a four-point Likert scale. In the study by Nilforoushan et al. (2013), content, face, and criterion validity of the questionnaire were evaluated as satisfactory, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported to be above .70. Internal consistency in the study by

Nilforoushan et al. (2013) was also reported to be above .70. In the present study, internal consistency was calculated as .84, and reliability assessed using Cronbach’s alpha was .74.

2.3. Data analysis

In this study, structural equation modeling was used to analyze the collected data. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 23.

3. Findings and Results

The descriptive findings of the study showed that among the participating women, 106 individuals (29.94%) were aged 35–40 years, 116 individuals (32.78%) were aged 41–45 years, 87 individuals (24.57%) were aged 46–50 years, and 45 individuals (12.71%) were aged 51–55 years. In addition, for 98 participants (27.68%), 3–5 years had passed since their marriage; for 124 participants (35.03%), 6–10 years; for 80 participants (22.60%), 11–15 years; and for 52 participants (14.69%), more than 15 years had elapsed since the beginning of their marital life.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Descriptive Indices	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pessimistic attitude toward marriage	16.25	4.08	9	30
Optimistic attitude toward marriage	12.23	3.42	7	23
Realistic attitude toward marriage	13.15	3.63	8	22
Idealistic attitude toward marriage	6.55	2.05	4	12
Love beliefs	25.12	6.87	7	38
Experiential orientation	15.52	3.69	4	26
Idealism	24.63	6.75	6	35
Contradiction seeking	16.80	3.74	5	27
Naivety	14.05	3.62	4	25
Gullibility	8.92	2.47	3	12
Marital stability	8.45	2.82	5	13
Attitude toward love (total)	122.14	18.24	45	395

As shown in Table 1, the mean (and standard deviation) for pessimistic attitude toward marriage was 16.25 (4.08), optimistic attitude toward marriage was 12.23 (3.42), realistic attitude toward marriage was 13.15 (3.63), idealistic attitude toward marriage was 6.55 (2.05), love beliefs was

25.12 (6.87), experiential orientation was 15.52 (3.69), idealism was 24.63 (6.75), contradiction seeking was 16.80 (3.74), naivety was 14.05 (3.62), gullibility was 8.92 (2.47), and marital stability was 8.45 (2.82).

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Attitudes Toward Marriage, Attitude Toward Love, and Marital Stability

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Marital stability	1				
2. Pessimistic attitude toward marriage	-.50**	1			
3. Optimistic attitude toward marriage	.56**	-.39**	1		
4. Realistic attitude toward marriage	.43**	-.25*	.26*	1	
5. Idealistic attitude toward marriage	-.20*	.10	-.15*	-.18*	1

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

The results of Pearson’s correlation coefficient indicated that marital stability had a significant relationship with pessimistic attitude toward marriage (r = -.50, p < .01), optimistic attitude toward marriage (r = .56, p < .01), realistic attitude toward marriage (r = .43, p < .01), and idealistic attitude toward marriage (r = -.20, p < .05). In addition, the

components of pessimistic attitude toward marriage (r = -.30, p < .05), optimistic attitude toward marriage (r = .38, p < .01), realistic attitude toward marriage (r = .25, p < .05), and idealistic attitude toward marriage (r = -.16, p < .05) showed significant correlations with attitude toward love.

Table 3

Measurement Parameters of Direct Relationships

Path	Standardized Estimate (β)	Unstandardized Estimate	SE	CR	p
Attitude toward mate selection → Marital stability	.48	1.53	0.10	15.30	< .001
Mate selection criteria → Marital stability	-.40	-1.35	0.16	-8.43	< .001

Based on the standardized path coefficients and corresponding critical ratios presented in Table 3, all direct paths were statistically significant. The path coefficient from attitude toward mate selection to marital stability was significant ($\beta = .48, p < .001$). Therefore, this finding supports the hypothesis of a direct and moderate effect of attitude toward mate selection on marital stability among married women. Given the positive path coefficient, it can be concluded that the more positive married women’s attitudes toward mate selection are, the greater marital stability they experience in their lives.

Furthermore, according to Table 3, the path coefficient from mate selection criteria to marital stability was also significant ($\beta = -.40, p < .001$). Thus, this finding supports the hypothesis of an inverse and moderate relationship between mate selection criteria and marital stability. Considering the negative path coefficient, it can be concluded that the more married women rely on restrictive criteria and beliefs in mate selection, the lower the stability of their marital life will be.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the direct effects of attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria on marital stability among married women referring to counseling centers in Tehran. The findings demonstrated that attitudes toward spouse selection had a positive and moderate direct effect on marital stability, whereas mate selection criteria exerted a negative and moderate direct effect. These results underscore the critical role of pre-marital cognitive frameworks and belief systems in shaping the durability and quality of marital relationships, particularly among women who seek professional support during marital challenges.

The positive association between favorable attitudes toward spouse selection and marital stability suggests that women who hold more realistic, informed, and flexible beliefs about choosing a marital partner are more likely to experience stable marriages. This finding aligns with evidence indicating that adaptive decision-making processes

during mate selection contribute to better marital outcomes by fostering realistic expectations, effective communication, and emotional preparedness for marital life (Amato et al., 2023; Rashvand Sorkhkoole et al., 2024). When individuals perceive spouse selection as a thoughtful, multidimensional process rather than a fate-driven or idealized event, they may be better equipped to navigate marital stressors and developmental transitions, thereby enhancing marital stability.

These findings are consistent with large-scale survey research demonstrating that premarital education and deliberate partner selection are associated with higher marital quality and reduced risk of marital dissolution (Amato et al., 2023; Garcia-Hombrados & Özcan, 2024). In this context, positive attitudes toward spouse selection may reflect greater self-awareness, psychological maturity, and alignment between expectations and realities, all of which contribute to marital resilience. The present results further corroborate research showing that women’s cognitive appraisals of marital formation significantly influence their subsequent marital satisfaction and stability (Acquah et al., 2024; Okoie et al., 2025).

The negative relationship between mate selection criteria and marital stability indicates that greater reliance on restrictive, rigid, or idealized criteria in choosing a spouse is associated with lower marital stability. This finding supports theoretical perspectives suggesting that inflexible standards—particularly those rooted in perfectionism or socially imposed ideals—may increase vulnerability to disappointment, conflict, and emotional disengagement within marriage (Blanchard & Fino, 2023; Mohammadian Khansari & Hosseinzadeh, 2023). When marital partners inevitably fall short of idealized criteria, the resulting cognitive dissonance may erode commitment and satisfaction, thereby undermining marital stability.

Empirical studies have similarly shown that excessive emphasis on narrow mate selection criteria can adversely affect marital adjustment and relationship longevity. For example, research on personality and relationship dynamics indicates that rigid expectations regarding partner traits are

associated with poorer relational outcomes, whereas flexibility and acceptance promote stability and satisfaction (Brkljačić et al., 2024; Weidmann et al., 2023). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that such dynamics are particularly salient among married women seeking counseling, suggesting that restrictive mate selection criteria may contribute to relational strain that eventually necessitates professional intervention.

Cultural context is essential for interpreting these results. In Iranian society, spouse selection is influenced by a complex combination of cultural traditions, family expectations, religious values, and increasing exposure to modern individualistic norms (Saadat et al., 2023; Shi & Lievens, 2023). While cultural guidelines can provide structure and shared meaning, overly rigid adherence to traditional or idealized criteria may conflict with individual psychological needs and evolving marital realities. The negative association observed in this study may therefore reflect the tension between culturally prescribed mate selection standards and the lived experiences of married women in contemporary urban settings (Garcia Hombrados & Özcan, 2023; Rashvand Sorkhkoule et al., 2024).

The findings also resonate with gender-sensitive research highlighting that women often experience marital instability more acutely due to their disproportionate emotional labor and relational responsibility within marriage. Studies conducted in diverse cultural contexts have shown that marital instability is strongly associated with psychological distress, reduced quality of life, and increased counseling utilization among married women (Batoool et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025). In this regard, restrictive mate selection criteria may exacerbate women's vulnerability by fostering unmet expectations and internalized dissatisfaction, even in the absence of overt marital conflict.

Personality-related research provides additional explanatory insight. Studies consistently demonstrate that both individual personality traits and similarity between partners play a significant role in relationship satisfaction and stability (Weidmann et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2023). When mate selection criteria overemphasize superficial or socially valued traits while neglecting deeper psychological compatibility, the resulting marriages may lack the interpersonal resources necessary to sustain stability over time. The present findings indirectly support this interpretation by suggesting that maladaptive criteria, rather than adaptive attitudes, are detrimental to marital stability (Brkljačić et al., 2024; Rassaf et al., 2023).

The results are also consistent with relational and motivational frameworks emphasizing the importance of emotional capacity, self-regulation, and mutual support in sustaining long-term relationships. Research indicates that beliefs about love, willpower, and emotional efficacy influence how couples cope with stress and maintain relational commitment (Deniz & Yıldırım Kurtuluş, 2023; Francis et al., 2023). Mate selection processes that prioritize emotional safety, growth potential, and realistic compatibility may therefore facilitate the development of these psychological resources, enhancing marital stability (Cassepp-Borges et al., 2023; Stedje et al., 2023).

Furthermore, demographic and structural factors such as age at marriage and educational attainment interact with spouse selection attitudes to shape marital outcomes. Evidence from economic and demographic studies shows that later age at marriage and higher educational levels are associated with greater marital stability, partly due to more informed partner selection and realistic expectations (Acquah et al., 2024; Garcia-Hombrados & Özcan, 2024). The present findings align with this body of research by underscoring the centrality of cognitive and attitudinal preparedness in marital formation.

5. Conclusion

Taken together, the findings of this study contribute to the growing literature emphasizing the continuity between pre-marital cognitive orientations and post-marital relational outcomes. By demonstrating that positive attitudes toward spouse selection enhance marital stability while restrictive mate selection criteria undermine it, this study highlights the importance of addressing belief systems and expectations early in the marital trajectory. These insights are particularly relevant for counseling centers, where interventions often focus on post-marital conflict without sufficiently addressing the underlying cognitive frameworks rooted in mate selection processes (Okoye et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025).

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, limiting the ability to determine the directionality of the observed relationships. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce response biases, including social desirability and recall bias. Third, the sample consisted exclusively of married women referring to counseling centers in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to men,

non-clinical populations, or individuals living in rural or non-urban contexts. Finally, cultural and contextual factors unique to the studied population may influence the observed relationships, warranting caution in extrapolating the results to other sociocultural settings.

Future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal designs to examine how attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria evolve over time and predict changes in marital stability across different stages of the family life cycle. Including both spouses in dyadic analyses would provide a more comprehensive understanding of mutual influences and interaction effects. Additionally, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches could offer deeper insight into the subjective meanings and lived experiences underlying mate selection beliefs. Expanding research to diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and age groups would further enhance the external validity and comparative value of future findings.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of incorporating belief-focused interventions into premarital education and marital counseling programs. Counselors and therapists may benefit from assessing clients' attitudes toward spouse selection and mate selection criteria as part of routine intake and intervention planning. Educational programs aimed at young adults and couples could emphasize realistic expectations, cognitive flexibility, and psychological compatibility in partner selection. Such preventive and corrective strategies may contribute to enhanced marital stability and reduced counseling demand over time.

Authors' Contributions

M.B. conceived the study idea, designed the research framework, and supervised data collection at the counseling centers. M.G. conducted the statistical analyses, including SEM using SPSS and AMOS, and contributed to the interpretation of the findings. F.D. managed instrument selection, coordinated participant recruitment, and drafted the initial manuscript. All authors contributed to revising the paper critically for important intellectual content and approved the final version.

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.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

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

References

- Acquah, S., Dzakadzie, Y., & Eshun, P. (2024). Level of Education, Marital Longevity and Religion as Determinants of Marital Stability among Couples in Tamale Metropolis, Ghana. *Advances in Research*, 25(3), 137-147. <https://doi.org/10.9734/air/2024/v25i31059>
- Amato, P. R., Stanley, S. M., Johnson, C. A., & Markman, H. J. (2023). Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: findings from a large, random household survey. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(1), 117. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.20.1.117>
- Batool, A., Bajwa, R. S., Farooq, S., & Ayub, M. (2023). The Impact of Marital Instability and Psychological Distress on Quality of Life among Married Women, Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(2), 2379-2386. <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhs.2023.1102.0536>
- Billah, M. A., Khan, M. M. A., Hanifi, S. M. A., & et al. (2023). Spatial pattern and influential factors for early marriage: evidence from Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey 2017-18 data. *BMC Women's Health*, 23, 320. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02469-y>
- Blanchard, A. E., & Fino, E. (2023). Love is a losing game: Capacity for love mediates the relationship between the vulnerable dark triad and love styles. *Personality and individual differences*, 215, 112360. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2023.112360>
- Brkljačić, T., Brajša-Žganec, A., Džida, M., Topić, M. K., & Kućar, M. (2024). Marital satisfaction and personality traits: the role of individual personality, spouse's personality, and personality similarity between spouses. *Hellenic Journal of Psychology*, 21(2), 122-140. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383973953_Marital_satisfaction_and_personality_traits_the_role_of_individual_personality_spouse's_personality_and_personality_similarity_between_spouses

- Cassepp-Borges, V., Gonzales, J. E., Frazier, A., & et al. (2023). Love and Relationship Satisfaction as a Function of Romantic Relationship Stages. *Trends in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-023-00333-4>
- Deniz, M. E., & Yildirim Kurtuluş, H. (2023). Self-efficacy, self-love, and fear of compassion mediate the effect of attachment styles on life satisfaction: A serial mediation analysis. *Psychological Reports*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941231156809>
- Francis, Z., Weidmann, R., Bühler, J. L., Burriss, R. P., Wünsche, J., Grob, A., & Job, V. (2023). My willpower belief and yours: Investigating dyadic associations between willpower beliefs, social support, and relationship satisfaction in couples. *European Journal of Personality*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08902070231220416>
- Garcia-Hombrados, J., & Özcan, B. (2024). Age at marriage and marital stability: evidence from China. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 22, 297-328. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-023-09651-z>
- Garcia Hombrados, J., & Özcan, B. (2023). Age at marriage and marital stability: evidence from China. *Review of Economics of the Household*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/vu4a8>
- Mohammadi, M., & Sadeghatifard, M. (2023). Predicting marital stability and marital adjustment based on self-differentiation in couples. *Applied Family Therapy*, 4(5), 84-99. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.afjtj.4.5.5>
- Mohammadian Khansari, M., & Hosseinzadeh, A. (2023). Predicting single youth attitudes toward marriage based on personality traits and perfectionism. *Applied Family Therapy*, 4(2), 156-172. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.afjtj.4.2.10>
- Okoie, E., Anyanwu, C. J., & Agbajor, h. (2025). Marriage Counselling, Self-Disclosure and Commitment as Correlates of Marital Stability Among Married Female Guidance and Counselling Post-Graduate Students in South-East Nigeria. *Djerd*, 22(1), 169-178. <https://doi.org/10.61448/djerd22115>
- Rashvand Sorkhkoole, M., Vojdani, F., & Larijani, M. (2024). Attitudes Toward Spouse Selection Among Female Students and Its Correlates. *Journal of Population Association of Iran*, 18(36), 9-50. https://www.jpaiassoc.ir/article_712265_en.html?lang=fa
- Rassaf, F., Elyasi, F., Moosazadeh, M., & Shahhosseini, Z. (2023). Relationship Between Couple's Personality Traits and Spousal Abuse of Women of Reproductive Age in Sari, Iran. *Research Paper*. <https://doi.org/10.32598/cpr.1.4.150>
- Saadat, A., Fallah, M. H., & Yazdi, S. V. (2023). Examination of Cultural Components of Spouse Selection Based on Iranian Culture: A Qualitative Study. *The Journal of Toloobehdasht*. <https://doi.org/10.18502/tbj.v22i3.13684>
- Sarfraz, M., Hamid, S., Kulane, A., & Jayasuriya, R. (2023). 'The wife should do as her husband advises': Understanding factors influencing contraceptive use decision making among married Pakistani couples-Qualitative study. *PLoS One*, 18(2), e0277173. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0277173>
- Shi, W., & Lievens, J. (2023). Gendered partner selection among overseas Chinese in the West and the motivations behind it. *China Population and Development Studies*, 7(3), 257-280. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42379-023-00139-y>
- Stedje, K., Kvamme, T. K., Johansson, K., Stensæth, K. A., Odell-Miller, H., Bukowska, A., Tamplin, J., Wosch, T., & Baker, F. A. (2023). Influential factors of spousal relationship quality in couples living with dementia - A narrative synthesis systematic review. *Dementia (London)*, 22(1), 281-302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14713012221137280>
- Wang, X., Li, Q., Chen, Z., & Fang, X. (2025). Stress Perception and Marital Instability Across the Family Life Cycle: An Actor-Partner Perspective. *Family Process*, 64(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.70018>
- Weidmann, R., Puroil, M. F., Alabdullah, A., Ryan, S. M., Wright, E. G., Oh, J., & Chopik, W. J. (2023). Trait and facet personality similarity and relationship and life satisfaction in romantic couples. *Journal of research in personality*, 104, 104378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2023.104378>
- Ye, S., So, J. J. M., & Ng, T. K. (2023). The effects of similarity in personality and values on relationship satisfaction among dating couples: A response surface analysis. *Personality and individual differences*, 213, 112306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2023.112306>