

Developing a Causal Model of Marital Relationship Quality Based on Dark Personality Traits and Communication Beliefs with the Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation in Women

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

Section:

Family and Couple Therapy

How to cite this article:

Enfeal, N., Sohrabi, N., Zarnaghash, M., & Sahami, S. (2026). Developing a Causal Model of Marital Relationship Quality Based on Dark Personality Traits and Communication Beliefs with the Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation in Women *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 4, 1-12.

<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.fct.psynexus.5285>



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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the present study was to examine marital relationship quality based on dark personality traits and communication beliefs, considering the mediating role of emotion regulation in women. The research method was correlational with a structural equation modeling approach. The statistical population consisted of all women referring to counseling centers in the city of Shiraz in 2023. A sample of 250 participants was selected using cluster random sampling. The research instruments included the Marital Relationship Quality Questionnaire by Busby et al. (1995), the Dark Personality Traits Questionnaire by Johnson and Webster (2010), the Communication Beliefs Questionnaire by Epstein and Eidelson (1990), and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire by Gross and John (2003). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 23 and SmartPLS version 4. The results of the structural equation model indicated that emotion regulation plays a mediating role in the relationship between marital relationship quality and both dark personality traits and communication beliefs. The proposed model can be applied as an educational intervention package to enhance couple relationships in counseling clinics.

Keywords: *Communication Beliefs, Emotion Regulation, Dark Personality Traits, Marital Relationship Quality*

1. Introduction

Marital relationship quality is one of the central indicators of psychological well-being, relational stability, and family functioning, and it has consequences that extend beyond the dyad to influence individual happiness, mental health, and the developmental climate of the family system. Recent evidence has shown that marital quality is not merely a private interpersonal outcome, but a construct with broad psychosocial significance. High marital quality has been associated with more favorable patterns of emotional exchange, stronger trust, better adjustment, and more constructive long-term partnership processes, whereas deteriorations in marital quality are linked to strain, conflict, disengagement, and vulnerability in broader family functioning (Su & Ledermann, 2024; Tong & Zheng, 2024; Xiao, 2025). Research has also demonstrated that marital quality remains a salient predictor of well-being across different stages of adult life, including midlife and later life, and is meaningfully associated with emotional health, sexual expression, confidence in the relationship, and even lifestyle-related outcomes such as alcohol use patterns within couples (Bulanda et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2020; Lyons et al., 2025). From a systems perspective, the quality of the marital relationship is interwoven with interpersonal trust, cohesion, emotional reciprocity, and the social exchange patterns that shape couple life (Adam & Abrutyn, 2021; Gndonu & Badejo, 2021; Heidari, 2017). Accordingly, identifying the psychological variables that undermine or strengthen marital relationship quality remains a major concern in contemporary family and personality research.

One of the most important classes of variables implicated in couple functioning involves maladaptive cognitive schemas and beliefs that partners bring into the relationship. Communication beliefs are among the most influential of these cognitive variables because they guide how spouses interpret disagreements, expectations, emotional disclosures, and relational disappointments. Dysfunctional communication beliefs—such as mind reading expectations, the belief that disagreement is destructive, rigid assumptions about gender differences, sexual perfectionism, and the belief that a partner cannot change—can intensify conflict and distort relational meaning-making. Studies in the field of marital relations have repeatedly shown that communication beliefs are significantly associated with marital dissatisfaction, lower relational functioning, and poorer quality of interaction (Amin et al., 2018; Hosseini et

al., 2023; Sedaghatkhan & Behzadipour, 2017). In women who are dissatisfied with their spouses, modification of maladaptive cognition through mindfulness-based cognitive interventions has been accompanied by improvements in communication beliefs, emotion regulation, and quality of life, suggesting that these beliefs are not only predictive but also clinically modifiable (Tabatabaiejad & Ibnyamin, 2020). Related therapeutic literature has likewise emphasized that the cognitive-behavioral approach to marital therapy treats distorted assumptions, rigid expectations, and dysfunctional interpretations as key mechanisms involved in persistent couple distress (Yazar & Tolan, 2021). Beyond marital therapy specifically, broader cognitive models indicate that dysfunctional belief systems can organize affective and behavioral difficulties in enduring ways, supporting the theoretical position that maladaptive relational beliefs are capable of shaping couple outcomes through cognitive-emotional pathways (Saperia et al., 2025).

Alongside maladaptive beliefs, dark personality traits have emerged as a powerful explanatory framework for understanding relational dysfunction. The Dark Triad—typically comprising Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—captures tendencies toward manipulation, callousness, entitlement, antagonism, impulsivity, and reduced empathy. Developmental evidence suggests that these dark traits can consolidate in young adulthood, a period that overlaps with the formation and stabilization of long-term romantic partnerships (Wolff & Wetzel, 2023). In close relationships, these traits are especially consequential because they undermine sincerity, mutuality, responsibility, and emotional safety. Research has shown that dark personality traits are linked with deception, infidelity proneness, aggression, low intimacy, marital maladjustment, and reduced relationship satisfaction (Borhanizad & Abdi, 2017; Forsyth et al., 2021; Kazemi & Saadatkhah, 2017; Sevi et al., 2020). Studies in Iranian samples have further indicated that dark traits are associated with marital infidelity proneness and poorer quality of couple relationships, and in some cases these relationships are strengthened by moral disengagement and other maladaptive interpersonal processes (Besharatpour & Miri, 2018; Fattahi et al., 2021; Hasheminejad, 2020). More recent international evidence has confirmed that dark personality characteristics are implicated in romantic conflict, intimate partner aggression, and destabilizing relational behaviors, especially among women and in contexts where trust and fidelity are central to relational continuity (Ataman & Alkar, 2024; Brewer et al., 2023; Ferrarini Furtado et al., 2024; Ferreiros

& Clemente, 2023). Dyadic studies have also indicated that dark traits can predict lower relationship satisfaction not only through individual effects but through interactive partner-level configurations, which makes them particularly relevant for structural modeling of marital outcomes (Kardum et al., 2023).

The relevance of dark personality traits to marital quality becomes even clearer when considered in light of relational mechanisms such as intimacy, infidelity perceptions, trust erosion, and emotional disengagement. Individuals high in Machiavellianism may strategically manipulate partners and relational contexts, those high in narcissism may prioritize admiration and self-enhancement over mutual responsiveness, and those high in psychopathy may show low guilt and reduced sensitivity to the emotional consequences of their behavior. These traits are therefore theoretically incompatible with the core dimensions of marital relationship quality, including satisfaction, cohesion, adjustment, and mutual agreement. Empirical findings support this interpretation by showing that dark traits are associated with attitudes more permissive of betrayal, lower intimacy, and more problematic interpretations of cheating and relational transgression (Borhanizad & Abdi, 2017; Brewer et al., 2023; Sevi et al., 2020). Moreover, emerging work has connected dark personality processes with broader indicators of women's relational well-being and happiness, further suggesting that dark traits do not merely affect isolated behaviors but may shape the overall emotional climate of intimate partnerships (Gharehhasanlou & Zarean, 2024; Mahdavi et al., 2023). For married women, whose relationship quality is often intertwined with emotional caregiving, family stability, and perceived security in the marital bond, the presence of dark personality features may be especially detrimental.

Another key variable in this domain is emotion regulation, which refers to the processes through which individuals monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional experiences and emotional expression. In couple relationships, emotion regulation is crucial because conflict, disappointment, jealousy, unmet expectations, and daily stressors all require adaptive management to prevent escalation and protect relational quality. The literature consistently indicates that emotion regulation is positively related to marital satisfaction, relational flourishing, and constructive couple functioning (Binti Roslan et al., 2023; Insan & Rosdiyati, 2022; Omoboye et al., 2024). More specifically, strategies such as cognitive reappraisal tend to support better relational outcomes by helping individuals

reinterpret stressful or frustrating events in less threatening ways, while maladaptive patterns such as suppression and broader difficulties in emotion regulation are often associated with dissatisfaction, emotional distance, and relational strain (Faraji & Keraci, 2018; Mazzuca et al., 2021). Studies of emotional responses in stressful or evaluative contexts have also underscored the importance of regulatory capacities in shaping how individuals respond to affectively loaded situations, which is highly relevant for the emotionally charged environment of couple interactions (Alhebaishi, 2019). In this sense, emotion regulation can be conceptualized as a proximal mechanism translating personality tendencies and cognitive schemas into actual relational experiences.

The mediating role of emotion regulation is particularly plausible when one considers the pathways linking both communication beliefs and dark personality traits to marital outcomes. Dysfunctional communication beliefs can amplify sensitivity to disagreement, reduce tolerance for ambiguity, and foster rigid interpretations of a partner's behavior, thereby increasing emotional arousal and interfering with adaptive regulation. Empirical evidence supports this connection. Studies have shown meaningful relationships between communication beliefs and difficulties in emotion regulation as well as their joint association with marital satisfaction and intimacy among women (Deris Jarfi, 2023; Fatehi & Kachouei, 2020). When irrational or rigid beliefs govern communication, spouses may be more likely to engage in rumination, emotional withdrawal, hostile interpretation, and ineffective coping, all of which undermine relationship quality. Conversely, when regulation processes are stronger, individuals may be better able to question their assumptions, tolerate interpersonal frustration, and respond more flexibly during marital disagreements. This line of reasoning is consistent with research showing that cognitive emotion regulation plays a mediating role between broader psychological experiences and marital quality of life (Afzoud et al., 2023). It is also compatible with findings that interventions targeting cognition and emotion can improve marital outcomes by reshaping maladaptive beliefs and regulatory responses (Tabatabaiejad & Ibnyamin, 2020; Yazar & Tolan, 2021).

A similar mediational argument applies to dark personality traits. Many of the interpersonal harms associated with dark traits appear to be expressed through emotionally dysregulated reactions, reactive hostility, defensive self-protection, and reduced empathic modulation. For example, individuals high in narcissism may respond

poorly to criticism, those high in Machiavellianism may regulate emotion strategically but not prosocially, and those high in psychopathy may show diminished emotional responsiveness paired with poor inhibitory control in conflict situations. Prior research has already shown that emotion-related variables such as affective reactivity and shared belief systems can help explain the impact of dark traits on marital quality of life (Gharehhasanlou & Zarean, 2024). Other studies examining extramarital tendencies and infidelity-related outcomes have similarly highlighted emotion regulation as a relevant mediating or explanatory mechanism in intimate relationship dynamics (Besharatpour & Miri, 2018; Shalchian Pourkhaljan et al., 2022). The relational effects of dark traits may therefore be neither wholly direct nor uniform; instead, they may depend partly on how emotions are processed, expressed, and controlled within the marriage. This view also resonates with neuroscientific and personality-based evidence that complex relational outcomes, including marital quality, reflect the interplay of dispositional tendencies and emotion-laden interpersonal processing (Ma et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2018).

The present topic is especially important in the context of married women referred to counseling centers, because such women are more likely to present with overt relational difficulties, accumulated interpersonal strain, and clinically relevant dissatisfaction. Counseling settings provide an important context for studying the psychological architecture of marital quality because they bring together women who are actively confronting relational distress rather than a purely nonclinical community sample. Existing evidence indicates that women's marital quality is closely connected with emotional well-being, life quality, marital expectations, and interpersonal trust (Heidari, 2017; Hosseini et al., 2023; Mahdavi et al., 2023). Furthermore, intervention studies show that marital relationship quality can be improved when cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms are addressed in therapy, reinforcing the practical importance of identifying explanatory pathways that can be translated into counseling programs (Kiani Khuzestani & Mahmoudfakhmeh, 2024; Yazar & Tolan, 2021). This is especially relevant in light of findings that marital satisfaction and quality are sensitive to contextual pressures such as fertility-related stress, changing family structures, and role expectations, all of which can intensify vulnerabilities tied to dark traits, dysfunctional beliefs, and emotion dysregulation (Chamorro et al., 2022; Su & Ledermann, 2024; Tong & Zheng, 2024). Because the family remains a primary site of emotional exchange and

social cohesion, disruptions in marital quality may also have downstream implications for children's social-emotional competence and broader family adjustment (Adam & Abrutyn, 2021; Xiao, 2025).

Despite the growing literature, several gaps remain. First, many studies have examined either communication beliefs, dark personality traits, or emotion regulation separately, but fewer have integrated them within a unified structural framework focused on marital relationship quality. Second, although there is evidence for pairwise associations among these variables, fewer studies have tested whether emotion regulation functions as a mediating mechanism linking maladaptive personality and cognitive processes to marital outcomes, particularly in women seeking counseling services. Third, the simultaneous examination of both adaptive and maladaptive emotion regulation processes may help clarify why some women maintain better relationship quality even in the presence of problematic beliefs or personality tendencies. Given the documented importance of communication beliefs in couple functioning (Amin et al., 2018; Sedaghatkhan & Behzadipour, 2017), the robust evidence linking dark traits to relational harm (Ataman & Alkar, 2024; Ferrarini Furtado et al., 2024; Kardum et al., 2023), and the central role of emotion regulation in marital adjustment (Binti Roslan et al., 2023; Mazzuca et al., 2021; Omoboye et al., 2024), an integrated causal model is both theoretically justified and clinically necessary.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to develop and test a causal model of marital relationship quality based on dark personality traits and communication beliefs, with emotion regulation as a mediating variable, among women attending counseling centers.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a descriptive correlational design using a structural equation modeling approach. The statistical population consisted of all married women who attended counseling centers in the city of Shiraz in 2023. Accordingly, the total sample included 250 married women selected through a multistage cluster random sampling method. To select the sample, first, 5 districts were randomly chosen from the 11 districts of Shiraz, and then 2 counseling centers from each district were selected through cluster random sampling. Subsequently, 50 married individuals from each center were selected using random sampling. Inclusion criteria comprised having at least five years of

marital life (to ensure that participants had at least one child), having an initial complaint of marital problems recorded in the client file, having at least one and at most two children, an age difference between spouses of at least 3 and at most 10 years, and holding at least a high school diploma to ensure the ability to respond to the questionnaires. Exclusion criteria included failure to complete assigned tasks, incomplete responses to the questionnaires, and withdrawal from participation in the study. To implement the study, necessary coordination was carried out with counseling center administrators, and information regarding the target sample was provided. After gaining access to the sample group, the participants were informed about the study process, and the questionnaires were administered by the researcher. Prior to data collection, a trust-based environment was established by the researcher, and explanations were provided regarding the study objectives and the procedure for completing the instruments. In order to adhere to research ethics, participants were assured of the confidentiality of their information and the voluntary nature of their participation, and informed consent was obtained before they responded to the questions.

2.2. Measures

Marital Relationship Quality Questionnaire: The 14-item Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale was developed by Busby et al. (1995) to assess marital relationship quality and consists of three components: consensus (items 1 to 6), satisfaction (items 7 to 10), and cohesion (items 11 to 14). Each item is scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (always disagree) to 5 (always agree), with total scores ranging from 0 to 70 for each respondent (Faraji et al., 2018). Internal consistency reliability coefficients, including Cronbach's alpha and split-half reliability, for the 14 items and the three factors were reported as satisfactory, with a value of 0.89. Additionally, convergent validity coefficients of marital quality with the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Couple Cohesion Evaluation Questionnaire, and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale were reported as 0.39, 0.36, and 0.33, respectively, all significant at the 0.001 level.

The 12-Item Dark Personality Traits Scale: This scale was developed by Johnson and Webster (2010) and includes 12 items measuring three dark personality traits: Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Participants respond to the items on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree), with

higher scores indicating a greater presence of the trait. Items 1 to 4 measure Machiavellianism, items 5 to 8 measure narcissism, and items 9 to 12 measure psychopathy. Each subscale has demonstrated strong correlations with corresponding measures of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Test-retest reliability coefficients were reported as 0.89 for the total scale, 0.86 for Machiavellianism, 0.76 for psychopathy, and 0.87 for narcissism (Johnson & Webster, 2010). The validity of the questionnaire has been confirmed through previous studies and expert evaluations, and its reliability using Cronbach's alpha has been reported as 0.81 (Besharpoor & Miri, 2018). Qamarani et al. (2015) also reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 for this instrument and demonstrated that item-total and subscale-total correlations were significant at the 0.01 level, with the three factors—manipulativeness, antisociality, and narcissism—explaining 63.30% of the variance in dark personality. In the study by Mirzaei Jahed and Saberi (2019), the questionnaire was completed by husbands, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the manipulativenss, antisociality, and narcissism subscales were 0.69, 0.72, and 0.70, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated as 0.78 for Machiavellianism, 0.77 for narcissism, and 0.81 for psychopathy.

Communication Beliefs Questionnaire: In this study, communication beliefs were assessed using the Communication Beliefs Questionnaire developed by Epstein and Eidelson (1990), which was originally introduced in 1982. After several revisions and the removal of some items, the authors developed a 40-item version in 1990. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The subscales of this questionnaire include belief in the destructiveness of disagreement, mind-reading expectation, belief in partner immutability, sexual perfectionism, and beliefs about gender differences. Eidelson and Epstein (1982) found that the scores of this questionnaire were positively correlated with general beliefs measured by the Irrational Beliefs Test developed by Jones (1968). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five subscales ranged from 0.72 to 0.81, as reported by Sahebi et al. (2003).

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: Emotion regulation strategies were measured using the questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003). This instrument consists of two subscales: cognitive reappraisal (6 items) and expressive suppression (4 items). Participants respond on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). In the study by Gross and John (2003), internal consistency coefficients were reported as 0.79 for

reappraisal and 0.73 for suppression. In Iran, Hosseini reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.79 for reappraisal and 0.83 for suppression.

2.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Structural equation modeling was employed to address the research questions using SPSS version 23 and SmartPLS version 4. Data normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis tests. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to verify the validity of the items and identify key factors for each construct. Structural

equation modeling techniques were then applied to examine the fit of the proposed research model with the collected data.

3. Findings and Results

In the present study, 31.6% of the respondents were aged 23–28 years, 34.4% were 29–33 years, 25.20% were 34–38 years, and 8.8% were aged 39 years or older. Table 1 presents the correlation matrix of marital relationship quality with communication beliefs, dark personality traits, cognitive reappraisal, and expressive suppression.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix Among Research Variables

Variables	Marital Relationship Quality	Communication Beliefs	Dark Personality Traits	Reappraisal	Suppression
Marital Relationship Quality	1				
Communication Beliefs	-0.425**	1			
Dark Personality Traits	-0.625**	0.318**	1		
Reappraisal	0.278**	0.165*	0.160*	1	
Suppression	-0.238**	0.101	-0.240**	0.088	1

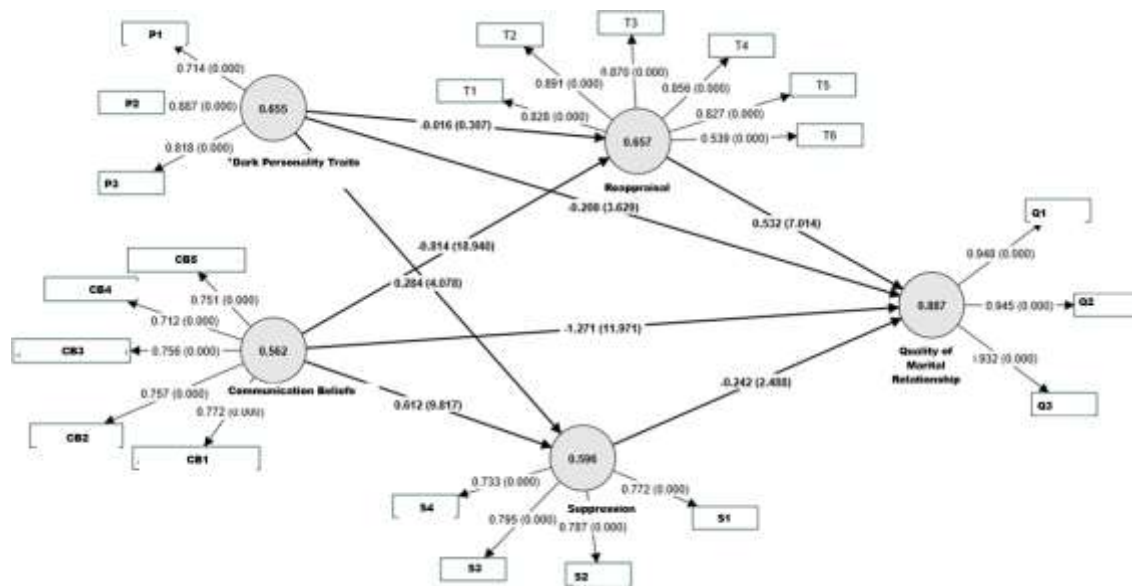
*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Table 1 indicates that marital relationship quality had a positive correlation with cognitive reappraisal and negative correlations with communication beliefs, dark personality traits, and expressive suppression (p < 0.05).

To examine the significance of path coefficients, the bootstrap method was used and Student's t-values were calculated. If the t-value exceeds the critical threshold, the path coefficient is considered statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure 1

Factor loadings and significance levels of Student's t-test results for assessing the significance of path coefficients.



The R² criterion pertains to endogenous (dependent) latent variables in the model and reflects the extent to which exogenous variables explain variance in endogenous variables. Values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are considered

weak, moderate, and strong, respectively. The R² values presented in Table 2 confirm the acceptable fit of the structural model.

Table 2

R² Values for Research Variables

Row	Variable	R ²
1	Marital Relationship Quality	0.716
2	Reappraisal	0.677
3	Suppression	0.641

The Q² criterion evaluates the predictive relevance of the model. Values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate weak, moderate, and strong predictive power, respectively. The

values in Table 3 demonstrate that the model has adequate predictive power for the endogenous constructs and confirm the appropriate fit of the structural model.

Table 3

Q² Values for Research Variables

Row	Variable	Q ²
1	Marital Relationship Quality	0.621
2	Reappraisal	0.433
3	Suppression	0.371

GOF Criterion: Another index introduced by Wetzels et al. (2009) is the Goodness of Fit (GOF), calculated as the geometric mean of the average communality (AVE) and the average R²:

$$GoF = \sqrt{((AVE) \times (R^2))}$$

This index ranges between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 indicating better model quality. Unlike some LISREL-based indices, GOF does not assess the discrepancy between

the theoretical model and observed data but rather evaluates the overall predictive capability of the model. The results indicated that the average communality was 0.671 and the average R² was 0.678. Based on the formula, the GOF value was calculated as 0.674, which exceeds the threshold value of 0.30, indicating strong predictive capability of the model for endogenous latent variables.

Table 4

Results of Structural Model Evaluation

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Mediator	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient	t-value	Significance Level	Result
1	Dark Personality Traits	Reappraisal	Marital Relationship Quality	0.009	0.301	0.763	Supported (H ₀)
2	Dark Personality Traits	Suppression	Marital Relationship Quality	-0.069	2.234	0.026	Rejected (H ₀)
3	Communication Beliefs	Reappraisal	Marital Relationship Quality	0.433	6.624	0.000	Rejected (H ₀)
4	Communication Beliefs	Suppression	Marital Relationship Quality	-0.148	2.276	0.023	Rejected (H ₀)
5	Reappraisal	—	Marital Relationship Quality	0.532	7.014	0.000	Rejected (H ₀)
6	Communication Beliefs	—	Reappraisal	-0.814	18.940	0.000	Rejected (H ₀)
7	Communication Beliefs	—	Suppression	0.612	9.817	0.000	Rejected (H ₀)
8	Communication Beliefs	—	Marital Relationship Quality	-1.271	11.971	0.000	Rejected (H ₀)

—	Suppression	—	Marital Relationship Quality	-0.242	2.488	0.013	Rejected (H ₀)
—	Dark Personality Traits	—	Reappraisal	-0.016	0.307	0.759	Supported (H ₀)
—	Dark Personality Traits	—	Suppression	0.248	4.078	0.000	Rejected (H ₀)
—	Dark Personality Traits	—	Marital Relationship Quality	-0.208	3.629	0.000	Rejected (H ₀)

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrated that marital relationship quality was significantly associated with both cognitive and personality variables, as well as with emotion regulation processes. Specifically, the results indicated that communication beliefs and dark personality traits were negatively related to marital relationship quality, while cognitive reappraisal showed a positive association and expressive suppression showed a negative association with marital relationship quality. Moreover, structural equation modeling revealed that emotion regulation, particularly reappraisal and suppression, played a mediating role in the relationships between communication beliefs and marital relationship quality, as well as between dark personality traits and marital relationship quality. However, the indirect effect of dark personality traits through reappraisal was not statistically significant, whereas mediation through suppression was supported. These findings suggest that maladaptive cognitive beliefs and dark personality traits influence marital outcomes both directly and indirectly through emotional processes.

The negative association between communication beliefs and marital relationship quality is consistent with prior research indicating that dysfunctional relational cognitions undermine interpersonal functioning. Maladaptive beliefs such as the destructiveness of disagreement, rigid gender expectations, and mind-reading assumptions can distort communication patterns and intensify conflict dynamics. Previous studies have similarly shown that communication beliefs significantly predict marital dissatisfaction and reduced relational quality (Amin et al., 2018; Sedaghatkhah & Behzadipour, 2017). Furthermore, the strong direct and indirect effects observed in this study align with findings that communication beliefs shape marital expectations and relational experiences through cognitive and emotional pathways (Hosseini et al., 2023). From a theoretical perspective, cognitive-behavioral models emphasize that distorted beliefs act as filters through which individuals interpret relational events, leading to maladaptive emotional

responses and ineffective interaction patterns (Yazar & Tolan, 2021). The current results extend this literature by demonstrating that these beliefs not only exert direct effects on marital quality but also influence emotional regulation processes, thereby amplifying their impact.

The significant positive relationship between cognitive reappraisal and marital relationship quality supports the growing body of literature highlighting the adaptive role of emotion regulation strategies in intimate relationships. Reappraisal allows individuals to reinterpret stressful or conflictual situations in less threatening ways, thereby reducing emotional reactivity and facilitating constructive communication. Previous research has consistently found that reappraisal is associated with higher marital satisfaction and better relational functioning (Binti Roslan et al., 2023; Mazzuca et al., 2021; Omoboye et al., 2024). The present findings are also consistent with studies showing that effective emotion regulation contributes to marital flourishing and emotional stability in couples (Insan & Rosdiyati, 2022). In contrast, expressive suppression was negatively associated with marital relationship quality, which aligns with evidence suggesting that suppression inhibits emotional expression, reduces intimacy, and creates emotional distance between partners. Suppression has been linked to lower satisfaction and poorer communication in relationships, as it prevents authentic emotional exchange and may lead to misunderstanding and disengagement (Faraji & Keraei, 2018). Therefore, the differential effects of reappraisal and suppression observed in this study highlight the importance of distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive regulation strategies in explaining marital outcomes.

The mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between communication beliefs and marital quality provides further insight into the mechanisms underlying these associations. The results indicated that communication beliefs significantly predicted both reappraisal and suppression, which in turn influenced marital relationship quality. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that maladaptive beliefs are associated with difficulties in emotion regulation and relational

dissatisfaction (Deris Jarfi, 2023; Fatehi & Kachouei, 2020). Individuals with rigid or irrational beliefs may experience heightened emotional responses during interpersonal interactions, making it more difficult to regulate emotions effectively. Conversely, adaptive regulation strategies may mitigate the negative effects of dysfunctional beliefs by enabling individuals to reinterpret and manage emotional experiences more constructively. These findings are also in line with research demonstrating that cognitive emotion regulation mediates the relationship between psychological variables and marital quality of life (Afzoud et al., 2023). Thus, the present study supports a process-oriented view in which cognitive and emotional factors interact to shape marital outcomes.

Regarding dark personality traits, the findings revealed a significant negative relationship between these traits and marital relationship quality, which is consistent with a substantial body of literature. Dark personality traits, including Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, are characterized by manipulation, lack of empathy, impulsivity, and self-centeredness, all of which are detrimental to healthy relationship functioning. Previous studies have shown that individuals with high levels of dark traits are more likely to engage in infidelity, deception, and conflict, leading to lower relationship satisfaction and stability (Ataman & Alkar, 2024; Brewer et al., 2023; Sevi et al., 2020). Research in both Iranian and international contexts has also demonstrated that dark traits are associated with reduced intimacy, marital maladjustment, and increased likelihood of relational problems (Borhanizad & Abdi, 2017; Fattahi et al., 2021; Kazemi & Saadatkhah, 2017). The present findings further confirm that dark personality traits play a significant role in shaping marital relationship quality, particularly among women in counseling settings.

Interestingly, the results indicated that the mediating role of emotion regulation differed across specific pathways. While suppression significantly mediated the relationship between dark personality traits and marital relationship quality, reappraisal did not. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of dark traits may be more likely to rely on maladaptive regulation strategies such as suppression rather than adaptive strategies like reappraisal. This pattern is consistent with research showing that dark personality traits are associated with poor emotional functioning and reduced regulatory capacity (Ferreiros & Clemente, 2023; Forsyth et al., 2021). Individuals high in psychopathy or narcissism, for example, may suppress emotions to maintain

control or avoid vulnerability, which ultimately undermines relational quality. Moreover, studies have indicated that affective processes such as emotional reactivity and disengagement can mediate the impact of dark traits on marital outcomes (Gharehhasanlou & Zarean, 2024). Therefore, the present findings contribute to the literature by clarifying that the influence of dark personality traits on marital quality operates primarily through maladaptive emotional mechanisms rather than adaptive ones.

The strong direct effects of communication beliefs and emotion regulation on marital relationship quality observed in this study also highlight the importance of these variables in understanding relational functioning. Communication beliefs had both direct and indirect effects, indicating that they are central determinants of marital quality. Similarly, reappraisal had a strong positive direct effect, while suppression had a significant negative effect, underscoring the critical role of emotional processes. These findings are consistent with broader theoretical frameworks emphasizing the interplay between cognition, emotion, and behavior in shaping relationship outcomes. For example, social exchange theory suggests that emotional experiences and cognitive evaluations jointly influence relationship satisfaction and stability (Adam & Abrutyn, 2021). Additionally, research on relational confidence and emotional dynamics has shown that positive emotional regulation contributes to more stable and satisfying partnerships over time (Johnson et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings of this study provide empirical support for an integrated model in which communication beliefs, dark personality traits, and emotion regulation jointly influence marital relationship quality. This model aligns with previous research demonstrating that marital quality is a multifaceted construct shaped by cognitive, emotional, and personality factors (Lyons et al., 2025; Xiao, 2025). By examining these variables simultaneously, the present study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying marital functioning, particularly in women seeking counseling services. The results also have important clinical implications, as they suggest that interventions targeting maladaptive beliefs and enhancing emotion regulation skills may be effective in improving marital relationship quality. This is supported by evidence showing that cognitive-behavioral and emotion-focused interventions can lead to significant improvements in marital satisfaction and relational functioning (Kiani Khuzestani & Mahmoudfakhmeh, 2024; Yazar & Tolan, 2021).

5. Conclusion

The findings reinforce the idea that marital relationship quality is embedded within broader psychological and interpersonal systems. Factors such as emotional intelligence, interpersonal trust, and relational expectations have been shown to interact with cognitive and personality variables to shape marital outcomes (Gdonu & Badejo, 2021; Mahdavi et al., 2023). Additionally, contextual influences such as social roles, demographic characteristics, and life transitions may moderate these relationships, suggesting the need for a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to understanding marital dynamics (Su & Ledermann, 2024; Tong & Zheng, 2024). Therefore, the present study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasizing the complexity of marital relationships and the importance of integrating multiple levels of analysis.

One limitation of this study is its reliance on a cross-sectional correlational design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships among variables. Additionally, the use of self-report measures may introduce biases such as social desirability and response distortion, particularly when assessing sensitive constructs such as dark personality traits and marital quality. Another limitation is that the sample was restricted to married women attending counseling centers in a specific city, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural contexts. Furthermore, potential moderating variables such as socioeconomic status, duration of marriage, and partner characteristics were not examined, which may influence the observed relationships.

Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to better understand the causal mechanisms underlying the relationships among communication beliefs, dark personality traits, emotion regulation, and marital quality. It is also recommended that future studies include both partners in the relationship to capture dyadic processes and mutual influences more accurately. Additionally, exploring other mediating and moderating variables, such as attachment styles, emotional intelligence, and cultural factors, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital dynamics. Researchers may also consider examining the effectiveness of targeted interventions aimed at modifying communication beliefs and enhancing emotion regulation skills in improving marital relationship quality.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study suggest that counseling and therapeutic interventions should

focus on identifying and modifying dysfunctional communication beliefs and promoting adaptive emotion regulation strategies. Training couples in cognitive restructuring techniques and emotional awareness may help reduce conflict and enhance relationship satisfaction. Additionally, screening for dark personality traits in counseling settings may provide valuable insights into relational difficulties and inform tailored intervention strategies. Developing structured educational programs that integrate cognitive-behavioral and emotion-focused approaches could be particularly beneficial for couples experiencing relational distress.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed 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.

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.

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