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## Predicting marital commitment based on differentiation in women: with the mediating role of emotional intelligence

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### Abstract

The research aimed to determine the structural model of predicting marital commitment based on differentiation in women with the mediating role of emotional intelligence. The research method was a correlation, and the statistical population was all married women referring to counseling centers in Tehran in 2018. In this way, random sampling was used to select counseling centers. For this purpose, the city of Tehran was divided into five regions: North, South, East, West, and Center. Then, three counseling centers were randomly selected from each region, and 300 women were selected based on Sample Power software. Then Adams and Jones' (1997) Marital Commitment Questionnaire, Skowron and Friedlander's (1998) Differentiation Questionnaire, and Bar-Ann Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (2002) were completed, and the data were analyzed using Smart Plus structural equations. The results showed at the 99% confidence level that the structural model can predict marital commitment based on differentiation with the mediation of emotional intelligence ( $\beta=0.120$ ) and has a good fit. The direct path of differentiation ( $\beta=-0.39$ ) and emotional intelligence ( $\beta=0.28$ ) on marital commitment was significant and the indirect path showed that differentiation with the mediation of emotional intelligence had a favorable effect on marital commitment. For the cohesion and creation of a desirable marital relationship, it is possible to improve the differentiation by strengthening the emotional intelligence of each couple.

**Keywords:** *Marriage, differentiation, emotional intelligence.*

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## Introduction

According to Hu, Jiang and Wang (2019), a healthy marriage means several elements such as commitment, marital satisfaction, communication and the absence of elements such as violence and betrayal. Although commitment is often considered a general construct, Dave and Jackson (2018) divided it into three distinct types. a) commitment towards spouse or personal commitment; b) moral commitment and c) forced commitment.

One of the most harmful factors that threatens married life and its stability is the lack of differentiation of each couple; The concept of "Self-differentiation" is one of the most basic concepts of Murray Bowen's family systems theory, which is used to explain the functioning of the family. Families and other social groups have a great influence on people's way of thinking, feeling and behavior (Zare Garizi et al., 2019); Therefore, the environment and family determine the level of self-differentiation of a person in childhood, and in turn, the level of self-differentiation of a person has an effect on the environment and social life and the future of the person, including his marital relations (Yousfi, Qurbani and Azizi, 2018). Bowen has defined differentiation as the ability of individuals to be flexible and act rationally, especially in the face of anxiety (Nichols and Davis, 2016). It has been proposed to distinguish four components. Emotional reactivity, my place, emotional avoidance and integration with others (Zare Garizi et al., 2020).

Emotional intelligence can affect the quality of a couple's marital relationship (Zidner, Kloda, Methous, 2013). According to the definition, emotional intelligence refers to a person's ability to consciously choose

emotions, thoughts and behavior in order to achieve desirable results in relation to oneself and others, which can affect individual and interpersonal life (Ekomatimi Otodon, 2016). In fact, one of the aspects in which emotional intelligence has an extraordinary effect on success is marriage and married life. People with higher emotional intelligence in comparison to people with low emotional intelligence experience more marital satisfaction, compatibility and intimacy, and higher commitment (Azernik and Aghaei, 2015). The expressed excitement of each couple affects the home environment as an important factor of stress (Niles, Ray and Liddell, 2011); These expressed emotions include hostile critical attitudes and excessive emotional conflict that one of the couples shows towards his wife (Bahri and Mohammadi, 2015).

The purpose of this research is to determine the structural model of marital commitment based on self-differentiation with the mediating role of emotional intelligence.

## Method

The current research is correlational. The statistical population was all married women who referred to Tehran counseling centers in 2018. Considering the nature of the research and taking into account the 20% probability of the subjects dropping out and based on the logic of regression (Delavar, 2018), the statistical sample was considered to be 300 people. The sampling method was a combination of simple random and non-random sampling available and voluntary.

## Materials

**1. Marital Commitment Inventory:** This inventory was prepared by Adams and Jones (1997) for research purposes and it measures the three dimensions of personal commitment, moral commitment and

structural commitment on a 5-point Likert scale. The general range of people's scores is between 1 and 172. A high score in this test shows the high commitment of couples (Momeni et al., 2015).

## **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. Emotional intelligence questionnaire.**

This exam has 117 questions and 15 sub-exams. The answers of the test have been adjusted based on a 5-point Likert scale, from completely agree = 5 to completely disagree = 1. The minimum score for each person in the whole exam is 90 and the maximum score is 450. The minimum and maximum score of each individual in each sub-scale was 6 and 30, respectively (Akbari, Pour-Etemad and Sedekpour, 2010).

## **Findings**

The results of correlation coefficients showed that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and marital commitment. Also, there is a significant negative correlation between the

combination of differentiation components and marital commitment ( $P=0.01$ ); However, no significant correlation was observed between reactivity, ego position and emotional avoidance with marital commitment ( $P<0.05$ ).

The four main path coefficients between the constructs in the model are significant at the 0.05 level. Only the path coefficient between differentiation and marital commitment is not statistically significant (0.543). The standardized parameter or beta coefficient of the direct effect of differentiation on marital commitment is 0.037. The statistic corresponding to this effect is equal to 0.927, because this value is less than the critical value of the table at the five hundredth level, i.e. 1.96, there is no significant direct effect between these two variables. But there is a significant indirect coefficient between these two variables through the construct of emotional intelligence ( $P<0.05$ ,  $\beta=0.120$ ).

All the direct coefficients between the constructs in the model are significant, except for the differentiation path to marital commitment with intermediate dependent constructs (emotional intelligence) and main dependent constructs (marital commitment). Also, the indirect coefficients of two main independent constructs to marital commitment through the mediating construct of emotional intelligence are significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels.

The fit indices in the first stage indicate the lack of acceptable fit of the model with the data. Therefore, the model was modified in the second step by creating the covariance of the indicators and finally the fitness indices were obtained. The measurement model has an acceptable fit with the collected data ( $P=0.001$ ).

The amount of explained variance of the main endogenous variable of the model,

marital commitment, through two independent constructs of differentiation and the mediating construct of emotional intelligence is equal to 0.41. That is, about 41% of the variance of the main dependent variable is explained by the variables of the model, and 59% of its variance is related to the variables outside the model. Also, 18% of the variance of the construct of emotional intelligence is explained through the construct of differentiation.

### **Discussion**

The findings indicated that differentiation in the family can predict marital commitment and emotional intelligence can mediate the relationship between differentiation and marital commitment in married women. Also, there is a significant direct relationship between differentiation and marital commitment and between emotional intelligence and marital commitment. In addition, there is a significant indirect relationship between emotional intelligence and marital commitment and differentiation with marital commitment.

People have three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and being in a relationship. The satisfaction of these basic needs leads to the promotion of desirable motivational procedures and autonomous and internal motivational states and ensures their psychological health and facilitates effective interaction with the outside world. Self-differentiation is the ability to think and reflect so that a person does not automatically respond to internal or external emotional pressures (Zare Garizi et al., 2020). Rivas, Bonilla and Vazquez (2020) found that in marriage, each of the parties bring their own and their parents' unresolved issues and conflicts into their married life; Because people have a tendency to repeat the communication styles of their families of

origin in marriage and other important relationships and transfer similar patterns to their children. They transfer. Therefore, those who have experienced a lot of emotional conflict in their family during childhood and adolescence; They have a low level of emotional differentiation and individuality, and they often choose spouses who have similar differentiation to them. It can be expected that undifferentiated people will marry someone who has the same emotional connection with their family of origin. The more this mixture is, the more the possibility of anxiety and instability will be, and the desire of the family to find a solution through war and conflict, distancing and dysfunctional functioning will be more. Usually, family patterns are repeated, what happens in one generation will happen in the next generation, because in each generation, similar unresolved emotional issues are activated again.

### **Ethics**

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

### **Acknowledgement**

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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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