



The role of personality and early maladaptive schemas in predicting marital forgiveness with the mediation of resilience in betrayed women suffering from depression

*Mahdiah Rahmanian¹; Narges Arefinia²

¹Associate professor, Department of Psychology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

²MSc. in psychology, Department of Psychology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

Introduction: The present study aimed to investigate the role of personality and early maladaptive schemas in predicting marital forgiveness with the mediation role of resilience in betrayed women suffering depression.

Materials and Methods: The research method used descriptive correlation with structural equations. The statistical population of this research included all married women who experienced marital infidelity and were depressed and referred to the counseling centers of Dehdasht City, Iran, in 2023. The sample consisted of 162 people out of all 280 women who were selected through the purposeful sampling method. Research tools included the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), the Family Forgiveness Scale, the HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised, the Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF), and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RIS). Pearson's correlation test and structural equations were utilized to analyze data.

Results: The structural model has an acceptable fit with the collected data ($\chi^2/df= 2.62$, CFI= 0.937, GFI= 0.919, AGFI= 0.876, RMSEA= 0.078, and $P= 0.055$).

Conclusion: The results showed that personality and early maladaptive schemas play a role in predicting marital forgiveness both directly and through the mediation of resilience in betrayed women with depression.

Keywords: Depression, Early maladaptive schemas, Forgiveness, Personality, Resilience

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Introduction

The family is a fundamental pillar of society and a primary center for human growth, established through the marital bond between a man and a woman (1). However, significant cultural changes over the past half-century have profoundly influenced marriage, altering the

expectations and experiences of couples. For many, marriage is a vital source of intimacy, support, and personal development (2). The health of marital relationships, characterized by satisfaction and stability, is affected by various intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental factors. Among these, extramarital relationships

*Corresponding Author:

Department of Psychology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

m.rahmanian@pnu.ac.ir

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pose a significant threat, often leading to instability and dissatisfaction (3).

Extramarital affairs are among the major causes of divorce, resulting in severe psychological consequences for couples. Infidelity can create conflicts and diminish marital satisfaction, frequently culminating in separation (4). Individuals experiencing infidelity often suffer from mental health issues, including depression, highlighting the need for effective coping mechanisms (5). One such mechanism is marital forgiveness, defined as the process of reducing anger, minimizing resentment, and releasing negative emotions associated with past grievances (6). Research indicates that forgiveness is an adaptive behavior linked to mental health, while its absence often signifies psychological distress. Various factors, including personality traits, early maladaptive schemas, and resilience, play crucial roles in facilitating marital forgiveness (7,8).

Personality traits significantly influence individuals' capacity for acceptance and forgiveness. Those exhibiting higher flexibility tend to cope better with stress (9). Previous studies have established connections between personality, emotional experiences, and interpersonal functioning (4). Personality traits and early experiences, such as attachment styles and parenting, shape one's understanding of romantic relationships and their quality (10). Traditionally, the five-factor personality model has been utilized, encompassing extroversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. However, the HEXACO model has emerged, introducing factors such as honesty, humility, and emotionality, which provide a more comprehensive understanding of personality dynamics (11).

Early maladaptive schemas arise from adverse childhood experiences and are another critical factor in relational dynamics. As Young identified, these cognitive patterns often manifest as biases that distort individuals' interpretations of events, leading to misunderstandings and unrealistic beliefs about marriage (12). Such schemas can significantly impact intimate relationships and contribute to psychological disorders (13,14).

Another critical variable, resilience, reflects individuals' capacity to navigate adversity and effectively adapt to challenging circumstances, influencing their ability to cope with life's stressors (15). Rising divorce rates indicate pervasive marital issues (16). The increase in

divorce in the country indicates marital problems that must be solved. So, it appears that personality dimensions, early maladaptive schemas, and resilience may play prominent roles in marital relationships, potentially contributing to dissatisfaction and turmoil in relationships, creating a context for marital commitment violations, and it needs to be thoroughly investigated. Since any woman plays a central role in her life story, and the reasons for extramarital relationships may differ between women and men, these factors may have distinct effects on women than men. Therefore, the present study aimed to address a critical gap in research related to the inclination toward extramarital relationships. Specifically, the primary research question is whether personality traits and early maladaptive schemas predict marital forgiveness with the mediating role of resilience in women who have experienced infidelity and are suffering from depression.

Materials and Methods

This research is applied in terms of purpose and is descriptive by using correlation-structural equation modeling in terms of collecting data. The statistical population of this research included all married women who were referred to the counseling centers of Dehdasht City with a history of experiencing marital infidelity in 2023, consisting of 280 people. The researchers referred to Cochran's formula to determine the sample size. According to this formula, the recommended sample size of 280 is 162 participants (17). The formula used to calculate the sample size is as follows:

Participants meeting the criteria of scoring above the average depression threshold (a score exceeding 29 on the Beck Depression Questionnaire) were selected through purposeful sampling. The purposeful sampling method was employed to select participants who met the criteria of experiencing marital infidelity and having elevated depression scores.

Inclusion criteria included 1) Married women with a history of experiencing marital infidelity, 2) Seeking counseling at Dehdasht City counseling centers in 2023, 3) Willing to participate in the study, 4) Able to provide informed consent, 5) Scored above the average depression threshold (a score exceeding 29 on the Beck Depression Questionnaire). Exclusion criteria included 1) Withdrawal of consent during the study, 2) Inability to complete the

questionnaires, and 3) Inconsistent or incomplete responses.

Then, the participants were assured about the confidentiality of the information, and all completed the given questionnaires.

Research instruments

A) Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II): This questionnaire, developed by Beck et al. (18), has 21 items. The scoring method of this questionnaire is on a four-point Likert scale, from zero to three (the minimum score test is zero, and the maximum is 63). A score of 0 to 13 indicates no or minimal depression, a score of 14 to 19 indicates mild depression, a score of 20 to 28 indicates moderate depression, and a score of 29 to 63 indicates severe depression. Beck et al. obtained a test-retest reliability of 0.93 for the Beck depression scale. Various studies have been conducted to measure the psychometric properties of this tool. Its reliability coefficient in Iran was reported 0.70 to 0.90 (19).

B) The Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS): This scale designed by Pollard et al. has 40 items. One section of this scale is related to the family (first generation), and the other part to the nuclear family or the second generation (couple). The scoring method of this questionnaire is on a four-point Likert scale (not at all= 1 to almost always= 4). The five subscales of the forgiveness scale include reality, confirmation, compensation, pleasure, and a recovery feeling or good feeling, each of which has eight questions. The maximum score is 160, and the minimum is 40. Pollard et al. reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9 in a study on 229 women and 113 men. To check the validity of this questionnaire, they correlated it with the Virtue Ethics Scale (VES) and Relational Ethics Scale (RES) on a sample of 342 people. The results showed that the subscales of this questionnaire have favorable convergent validity (20). Zarghami et al. have reported a reliability coefficient of 0.84 for the family-related section and 0.85 for the spouses-related section. The coefficient of the forgiveness scale was approximately 8.88, representing the optimal discrimination coefficient for this scale (21).

C) HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised (HEXACO-PI-R): To measure personality dimensions, the 60-item version of the HEXACO self-report questionnaire, developed by Ashton and Lee (2007), was used. This questionnaire measures six factors: humility, excitability, extroversion, agreeableness,

conscientiousness, and openness to experience. The scoring of this questionnaire is on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Higher scores mean higher personality traits. In the Iranian version, Cronbach's alpha for each factor of humility (including four levels of honesty, fairness, avoiding greed, and humility), excitability (including four levels, emotionality, timidity, dependency, and anxiety), extroversion (including four levels of social self-respect, social courage, people-friendliness, and vitality), agreeableness (including four levels of forgiveness, kindness, flexibility and tolerance), conscientiousness (including four levels of organization, perseverance, perfectionism, and caution), and openness to experience (including four levels of appreciation for beauty, search, creativity and unconventionality), while confirming the content validity of this questionnaire, were reported as 0.80, 0.74, 0.81, 0.73, 0.71, and 0.76, respectively (22). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the above factors was 0.81, 0.86, 0.78, 0.79, 0.80 and 0.83, respectively.

D) Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ – SF): This questionnaire was created by Young (1988) and included 75 items to evaluate 15 schemas and five domains. The domains are obtained from the sum of the schemas, so the questions of emotional deprivation, social isolation/alienation, abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, and defect/shame measure the domain of deprivation and rejection; the schemas of obedience and sacrifice measure the other domain of orientation; the schemas of dependence/incompetence, vulnerability to harm and illness, and untransformed self/trapped measures the domain of self-management and impaired performance; schemas of entitlement and insufficient self-restraint and self-discipline measures the domain of impaired limitations; and the emotional inhibition schema and the stubborn criteria measure the domain of over-arousal and inhibition. The scoring of the short-form questionnaire is on a 6-point Likert scale from completely false= 1 to completely true= 6, where higher scores mean the intensity of schemas or domains. In the internal validation by Shahamat et al. they reported 0.94 for its reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and 0.34 for its validity using the correlation method with the irrational beliefs questionnaire (23). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the

domain of rejection and deprivation, the domain of orientation, the domain of self-management and impaired performance, the domain of impaired limitations, and the domain of over-arousal and inhibition was obtained 0.81, 0.77, 0.75, 0.83, and 80, respectively.

E) Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RIS): This scale was created by Connor and Division (2003) and has 25 items. This scale is multidimensional and has five components: personal competence (24,25,23,17,16,12,11,10), trust in individual instincts/tolerance of negative emotions (6,7,14,15,18,19,29), positive acceptance of changes/secure relationships (2,4,5,8), control (13,21,23), and spirituality (3,9). It is scored on a five-point Likert scale (0= never to 4= always) with a maximum score of 100 and a minimum of 0 for the level of resilience (24). The reliability and validity of this scale have been examined in Iran. Mohammadi

translated and validated it for the first time in Iran, reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 (25). Samani et al. also reported an internal consistency of 0.93 for this scale in their research to determine its validity using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Also, the factor analysis method confirmed the existence of one factor in this scale (26).The data was analyzed with SPSS 25 and AMOS 24 software.

Results

The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 50, with a mean age of 36.5 ± 8.3. The duration of marriages ranged from 5 to 25 years, with an average duration of 12.3 ± 4.5. Participants had between 0 and 4 children, with an average of 1.5 ± 1.2. The mean and standard deviation were used to check the descriptive statistics of the research variables, and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of research variables

Variable	Component	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Marital forgiveness	Total	83.84	7.59	0.75
	Humility	41.35	1.04	0.73
Personality	Excitability	38.63	1.02	0.71
	Extroversion	37.88	2.91	0.69
	Agreeableness	37.75	3.02	0.72
	Conscientiousness	37.81	3.03	0.74
	Openness to experience	38.05	3.17	0.71
Resilience	Total	231.50	7.01	0.73
	-	43.79	3.45	0.75
	Emotional deprivation	17.50	6.93	0.83
	Social isolation/alienation abandonment/instability	19.05	6013	0.74
	Mistrust/abuse	18.60	5.92	0.81
Early maladaptive schemas	Defect/shame	15.80	6.44	0.80
	The domain of Deprivation and Rejection	15.45	6.86	0.83
	Obedience	86.40	31.28	0.84
	Sacrifice	15.45	5.70	0.86
	The area of orientation	16.05	5.75	0.87
	Dependence/incompetence	31.50	11.30	0.88
	Vulnerability to harm and illness	16.60	8.18	0.89
	Untransformed self /trapped	16.30	7.70	0.75
	Failour	15.90	5.52	0.78
	The domain of self-management and impaired performance	16.70	4.35	0.79
	Entitlement	48.80	21.16	0.81
	Insufficient self-restraint and self-discipline	17.75	7.36	0.80
	The domain of impaired limitations	16.10	5.30	0.85
	Emotional inhibition	50.55	16.48	0.87
	Stubborn criteria	15.90	7.64	0.89
The domain of over-arousal and inhibition	16.40	5.14	0.79	
		32.30	12.40	0.74

According to the table, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all variables and components were close to or above 0.70. Thus, the items of

each of the questionnaires used to measure the research variables had an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Table 2. Correlation matrix, skewness, and kurtosis of research variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Marital forgiveness	1							
Personality	0.883**	1						
Deprivation and rejection	-0.775**	-0.569**	1	1				
The other domain of orientation	0.876**	0.449**	-0.654**	-0.654**				
The domain of self-management and impaired performance	-0.889**	-0.556**	0.541**	0.541**	1			
The domain of impaired limitations	-0.880**	-0.567**	0.489**	0.489**	0.464**	1		
The domain of over-arousal and inhibition	-0.770**	-0.671**	0.566**	0.566**	0.464**	-0.642**	1	
Resilience	0.766**	0.551**	-0.475**	-0.475**	-0.654**	-0.565**	-0.47**	1
kurtosis	-0.026	0.034	0.031	0.031	-0.018	0.043	-0.016	-0.014
Skewness	-1.214	-1.356	-1.214	-1.214	-1.611	-1.124	-1.127	-1.014

As can be seen in Table 2, there was a negative and significant relationship between the early maladaptive schemas and the areas of deprivation and rejection, the other domain of orientation, self-management and impaired performance, impaired limitation, and over-arousal with marital forgiveness, and there was a positive and significant relationship between personality and resilience with forgiveness ($P < 0.01$). Table 3 shows that all the obtained fit

indices support the acceptable fit of measurement model with the collected data. The indirect path coefficient between personality and marital forgiveness was positive and significant at the 0.01 level ($P < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.55$). Also, the indirect path coefficient between primary maladaptive schemas and marital forgiveness was positive and significant at the 0.02 level ($P < 0.02$, $\beta = 0.48$) (Table 4).

Table 3. Fit indices of the measurement model

Fit indices	Measurement model	Cutting point
Chi square	208.68	-
df of the model	83	-
χ^2/df	2.62	< 3
GFI	0.919	> 0.90
AGFI	0.876	> 0.85
CFI	0.937	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.078	< 0.08

Table 4. Total, direct, and indirect path coefficients between the research variables in the research model

Paths	b	S.E	β	P
Total path coefficient of Early maladaptive schemas → Marital forgiveness	-0.533	0.251	0.55-	0.001
Total path coefficient of Personality → Marital Forgiveness	0.422	0.312	0.53	0.001
Direct path coefficient of Early maladaptive schemas → Forgiveness	1.166-	0.125	0.56-	0.002
Direct path coefficient of Personality → Forgiveness	1.134	0.245	0.53	0.002
Path coefficient of Early maladaptive schemas → Resilience	0.168-	0.125	0.55--	0.016
Path coefficient of Personality → Resilience	0.631	0.226	0.45	0.002
Path coefficient of Resilience → Marital Forgiveness	0.554	0.151	0.55	0.002
Indirect path coefficient of Early maladaptive schemas → Resilience → Marital Forgiveness	0.143-	0.131	0.48-	0.002
Indirect path coefficient of Personality → Resilience → Marital Forgiveness	0.142	0.132	0.55	0.001

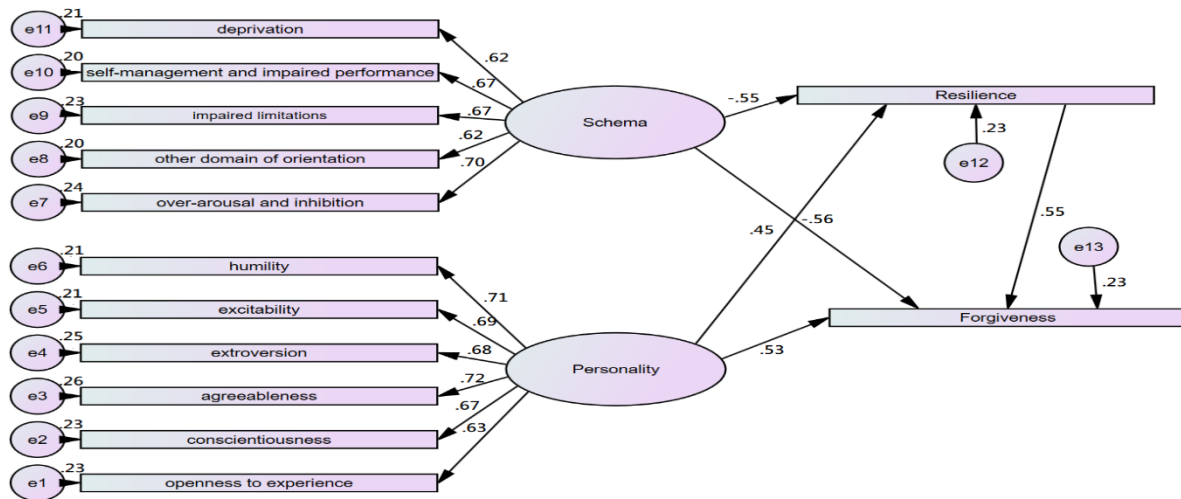


Figure 1. The structural model of research in the case of standardized coefficients

Discussion

The present findings indicated that personality traits and early maladaptive schemas significantly influence marital forgiveness, particularly in women with depression who have experienced infidelity. The findings of the current study demonstrate a strong fit for the model proposed. In this line, Gojković et al. (27) also focused on individuals with emotional vulnerabilities through HEXACO model to assess personality traits and found the significance of emotionality and openness in resilience and posttraumatic growth. Also, Thielmann and Hilbig (28) and Zhao et al. (29), investigated the role of agreeableness in forgiveness. The results of this study, indicating that agreeableness is a significant predictor of marital forgiveness, align with these earlier findings.

Brudek and Kaleta (30) also studied the impact of personality traits on marital satisfaction. They revealed that forgiveness mediated the relationship between neuroticism and marital satisfaction (30). We showed that neuroticism negatively affects marital forgiveness, similar to Brudek and Kaleta's findings.

In addition, Mahmoudvand explored the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the context of betrayal and forgiveness, using the Young's Early Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire.

The findings suggest that these schemas significantly influence the capacity for forgiveness and resilience in the face of betrayal (31). The correlation between forgiveness and resilience, as evidenced by Uyanik et al. (32), is also supported by the present results. The

mediating role of resilience in the relationship between personality traits, early maladaptive schemas, and marital forgiveness is a key finding that aligns with the broader literature on resilience and psychological well-being. In comparing the results of this study with those of Mohammadkhani et al. (33) and Tariq et al. (34), who both examined the impact of emotional schemas and maladaptive schemas on psychological distress and resilience, it is evident that resilience plays a crucial mediating role in the context of marital relationships.

Previous research suggests that individuals with heightened emotional sensitivity or emotional challenges may exhibit a decreased likelihood of forgiving their partners following instances of marital infidelity (35). It appears that the impact of maladaptive schemas on marital forgiveness is as follows: individuals who did not achieve self-esteem and necessary competence during childhood experience conflicts between their own and others' expectations or demands constantly due to their perceived abilities for autonomy and independent functioning. Therefore, individuals with maladaptive schemas in this area perceive every behavior and reaction from their spouse as threatening their sense of competence and independent identity. Consequently, they begin to act defensively, leading to a reduction in marital adaptability. Schemas related to obedience and self-sacrifice formed during childhood to receive love, acceptance, and connections manifest as a deficit in the need for self-sufficiency. It seems that the pattern of the impact of these schemas on marital forgiveness

is as follows: individuals with compatible schemas in this area, by demonstrating excessively obedient and self-sacrificing behaviors towards their spouse's desires and needs, eventually experience feelings of victimization and exploitation (especially in women), which leads to a decrease in marital adaptability.

Hence, when marital infidelity occurs, this experience is perceived as even more painful, evoking feelings of anger. Schemas such as emotional inhibition and stubborn standards are formed with a deficiency in the need for freedom and expression of healthy needs and emotions, and individuals who exhibit emotional inhibition tend to suppress deep emotions, both positive impulses and personal feelings, resulting in challenges in marital adaptability.

Those with stubborn criteria for achieving ideal levels in various aspects of relationships regulate their idealistic criteria. As there is no stopping point for perfectionism in them, it leads to reduced satisfaction in relationships and increased marital maladjustment. These factors cause them to consider marital infidelity the opposite of their ideal goals and feel deep emotional pain. Hence, schemas of entitlement/grandiosity and insufficient self-management/self-discipline are placed in the field of failure in accepting realistic limitations for the individual (36).

This study has several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the research was cross-sectional, which limits the ability to infer causality. Future studies could benefit from longitudinal designs to better understand the temporal relationships between the variables studied.

Secondly, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias; incorporating multiple data collection methods, such as interviews or observational studies, could enhance the validity of the findings. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on women who have experienced infidelity and suffer from depression, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should consider including broader populations, such as men or individuals from different cultural backgrounds, to assess the universality of the findings.

Lastly, while this study highlighted the importance of resilience, further research could explore other potential mediators or moderators, such as coping strategies or social support,

which also influence the relationship between personality traits, early maladaptive schemas, and marital forgiveness. Despite the high contributions of this research, the impossibility of random selection of subjects and the selection of participants from a specific geographical area are the main limitations of this study, which should be considered cautiously when generalizing the results. To address this limitation, we recommend that researchers conduct this research with a broader population and use the random sampling method in future studies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can state that personality and early maladaptive schemas play significant roles in predicting marital forgiveness with the mediation of resilience among women who have experienced infidelity and depression. On the other hand, the results of the present study suggest a significant correlation between personality, early maladaptive schemas, and resilience with psychological well-being and psychological components.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the ethical committee of Payame University, South Tehran branch. Ethical considerations included: 1) Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study, 2) Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, 3) Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, 4) The research aimed to minimize any potential harm or discomfort to the participants throughout the study process.

Authors' Contribution

The first author was responsible for the main idea and writing of the article, while the second author conducted the data analysis. Both authors were involved in data collection. The first author contributed 60% of the work, and the second contributed 40%.

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