

# Structural Equation Modeling of Marital Boredom Based on Resilience through Emotional Self-Regulation

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Received 2021 January 11; Accepted 2021 June 03.

## Abstract

**Background:** Marital boredom is one of the variables affecting the rate of marital conflict resolution and is directly or indirectly affected by various factors.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to develop a causal model of marital boredom based on the degree of differentiation and resilience mediated by couples' emotional self-regulation.

**Methods:** The statistical population in this correlational study with structural equation modeling included all couples with marital conflict who were referred to the counseling centers of Gachsaran, Iran, in 2019. The data collection was performed using the resilience questionnaire, the scale of marital boredom, and the questionnaire of marital conflict. Data were analyzed using Smart PLS and SPSS software (version 22) through Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant in this study.

**Results:** The results showed that the direct path coefficient between resilience with emotional self-regulation was positive and significant ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $\beta = 0.63$ ). Furthermore, the path coefficients between resilience and marital boredom ( $P = 0.009$ ,  $\beta = -0.15$ ), and emotional self-regulation with marital boredom ( $P < 0.001$ ,  $\beta = -0.48$ ) were significant and negative. The adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.93 and 0.061 indicated that the emotional atmosphere of the family played a mediating role in the relationship between the variables of life expectancy and academic performance.

**Conclusion:** Based on the obtained results, marital boredom and its components including resilience and emotional self-regulation have a significant effect on resolving marital conflict.

**Keywords:** Emotional regulation, Marital boredom, Marriage

## 1. Introduction

Marital distress is a painful state of physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion affecting those who expect dream love to give meaning to their lives. Disillusionment with love is a gradual process through which intimacy and love gradually fade and are accompanied by a general feeling of fatigue. Life is meaningless and inconsequential for those who are psychologically disturbed (1). However, most couples do not know the underlying motivation of the behaviors that lead to their alienation from each other, reduced intimacy, or marital distress (2).

Resilience is another variable that significantly affects marital distress (3). It is a phenomenon that arises from human's natural adaptive responses and empowers one to succeed and overcome serious threats. A resilient person is not passive to harms or threatening conditions, rather s/he is an active contributor and builder of the surrounding environment (4). Resilience is the ability to reach

psychological and spiritual equilibrium in precarious conditions. It is also defined as one's ability to successfully adapt oneself to threatening conditions (5).

Emotional self-confidence in couples is one of the factors affecting marital distress. Self-regulation is a skill that affects a person's abilities to tolerate sealed desires and needs, control frustrations and failures, and turn them into success (6). This skill can also increase resilience and differentiation in couples and reduce marital distress in turn. People with higher self-regulation have a higher life quality and mental health (7). Self-regulated people have the capacity to adjust their behavior or emotions to internal and external stimuli, and their ability for self-regulation enables them to achieve various goals (8). One of the researches conducted on the model of marital distress can be compared with that of Omidifar et al. (9). The results of the comparison showed that there is a significant difference between two groups of one-career and dual-

career couples in terms of the mean of emotion regulation strategies, marital burnout, and marital intimacy. In addition, emotion regulation and marital intimacy are lower, and negative strategies of emotion regulation and marital burnout are higher in dual-career rather than one-career couples. It should be noted that there is a significant relationship between emotion regulation strategies and marital burnout; emotion regulation strategies and marital intimacy; as well as marital intimacy and marital burnout (9).

The results of the present study can be used to help couples increase the level of satisfaction and happiness in marital life, maintain mutual relations, and protect their family foundation from harm. The feeling of couples about their marital relationship undergo changes over time and couples usually feel happier and generally have more positive feelings for each other at the beginning of their marriage. Therefore, the amount of these positive feelings can be reduced over time when couples face different challenges in their marital life and do not have the necessary skills to improve the quality of marital relationships. However, the adoption of effective interventions can help couples to improve this situation. Therefore, this study aimed to develop a causal model of marital boredom based on resilience and emotional self-regulation.

## 2. Objectives

This study aimed to develop a causal model of marital distress based on the degree of resilience induced by the emotional self-regulation of the couples.

## 3. Materials and Methods

This correlational study had a structural equation model (SEM). The statistical population of the study included 1000 to 1200 couples with marital conflict problems who were referred to the counseling centers in Gachsaran, Iran, in 2019. A total of 300 couples were selected from among the participants using the convenience sampling method and they were asked to complete the research questionnaires. To determine the number of samples, 270 people were needed for each apparent variable because of the need for each obvious variable and based on 18 obvious variables, 270 people were needed to ensure more confidence, 300 people were selected by convenience sampling method.

Subsequently, the couples were given enough time to complete the questionnaires after they were provided with enough information regarding the objectives of the study. Upon the completion of the questionnaires, the researcher collected all the questionnaires in coordination with the officials of the counseling center. Afterward, the questionnaires' data were extracted for statistical analysis.

Inclusion criteria included a high score of marital conflict, no drug abuse, no chronic mental disorders, and willingness to participate in the study. However, those who failed to answer all questions in the questionnaires or provided incomplete information were excluded from the study. It should be mentioned that all the participants were informed about the study objectives and participation in the study was based on willingness. Moreover, they were assured about the confidentiality of their information and

that their names and surnames were not registered to respect privacy. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences (IR.MUK.REC.1397.5039), Kurdistan, Iran.

### **Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (2003):**

Connor and Davidson developed this 25-item questionnaire by reviewing resources on resilience between 1979-1991 (11). This scale is scored based on a Likert scale from 0 (completely incorrect) to 5 (always correct). The results of the factor analysis indicated that this scale evaluates five factors including personal competency imagination, trust in individual instincts, tolerance of negative affect, positive acceptance of change and safe relationships, as well as control and spiritual influences. Connor and Davidson reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale to be 0.89 (11). In addition, the reliability coefficient of the retest in a 4-week interval was determined at 0.87 (12). Mohammadi reported a reliability coefficient of 0.89 for the Connor and Davidson resilience scale using Cronbach's alpha method (13). In the present study, the reliability of the questionnaire was determined at 0.80 using Cronbach's alpha.

### **Emotional Self-Regulatory Strategies Scale (2004):**

This 44-item questionnaire was designed by Larsen and Prizmic (14) and included questions regarding cognitive, behavioral, situational changes, negative mood reduction, and positive mood enhancement. This scale is scored based on a 7-points Likert scale from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Test-retest reliability of the original version of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.79 and 0.84 using Cronbach's alpha, respectively (14). The senior colleagues reported the reliability of this questionnaire at 0.75 and 0.80 using split-half reliability and Cronbach's alpha, respectively (15). The reliability of this questionnaire in the present study was 0.78 using Cronbach's alpha.

### **Marital Burnout Questionnaire (1996):**

This 20-item scale was developed by Pinesa and include three main components of physical fatigue (e.g. feeling tired, frail, and having sleep disorders) emotional fall (e.g. feelings depressed, hopeless, and trapped), and mental exhaustion (e.g. feeling worthless, frustrated, and anger toward the spouse). All questions were answered on a 7-point scale. The severity of marital burnout was indicated by higher scores in this questionnaire. Evaluation of the reliability coefficient of the marital burnout scale showed that there is an internal consistency between the variables in the range of 0.84 and 0.90 (16). The test-retest reliability coefficient was determined at 0.89, 0.76, and 0.66 for one month, two months, and four months, respectively. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was estimated at 0.91 to 0.93 for this scale (16). Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire was determined at 0.86 in Iran in a study that has been conducted on 240 samples including 120 nurses and 120 teachers (17). The reliability of this questionnaire was obtained at 0.80 using Cronbach's alpha method in the present study.

### **The Marital Conflict Questionnaire (2000):**

This 42-item Marital Conflict Questionnaire (MCQ) was developed by Sanaei and Barati based on clinical experiences to measure marital conflicts. The questionnaire measures seven dimensions of marital conflicts, including

decreased cooperation, sexual intercourses, family relationships with spouse's relatives and friends, increased emotional reactions, child support, personal relationship with relatives, and financial separation. Consultants and other clinical specialists can use this questionnaire to measure dimensions of marital conflicts. This scale is scored based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The maximum and the minimum total score of the questionnaire is 210 and 42, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the different components of the questionnaire including decreased cooperation, sexual intercourses, family relationships with spouse's relatives and friends, increased emotional reactions, child support, personal relationship with relatives, and financial separation were reported at 0.73, 0.69, 0.74, 0.81, 0.65, 0.81, and 0.69, respectively (18). The reliability of this questionnaire in the present study was obtained at 0.87 using Cronbach's alpha.

The inferential and descriptive statistics were used in the present study to categorize the individual characteristics of the subjects and calculate the mean and standard deviation. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and an SEM were used were utilized to detect the normality of the data. The degrees of freedom for the chi-square test, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Goodness of Fit

Index (GFI), AGFI, and the RMSEA were investigated according to the proposed model. The indirect effect was evaluated using the bootstrapping method. The study data were analyzed using Smart PLS and SPSS software (version 22). The level of significance was set at 0.05 in this study.

**4. Results**

The study population included 150 (50%) males and 150 females. Among all participants, 19 (6.3%), 103 (34.3%), 106 (35.3%), 51 (17%), 13 (4.3%), and 8 (2.7%) were under 20 years old, between 20 and 25, between 26 and 30, between 31 and 35, between 36 and 40, and over 40 years old, respectively. Therefore, the majority of the samples were between 26 and 30 years old, of whom 60 (20%), 75 (25%), 113 (37.7%), 47 (15.7%), and 5 (1.7%) participants had high school diploma and lower, associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral education, respectively.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to evaluate the normality of the study data which was not significant for all the variables. The assumption of normality of differentiation, resilience, emotional self-regulation, and marital distress was not ruled out; therefore, the structural equation model was used.

**Table 1.** Description of research variables using descriptive indicators

Variable		M	SD	K-S	P
Resilience	Perception of individual competence	25.15	5.32	0.74	0.64
	Tolerance of negative affection	22.14	5.32	0.69	0.84
	Positive acceptance of change and secure relationships	15.35	3.39	0.77	0.65
	Control	9.36	2.13	0.61	0.63
	Spiritual influences	6.30	1.48	0.84	0.59
	Total resilience score	78.31	15.22	0.79	0.48
Emotional self-regulation	Cognitive	33.23	7.73	0.74	0.67
	Behavioral	82.45	19.36	0.59	0.72
	Focus on changing positions	57.06	14.15	0.63	0.65
	Focus on changing affection	64.31	14.81	0.78	0.84
	Reduction of negative emotions	86.17	19.32	0.82	0.57
	Increase of positive emotions	24.62	6.25	0.89	0.34
	Total score of emotional self-regulation	121.37	27.74	0.95	0.44
Marital boredom	Physical	13.21	4.13	0.90	0.29
	Psychological aspect	17.04	5.56	0.84	0.34
	Emotional aspect	15.49	4.92	0.82	0.36
	Total score of marital boredom	45.75	13.80	0.77	0.81

**Table 2.** The estimation of the direct effect of research variables

Independent variable	Path	Dependent variable	b	Standard Error	β	P
Resilience	< ---	Emotional Self-Regulation	0.67	-0.19	0.63	0.001
Resilience	< ---	Marital boredom	-0.19	0.12	-0.15	0.009
Emotional Self-Regulation	< ---	Marital boredom	-0.53	-0.04	-0.48	0.001

Table 2 present that the direct path coefficient between resilience and emotional self-regulation ( $P < .001$ ,  $\beta = 0.63$ ), resilience with marital boredom ( $P = 0.009$ ,  $\beta = -0.15$ ), and emotional self-regulation with marital boredom ( $P = 0.001$ ,  $\beta = -0.48$ ). In addition, the bootstrapping method was used to investigate the mediating role of emotional self-regulation in the relationship between differentiation and

resilience with marital distress (Table 3).

The indirect effect of resilience on marital distress was positive and significant ( $P < 0.01$ ,  $\beta = 0.30$ ), based on the data presented in Table 3. The goodness of fit indicators suggested the relatively good fit of the model with the collected data (Table 4).

**Table 3.** Estimation of indirect effect (using bootstrapping method) and total research variables

Independent variable	Path	Dependent variable	Direct Effect		Total Effect		P-value
			$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t	
Resilience	< ---	Marital boredom	-0.30	7.72	-0.45	10.24	0.001

**Table 4.** Goodness of fit indicators for fitting path analysis model

The goodness of fit	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	AGFI	GFI	CFI
Path	3.13	0.061	0.93	0.95	0.91

## 5. Discussion

This study aimed to develop a causal model of marital distress based on the degree of resilience induced by the emotional self-regulation of the couples. Based on the obtained results, high resilience in couples reduces their discomfort and leads to reduction of conflict and increased adjustment of couples as a result. Resilient couples tend to move forward, temporarily see stressful behaviors, and realistically evaluate each other, and hope for the future (19). Moreover, highly resilient couples have high self-regulation ability; therefore, they regulate their emotions and behaviors, calm themselves, and more likely attract positive attention. Couples with high resilience have positive self-perception, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, internal control, and high intelligence. Therefore, resilient couples are less annoying, have less conflict with each other during the marriage, and enjoy a stable life (9). The results of the present study were consistent with those of Kalokerinos et. al (19), Florean and Păsărelu (20), and Sanford et. al (21).

The results showed that couples with high emotional self-regulation have less marital distress and less conflict in their marital life. Couples with high emotional self-regulation modulate positive and negative emotions with the adoption of techniques for the increase of awareness, evaluation of emotions, acceptance of expressed emotions, and expression of appropriate emotions. Resort to positive thinking and self-perceptions can be effective in mental health, marital adjustment, and reduction of marital conflicts. Additionally, the expression of emotions is socially beneficial and can be useful in the transfer of emotions to others, social interaction, and the creation and maintenance of constructive relationships. Moreover, emotions also act as a mechanism to cope with challenges, stresses, and problems in life (20). The results also showed that high resilience in couples leads to increased emotional self-regulation. The increase of emotional self-confidence reduces discomfort and marital conflict as well. Therefore,

it can be concluded that self-regulated couples have fewer mental health disorders, more interaction, and fewer marital conflicts (21).

Regarding the limitations of the present study, one can refer to the selection of research instruments that could create bias in the results. The researcher could not control the difference between the participants in factors related to socio-economic and cultural issues. Based on the results of this study, it is suggested to hold workshops for couples on marital distress symptoms and proper coping strategies. The establishment of counseling centers and provision of psychological services as well as advice on marriage and family is effective in the reduction of marital distress of couples and divorce statistics.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the marital boredom model and its components including resilience and emotional self-regulation have a significant effect on resolving marital conflict.

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