

Research Paper

## The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study

Parastoo Malekanmehr<sup>1</sup>, Hossein Mohagheghi<sup>2\*</sup>, Abolghasem Yaghoobi<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** One of the issues that arise in the area of the family is affective divorce. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between maladaptive schemas and affective divorces in unhappy couples in Hamedan city. **Methods:** The research design was correlational. The statistical population of the study was including all unsatisfied couples referring to counseling centers in Hamedan city in 2016-2017. A sample of 80 unsatisfied couples was selected using available sampling method. For collecting data, Yang's short form schema questionnaire and Gatman's affective divorce questionnaire were used. Pearson correlation method was used to analyze the data. **Results:** The findings showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between the scales of disconnection and rejection and impaired autonomy and performance, impaired limits, and between over vigilance and inhibition with affective divorce in couples. **Discussion and Conclusion:** According to the results of the study, it can be said that by identifying and correcting maladaptive schemas, marital satisfaction could be increased and the level of affective divorce in couples could be decreased.

**Keywords:** Family, Affective Divorce, Maladaptive Schemas

The family as the first component of sociability and the earliest natural nucleus has been existed in all human societies since the beginning of history till now, and humankind has so far failed to find a replacement for it. This shows the permanent presence of this social institution and its existential necessity. Marriage begins with a world of hope with hope, hope for a day that understands our feelings and accepts us, hoping to become addicted, supported, and be secured, but sometimes this hope disappear in facing with the realities of marriage, the needs are not met, the anger produces distance, the judgments are became problematic and

<sup>1</sup> MA in Clinical Psychology, Islamic Azad University Branch of Hamedan, Hamedan, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of Psychology, Faculty of Economic and Social Science, Bu Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor of Psychology, Faculty of Economic and Social Science, Bu Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran

\*Responding Author

**Received: February 20, 2018; Revision Received: March 11, 2018; Accepted: March 15, 2018**

2018 © Malekanmehr P, Mohagheghi H & Yaghoobi A; licensee IJIP. This is an Open Access Research distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License ([www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/](http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any Medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## **The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study**

the loneliness is dominant (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011). The opposite pole of the marriage is divorce, which causes it to disappear. Divorce has an individual, family and social collapse, and has a more negative effect on women than men (Musai et al., 2011). Contradiction in marriage and marital relationship are one of the most important factors of stress, coldness of relationships, failure of cohesion and unity of the family, thus creating a focal point that not only cannot meet the emotional, psychological and security needs of its members; but also it can cause to mental disturbances, discomfort and psychological problems in the members, and reducing marital intimacy significantly (Orki et al., 2012).

The official statistics of divorce do not fully reflect the level of wives' failure in marital life, because along with, a larger statistic is devoted to affective divorce, that is, to silent lives and hollow families that wife and husband are living together but do not demand divorce (Bokharaei, 2007). In fact, some marriages that do not end up with divorce, become hollow marriages that are suffering from lack of love, companionship and friendship, and the spouses only go on with the flow of family life and spend time. (Steel and Kidd, 2001; translated by Kamali and Seyedian, 2009).

In this regard, affective divorce is a hidden and unregistered phenomenon in the lives of many couples; although the husband and wife are not formally separated, but continue to live with each other in the same home without any feeling and affection (Beach & Whisman, 2012). Affective divorce can have various causes: including excessive work and employment, economic and financial problems, differences in marital and sexual issues, having different cultural and educational backgrounds, having different hobbies and disagreement over spending the course of leisure time and some personality traits such as selfishness, extravagance, pride and strangling, diversity, self-confidence and low self-esteem (Buss & Shackelford, 2005).

Maladaptive schema is a variable that can be related to affective divorce in couples. These schemes are not the result of individual traumatic events, and they are formed during childhood through interpersonal interactions, especially the inefficient model of interpersonal interaction with family members (Lomax & Lam, 2011). On the other hand, a group of early negative schemas are formed in the adult age due to the person's inability to adapt to the temporal and spatial conditions; however, the incompatibility nature of the above-mentioned schemes in childhood is questioned (Ghamkharfard et al, 2012). Young (1988) argues that the initial failure needs of life and the negative experiences of childhood, including violence, abuse and inadequate care, lead to sustained outcomes and the formation of negative schemas, and serves as an individual guide for interpretation of the information and problem solving in the future, and hence increases the vulnerability of a person to mental disorders (Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2003).

In many studies, the relation of maladaptive schemas with various topics related to affective divorce has been studied, researches such as Asghari et al (2015), Azadbakht and Vakili

## The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study

(2011), Chay et al. (2014), Dumitrescu and Rusu (2012). In this research, it has been shown that early maladaptive schemas have a significant relationship with affective divorce and disconnection has the highest correlation with affective divorce. Despite the importance of the theory of mental structure (schemas) which is one of the most important components of cognitive theories, and while cognitive therapy has been designed as a successful treatment for a wide range of psychiatric disorders based on schemas, there is no comprehensive information available about the structure of the schema in the affective divorce. It seems that emphasis on the content and process of thinking and working alone on the level of negative self-conscious thoughts and beliefs is not enough, and cognitive structures, especially maladaptive cognitive schemas, should be considered as the most basic and first pillar of cognitive therapy. The researcher poses the question that whether there is a relationship between maladaptive schemes and affective divorce in the unsatisfied couples in Hamedan city?

### METHODS

#### *Statistical population, sample and sampling method*

The statistical population consisted of all unsatisfied couples referring to counseling centers in Hamedan city in 2016-2017. In this research, a sample of 80 unsatisfied couples was selected using available sampling method. In this way, people who came to the family counseling centers were asked to assist the researcher in their research if they wished, and if they were willing to cooperate, the questionnaires were delivered to the couples and were collected after completing them.

#### *Instruments*

**1- Affective divorce questionnaire:** Gutman (2002) has set this questionnaire in 24 items in the form of two options of Yes (1) or No (0) (Mousavi and Rezazadeh, 2014). After collecting positive responses, if the number is equal to eight (8) and above, it means that the person's marital life is subject to separation and signs of psychological divorce are evident. In the study of Mousavi and Rezazadeh (2014), the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was obtained by the method of Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.93. In a research, Mami and Asgari (2014), in order to determine the apparent and content validity of the questionnaire, they were first approved it by the expert professors, then they used Cronbach's alpha to obtain reliability, and the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was obtained higher than 0.7.

**2- Young Schema Short Form Questionnaire (SQ-SF):** This questionnaire with 75 items was developed by Yang (1998) to evaluate 15 early maladaptive schemas. These schemas are including: 1- Disconnection and Rejection, including Abandonment / Instability, Mistrust / Abuse, emotional deprivation, Defectiveness / Shame, Social Isolation and Alienation; 2- Impaired Autonomy and Performance, including Dependency / Incompetence, Vulnerability to Harm and Illness, Undeveloped Self / Enmeshed, Failure; 3- Impaired Limits including Entitlement / Grandiosity, Insufficient Self-Control / Self-Discipline; 4- Other – Directedness including Subjugation, Self-Sacrifice; 5- Overvigilance and Inhibition including Emotional Inhibition, Unrelenting Standards / Hypercriticalness. The response pattern to this test is six

## The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study

options and in the form of likert scale, and the responses range from (completely false = 1 to completely true = 6). Each five questions in this questionnaire relate to a schema and to calculate scores of schemas, the average score is calculated in each 5 questions. The first comprehensive study on the psychometric properties of these schemas was made by Smith, Jones & Yungoothlech (1995), and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the non-clinical population for the subscales of this questionnaire was obtained between 0.50 and 0.82. The researchers also showed that Young Schema Questionnaire has a high correlation with psychological distress and personality disorders, and therefore has a desirable validity (quoted from Lotfi, 2006).

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, after the issuance of a referral from the university by attending in family counseling centers and after providing the necessary information and the purpose of the research and the cases of confidentiality; Questionnaires were distributed between couples that had been referred to the family counseling centers and related issues voluntarily and available, and after their responses, questionnaires were collected. After completing the questionnaires, the data were reviewed, coded and extracted.

#### *Statistical methods for analysis of data*

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods such as mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution, and also inferential statistical methods such as Pearson correlation. SPSS 23 software was also used to analyze the data.

### RESULTS

**Table 1: Frequency distribution of sample individuals in terms of education**

Education level		Frequency	Percent
	Under diploma	49	32.7
	Diploma	64	42.7
	College education	37	24.7
	Total	150	100

In Table 1, the ratio of the studied individuals is based on education level. In this regard, 49 people of the sample had education level under diploma, 64 people had diploma, and 37 had university degrees. These data are also shown in chart 1.

**Table 2: Frequency distribution of sample individuals according to the duration of marriage**

Duration of marriage		Frequency	Percent
	1-3	70	46.7
	4-7	60	40.0
	Above 8	20	13.3
	Total	150	100

**The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study**

In Table 2, the ratio of the studied individuals is based on their marriage duration. Of these, 35 couples equal to 70 people had marriage duration between 1 and 3 years, 30 couples equaling 60 people between 4 to 7 years, and 10 couples equaling 20 people had marriage duration equal to 8 years or more.

**Table 3: Average and standard deviation**

Maladaptive schemas		Average	Standard deviation
	Affective divorce	9.773	3.139
	Disconnection and Rejection	10.373	3.517
	Impaired Autonomy and Performance	9.620	3.123
	Impaired Limits	13.000	3.754
	Other - Directedness	12.200	4.252
	Overvigilance and Inhibition	7.700	2.579

According to table (3), the average and standard deviation of the research variables were obtained as follows: Affective divorce (9.773, 3.139), Disconnection and Rejection (10.373, 3.517), Impaired Autonomy and Performance (9.620, 3.123), impaired limits (13.000, 3.754), Other- Directedness (12.200, 4.252) and Overvigilance and Inhibition (7.700, 2.579).

**Table 4: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for data normalization**

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov test		
	Statistic	Degree of freedom	Significance level
<b>Affective divorce</b>	0.068	150	0.090

According to the results of Table 4, the significance level of affective divorce was obtained in Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ( $Sig = 0.090$ ). Considering that in Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the significance level is higher than  $Sig = 0.05$ , it indicates that the data are normal, it can be said that the explanation of the data is normal.

**Table 5: Correlation coefficient between maladaptive schemas and affective divorce in couples**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1-Affective divorce</b>	1					
2-Disconnection and Rejection	0.444	1				
3-Impaired Autonomy and	0.264	0.127	1			

**The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1-Affective divorce</b>	<b>1</b>					
Performance						
4-Impaired Limits	0.330 **	0.340 **	-0.007	1		
5-Other - Directedness	0.148	0.275**	-0.026	0.88	1	
6-Overvigilance and Inhibition	0.276 **	0.280 **	0.086	0.225 *	0.250 **	1

According to the results of Table 5, it is clear that there is a positive and significant relationship between the Disconnection and Rejection scale with affective divorce in couples ( $r = 0.444$ ,  $p <0.01$ ). Also according to the results of the table, it is clear that there is a positive and significant relationship between Impaired Autonomy and Performance with affective divorce ( $r = 0.264$ ,  $p <0.01$ ), between Impaired Limits and affective divorce ( $r = 0.330$ ,  $p <0.01$ ), and between Overvigilance and Inhibition and affective divorce ( $r = 0.276$ ,  $p <0.01$ ) in couples. On the other hand, according to the results of the table, it is clear that there is no significant relationship between Other – Directedness and affective divorce in couples.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

According to the findings of this study, there is a significant relationship between maladaptive schemes and affective divorce in couples and there is no significant relationship between other-directedness and affective divorce in couples. In general, the findings of this study are directly or indirectly consistent with many of the other studies' findings, such as Asghari et al. (2015), Azadbakht and Vakili (2011), Chay et al (2014), Dumitrescu and Rusu (2012). In explaining this finding, it can be said that when a particular need is not met, a maladaptive schema is created in that area. With unsatisfying interested needs and intimacy and frustration from early emotional relationships, maladaptive schemas associated with intimate relationships and interest are created. These beliefs and schemas reveal interpersonal relationships in adulthood and marriage in marital relationships and have a devastating effect on them. The domain of disconnection and rejection, which includes maladaptive schemas of abandonment / instability, mistrust / abuse, emotional deprivation, defectiveness / shame and social isolation / alienation, suggests that these people experience maladaptive beliefs in the field of failure to receive support and guidance from important people of their life, lack of trust in others and extreme pessimism towards others, abandonment and lack of utility, and feeling alienation of others. Therefore, it can be expected that there is a negative relationship between the high level of disconnection and rejection schema in couples with affective divorce.

Also, the results showed that the impaired limits schemas also had a significant relationship with the incidence of affective divorce in couples. The existence of impaired limits schemas

## **The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study**

in a person causes defects in internal limits, responsibility for others or the orientation towards long-term goals of life. These issues lead to problems with respect to the rights of others, cooperation with others, commitment or goal-orientation, and long-term goals. They do not understand why others (including the spouse) are upset about them and do not take responsibility for this matter. In addition, they are less worried about their partner's feelings. It is likely that higher scores on the scale of entitlement are predictive of distance, because the person who is fascinated by himself only takes consideration into himself and does not adhere to the principle of mutual respect, which is the basis of healthy human relations. Another dimension of "impaired limits" is insufficient self-control and self-discipline. Young et al believe that people with this schema cannot withstand their emotions and impulses in a way that lead to difficulty both in life and in delaying their immediate satisfaction for future long-term goals. They may lose the ability to experience intimacy because of these issues. Therefore, it can be said that the existence of a high rate of impaired limits schemas in couples applying for divorce is related to the degree of marital dissatisfaction among them in marital life.

The results also showed that there are significant relationships between the schemas of overvigilance and inhibition areas and also between impaired autonomy and performance with the rate of affective divorce in couples. Individuals, whose schemas are in an overvigilance and inhibition area, reject their self-stimulated emotions and impulses. According to Young and Klosko, those people who have this schema would have high unrealistic expectations from their partner in adulthood. When these criteria are not met, they become cold and angry; and their relationship becomes superficial and non-intimacy. Also negativeness, neglected positive aspects of life, lack of expressing emotions, love and amour that are characteristics of negativeness, can lead to problems in the field of intimacy and marital satisfaction. On the other hand, people who have high levels of schemas of Impaired Autonomy and Performance, find themselves incompetent in the face of problems. They need help in doing simple things of life. Because these people cannot afford to do their things alone; consequently, they are affiliated with other people. Their usual behaviors are leaving works unfinished due to poor performance. According to Yang, people who have problems in this schema, the expectations that they have from the environment interferes with their ability to separate, survive and function independently or successfully of the works. This person is affiliated with the schema in maintaining his personal identity and his partner, and may choose a partner who is too supportive of him and who cares for him as a child, and thereby reinforces his view of himself as dependence. Indeed, some of these individuals are trying to indiscriminately compensate for their schema, which may be far from emotional intimacy in line with this mechanism. Therefore, the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and affective divorce in unhappy couples seems completely logical.

One of the limitations of this research was the large number of the questions of the research questionnaires that could lead to fatigue of the respondents and affect the outcome of the research, therefore, it is necessary to use shorter questionnaires in the future research. It is

## The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study

also suggested to use a treatment schema to help reduce the incidence of affective divorce and increase the satisfaction of unsatisfied couples.

**Conflict of interest:** The author have not reported any conflicts of interest.

**Acknowledgement:** The author is grateful to all the people who participated in this study and helped to facilitate the research process.

## REFERENCES

- Azadbakht R & Vakili P (2013). Relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital satisfaction of women, *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health*, 17(4), 1-18.
- Beach, S. R., & Whisman, M. A. (2012). Affective disorders. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(1), 201-219.
- Buss, D. M, & Shackelford, T. D (2005). "How To Save A Marriage: Different Gender Strategies To Save Relationship", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 72, No. 2.
- Chay, S. R. F., Zarei, E., & Pour, F. (2014). Investigating the relationship between maladaptive schemas and marital satisfaction in mothers of primary school children. *Journal of Biomedical and Life Sciences*, 4, 119-124.
- Dumitrescu, D., & Rusu, a. S. (2012). Relationship between early maladaptive schemas, couple satisfaction and individual mate value: an evolutionary psychological approach. *Journal of cognitive & behavioral psychotherapies*, 12 (1).63-76.
- Lomax, C. L., & Lam, D. (2011). Investigation into activation of dysfunctional schemas in euthymic bipolar disorder following positive mood induction. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 50(2), 115-126.
- Musai, M., Tavasoli, G., & Mehrara, M. (2011). The relationship between divorce and economic-social variables in Iran. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 1(2), 89-93.
- Oraki, M., Jamali, C., Farajollahi, M (2013). The effects of relationship enrichment program on compatibility of married students. *Social Cognition*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 52-61.
- Siffert, A., & Schwarz, B. (2011). Spouses' demand and withdrawal during marital conflict in relation to their subjective well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28(2), 262-277.
- Young, J. E., Klosko, J. S., & Weishaar, M. E. (2003). *Schema Therapy: A practitioners Guide*. New York: The Guilford press.

**How to cite this article:** Malekanehr P, Mohagheghi H & Yaghoobi A (2018). The Relationship between Maladaptive Schemas and Affective Divorce in Unsatisfied Couples: A Cross Sectional Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Vol. 6, (1), DIP: 18.01.079/20180601, DOI: 10.25215/0601.079