



Research Paper

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A Causal Model of Emotional Divorce in Couples Based on Emotional Aggression and Dyadic Coping: The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Strategies

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Article Info.	Abstract
<p>Received: 01.08.2022</p> <p>Accepted: 14.02.2023</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>Emotional Divorce,</i></p> <p><i>Emotional Aggression,</i></p> <p><i>Dyadic Coping,</i></p> <p><i>Emotion Regulation</i></p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>Emotional divorce is a form of divorce in which the couples continue to live together but are cold towards each other, feel isolated, and live separately without obtaining a formal divorce. This study aimed to develop a model which examines the cause of emotional divorce based on emotional aggression and dyadic coping with the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies among couples in Guilan. The research design was descriptive and structural equation modeling. The statistical population of this study included all married individuals living in Guilan in 2021. The sample size was 253 individuals who were selected through the purposive sampling method. Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale (EDS), Nelson-Carroll's Covert Relational Aggression Scale (CRAViS), Bodenmann's Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI), and Gross-John's Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) were used to collect data. The collected data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results showed that the causal model of the relationship between emotional aggression, dyadic coping, emotion regulation strategies, and emotional divorce in couples based on different indicators had a good fit. Emotional aggression, dyadic coping, and emotion regulation had a direct effect on the couple's emotional divorce. Moreover, emotional aggression and dyadic coping had an indirect effect on the emotional divorce of couples through emotion regulation strategies ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, emotional aggression, dyadic coping, and emotion regulation strategies play an important role in the rate of emotional divorce of couples; therapists' attention to these three components can be important in reducing the rate of emotional divorce of couples.</p>
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Introduction

Divorce is an important decision in individuals' lives, and is considered one of the most difficult moments of adulthood (Greene et al., 2016). Divorce can take an open and formal form, during which the family collapses. It can also take a hidden form, as a result of which the family only maintains its external structure, but it is emptied from the inside. This state is called emotional divorce (Parvin et al., 2012). The research results of Bastani et al. (2011) showed that emotional divorce is not a single-factor phenomenon. However, a set of factors (e.g., failure to provide emotional needs, husbands' inattention, communication problems, inconsistent thoughts, attitudes of husband and wife, lack of empathy and companionship, blame and criticism, long angers, and withdrawal and avoidance to have a relationship) lead to emotional divorce. Poor communication between partners also appears as a relevant predictor of divorce within the first five years of marriage (Markman et al., 2010). According to experts, most communication problems between couples can lead to couples' emotional aggression (Frankel et al., 2015). Coyne et al. (2017) defined two forms of emotional aggression, including direct (face-to-face) withdrawal (e.g., withholding affection and support in the midst of problems) and indirect social disruption (i.e., spreading rumors about one's spouse with the aim of defaming or embarrassing him). In some studies, it was found that violence had many negative effects on the communication functioning of couples (Coyne et al., 2017).

The results of research studies confirm that coping strategies play an effective role in couples' relationships. It can both reduce the tension between couples, and intensify the tension and conflicts between them (McDonald, 2011). Dyadic coping takes a systemic approach to the concept of coping in couples' relationships. It advocates that when an individual's coping efforts are insufficient to manage stress and are supported by an intimate partner, couples respond to each other's stress in constructive and supportive ways; both parties increase the well-being of the relationship (Johnson et al., 2016). Rusu et al. (2020) showed that supportive dyadic coping efforts of the couples and spouses predicted greater relationship satisfaction for stressed couples.

Based on clinical observations, almost all incompatible couples face some kind of difficulty in regulating their emotions (Levenson et al., 2014). Emotion regulation is conceptualized as the awareness, understanding and acceptance of emotions, along with the ability to control impulsive behaviors and to engage in appropriate emotion management skills in a flexible manner, to moderate emotional responses when experiencing negative emotions. Lack of any of these abilities indicates difficulties in emotion regulation (Grazt & Roemer, 2004). Falconier et al. (2022) showed that dyadic coping strategies are related to couples' emotion regulation ability. Women who engage in supportive dyadic coping experience greater emotional acceptance.

A review of the literature shows that emotional divorce is among the most difficult social phenomena from research point of view (Damo & Cenci, 2021; AL-shahrani & Hammad, 2023). It is never possible to study social pathology, deviations and social delinquency without identifying divorce and emotional divorce. Therefore, the objective of the present study was to present a causal model of emotional divorce based on emotional aggression and dyadic coping with the mediation of emotion regulation strategies in married people.

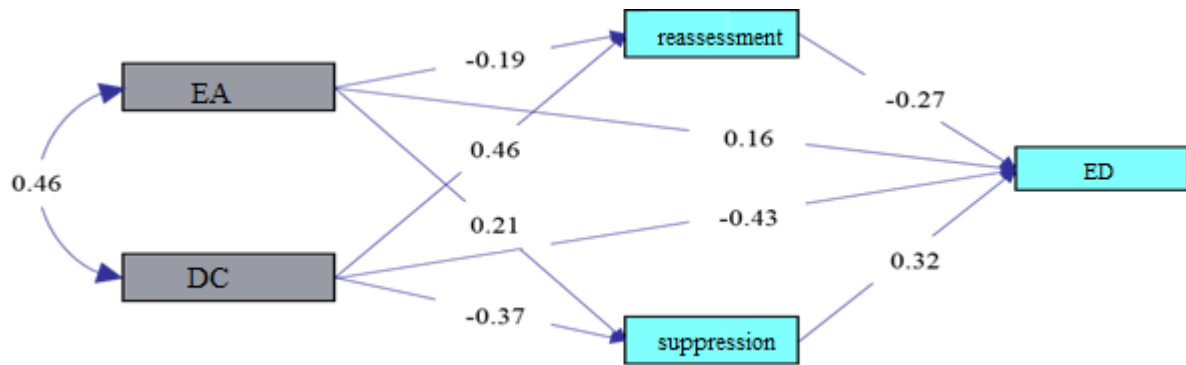
Methodology

The current descriptive-correlational research study was of the structural equation modeling type. The statistical population of this study included all married people in Gilan in 2021. In structural equations, the minimum sample size is 200 individuals. In the present study, in order to increase the accuracy of the study, a sample size of 300 individuals was taken into account; they were selected through purposive sampling method. Emotional Divorce Scale (EDS), Couples Relational Aggression and Victimization Scale (CRAViS), Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI) and Emotion Regulation Scale (ERS) were used to collect data. Finally, after collecting the questionnaires and removing outliers, the data of 253 questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics

such as mean, standard deviation and variance. Furthermore, Pearson correlation using SPSS software (version 25) and structural equation modeling using Lisrel software (version 8.8) were performed.

Results

This research study was conducted on 253 married individuals who have been married for at least one year. 169 individuals (66.7%) were women, and 84 individuals (33.3%) were men. In addition, 33 individuals (13%) filed for divorce at least once during their life.



EA: emotional aggression, DC: dyadic coping, ED: emotional divorce

Figure 1. The standard model of emotional divorce based on dyadic coping strategies and emotional aggression through emotion regulation

Based on the obtained results, it can be stated that the research model is approved in terms of meaning and fitting indicators. The direct effects of emotion regulation, emotional aggression and dyadic coping with emotional divorce, the direct effect of dyadic coping strategies and emotional aggression on emotion regulation, and the direct effect of emotion regulation on emotional divorce were confirmed.

In order to investigate the indirect effects of dyadic coping strategies and emotional aggression on emotional divorce with the mediation of emotion regulation, Sobel test was used. Furthermore, to examine the intensity of the indirect effects through mediation, a statistic called Variance accounted for (VAF) was used, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Examining the indirect effects of dyadic coping strategies and emotional aggression on emotional divorce with the mediation of emotion regulation

Research hypotheses	T-soble	Std. path coefficient	VAF	Results
Emotional aggression → reassessment → emotional divorce	2.114	.051	.242	Significant
Emotional aggression → suppression → emotional divorce	2.932	.067	.296	Significant
Dyadic coping → reassessment → emotional divorce	5.165	.124	.224	Significant
Dyadic coping → suppression → emotional divorce	4.349	.118	.216	Significant

According to the T-soble of the indirect relationship between the variables of dyadic coping strategies and emotional aggression with emotional divorce, which was outside the range (1.96 and -1.96), the hypothesis of the indirect effect of the variables of dyadic coping strategies and emotional aggression on emotional divorce was accepted. Moreover, according to the obtained VAF, it can be seen that 24.2% of the effect of aggression on emotional divorce, 22.4% of the effect of dyadic coping strategies on emotional divorce through the reassessment variable, 29.6% of the effect of aggression on emotional divorce, and 21.6% of the effect of dyadic coping strategies on emotional divorce were explained through suppression.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of presenting a causal model of emotional divorce based on emotional aggression and dyadic coping with the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies in couples .

The study indicated that dyadic coping through emotional regulation had an indirect effect on emotional divorce. This finding is consistent with the research studies of Levesque et al. (2017) and Asghari et al. (2018). In explaining this finding, it can be stated that while emotion regulation involves internal processes to regulate the internal emotional state (Levesque et al., 2017), dyadic coping involves deliberate efforts to manage stressful situations. Considering that emotion regulation can be considered as an intra-individual strategy to deal with stress, and dyadic coping is conceptualized as a behavioral strategy, dyadic coping is likely to be affected by emotion regulation (Asghari et al., 2018). In general, effective emotion regulation strategies are related to positive dyadic coping. Positive dyadic coping provides balance at the individual and interpersonal level in facing stressful factors. In addition, previous research studies showed that all incompatible couples have some kind of problems in regulating their emotions. On the other hand, positive dyadic coping has a positive and significant relationship with the quality of marital relations, intimacy, closeness, and satisfaction with life. The more couples manage their emotions in a more constructive way, the more positive their performance in dyadic coping is. In this way, the quality of their relationship is improved, and they suffer less from compatibility problems and emotional divorce .

Emotional aggression had an indirect effect on emotional divorce through emotion regulation. This finding is in line with those of Rusu et al. (2020), Kokkinos et al. (2019), and Gower et al. (2014). Couples' problems in regulating their emotions are associated with increased symptoms of emotional aggression (Klein et al., 2016). People who are emotionally aggressive in their relationships show a negative coping pattern (hostile, ambivalent and superficial) in stressful situations, which causes decreased cohesion in relationship, emotional distance and marital helplessness instead of helping to manage the situation and to improve the relationship, (Rusu et al., 2020). The need for safety is satisfied in a married life when a person does not feel harm and psychological pressure on the part of his spouse. When people are unable to regulate their emotions, they do not satisfy the need for safety in their emotional partner through aggressive behaviors; this causes the distance from their emotional partner, the reduction of the quality of their relationship, and emotional divorce . One of the limitations of this research study is the limited scope of the study (i.e., Gilan). Thus, it is suggested the researchers replicate the study with a larger sample size and in other contexts in order to increase the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation of this study is the lack of control of the moderating variables (e.g., age, gender, duration of marriage and education). It is suggested that researchers consider the role of the moderating variables in future research studies.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest is declared by the authors.

Acknowledgment

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