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The mediating role of alexithymia in the relationship between differentiation, neuroticism and anger rumination with marital burnout in women

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Abstract

This research aimed to explain the mediating role of Alexithymia in the relationship between differentiation, neuroticism, and rumination of anger with marital burnout of women in Estehban city. The current research was descriptive and correlational. The research's statistical population was comprised of all the women of Estehban city in 1997-98. From the statistical population, 150 women were selected and studied by simple random sampling method. Differentiation, neuroticism, anger rumination, and marital burnout scales were used to collect data. After collecting and extracting the data, the participants' scores were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and path analysis using statistical software (SPSS). The results of the path analysis showed that Alexithymia plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between differentiation, neuroticism, anger rumination, and marital burnout of women. Also, the findings showed that there is a significant relationship between differentiation, neuroticism, and rumination of anger with women's marital burnout.

Keywords: *Alexithymia, differentiation, neuroticism, anger rumination, marital burnout.*

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Introduction

Marital burnout is a painful state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that affects those who expect dream love to give meaning to their lives. Burnout from love is a gradual process that rarely occurs suddenly; in fact, intimacy and love gradually fade and a feeling of general fatigue. For people suffering from burnout, life is empty, meaningless, and no longer important (Pines, 2010). This condition occurs when couples realize that despite their efforts, their relationship has not and will not give meaning to life, they have not felt any difference in their world, and therefore they begin to feel poor, hopeless, and burnout. Marital burnout occurs due to a set of unrealistic expectations from the spouse and marriage combined with the stresses, realities, and vicissitudes of life; This state occurs when one of the couples does not value the relationship as much as the other party or the most important needs of one of the parties are ignored, in this case, marital satisfaction and intimacy are diminished, or the reason for being together is lost (Pines, 2002).

Many studies show that one of the most important predictors of marital burnout is personality and psychological characteristics (Yousfi, 2010). One of the most influential views in this field is Bowen's differentiation theory, which emphasizes the family's early relationships and considers them effective in later relationships (Yang, Jewitt, and Chan, 2015). The degree of the emergence of differentiation in each person indicates the level of a person's ability to separate the cognitive process from the emotional process that the person experiences. In general, differentiation is a process in which a husband and wife learn to draw their direction and path in life without being

constantly involved in the guidance of their family or spouse (Gladding, 2011; translated by Tajik Esmaili and Rasouli, 2012). Another personality trait related to marital burnout is neuroticism, which has the most consistent relationship with the quality of marital relationships among personality traits (Hermand et al., 2013). One of the models related to the influence of personality factors is the five-factor personality model. Using this model, researchers have investigated the role of personality traits in marital relationships. This model examines the five personality traits of neuroticism, extroversion, flexibility, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCree, 1992). On the other hand, rumination is a repetitive and often unavoidable process of thinking about past experiences. In other words, rumination refers to repeated focused attention on personal concerns and unresolved goals, negative emotions, and causes and consequences of negative emotions (Eshghi, 2014).

Alexithymia is the inability to process emotional information and regulate emotions cognitively. Alexithymia is a multifaceted construct consisting of difficulty identifying emotions, distinguishing between emotions and physical stimuli related to emotional arousal, limited visualization power, and difficulty in describing emotions (Zargham Hajabi & Sahranood, 2016). In this research, the question is answered whether Alexithymia plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between differentiation, neuroticism, and anger rumination with marital burnout

Method

The current research has an applied purpose, and in terms of methodology, the method it follows is descriptive-correlational. The statistical population of this research

includes all couples in Estehban city in 1997-98. The sample of the present study was made up of 150 couples from Estehban city, and a simple random sampling method was used to select the sample group. The criteria for entering the research were: 1- Informed consent 2- Having at least reading and writing literacy 3- Not suffering from acute mental illnesses 4- At least three years of married life have passed.

Materials

1. Toronto Alexithymia Scale TAS-20.

This scale was developed by Taylor in (1986) and revised by Bagby, Parker, and Taylor in 1994. In this scale, the structure of Alexithymia is evaluated in three subscales: difficulty recognizing emotions, difficulty describing emotions, and externally oriented thinking. The first subscale evaluates the subject's ability to identify and distinguish between emotions and physical sensations. The second subscale measures a person's ability to express feelings and whether he can express his feelings in words. The third subscale examines the degree of introspection and deepening of the person's inner feelings and those of others. The method of scoring the test is based on the Likert scale (1=completely disagree to 5=completely agree). The minimum score of the subject in this questionnaire is 20 and the maximum score is 100. A score between 20 and 40: the person's problem in expressing and recognizing emotions is low. A score between 40 and 60: the person's difficulty in expressing and recognizing emotions is average. A score above 60: the person has a lot of difficulty in expressing and recognizing emotions.

2. 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.

3. Marital burnout questionnaire. This questionnaire was created by Pines (1996) and contains 21 questions that indicate burnout symptoms. This questionnaire has three components: emotional fatigue, mental fatigue and physical fatigue. In this scale, higher scores indicate more burnout, and the upper limit of the score is 147 and the lower limit of the score is 21.

4. Anger Rumination Questionnaire (ARS). This scale was created by Sokodolski et al. (2001) and it measures the tendency to think about current anger-provoking situations and recall past episodes of anger. This scale includes 18 items and 4 factors:

5. Personality Characteristics Questionnaire (NEO). The NEOPI-R personality questionnaire is a successor to the NEO test, which McCree and Costa prepared in 1985. This questionnaire measures 5 main factors of personality and 6 characteristics in each factor, or 30 characteristics. The answer sheet of this questionnaire is based on the Likert scale (completely disagree, disagree, indifferent, agree and completely agree).

Findings

The differentiation score was reported with an average of 98.38 and a standard deviation of 18.23. The highest average was related to the subscale of mixing with others with a mean and standard deviation of 26.37 (6.38). The lowest mean is related to emotional breakdown with a mean and standard deviation of 20.79 (7.61). Also, the total score of Alexithymia was reported with a mean and standard deviation of 60.92 (12.45). The highest score was related to the difficulty in describing emotions subscale with a mean and standard deviation of 25.56 (5.15). The lowest score is related to the objective thinking subscale, with a mean and standard deviation of 16.61 (80/). The total score of anger rumination was 65.65 (12.54) with mean and standard deviation. The lowest score was related to the afterthought subscale of anger, with a mean and standard deviation of 14.44 (3.98). The highest score was related to the subscale of understanding the causes, with a mean and standard deviation of 15.83 (5.11). Marital burnout score has been reported with a mean and standard deviation of 66.91 (12.33). The findings showed a negative relationship between neuroticism and differentiation, a negative relationship between rumination of anger and differentiation, and a significant positive relationship with neuroticism. Also, there is a significant positive relationship between Alexithymia and differentiation and neuroticism and anger rumination. There is a significant positive relationship between marital burnout with differentiation and a negative relationship with neuroticism, anger rumination, and Alexithymia.

A goodness of fit index (GFI) equal to 0.89 adjusted goodness of fit index (CFI) equal to 0.87 has been obtained. The size of the indices obtained from the structural model fit

test indicates that the model fits well. The root means square error approximation (RMSEA) was obtained equal to 0.038, and this index also indicates the good fit of the model.

The findings showed a significant relationship between anger rumination and neuroticism and differentiation, and 26% of the variance of neuroticism and differentiation was explained based on anger rumination. Also, there is a significant relationship between neuroticism and differentiation and Alexithymia, and 8% of its variance is explained. Anger rumination has a significant relationship with Alexithymia and 4% of its variance is also explained. Also, differentiation has a significant relationship with Alexithymia, and 1% of its variance is also explained. There is also a significant relationship between anger rumination, neuroticism and differentiation and Alexithymia with marital burnout, 32% of its variance is explained.

Discussion

The present study aimed to determine the significant mediating role of Alexithymia in the relationship between differentiation, neuroticism, anger rumination, and marital burnout of women. This research showed a negative relationship between neuroticism and differentiation, a negative relationship between rumination of anger and differentiation, and a significant positive relationship with neuroticism. Also, there is a significant positive relationship between Alexithymia and differentiation and with neuroticism and anger rumination. There is a significant positive relationship between marital burnout with differentiation and negative relationship with neuroticism, anger rumination and Alexithymia. Also, there is a significant relationship between anger rumination and neuroticism and

differentiation, and 26% of the variance of neuroticism and differentiation is explained based on anger rumination. Also, there is a significant relationship between neuroticism and differentiation and Alexithymia, and 8% of its variance is explained.

In explaining the obtained results, it should be said that emotions and emotions play an important role in intimate relationships between couples. Therefore, failure in emotions causes couples to face many problems and increases marital burnout because the basic characteristics needed to establish an intimate relationship are lacking in people with emotional failure. People with Alexithymia show lower levels of empathy, which is necessary for an intimate relationship. Recent research shows that Alexithymia negatively affects psychological and emotional well-being and is a risk factor for people suffering from emotional distress, psychological problems, and the diagnosis of mental health. Also, research results show that interpersonal problems can intensify the relationship between Alexithymia and marital burnout (Yaqotian et al., 2015). The correct recognition of emotions is one of the inseparable components of interpersonal relationships. People suffering from Alexithymia have difficulty correctly identifying emotions from the faces of others, which is necessary to establish interpersonal relationships. Alexithymia makes a person face many problems in interpersonal relationships; When emotional information cannot be perceived and evaluated in the process of cognitive processing, a person becomes emotionally and cognitively confused and helpless, which disrupts the organization of emotions and cognitions of a person. The need for interpersonal communication is innate, and

people who cannot receive the necessary physical and psychological care will suffer. When facing stress and crisis, if a person does not have enough interpersonal support, he cannot face the crisis. Therefore, if a person has interpersonal problems and suffers from Alexithymia, he will experience high marital burnout (Bashart et al., 2014).

It is suggested that future researchers use interview and observation tools to collect data. It is also suggested that similar research be conducted in other cities and cultures. In such research, factors such as family structure, socio-economic status of the family, number of children, couple's education, and other factors can be investigated as influencing variables.

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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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