Original Research

The Mediating Role of Attachment Styles in the Relationship between Couple's Personality Characteristics Similarity to Marital Adjustment

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Abstract:

Background:

This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of attachment styles in the relationship between similarity of couple personality traits and marital adjustment.

Method:

The research method was correlation through structural equation modeling. The sample consisted of 100 couples referring to counselling and psychology centers in Karaj. They were selected using the available sampling method and answered to the short form of the five-factor personality scale (NEO–FFI), Spanier Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (RDAS), and Collins and Reed Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire (RAAS). Data analysis and evaluation of the proposed model were done using structural modeling (SEM).

Result:

The results showed a significant positive relationship between couples' similarity in extroversion and agreeableness personality traits with marital adjustment and a significant negative relationship between couples' similarity neuroticism personality trait and marital adjustment. Also, secure and insecure attachment styles mediate the relationship between similarity of couple personality traits with marital adjustment.

Conclusion:

According to the final research model, secure and insecure attachment styles play a mediating role in the relationship between the similarity of extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism personality traits with their marital adjustment.

Keywords: Couples Personality Similarity, Marital Adjustment, Attachment Style Corresponding

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Introduction

Marriage is a religious and social bond between spouses that leads to the formation of legal obligations between them. Starting a new life after marriage can be exciting and stressful for a couple (1). In the process of marriage, which includes psychological, social, emotional, sexual and economic relationships, the effort to satisfy the needs of individuals is emphasized. Moreover, this process brings new experiences that people need to adapt to. The ability to meet the needs of individuals in marriage and the degree of adaptation to the new life (2). is called a marital adjustment. Spanier (1976) (3) conceptualized the concept of marital adjustment in the form of adaptation of the couple to daily life, its changing conditions, and the couple's change over time. The marital adjustment consists of consensus, cohesion, and marital duties' performance. Marital adjustment is the ability of spouses to agree on issues that separate them from each other and reduce the emotional intimacy of spouses with each other, the level of satisfaction of couples with their marital relationship and the desire to be together (3).When marriage is stable and compatible, spouses are healthier and happier (4). and experience a more sustainable life (5). Low levels of marital adjustment are one of the strongest predictors of divor (6). Excessive incompatibility and conflict can occur due to the contradicting personality traits of the couple (7).

Spouses' personality traits are associated with different levels of marital satisfaction (8). Previous studies have indicated that personality traits are the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction in spouses (9). Personality is a set of characteristics that refers to relatively stable thinking, feeling, and acting styles (10). In adulthood, personality traits are more resistant and therefore easier to recognize. However, the values, beliefs, and motivations that make up a personality can change through the various experiences that people have throughout their lives, or depending on the context in which they live (10). Also, people's perception of marital adjustment concerns their personality traits (11).

There are many personality patterns, but the five-factor model is one of the most common patterns used to examine personality (McCrae, & Costa, 1987). These five factors are neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. Extroversion with the ability to socialize, dare and energy, agreeableness with optimism, trust and cooperation, conscientiousness with a sense of competence, progress, self-discipline, neuroticism with emotional instability, openness to experience with creativity, traditional thinking and patience are described (12).

Most studies have investigated the effect of couples' personality traits on their spouse's marital satisfaction or the relationship between couples' personality traits and marital satisfaction. But few studies have examined the role of similarity in couples' personality traits in predicting marital adjustment (13). According to homogamy theory, individuals usually choose a person with characteristics similar to their own. According to this theory, one of the mechanisms that can lead to homogamy is that people prefer to have a spouse similar to an opposite-sex parent. Also, proximity (workplace, neighborhood, family network and voluntary associations) is effective in attracting similar people (14). The study examined the effect of the similarity of couples 'personality traits on their marital satisfaction and concluded a significant relationship between the similarity of couples' personality traits and their marital satisfaction (15). Research has also demonstrated that couples with similar personality traits are more likely to have marital satisfaction than couples with different personality traits (16).

This study hypothesized that attachment styles could play a mediating role in the relationship

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between couples' similarity and marital adjustment. Research has shown that attachment styles can affect romantic relationships in adulthood (17). Attachment theory describes how social status (interaction with the caregiver) creates personality (attachment pattern) and how the resulting personality patterns impress people's choices and behavior in social situations (18). Attachment styles determine how people gain their spouse's approval and support when upset (19). Couples who have an insecure attachment style score high on avoidant and anxious components; also, they have less ability to regulate their emotions and less marital satisfaction than secure attachment couples (20). Avoidant and anxious attachment are associated with not meeting attachment needs and indicate a lack of comfort in intimate relationships. Some research has shown that these two attachment styles play a role in predicting relationship satisfaction (21,22,23). These studies have illustrated that higher levels of avoidance and anxiety are negatively associated with satisfaction in romantic relationships. People who report higher levels of anxious and avoidant attachment styles have dysfunctional communication thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make them dissatisfied with their marital relationships (24).

In contrast, individuals with secure attachment rely on their spouses. This trust is rooted in their past experiences that satisfy attachment needs to approval, support, and empathy by feeling intimate with their spouses and expressing those needs openly. A secure attachment style leads to regulating negative emotions and satisfaction in marital relationships (19). Only one study examined the mediating role of attachment styles in the relationship between similarity of spouses' personality traits and marital satisfaction. It concluded that attachment styles play a mediating role in the relationship between the similarity of spouses' personality traits and marital satisfaction (25). Given the above, as well as the lack of research on the mediating role of attachment styles in the relationship between similarity of couples' personality traits and their marital satisfaction, the researchers sought to answer the question of whether attachment styles in the relationship between similarity Do couple personality traits and marital satisfaction play a mediating role?

Method

Research plan

The present study sought to investigate the mediating role of attachment style in the relationship between similarity of personality traits and marital adjustment. Therefore, the correlation research method was structural equation modeling.

Participants

The statistical population of this study included all couples who were referred to counselling centers in Karaj in 2021. The study population selected 100 couples who had lived together for two years by convenience sampling method. After talking with the managers of counselling and psychology centers plus obtaining permission to collect information, questionnaires were explained to the secretary of these centers and clarified the purpose of the research and how to respond. The secretary was instructed to present the questionnaires to couples who had been married for at least two years, had a bachelor's degree or higher, and was willing to participate in the research. Also, receive the questionnaires from the couples after answering the questionnaires. The highest age range of couples participating in this study was 29-35 years (35%), and the lowest age range was 43-49 years (9%). The highest frequency of marriage of couples participating in this study was 1-6 years (43.5%), and the lowest duration was 24-19 years (11.5%). Most of the couples participating in this study had a

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bachelor's degree (50.5%), and a small number had a PhD (7.1%).

Research procedure

The questionnaires were given to couples who had been married for two years and wanted to participate in the study. Couples were asked to answer questions independently and were assured that the answers would be confidential. The absolute value of the difference in the scores of couples in a particular personality trait was calculated as an indicator to examine the similarity and dissimilarity of personality traits. This index has been called the absolute difference score (ADS) in previous research. The larger the ADS calculated for a couple indicates a dissimilarity, and the closer the ADS obtained is to zero, the more similar the couple is to the desired trait. The relationship between marital adjustment and similarity in five personality traits was investigated using the Pearson correlation method. In the next step, path analysis was used to examine the mediating role of attachment style.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the research variables' descriptive indicators and correlation matrix.

As can be seen in Table 2, the correlation coefficient between neuroticism personality traits and marital adjustment in the negative direction ($p<0.05$, $r= -0.49$), personality traits and marital adjustment in the positive direction ($p<0.05$), $R=0.52$), personality traits of extroversion and marital adjustment in a positive direction ($p<0.05$, $r=0.44$), secure attachment and marital adjustment in a positive direction ($p<0.05$, $p=0.56$ r), avoidant attachment and marital adjustment ($p<0.05$, $r=-0.31$) as well as anxious attachment and marital adjustment ($p<0.05$, $r=-0.45$) were obtained in a negative direction.

For this purpose, the assumptions of structural equations, including normality, outliers, a linear relationship between variables and the absence of multicollinearity between independent variables, were examined. All statistical assumptions are confirmed.

Table (3) illustrates that although the proposed research model has a relatively good fit in some fit indexes such as NFI, CFI, AGFI, and GFI, other indicators show that the proposed model needs to be modified and improved. After removing the non-significant paths, the pattern's fit with the data is reassessed. Experimental model fit indexes show that the obtained data correspond to the conceptual (proposed) model. In other words, the data and the experimental model are compatible with each other, and the data supports the experimental model. As shown in the table above, the two indexes, GGP 0.93 and AGF 0.89 are close to 1; the closer these two indexes are to 1, indicating the experimental models complete fit. Also, the RMSEA index indicates the desirability of the model.

According to Figure 1, the coefficients of the direct effect of similarity of couples' neuroticism personality traits on avoidant and anxious attachment styles are equal to (0.38), (0.44), extroversion similarity on secure attachment style (0.35), similarity on secure attachment (0.19), avoidant and anxious attachment on marital adjustment (-0.41), (-0.50), secure attachment on marital adjustment (0.33), neuroticism similarity on marital adjustment (-0.42), Extroversion similarity on marital adjustment (0.30) and compatibility similarity on marital adjustment (0.21) were obtained. All these coefficients are significant at the level of 0.01. Therefore, it can be said with 99% confidence that the similarity of couples' personality traits and attachment styles directly impact marital adjustment.

This study tested indirect variables (mediating) relationships through the bootstrap macros method. Confidence intervals for the contents of the above table indicate no zeros in these distances and the significance of indirect paths

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mediated by attachment styles, thus confirming the research hypothesis. In other words, the similarity of personality traits of neuroticism, extroversion, and agreeableness of couples indirectly affects marital adjustment through secure, avoidant and anxious attachment styles.

Discussion

In the present study, a theoretical model was proposed and tested by structural equation analysis to investigate the mediating role of attachment styles in the relationship between personality traits and marital adjustment. The results demonstrated that the proposed model has a good fit. Findings indicated that neuroticism personality traits through insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) directly and indirectly affect marital adjustment. Personality traits of extroversion and agreeableness also directly and indirectly affected marital adjustment. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Gaunt (2006)(15), Hudson et al. (2014)(25), Yahya et al. (2020)(1), Mohammadzadeh et al. (2008)(16), Hollist et al (2012)(3). These researchers concluded a significant relationship between the similarity of a couples' personality traits and marital satisfaction. Also, Hudson and Fraley (2014)(25) showed that attachment styles play a mediating role in the relationship between the similarity of spouses' personality traits and marital satisfaction. Couples who receive a high score on neuroticism characteristics and are similar in neuroticism do not have psychological adjustment and emotional stability. They are often prone to negative emotions such as anger, shame and embarrassment and are incredibly aggressive, tense, unstable, impulsive, and restless (Celikkaleli & Gunduz, 2019). As a result, it can be said that neurotic couples have slight marital adjustment due to emotional instability and experiencing negative emotions. Neuroticism, due to accompanying negative emotions, affects couples' impressions and perceptions of each other, and their dysfunctional behaviors also deprive them of the possibility of correct and conscious reactions. Couples are more likely to escalate their conflicts and make interpersonal mistakes due to the eruption of negative emotions, mental preoccupation with their conflicts, and lack of flexibility when arguing. These conflicts activate anxious and avoidant insecure attachment styles and thus reduce marital adjustment. Spouses with neuroticism and avoidant attachment styles do not value intimacy and trust their partner emotionally or sexually. Therefore, they reject their spouse's attempts for greater intimacy. Couples with anxious attachment styles are afraid of rejection, constantly complaining and humiliating their spouse. They ignore their spouse's needs and concentrate on their distressing thoughts, leading to anger and reduced marital adjustment (17).

In contrast, extroverted couples enjoy being together (21). They are social, talkative, domineering and optimistic. Also, couples with adaptive personality traits tend to conform to each other's feelings and desires. They are usually cooperative, considerate, empathetic, high-minded, polite and kind in their interactions (7). As a result, couples who score high on extroversion and adaptive personality traits and have a secure attachment style are better able to assess situations, organize the information they need, and choose the best solution available to deal with conflicts. Extroverted and adaptable couples who have a secure attachment style and the power of empathy and cooperation manage difficult situations and face these situations. Instead of constantly criticizing, they express their complaints, discuss issues, ultimately resolve issues, and become less involved in marital conflicts. For this reason, they feel that they have a high level of marital compatibility.

The present study had some limitations; since it is correlational, it is not possible to deduce

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causal relationships between variables. The instruments used were self-assessment tools, and in some cases, especially the marital adjustment questionnaire, participants did not seem to have adequate self-disclosure. The sample was limited to couples in Karaj, so caution should be exercised in generalizing to other populations. Because of limitations, the following suggestion is made:

Using the interview method and the questionnaire leads to more accurate data collection. The use of a more comprehensive sample makes the similarity of the couples' characteristics more accurately assessed. Investigate the relationship between different attachment styles and components of marital adjustment, including satisfaction, consensus and cohesion. In order to more accurately study the relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment, the relationship between these two variables should be examined in a clinical sample, including couples with personality disorders.

Conclusion

Finally, it can be said that the findings of this study can be helpful for couple's therapists and premarital counsellors increase couples' awareness about the effect of personality matching and attachment style on the success of a marriage. According to the results of this study on the efficacy of attachment style on intimate adult relationships, it can be used to enhance parents' awareness of how attachment style is formed and its effect on the personality and success of children's future relationships.

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Tables

Table 1. Descriptive indicators of the research variables

variables	The least	The most	mean	Standard deviation
Marital adjustment	9	70	85.34	09.10
Attachment styles				
Secure attachment	5	22	77.19	54.3
Avoidant attachment	7	24	48.21	87.3
Anxious attachment	3	22	11.20	61.3
Personality traits				
neuroticism	18	50	05.42	87.6
extroversion	28	55	12.39	23.5
openness to experience	26	51	66.34	84.3
agreeableness	29	55	18.40	12.5
conscientiousness	28	54	23.41	75.4

Table 2. Correlation matrix among the research variables

variable	1	2	3	4	5
1Similarity of neuroticism	-				
2similarity of agreeableness	-0.34*	—			
3similarity of extroversion	-0.51*	0.67**	—		
4secure attachment	-0.30*	0.55**	0.62**	—	
5avoidant attachment	0.61**	-0.47**	-0.38**	-0.68**	—
6anxious attachment	0.22*	-0.38*	-0.23*	-0.19*	0.43**
7marital adjustment	-0.49**	0.52**	0.44**	0.56**	-0.31* 0.45**

Table 3. Comparison of proposed and experimental model fit indexes.

model	P-Value	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	x2
Proposed model	0.000	0.09	0.75	0.69	0.82	0.78	12.32
Experimental model	0.000	0.04	0.94	0.89	0.93	0.90	61.06

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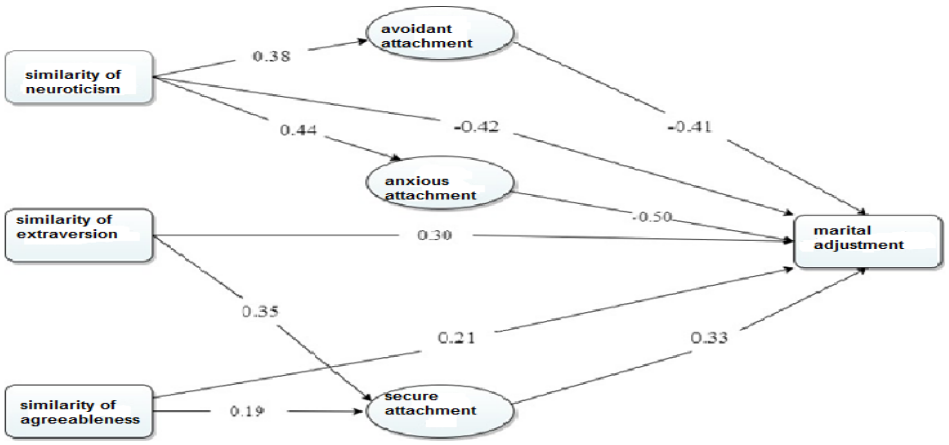


Figure 1. Structural modeling results for direct path coefficients of the final research model

Table 4. Bootstrap results to investigate the indirect effects of similarity of couple personality traits on marital adjustment through attachment styles.

Predictor variable	Mediating variable	The indirect effect of a low limit	The indirect effect of a high limit	Criterion variable	P value
neuroticism	Avoidant attachment	0.47	0.56	marital adjustment	0.001
neuroticism	Anxious attachment	0.38	0.61	Marital adjustment	0.001
extroversion	Secure attachment	0.29	0.43	Marital adjustment	0.001
agreeableness	Secure attachment	0.15	0.36	Marital adjustment	0.001

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