

## Study Early Maladaptive Schemas as Predictors of Marital Dissatisfaction in India and Iran- Role of Conditional Schemas as a Mediator and Moderator

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### ABSTRACT

The main goal of this study was to investigate and compare the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital dissatisfaction in married persons in India and Iran. The tools of this research were Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form and Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire. A sample of 107 Indian and 97 Iranian were selected randomly. The age group of sample was 20-50 female and male in Iran (M= 31/39, SD= 6/58) and Indian (M= 34/40, SD= 6/00). Data analyses comprised of the methods of descriptive statistics and deductive statistics (hierarchical and multiple regression) and was obtained by conducting SPSS 20. Results derived from the analysis of data showed that abandonment, dependence, and subjugation are significant predictors for marital dissatisfaction in Iran and emotional deprivation is a predictor for marital dissatisfaction in India (P<0.05). Likewise, the results yielded that subjugation mediate the relationship between marital satisfaction and abandonment in Iran (P<0.05). Early maladaptive schemas to some extent can predict marital satisfaction. Moreover, conditional schemas mediated unconditional schemas in this research. The results of this study can be used in clinical and counseling setting to help problematic couples.

**KEY WORDS:** Early maladaptive schemas, conditional schemas, marital satisfaction, mediator, moderator

### 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important aims of a marriage system is satisfaction that the couples experience in their marriage which has the highest impact on strength and stability of family life (Taniguchi et al., 2006; Crowe & Reedly, 2000, quoted in Askari & Navabinezhad, 2012) [1,2]. Asgari (2001) [3] emphasized that marital satisfaction results from happiness and a good adjustment between couples about different aspects of life and empowers the family structure and their relationship. Marital satisfaction influences various dimensions that included the quality of communication, leisure interactions, unity on matters relevant to the child rearing and finances, and family history of distress (Snyder, 1979, 1983; cited in Sousou, 2004) [4]. Moreover, mental health, life satisfaction, and social communication success are affected as well (Beirami, 2012; sarabandi & Alishirazi, 2012) [5,6]. Therefore, according to definitions, the marital satisfaction is a condition in which couples feel happy and satisfied with their marriage (Sinha & Mukerjee, 1990; Mirahmadzadeh et al., 2003) [7,8].

In opposite, dissatisfaction in the relationships of spouses results in reducing the mental health, the level of life satisfaction (Nock, 1995) [9] causes difficulty in their social relationships (Niolon, 2000) [10]. According to the literature review, factors such as age, education, children, marriage duration, couples' cooperation, interpersonal understanding, religious beliefs, financial matters, friends and relatives, sexual relationship, leisure time activities and housework, occupation, interpersonal skills, intimacy and self-expression, cognitive factors, personality traits, mental disorders and psychological health affect on marital satisfaction (Nazari, 2008; Greef & Malherb, 2001; Bouchard et al, 2009) [11,12,13]. Likewise, intimate relationship, self-expression, positive emotions and praising each other are the fundamental factors for marital satisfaction (Monroe, 1990 as cited by Bouchard et al., 2009) [13]. In addition to the factors mentioned above, the first question that arose in the present study is that, according to schema approach, cognitive factors can be regarded as predictors of marital dissatisfaction.

Evaluating thoughts or beliefs which people keep about their close relationships is useful in understanding interpersonal relationships such as marital relationships. Ways people think about their relationships probably influence the way they feel and behave in their relationships. Hence, in studying relationship cognition, researchers have generally focused on the contents of the cognitions people have about their relationships

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(Baldwin, 1992; Whisman & Delinsky, 2002 quoted in Yael & Whisman, 2009) [14,15]. A pattern utilizes experiences to help individuals explain it, to mediate perception, and to guide their responses which are called schemas. Schemas are basically representations of early childhood experiences, and serve as patterns for processing and defining behaviors, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and relationships with others in following one's life. Jeffrey Young (1990-1999) [16,17] created schema approach to address lifelong and self-defeating patterns that called early maladaptive schema (EMSs). They are self-defeating emotional and cognitive patterns that begin early by toxic experiences and repeat throughout life. Furthermore, it is believed that unmet core emotional needs in childhood lead to dysfunctional schemas. There are five core emotional needs: 1) Secure attachments to others, 2) Autonomy, competence, sense of identity, 3) Freedom to express valid needs and emotions, 4) Spontaneity and play, 5) Realistic limits and self-control for human beings that these needs are universal. Everyone has them, although some individuals have stronger needs than others. The approach traces these schemas from early childhood to the present, with particular emphasis on individuals' interpersonal relationships (Young et al., 2003) [18].

It is likely to be important to consider the role of core beliefs which were shaped in negative automatic thoughts and dysfunctional assumptions due to toxic experiences in the past or childhood. The present research offers an attempt to investigate the effects of cognitive aspects such as dysfunctional pattern of thinking on marital satisfaction. It is endeavored to provide a clear understanding in which areas are problematic in the relationships of couples and probes to understand the sources of marital dissatisfaction.

Numerous studies were conducted on cognitive areas and their effect on close relationship and also various variables have been used to predict marital dissatisfaction and elements that involved in the way people interact during their relationship. In this connection, a research by Calvete, Est'vez & Corral (2007) [19] yielded schemas of the disconnection and rejection domain performs as a mediator in association between violence and depression in partners. Whisman and Delinsky (2002) [20] introduced an information processing measure of partner-schemas based on the incidental recall task. The results indicated that the newly introduced measure of partner-schemas was correlated with marital satisfaction, and these correlations remained significant when controlling for symptoms of depression. To investigate the relationship between EMSs and marital intimacy among couples, a study by Zolfaghari et al., (2008) [21] in Iran revealed that there was a negative significant correlation between EMSs and dimensions of marital intimacy. The analysis of data showed that "impaired limits" was the best predictor of marital intimacy. This study showed that the schemas related to the impaired limits including entitlement/grandiosity and Insufficient self-control/ self discipline play the most crucial role in the explanation of the lack of marital intimacy. Likewise, Yousefi et al. (2010) [22] assessed early maladaptive schemas in marital relationship as predictors of divorce in Iran. The schemas of mistrust- abuse, unrelenting standards and emotional inhibition with standard correlations had the highest predicting power. A study also performed in Iran by Hasanvandi, Davoodi & Valizadeh (2011) [23] indicated that subjugation schema is the strongest predictor of marital dissatisfaction.

Additionally, according to schema therapy approach, it is believed that the schemas which are developed in early life experiences are unconditional core beliefs about the self and other. It means they are representation of what was done to the child, without the child having had any choice in the matter. Contrary, the schemas that are developed later are conditional. In fact, they are developed to get relief from unconditional schemas. For instance, subjugation is conditional schema and dependence/incompetence and abandonment are unconditional schemas. Hence, conditional core beliefs status is placed after unconditional schemas in cognitive structure (Young et al., 2003) [18]. In other words, it can be inferred that conditional schemas are performing as mediators and moderators among unconditional schemas and individuals' functions and their information processing system. Therefore, it is beneficial to elicit conditional and unconditional schemas by therapists who are following schema approach. It is helpful to find out cognitive and psychodynamic of patients to reach the goal of the therapy.

According to schema therapy, three factors are of significance; early childhood experiences, the innate temperament of the child, and cultural influences (Young et al., 2003) [18]. Inasmuch as one of the goals of the present study is comparing EMSs which influence on marital dissatisfaction of the participants between Iran and India. Cultural factors of these two countries are considered by comparing EMSs and their impact on marital dissatisfaction. Pertaining to cultural influences, Adonu (2005) [24] attempted to study the cultural construction of marriage and the relative psychosocial predictors of marital satisfaction across British and Ghanaian settings. The Analysis of data revealed the role of cultural grounding indicators in mediating the relationship between predictors and marital satisfaction. Specifically, interdependent self-construal mediated the relationship between material support and satisfaction, but independent self-construal mediated the relationship between self-disclosure and marital satisfaction. Hence, the current study made an effort to identify the contributions of EMSs in married life in Indian and Iranian people regarding cultural differences, since one factor in the development of maladaptive schemas is cultural influences.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Sampling

The comparative subjects for the present study were selected from Iran and India. All married individuals were randomly selected from Tehran (n=97) and Pune (n=107). It has to be said that one of the couples solely were asked to answer the questionnaires. The researchers first used to explain about the significance of the current study and illustrate about the instructions of the questionnaires. After taking their consent, they were assured that all the information will be kept confidential and will be used for research purpose. Then, they were requested to answer all the questions. The time of answering questionnaires was not limited and it depended on the participants.

### 2.2. Tools

**2.2.1. Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF):** The Young Schema Questionnaire was developed in 1999 by Jeffery Young. The questionnaire is composed of statements that people might use to elucidate themselves. Some of the items ask about relationships with parents or romantic partners. Participants are asked to choose the highest score from 1 to 6 on the rating scale (Likert Scale) that describes them. This questionnaire contains 75 items to measure EMSs in 15 subscales which are included in 5 domains: Emotional Deprivation, Abandonment/Instability, Mistrust/Abuse, Social Isolation/Alienation, Defectiveness/Shame, Failure to achieve, Dependence/ Incompetence, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, Enmeshment/Undeveloped Self, Subjugation, Self-Sacrifice, Entitlement/Grandiosity, Insufficient Self Control/Self-Discipline, Emotional Inhibition, Unrelenting Standards/ Hyper criticalness. Investigations by Rijkeboer, Van Den Bergh, & Van Dan Bout (2005) [25], Welburn et al. (2002) [26], Glaser et al. (2002) [27], Waller, Meyer, & Ohnian, (2001) [28] and Ahi et al. (2006) [29] found that validity of YSQ-SF with 75 items in total scale was %94-%96 and subscales were %63-%93 in their research population.

**2.2.2. Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ):** Marital satisfaction is measured as the degree to which spouses perceive that their partners meet their needs and desires (Bahr, Chappell, & Leigh, 1983; Bohlander, 1999; Fields, 1983) [30,31,32]. The questionnaire is used highly in clinical practice. It is a 12-item, symptom-based questionnaire; requesting spouses to rate different areas of potential marital dissatisfaction on a 10-point Likert scale (Herman, 1991) [33]. Although used primarily in clinical practice, the MSQ has been determined to be a psychometrically valid and reliable instrument in a published research study (Herman, 1991) [33]. A correlation of .789 was obtained between the MSQ-R and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS). Alpha for the MSQ-R was found to be 0.91, and The Guttman split-half reliability was 0.90.

## 3-RESULTS

Analysis of data was conducted by SPSS 20. For the purpose of analyzing data, descriptive statistics tests and hierarchical and multiple regression were executed in the present study. Firstly, for the aim of making normality of data Kolmogorov- Smirnov test was performed. Also, linearity test was utilized for assessment of linear correlation. The results of both tests revealed normality and linear correlation. It should be mentioned that outlier data were omitted from total data.

Table 1 show that the means of age (34.40) and education (16.20) in India is higher than Iran.

**Table 1: Mean scores and standards deviation of age, education and percentage of occupation status of participants**

	Age		Education		Job	
	M	SD	M	SD	Self-employment	Government
Iran	31.39	6.58	13.28	2.5	59.8%	40.2%
India	34.40	6.00	16.20	2.01	35.5%	64.5%

Table 2 indicates the means of self-sacrifice in India (16.95) and Iran (16.16) is higher than other subscales of EMSs. In addition, results reveal that there is no remarkable difference in scores of marital satisfaction between Iran (87.72) and India (88.22).

**Table 2: Mean scores and standards deviation of early maladaptive schemas and Marital Satisfaction in Iran and India**

Variable	India		Iran	
	M	SD	M	SD
Emotional Deprivation	10.35	4.44	13.32	5.46
Abandonment	11.58	4.59	14.47	5.61
Mistrust	11.70	4.33	13.16	4.51

Social isolation	10.62	3.99	13.76	4.38
Defectiveness	8.83	3.25	13.09	4.49
Failure to Achieve	9.34	3.75	11.69	4.86
Dependence	8.91	3.24	12.28	4.82
Vulnerability to Harm or Illness	10.26	3.61	14.01	5.17
Enmeshment	10.62	4.62	12.89	5.18
Subjugation	12.59	4.23	13.72	4.64
Self- Sacrifice	16.95	5.27	16.16	5.21
Emotional Inhibition	13.67	4.91	14.64	4.66
Unrelenting Standards	16.17	4.97	15.92	4.75
Entitlement	13.58	4.75	14.51	5.68
Insufficient Self- control	13.69	5.56	15.23	4.96
Marital Satisfaction	88.22	20.57	87.72	21.88

Table 3 shows that abandonment ( $R^2=.20$ ), dependence ( $R^2=.30$ ), and subjugation ( $R^2=.35$ ) at  $P<0.05$   $F(3, 73)=13.09$  are significant predictors for marital satisfaction in Iran.

**Table 3: Stepwise regression analysis for predicting early maladaptive schemas on the basis of marital satisfaction in Iran**

Predictor variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Sig.
Abandonment/instability	0/44	0/20	0/20	-1/15	0/31	-0/35	-3/65	0/00*
Dependence/incompetence	0/55	0/30	0/10	-0/98	0/40	-0/24	-2/43	0/01*
Subjugation	0/59	0/35	0/04	-0/90	0/40	-0/22	-2/20	0/03*

\* $P<0.05$

Table 4 indicates emotional deprivation ( $R^2=.35$ ) is a predictor for marital satisfaction in India.

**Table 4: Stepwise regression analysis for predicting early maladaptive schemas on the basis of marital satisfaction in India**

Predictor variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Sig.
Emotional Deprivation	0/41	0/17	-1/82	0/46	-0/41	-3/96	0/00*

\* $P<0.05$

From the perspective of Young theory (Young et al., 2003) [18] subjugation is one of conditional schemas. Abandonment and dependence/incompetence are unconditional schemas. In the present research, subjugation is as a mediator between dependence, abandonment schemas and marital satisfaction. Hierarchical and multiple regressions were conducted, as it can be seen in table 5. In the first step, abandonment (predictor variable) and marital satisfaction (dependent variable) were entered in the analysis process. The results revealed a significant association between these two variables ( $\beta = -0.31$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.002$ ). In the second step, correlation between abandonment (predictor variable) and subjugation (mediator variable) were analysed. The results also showed a significant association ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.002$ ). Finally, in the third step, the significant correlation between abandonment, subjugation subscales (predictor variable) and marital satisfaction (dependent variable) was observed. A reduction process compared to the first step was demonstrated ( $p < 0.05$ ). The partial correlation was significant; a reduction in coefficient Beta from the first to the third step was yielded. So, it can be said that subjugation mediates between abandonment and marital satisfaction.

**Table 5: Hierarchical and multiple regression analyses examining the mediating role of subjugation between abandonment and marital satisfaction in Iran**

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change
Step 1 Abandonment	Marital satisfaction	-1/24	-0/31*	-3/22	0/002	0/10	0/10	10/41*
Step 2 Abandonment	Subjugation	0/25	0/31*	3/20	0/002	0/09	0/09	10/27*
Step 3 Abandonment Subjugation	Marital satisfaction	-0/96 -1/10	-0/24* -0/23*	-2/42 -2/31	0/01 0/02	0/10 0/15	0/10 0/05	10/41* 5/36*

\* $P<0.05$

With respect to dependence variable which can be observed in table 6, in the first step, correlation between dependence schema (predictor variable) and marital satisfaction (dependent variable) was analyzed. The results revealed a significant correlation between these two variables (Beta = -0.34, sig= 0.001). In the second step, dependence (predictor variable) and subjugation (mediator variable) were examined. A significant association was indicated (Beta = 0/48, sig= 0.002). Finally, the third step showed dependence and subjugation are significantly correlated. Because the results showed partial correlation was not significant ( $r = -0.17$ , sig= 0.09). Also coefficient beta was not reduced from the first step to the third step. Hence, subjugation cannot mediate the correlation between dependence schema and marital satisfaction.

**Table 6: Hierarchical and multiple regression analyses examining the mediating role of subjugation between dependence and marital satisfaction in Iran**

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	F change
Step 1 Dependence	Marital satisfaction	-1/56	-0/34*	-3/43	0/001	0/11	11/82*
Step 2 Dependence	Subjugation	0/47	0/48*	5/22	0/00	0/23	27/26*
Step 3 Dependence	Marital satisfaction	-1/56	-0/34*	-3/43	0/001	0/11	11/82*

\*P<0.05

Since subjugation didn't mediate the relation between predictor variable and dependent variable, therefore, its affect was examined as moderator in relation between dependence and marital satisfaction. Pertaining to this, regression analysis was conducted which is exhibited in table 7. As it can be observed, the result indicated that subjugation did not moderate on the association between dependence and marital satisfaction as well.

**Table 7: Regression analysis examining the moderating role of subjugation between dependence and marital satisfaction in Iran**

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	F change
Dependence	Marital satisfaction	-2/63	-0/58	-2/17	0/03	0/16	5/61
Subjugation	Marital satisfaction	-2/01	-0/43	-2/03	0/04		
Dependence* Subjugation	Marital satisfaction	0/09	0/51	1/35	0/18		

\*P<0.05

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This research sought aims to shed light on study of the role of early maladaptive schemas(EMSs) as predictors for marital satisfaction in Iranian and Indian participants and to demonstrate conditional schemas as mediators or moderator of conditional schemas. Results provided abandonment, dependent, and subjugation as predictors for marital satisfaction in Iran. Emotional deprivation was regarded as a predictor for marital satisfaction in Indian population. Subjugation, also, mediated on association between marital satisfaction and abandonment in Iran.

The major findings are consistent with a research by Dumitrescu and Rusu (2012)[34] indicating that an increased level of maladaptive schemas predicts a decreased level of couple satisfaction, and the level of EMSs negatively correlates with the individual mate value. The results also were consistent with the findings of a research by Zolfaghari et al. (2008) [21] revealing that there is a negative significant correlation between EMSs and dimensions of marital intimacy and Whisman and Delinesky (2002)[20] showed that the newly introduced measure of partner-schemas was correlated with marital satisfaction.

As it was indicated, abandonment is one of the predictors of marital dissatisfaction in Iran. A person who possess abandonment schema, expects to lose anyone with whom has emotional attachment and close relationships will end imminently. Therefore, this feeling and belief hinders to satisfy in the married life. The person is concerned that his/her partner leave and abandon at any moment. The system of family in Iran is a nuclear system which typically center on couples and kids. Family members share strong bounds with each other. Possessing abandonment schema might provide background on the creation fin security and leaving the front partner in this family structure. The second predictor of marital dissatisfaction in Iran was dependent core belief. People with depended subscale believe that they are not competent enough to manage day to day responsibilities independently. Such persons rely on others excessively for making decision and starting new work(Young et al., 2003) [18]. The partner of such person will be exhausted owing to burden of too much responsibility. Consequently, it might be a reason of engendering challenges and problems in their interpersonal relationships. The last predictor of unhappiness in the marriage life in Iranian population was subjugation

schema. It refers to the perception that one is obliged to surrender to their desire in order to avoid the negative consequences such as being rejected. A person feels trapped because of being obedient and too sensitive. Hence, this status leads to anger and is manifested in maladaptive symptoms such as passive-aggressive behavior, uncontrolled outbursts of temper and withdrawal of affection which in turn results in feeling of displeased in the couple's relationship.

In the present study, the effects of conditional core beliefs as mediators or moderators on relationship between unconditional subscales and marital satisfaction were also investigated. Subjugation had a role as a mediator in association between marital satisfaction and abandonment in Iran. According to schema therapy, subjugation schema is a belief of submitting to others excessively because one feels coerced and obedient in order to avoid anger, retaliation or abandonment (Young *et al.*, 2003) [18].

Individuals, who possess abandonment schema, develop subjugation for hindering to be emotionally neglected and ignored by other significant people specially their spouse. So, they attempt to suppress their desires, preferences, and emotions in order to control extremely their anger, deprivation, and revenge for preventing to be abandoned by their spouse or their family. Studies have rarely been done concerning the role of conditional early maladaptive schemas as moderators or mediators on the relationships between unconditional early maladaptive schemas and marital satisfaction. So, in the current study, it is attempted to fill this gap.

Since the results yielded that subjugation mediate the relationship between abandonment and marital satisfaction, it indicates that the result is consistent with the theory of Young. Some studies supported the results of this study by addressing EMSs as mediate or moderator. Calvete, Est'avez & Corral (2007) [19] obtained in their investigation that subscales of the disconnection and rejection mediate in relationship between violence and depression in partners.

As it was showed, emotional deprivation has potential as a predictor for marital dissatisfaction in Indian population. Individuals with this emotional deprivation schema believe their emotional need will be never met by others. These needs are such as; nurturance, empathy, affection, guidance, protection, and caring (Young *et al.*, 2003) [18]. This result might be due to family system in India. System of family in India is extended family that consists of parents and children along with other relatives. Hence, members of family have to share their affection and caring in the family. In this situation, persons may not be given and receive affection equally. A core belief emerges when significant others will not nurture their emotional needs. They always feel emotionally insecure. This schema is perpetuated throughout their life and influences their interpersonal relationship with spouse.

Since the results indicated, there are differences between Iranian and Indian cultures respecting to dysfunctional schemas as predictors of marital dissatisfaction. In this regard, the results partially are consistent with a study by Adonu (2005) [24] showing the role of cultural grounding indicators in mediating the relationship between predictors and marital satisfaction. Specifically, interdependent self-construal mediated the relationship between material support and satisfaction, but independent self-construal mediated the relationship between self-disclosure and marital satisfaction.

The results of the present study will be fruitful for therapists who work in the field of family and marriage counseling. Clients would gain the insight to view their character logical problems as ego-dystonic, and thus, become more empowered to give them up.

One of the noticeable limitations in the present research is that although the researchers used to explain the purpose of the study and assure the respondents that their information will be totally confidential, but most of them in Iran and India used to resist filling out the questionnaires. They kept saying that this kind of information is so private. Especially in India they told the researcher that they respect their relationship and they are not comfortable to disclose their relationship with their spouses.

Suggestions for future study include expanding geographical area and ethnicity of participants for a more diversity-based approach, because in Iran and India there are various cultures across the countries. Since family problems are being increased in both countries, therefore, working on this spectrum needs more studies to help therapists for giving intuition to families to solve their problems. Particularly, in India, this is the first study which was conducted in the field of family therapy according to Schema Therapy approach. It also contributes to the literature examining the effects of dysfunctional schemas on couples' relationship.

## 5. Conclusion

In brief, it can be inferred that abandonment, dependence, and subjugation as dysfunctional schemas are significant predictors for marital dissatisfaction in Iran and emotional deprivation can predict marital unhappiness in India. Therefore, early maladaptive schemas to some extent can predict marital satisfaction. Furthermore, conditional schemas mediated unconditional schemas in this study.

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