Predicting Marital Burnout Based on the Severity of Early Maladaptive Schemas and Criteria for Mate Selection in Female Teachers

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A r t i c l e   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

Objective: The study aims to investigate the relationship between caregiving burden, social support, and psychological distress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It specifically examines the mediating role of social support in the linkage between caregiving burden and psychological distress.

Methods and Materials: The study employed a descriptive correlational method. The target population comprised all female teachers in Shiraz city in 2021. A purposive sample of 200 teachers was selected. Data were collected using the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ), Refahi and colleagues' Mate Selection Criteria Questionnaire (2008), and the Pines Marital Burnout Scale (1996). The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients and multivariate regression in SPSS-24 software.

Findings: The results indicated that mate selection criteria with a beta coefficient of -0.13, positive perfectionism with a beta coefficient of 0.31, and negative perfectionism with a beta coefficient of -0.19 significantly predicted marital burnout. Additionally, schemas in the domains of rejection and disconnection (beta = 0.59), impaired autonomy and performance (beta = 0.26), impaired limits (beta = 0.19), and other-directedness (beta = 0.20) were significant predictors of marital burnout in female teachers.

Conclusion: The study concludes that both early maladaptive schemas and mate selection criteria are significant predictors of marital burnout among female teachers. The findings suggest that interventions targeting these schemas and criteria can be beneficial in addressing marital burnout.

Keywords: Marital burnout, Early maladaptive schemas, Mate Selection, Female Teachers.

1.   Introduction

The family, in terms of antiquity, is the most primitive and, in terms of breadth, the most universal social institution. Undoubtedly, the topic of family is one of the most important in psychology, as without family, the concept of life would be meaningless. The value of this social institution is so great that psychologists and counselors have always addressed this important issue. Various factors are related to the quality of women's marital relationships, one of which is women's employment or unemployment (Parsakia & Darbani, 2022). Women's employment can be related to their perception of their husbands' behavior, expectations and desires from life, their time spent at home, etc., and this can differentiate the quality of life and marital intimacy between working women and housewives, and be related to their tendency towards marital burnout (Yazdanpanah et al., 2019).

Marital life is one of the human institutions made up of two people with different talents and abilities or needs and interests, in a word, with different personalities (Fahimi & Taghvaei, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, during marriage, specific behaviors arise between men and women, which alienate them from each other. Discussions, arguments, excessive criticism, and emotional rejection are among these behaviors. Since most couples do not know the underlying motivation of these behaviors, these behaviors lead to alienation of the couples and an increase in marital burnout (Vahdani et al., 2020).

Marital burnout can be considered one of the underlying causes of marital conflicts and reduced intimacy. It is a state that develops in couples after marriage who choose a partner who both gives meaning to them and satisfies their unmet childhood needs. However, after marriage, since their spouse is unable to fulfill all their desires (because the spouses themselves have wounds from their childhood), they experience depression, a sense of failure, and eventually marital burnout. Burnout includes a state of depression, despair, loss of motivation to continue life, physical pain, and negative feelings towards the spouse, which can lead to emotional divorce or even formal divorce (Rezvani Abdolabad & Manzari Tavakoli, 2021). Recent research shows that it is not the occurrence of conflicts and clashes that leads to troubled marriages, but rather the reduction in the expression of emotional feelings, harmful schemas, and inappropriate criteria for selecting a spouse that predict the breakdown of the relationship and marital burnout (Amini & Karami Nejad, 2021; Falahati & Mohammadi, 2020;

Vahdani et al., 2020). According to the opinions and research of theoretical psychologists in new branches of cognitive psychology and psychotherapy such as Young and his colleagues (2007), any psychological and marital problem is based on how an individual perceives themselves and their surroundings based on early schemas formed in their mind. These schemas operate out of habit and easily, and when faced with challenges, the individual distorts information to maintain the accuracy and correctness of these schemas (Rasouli Rad et al., 2023; Soleimannezhad & Hajizadeh, 2022). Since schemas are relatively stable and a source of self-stability, they are constantly searched for as confirmatory information and can lead to marital burnout and vulnerability of couples to psychological turmoil (Cheshmeh Noshi et al., 2021). Maladaptive schemas can arise from early traumatic experiences and later in similar situations cause the activation of a response that had appeared in the past (Navaei & Mohammadi Arya, 2016; Solmaz et al., 2023).

In studies related to identifying factors affecting marital burnout, criteria for mate selection play a determining role. Psychologists have given different responses regarding criteria for choosing a spouse, including 1) the idea of randomness, 2) the idea of matching (Jalili, 2020). Numerous studies have shown that couples are physically and psychologically more similar to each other than would be expected by chance. There is also significant evidence that people tend to choose similar mates. This applies to age, physical characteristics, attractiveness, intelligence, education, social class, economic status, religion, personality, social attitudes, and pathological aspects. 3) The complementarity hypothesis was first proposed by Winch in 1958. He stated that people prefer to choose a partner who fulfills their needs and complements their desires. In other words, according to the proponents of this theory, it is not similarity and compatibility but dissimilarity and incompatibility, especially complementary traits, that attract individuals to union with others (Razeghi et al., 2015). Many studies on mate selection have concluded that women, compared to men, place greater importance on economic and social status, ambition, demeanor, and good manners. Therefore, given the aforementioned points, the purpose of the current research is to predict marital burnout based on the severity of early maladaptive schemas and criteria for mate selection in female teachers.

2.   Methods and Materials

2.1.   Study Design and Participants

The present research is of an applied nature and follows a descriptive-correlational methodology. The population of this study included all married and employed female teachers in the education sector of Shiraz city in that year, totaling around 300 individuals. The sampling in this research was conducted through purposive (goal-based) sampling. Accordingly, considering the population consisting of married and employed female teachers in the Shiraz education department, the sample size was calculated to be 92 female teachers based on Morgan's table. However, to increase the credibility in the current research, the researcher increased the sample size to 200 female teachers. Individuals selected as samples for this study were women who were married and had at least 3 years of marriage experience.

Initially, the necessary introduction letter was obtained from Shiraz Azad University and the Shiraz Education Department by stating the purpose of this research. Then, the desired sample was identified by visiting schools in Shiraz. In this study, questionnaires on marital burnout, early maladaptive schemas, and mate selection criteria were used to collect data. The participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential, therefore they were asked to fill out the questionnaire honestly. They were also asked to request further explanation from the researcher if they encountered any ambiguities while completing the questionnaire. They were advised to answer the questionnaire questions calmly and confidently.

The participation of female teachers in this project was voluntary, and care was taken to maintain the confidentiality of the information in the completed questionnaires. For this purpose, the information related to these individuals was analyzed anonymously, only using identification codes. The participants were assured that the questionnaire information would only be used for research purposes.

2.2.   Measures

2.2.1.   Early Maladaptive Schema

The short form of the Early Maladaptive Schema questionnaire was developed by Young in 2005. This questionnaire contains 75 questions assessing the respondent's schemas in 15 subscales. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale for grading, with subscales including emotional deprivation (questions 1-5), abandonment/instability (questions 6-10), mistrust/abuse (questions 11-15), social isolation/alienation (statements 16-20), defectiveness/shame (questions 21-25), failure (questions 26-30), dependence/incompetence (statements 31-35), vulnerability to harm and illness (questions 36-40), enmeshment/undeveloped self (questions 41-45), subjugation (questions 46-50), self-sacrifice (questions 51-55), emotional inhibition (questions 56-60), unrelenting standards (questions 61-65), entitlement/grandiosity (questions 66-70), and insufficient self-control/self-discipline (questions 71-75). The scoring of the questionnaire is on a 6-point Likert scale, with scores of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively for options "completely false for me," "mostly false for me," "more true than false," "slightly true for me," "mostly true for me," and "completely true for me." The reliability of this questionnaire has been reported with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.94 (Ghayathi, Molavi, Neshat Doost, & Salavati, 2008). Additionally, the reliability of Young's Schema Questionnaire with 75 items was measured by various researchers, with an overall reliability between 0.94 to 0.96 and subscale reliability ranging from 0.62 to 0.93. Considering that the Ineffective Attitude Scale, like Young's Schema Questionnaire (third version of the short form, 2005), examines inefficient attitudes in individuals, and as we know, concurrent validity is usually appropriate for diagnostic tests and tests developed to measure a construct (Hooman, 2007). In Ghayathi et al. (2011), the concurrent validity of the questionnaire's factors was determined using the Ineffective Attitude Scale, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed as the statistical method. The results show that the correlation coefficient is significant in all factors, only slightly in the entitlement schema (Khorasani Zadeh et al., 2019).

2.2.2.   Mate Selection Criteria

This is a 22-question questionnaire developed by Refahi, Sanaei, and Sharifi (2008) on mate selection. The responses are organized on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very important" to "very unimportant." The questionnaire assesses two categories of criteria in mate selection. Questions 1, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 21 measure content-based mate selection criteria, which refer to characteristics an individual brings, such as personal and family psychological traits (age, education, occupation, income), as well as mental and physical health, ethnicity, and

religion. Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 16, 19, 20, and 22 assess process-based mate selection criteria, which involve a collection of actions that organize the family system, such as understanding the other party, social and communication skills, coping skills, problem-solving abilities, and flexibility. The overall test reliability was calculated to be 88%, with the questionnaire's reliability in the process dimension at 85% and in the content dimension at 74%. In Mohammadi's (2018) research, Cronbach's alpha was used to determine reliability, resulting in overall scale reliability of 73%, process dimension 75%, and content dimension 74%. Validity was also tested using the correlation of the total score of each dimension with its constituent questions and the overall scale score with each question, with all coefficients being significant at the 0.01 level (Razeghi et al., 2015).

2.2.3. Marital Burnout

This questionnaire consists of 20 questions and aims to measure the degree of marital burnout among couples, using a 5-point Likert scale for scoring. The reliability assessment of the Marital Burnout Scale showed an internal consistency among variables ranging from 0.84 to 0.90. Validity was confirmed through negative correlations with positive communication traits such as positive view about communication, conversation quality, sense of security, self-actualization, sense of purpose, emotional attraction to the spouse, and the quality of their sexual relationship. Translated versions of the CBM have been successfully used in cross-cultural studies in Norway, Hungary, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Finland, and Israel (Pines & Nantz, 2003; Laas & Laas, 2001). The test-retest reliability was 0.89 for a one-month period, 0.76 for a two-month period, and 0.66 for a four-month period. Internal consistency for most respondents was measured with a constant alpha coefficient, ranging from 0.91 to 1.93 (. In Iran, Navidi (2005) measured the Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire on 120 nurses and 120 teachers, resulting in a reliability of 0.86 (Jalalvand et al., 2023).

2.3. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients and multivariate regression in SPSS-24 software.

3. Findings and Results

Regarding demographic characteristics, the highest frequency of participants was among those aged 25 to 35 years. Also, the highest frequency of participants had a bachelor's degree, and finally, the highest frequency of participants had a marriage duration of 3 to 5 years.

Table 1

Descriptive Findings of Early Maladaptive Schemas and Mate Selection Criteria in Female Teachers

Variable	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Domain of Rejection and Disconnection	200	52.83	7.48
Domain of Impaired Autonomy and Performance	200	36.19	14.10
Domain of Impaired Limits	200	42.70	9.50
Domain of Other-Directedness	200	44.63	7.93
Domain of Overvigilance	200	37.14	4.40
Mate Selection Criteria	200	40.22	7.93
Content-Based Criteria	200	16.54	4.73
Process-Based Criteria	200	23.67	4.81

The results of the Table 1 show the mean and standard deviation scores for schemas in the areas of rejection and disconnection, impaired autonomy and performance, impaired limits, other-directedness, and overvigilance. According to the table, the highest score belongs to the schema in the area of rejection and disconnection with a mean and standard deviation of 52.83 (7.48), and the lowest mean is related to the schema in the area of impaired autonomy and performance with a mean and standard deviation of 36.19 (14.10). Additionally, the mean and standard deviation for mate selection criteria is observed to be 40.22 (7.93). Furthermore, the mean and standard deviation for marital burnout is reported to be 52.47 (7.77).

In the application of statistical methods, the normality of data was first tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test. According to the results of this test and the obtained significance levels, which are greater than 0.05, the data for all research variables are normal, and parametric tests can be used to test each of the variables.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Early Maladaptive Schemas and Mate Selection Criteria with Marital Burnout in Female Teachers

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Schema of Rejection and Disconnection	0.75	0.001
Schema of Impaired Autonomy and Performance	0.19	0.001
Schema of Impaired Limits	0.40	0.001
Schema of Other-Directedness	0.61	0.001
Schema of Overvigilance	0.15	0.040
Content-Based Criteria	-0.29	0.001
Process-Based Criteria	-0.14	0.040

The Table 2 shows that there is a significant positive correlation at the 0.01 level between the schema scores in the areas of rejection and disconnection, impaired autonomy and performance, impaired limits, other-directedness, and marital burnout in female teachers. A significant positive correlation at the 0.05 level is established between the schema in the area of overvigilance and marital burnout. It indicates that there is a significant negative correlation at the 0.01 level between the content-based mate selection criterion score and marital burnout, and a significant negative correlation at the 0.05 level between the process-based mate selection criterion score and marital burnout.

Table 3

Regression Results Predicting Marital Burnout Based on Components of Early Maladaptive Schemas and Mate Selection Criteria in Female Teachers

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R2	R2adj	F	sig
Regression	11351.92	5	2270.38	0.81	0.66	0.65	75.25	0.001
Residual	5853.23	194	30.17					
Total	17205.15	199						

As observed in the Table 3, the sig value is less than 0.01, indicating the significance of the regression model, meaning that at least one of the predictor variables has a significant impact on the criterion variable.

R2 (Multiple Determination Coefficient): This index indicates what percentage of the variation in the criterion variable is explained by the predictor variables. In other words, it shows how much the predictor variables are capable of fitting the dependent variable. In this research, the R2 value is 0.66, meaning that the components of maladaptive schemas and mate selection criteria can predict 66% of marital burnout.

R2adj (Adjusted Determination Coefficient): This index assesses the predictive ability of the dependent variable by the predictor variables in the population. It extends the sample to the entire population with some adjustment. The value of this coefficient in this research is 0.65, meaning that the components of maladaptive schemas and mate selection criteria collectively have a 65% predictive ability for marital burnout in female teachers.

Given the significance of the overall model, it is now necessary to determine which of the coefficients is not zero, or in other words, which variable or variables have a significant impact in the model. For this purpose, the t-test is used.

Table 4

Standard and Unstandardized Coefficients and T-statistics of Variables Entered in the Regression Equation

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	T-statistic	Significance Level (sig)
Domain of Rejection and Disconnection	0.07	0.54	9.85	0.001	0.01
Domain of Impaired Autonomy and Performance	0.04	0.25	5.53	0.001	0.01
Domain of Impaired Limits	0.04	0.18	3.97	0.001	0.01

Domain of Other-Directedness	0.06	0.14	2.39	0.018	0.05
Domain of Overvigilance	0.09	0.06	1.62	0.130	0.05
Content-Based Criteria	-0.14	-0.28	3.81	0.001	0.01
Process-Based Criteria	-0.14	-0.13	2.52	0.019	0.05

As the Table 4 results showed, among the components of maladaptive schemas, the areas of rejection and disconnection with a beta coefficient of 0.54, impaired autonomy and performance with a beta coefficient of 0.25, impaired limits with a beta coefficient of 0.18, and other-directedness with a beta coefficient of 0.14 were able to predict marital burnout in female teachers. Only the schema in the area of overvigilance was unable to predict marital burnout. Additionally, it was shown that the content-based mate selection component with a beta coefficient of -0.28 and the process-based mate selection component with a beta coefficient of -0.13 were able to predict marital burnout in female teachers.

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to predict marital burnout based on the severity of early maladaptive schemas and mate selection criteria in female teachers. To test the hypotheses related to this objective, 200 female teachers from Shiraz were purposively sampled and studied. The results indicated that early maladaptive schemas and mate selection criteria could predict marital burnout in female teachers which is consistent with previous studies (Ahmadi et al., 2019; Moayed et al., 2018; Navaei & Mohammadi Arya, 2016; Rezakhaniha & Ashkan, 2022; Saboonchi et al., 2020; Sharifi et al., 2022; Zolfaghari et al., 2021).

Explaining these findings, it can be said that early maladaptive schemas are long-term and persistent issues that originate in childhood, persist into adulthood, and are somewhat inefficient. Early maladaptive schemas are enduring and resistant to change and appropriate resolution of individual and marital conflicts. These schemas operate easily and habitually, and when challenged, individuals distort information to maintain the accuracy and correctness of these schemas. Maladaptive schemas perpetuate themselves through cognitive distortions, self-destructive life patterns, and maladaptive coping styles, and directly and indirectly lead to psychological distress and affect individual conflicts and couples' inclination towards marital burnout. Furthermore, based on the review of prior research and due to the novelty of the research field in predicting marital burnout based on mate selection criteria. In explaining the obtained results, it must be said that choosing a spouse and marriage is one of the most important decisions in an individual's life, which, if done with proper understanding and in accordance with desired criteria, can promise a stable life for couples. Conversely, if the choice is based on convenience and lacks appropriate criteria, such a marriage can lead towards instability and an inclination to marital burnout.

Mate selection methods are based on two types of selection criteria: content-based and process-based, and look at these criteria from two temporal perspectives: at the time of marriage and the present, after several years of marriage. Different people view the topic of marriage and spouse selection with different criteria. Imagine how much the congruence of these criteria (content and process) in an intimate and important relationship, like marriage, can be effective and bring about high marital satisfaction for couples. Paying attention to the inner self, being vigilant, and having high self-awareness lead individuals to the point where they set criteria for key life issues, plan based on this framework, and shape their life goals. Marital burnout, as one of the most important topics in families, is examined in many current studies worldwide. There are many influencing factors for this variable, which is why it is often used as a measure in most family-related research. Certainly, the more normative an individual's personality score is, the more defined and acceptable these criteria are. Such an individual looks at the philosophy of marriage with a purposeful and clear view, knows their interests and preferences, and steps into this field with a balance of emotional logic and logical emotion. They evaluate their life partner with appropriate content-based and process-based criteria and do not enter into married life until they are sure that the important criteria for entering into marital life are met. Such an individual is less likely to feel dissatisfaction with their marital relationship in the future and, therefore, is less inclined to marital burnout. These two variables undoubtedly have the ability to manage and control effectively to achieve marital satisfaction. By providing an appropriate opportunity to enhance the psychological and personal quality of individuals and helping them to recognize themselves and identify their needs and interests, it is possible to prevent the formation of damaging families and, with healthier and happier families, have a society worthy of Iran.

5.   Limitations and Suggestions

Like any other scientific study, the current research faced various obstacles and limitations in practice; some of these limitations were internal, while others were external in nature, including financial, administrative, and operational constraints.

- This study was conducted in the population and statistical sample of female teachers in Shiraz city, and generalizing the results to other employed women in different provinces should be done cautiously.

- The primary limitation in this study was the use of a correlational method and self-report instruments (the correlational nature of the research method and its cross-sectional aspect). In this method, the relationships discovered cannot be assumed to be causal, and in self-report instruments, individuals might not have sufficient introspection and may not respond responsibly to the items.

- Furthermore, the present research has overlooked many other variables that affect the formation of attitudes towards extramarital relationships in women.

- Another significant limitation related to this research and other related studies is the concept of schemas and the process related to them, namely schema processing. Schema processing means that a person with a particular schema processes received information in a way that leads to the confirmation of that schema. In other words, schema processing leads to distortion, searching, memorizing, recalling schema-consistent information, and more importantly, overlooking schema-inconsistent information. Therefore, when an individual with a particular schema responds to a questionnaire, schema processing can lead to incorrect and unrealistic interpretations of the questionnaire items. This limitation can lead to the creation of spurious correlations between research variables not only in this research but in all studies.

Practical suggestions:

- Couples with maladaptive schemas are more prone to marital burnout, and educational and clinical interventions aimed at changing and correcting early maladaptive schemas among couples can be used in addressing interpersonal problems, particularly in treating marital burnout.

- It is suggested that psychologists and family counselors use the results obtained in premarital workshops and workshops aimed at reducing marital problems.

- It is suggested that family counselors organize workshops under the title of premarital education and counseling and mate selection criteria to reduce marital burnout in couples.

- This research can be useful for couples' awareness and attention to mutual understanding and learning mate selection criteria before marriage, in decision-making and preventing the occurrence of marital burnout and infidelity in marital life. It can also be useful for researchers and psychologists to understand the underlying causes of accepting marital burnout and for couple therapists to expedite the treatment process.

Research suggestions:

- Other researchers are suggested to consider the number of subjects and involve more individuals in the research to have a broader statistical sample and obtain more comprehensive results.

- Future research should examine variables such as income, education, employment history, and similar factors to further clarify the general situation of cultural couples.

- Use of shorter questionnaires to increase the interest and willingness of subjects to respond.

- It is suggested that future research use structured and semi-structured interviews for data collection.

- Interventional studies to investigate their impact and establish causal relationships are also an appropriate suggestion for future research.

- Comparing the tendency towards extramarital relationships and mate selection criteria in employed women and housewives.

- Comparing the tendency towards extramarital relationships in women older than their husbands and women younger than their husbands.

- Since the issue of extramarital relationships is influenced by cultural values and beliefs, it is better to examine the questionnaire of extramarital relationships considering the attitudes of people in society towards this issue and to discuss it on a broader scale.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally 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.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics 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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