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The mediating role of self-differentiation in the relationship between lifestyle and distress tolerance with marital conflicts of working women

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to determine the mediating role of self-differentiation in the relationship between lifestyle and distress tolerance with marital conflicts in working women of Estehban city. The present research method was descriptive-correlation of structural equations type. This research's statistical population was comprised of all working women in Estehban city in 2020. Among the statistical population, 260 people were selected and studied by the one-stage cluster sampling method. Self-differentiation questionnaires by Skowron and Smith (2003), distress tolerance by Simmons and Gaher (2005), lifestyle by Smith (2004), and marital conflict by Sanai et al. (2018) were used to collect data. After collecting and extracting the data, the participants' scores were analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient and path analysis and SPSS-24 statistical software. The findings of the research's direct paths showed a significant negative correlation between lifestyle components (Environmental health, accident prevention, drug, and substance avoidance, social health, spiritual health, psychological health, disease prevention, weight control and nutrition, exercise and wellness, and physical health), distress tolerance (Environmental health, accident prevention, drug, and substance avoidance, social health, spiritual health, psychological health, disease prevention, weight control and nutrition, exercise and wellness, and physical health), and self-differentiation (emotional reaction, my situation, emotional breakdown, and mixing with others) with marital conflict. Also, the indirect hypothesis results showed that self-differentiation significantly mediated the relationship between lifestyle and distress tolerance with marital conflicts in working women of Estehban city.

Keywords: Self-differentiation, lifestyle, distress tolerance, marital conflicts.

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Introduction

Women's employment, which can be one of the factors causing conflict between couples, has an undeniable effect on the structure of the family, the traditional relationships of couples and the fate of children. Especially that women try to plan family life based on their type of job (Barnett and Hyde, 2018).

Marital conflict is defined as an interactive process characterized by incompatibility and disagreement, or abnormally with institutions or between different social institutions (Galinski & White, 2014). Although conflict and differences are normal in married life, at the same time, if it escalates, it can have a very bad effect on the mental health of family members. The members of families that have conflict and divorce are at risk of all kinds of behavioral and emotional problems and show symptoms such as antipathy, aggression, and depression symptoms (Yalsin & Karahan, 2017).

Couples' lifestyles are one of the variables that can affect marital commitment or marital conflicts. Lifestyle means how couples deal with life's tasks and events. Each person has a special way of dealing with tasks and life events based on unconscious defense mechanisms, conscious adaptive strategies and the influence of environmental factors (Mohan, Wilkes and Jackson, 2018). Today, it is believed that 70% of marital conflicts and disputes are somehow related to a person's lifestyle (Zarei, 2019).

Understanding distress and distress tolerance is another component that can significantly impact the mental health of men and women in married life. In the daily life of each person, various stress and distresses are experienced (Kag, Riccardi, Timpano, Mitchell, and Schmidt, 2020). When the level of distress tolerance in

couples is low, the emotional suffering caused by internal and external pressures is experienced much more and more intensely. As a result, people with low levels of distress tolerance usually tend to look for ways to immediately relieve their emotional suffering instead of facing problems and solving them directly.

Self-differentiation is the basis of family systems theory, which is defined as a person's ability to experience intimacy with others and remain in the emotional atmosphere of the family and maintain independence from them (Carr, 2004). Self-differentiation is an indicator of interpersonal functioning, the ability to separate emotional processes from logical and perform interpersonal functioning, the ability to experience intimacy along with independence and appropriate balance between them (Kiang-Sil, 2016). The theory of family systems states that when the differentiation level of both couples is low in the marital relationship, more emotional intercourse occurs. This condition leads to a decrease in marital quality and high marital conflict in marital relationships. Differentiation is an integral component of a person's ability to develop intimacy, and the level of differentiation is related to the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with marital life (Martinez & Castadio, 2014).

The current research aims to determine the mediating role of self-differentiation in the relationship between lifestyle and distress tolerance with marital conflicts in working women of Estehban city.

Method

The current research is of the applied objective type and in terms of methodology, correlation is of the path analysis type. The statistical population of the present study was made up of all the working women of Estehban city who were working in 1400 and their population consisted of 800 people. In the current study, one-stage cluster random sampling method was used for sampling.

Based on Morgan's table, the number of sample people was determined to be 260 people. For this purpose, 8 offices were randomly selected from all the offices of Estehban city, and in each office, working and married women who had the conditions to participate in the research responded to the research tool.

Materials

1. Simons and Gaher Distress Tolerance Questionnaire. This scale has 15 items and was made by Simmons and Gaher (2005). The items on this scale are scored based on a five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5. High scores on this scale indicate high distress tolerance. Simmons and Gaher, 2005; Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was reported as 0.82, and its internal consistency after six months was 0.61 (Dry Organ, 2012). In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total distress tolerance score was 0.85.

2. Marital conflict questionnaire. This tool has 54 questions prepared to measure marital conflicts (Sanaei et al., 2008). This questionnaire evaluates eight dimensions of marital conflicts. These eight dimensions are: reduction of cooperation; ; reduced sex; increased emotional reactions; increasing the support of children; Increasing personal relationship with your relatives; reduction of family relationship with spouse's relatives and friends; separating financial affairs from each other; Reduction of effective communication (Sanaei et al., 2008). Answering the questionnaire questions is set on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The maximum total score of the questionnaire is 270 and the minimum score is 54. In this questionnaire, a higher score indicates more conflict and a lower score indicates a better relationship and less conflict.

3. Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI).

The initial form of this questionnaire was created by Skowron and Friedlander (1998) and was revised in 2003 by Skowron and Smith. Its final questionnaire was made by Jackson in 46 items based on Bowen's theory (Skowron and Smith, 2003). The items of this questionnaire are scored on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all true of me) to 6 (completely true of me). This scale includes four subscales of emotional reaction, my situation, emotional disconnection and integration with others. The scoring of the questionnaire is on a 6-point Likert scale. The maximum score of the questionnaire is 276. A score between 46 and 115 means low differentiation of people. A score between 115 and 161 means the level of average differentiation of people, a score higher than 161 means the level of high differentiation of people.

4. Lifestyle Questionnaire (LSQ). This questionnaire has 70 questions, and its purpose is to evaluate different aspects of lifestyles (physical health, exercise and wellness, weight control and nutrition, psychological health, disease prevention, spiritual health, social health, avoiding drugs and narcotics, preventing accidents, and environmental health). The response range of this questionnaire is of Likert type, and the score for each option is as follows. (never = 0 points, sometimes = 1 point, usually = 2 points, always = 3 points). The minimum possible score will be 0, and the maximum will be 210. The score between 0 and 70: Poor healthy lifestyle. The score between 70 and 105: Healthy lifestyle is average. A score above 105: Lifestyle score is high. In the research, Laali et al. (2012) confirmed the construct validity of the lifestyle questionnaire as a multidimensional tool for evaluating and measuring lifestyle using the

factor analysis test. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha measurement method, and all numbers were higher than 0.70.

Findings

The findings show that there is a significant negative correlation between lifestyle, distress tolerance and self-differentiation with marital conflict at the level of 0.01.

The results of the path coefficients model showed that a significant direct relationship was obtained between distress tolerance and differentiation and lifestyle with differentiation. Also, there is a significant negative direct relationship between distress tolerance, lifestyle and differentiation with marital conflict.

Goodness of fit index (GFI) equal to 0.98, adjusted goodness of fit index (CFI) equal to 0.99 have been obtained. The size of the indices obtained from the structural model fit test indicates that the model fits well. The root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) is equal to 0.01 and is less than 0.067, and this index also indicates the good fit of the model.

There is a significant negative correlation between the score of physical health, exercise and wellness, psychological health, social health, avoiding drugs and substances, and environmental health with marital conflict at the level of 0.01. Also, there is a negative correlation between the components of weight control and nutrition, prevention of diseases, spiritual health, prevention of incidents with marital conflict at the level of 0.05.

Among the lifestyle components, exercise and wellness components with a beta coefficient of 0.12, weight control and nutrition with a beta coefficient of 0.14,

disease prevention with a beta coefficient of 0.13, psychological health with a beta coefficient of 0.14, spiritual health with a beta coefficient of 0.16, social health with a beta coefficient of -0.21 were able to predict marital conflict in working women.

The findings showed that there is a negative correlation between the subscale of tolerance and marital conflict at the level of 0.01 and between the subscale of absorption, evaluation and adjustment at the level of 0.05.

Also, tolerance subscale with beta coefficient of -0.13, absorption subscale with beta coefficient of -0.11, evaluation subscale with beta coefficient of -0.16 and adjustment subscale with beta coefficient of -0.29 could predict marital conflict in working women.

There is a significant negative correlation between the score of emotional reaction, my position, emotional breakdown and mixing with others with marital conflict at the level of 0.01.

Emotional reaction with a beta coefficient of -0.13, my position with a beta coefficient of 0.14, emotional breakdown with a beta coefficient of -0.13 and integration with others with a beta coefficient of -0.14 could predict marital conflict in working women.

Discussion

The present study was conducted with the aim of determining the mediating role of self-differentiation in the relationship between lifestyle and distress tolerance with marital conflicts in working women of Estehban city. The results showed that there is a significant negative correlation between lifestyle, distress tolerance and self-differentiation with marital conflict. Also, the results of the path analysis of the indirect hypothesis showed that self-differentiation plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between lifestyle and distress

tolerance with marital conflicts in the working women of Estehban city.

Working women who have a low level of differentiation are caught in the trap of their emotions and cannot differentiate between emotions and reason, and they deal with issues that arise in their interpersonal lives suddenly and make decisions based on emotions. In fact, more differentiated people tend to have autonomy in their relationships and want to have more intimacy in their relationships without drowning in emotions. These characteristics of differentiated people ultimately lead to the reduction of marital conflicts (Arafi et al., 2016).

Lifestyle is the specific way of life of a person, group or society. A collection of attitudes, values, behaviors, moods, and tastes, that is, all the things that sharing them lead to more contact. Greater contact will lead to greater perceived similarity because the more things two people have in common, the more similar they will see each other. Perceived similarity combined with the possibility of rapport leads to interpersonal situations that are fruitful. More contact also leads to the creation of the same ideas, considering that the ideas of the couple find objectivity in actions. Therefore, couples usually enjoy relatively similar activities and hobbies, which provides this important factor of bringing men and women closer together. Women who have high distress tolerance have the ability to manage crisis in life and can look at issues and problems as a reality and accept it. Finally, try to solve it, without showing a negative reaction and causing chaos in your life and others. Women who have this ability show more tolerance against hardships and troubles, and this patience creates more compatibility and peace in married life, and as a result, reduces conflicts and tensions in married life.

Undifferentiated couples react to marital conflicts by withdrawing, counter-attacking or defensive reactions. In this kind of marital relationships where couples are in conflict-avoidance cycle, continuing to experience negative feelings in the marital relationship leads to marital boredom and marital conflicts. What differentiation in marital relationships provides for couples is their increased ability to be intimate with each other, maintain privacy, and at the same time understand differences in stressful situations. It is suggested to carry out this research on married and working men as well as in other cities.

Ethics

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

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Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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