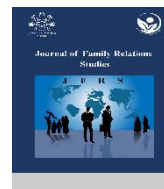




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## Research Paper

# Relationship between Action Flexibility and Personality Traits with Marital Adjustment in Married Students of Shahrood Azad University



Crossmark

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between action flexibility and personality traits with marital adjustment in married students.

**Methods:** The present study was a descriptive correlational study. In this study, 400 married students of Shahrood Azad University in the academic year 2020-2021 were selected by convenience sampling method. Action flexibility questionnaire, personality traits questionnaire and marital adjustment questionnaire were used to collect data. Data was analyzed simultaneously using SPSS software version 21 through statistical method of Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression.

**Results:** Findings showed that there was a significant relationship between action flexibility and marital adjustment. There was also a significant correlation between the components of extraversion, agreeableness and openness to experience with marital adjustment; but there was no significant correlation between the components of honesty-humility, emotionality and conscientiousness with marital adjustment.

**Conclusion:** Action Flexibility allows the individual to adapt well to the traumatic events of life, and individuals successfully demonstrate positive adaptation to traumatic events, which can be related to and lead to marital adjustment. Personality traits cause people to react differently to life issues and problems. The more people are able to control stress, the less they use emotion-based coping techniques that lead to incompatibility.

## 1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important and highest social traditions to meet the safety and emotional needs of adults. Marriage is a human, complex, delicate and dynamic relationship with its unique characteristics (Kebritchi and Mohammadkhani, 2016). One of the most important factors affecting family function is marital adjustment of couples

(Rezahaji Bidgoli and Tamnaei Fard, 2017). With the beginning of marriage and the development of a marital relationship, adjustment and flexibility between couples become important variables in relation to the marriage quality and one of the most important components of emotional stability of couples, which is a priority in all cultures, is marital adjustment (Nema, 2013).

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Marital adjustment is a state in which there is a general feeling of satisfaction and happiness in a couple towards their marriage and towards each other. Adjustment in married life is a continuous and changing process (Manyam & Junior, 2014). Marital adjustment does not mean having no problems in life, but it means the capacity to adapt to problems and the ability to solve those (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). Marital adjustment is an active process which couples understand and accept their various responsibilities over time and find new roles on the family. Adjustment in a relationship is one of the most important correlations of life satisfaction. The research showed that marital adjustment and life satisfaction remain interrelated during the years after marriage. On the other hand, marital adjustment of each couple can increase satisfaction of the other's life (Be, Whisman, & Uebelacker, 2013).

Some researchers have also been done on the relationship between action flexibility and marital adjustment. Noal et al. (2011) in a study showed that flexibility is significantly associated with adjustment. Also, Share and Ishaqi Thani (2015) in a study showed that personality and flexibility are related to marital satisfaction. Personality factors are related to the improvement or deterioration of marital adjustment (Ahmadi, Panghi, Sadat Sadeghi and Zamani Zarchi, 2020). The results of Costa and Mosmann (2021) showed that there was a significant relationship between personality traits and marital adjustment.

Socialization, neuroticism and achievement factors have an effect on the marital adjustment of couples. There is a partner effect on the wives' neuroticism factor and on the husbands' achievement factor. The extroversion and openness factors do not provoke actor-partner effects on the adjustment of the couples. The results are discussed in the light of other studies and research agendas are suggested (Costa & Mosmann, 2021). One of the most important determinants of how people deal with others is personality. Goldberg (1993) describes personality as a unique and relatively stable set of traits and behaviors that individuals display at different levels in decisions, behaviors, and when confronting others. Personality is a trait that enables a person to connect with others. The concept of personality is important for the relationship between couples because it plays a major role on the perception, evaluation and reaction of the individual towards the spouse (Naderian Jahromi and Hosseini, 2007). Allport (1937) defined personality as a set of internal factors that guide how an individual specific

adjustment to the environment. George Kelly (1993) suggested a personality as the specific path of each individual in the search for interpretation of the meanings of life (Lawrence and John, 2001). In recent years, researches have been conducted based on the HEXACO personality model. This model which consists of six attributes of honesty-humility, emotionality, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience; tries to reduce the shortcomings of the theories of previous attributes and its name is derived from the first letter of these attributes. It was found that in the HEXACO model, traits play an important role on the foundations of personality (Sibley, Harding, Perry, Asbrock & Duckitt, 2010).

Another factor related to marital adjustment is action flexibility. Action flexibility is defined as the dynamic process of positive adjustment to bitter and unpleasant experiences. This structure represents the individual's ability to deal with life experiences, crises and stressful situations in a positive and sustainable ways. Action flexibility is not only resistance to injury or threatening conditions, but also includes the active and constructive participation of the individual in the environment (Litinas and Koutselos, 2017). Individuals with high action flexibility in the face of emotional events with a neutral and unknown nature were more likely to show positive emotions (Whishaw, Mirza Agha, Kuntz, Qandeel, Faraji and Mohajerani, 2018). This is probably due to their ability to cope successfully when facing with difficult situations, especially interpersonal situations (Connor and Davidson, 2003). Action flexibility is one of the factors that makes individuals more and more compatible to the needs and threats of life. Action flexibility has found a special place in the fields of evolutionary psychology, family psychology and mental health. Action flexibility is defined as the process, ability, or consequence of successful adjustment to threatening situations. The term action flexibility refers to an object's ability to recover its original shape and structure after being transformed by external forces (Wahhabi, Shahmoradi, & Sheikh, 2016).

The findings of researchers such as Luo and Klohnen (2005), Abbasi and Rasoulzadeh (2009), Donnellan, Conger and Bryant (2004) indicated that personality traits are empirical predictors of marital adjustment. Shakarian et al. (2012) also found in a study that personality traits can be a significant predictor of marital adjustment. Also, in the research by Claxton, O'Rourke, Smith, & DeLongis (2011), the personality

trait of extroversion was more associated with marital satisfaction than other personality factors. [Sepehrian Azar and Fattahi \(2014\)](#) showed in a study that the training of personality types has an effect on students' academic adjustment. [Karimi, Yousefi and Soleimani \(2020\)](#) also showed in their research that personality traits can predict marital infidelity of couples.

Therefore, considering the importance of marital adjustment of couples in life, the role of marital adjustment on the stability of marriage and research gap in Iranian society, the aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between action flexibility and personality traits with marital adjustment of married students. Considering that before this research, effective research on the relationship between action flexibility and personality traits with marital adjustment of married students with a focus on Iranian students has not been done and the lack of this is felt considering the specific cultural conditions of Iranian society; The need to address this makes research unavoidable.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The method of the present study was descriptive-correlational. The population included all married male and female students of Islamic Azad University, Shahrood Branch in the academic year 2020-2021, from which a sample of 400 people were selected by convenience sampling. 84, 63 and 46 women were in the age ranges of 20-25 years; 25 to 30 years and 31 to 35 years, respectively and also 93, 82 and 32 men were in the age ranges of 20 to 25 years; 25 to 30 years and 31 to 35 years, respectively. The mean ages of women and men were 28.4 and 27.8 years old, respectively.

### Research tools

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), HEXACO-Personality-Inventory (HEXACO-P-I) and Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (1976) were used to collect data.

**1) Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC):** This questionnaire was designed by [Connor and Davidson \(2003\)](#). The authors of this scale believed that this questionnaire is well able to distinguish between resilient and non-resilient individuals in clinical and non-clinical groups and can be used in clinical and research situations. The Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (CD-RISC) comprises of 25 items, each rated on a 5-point scale (0-4), with higher scores reflecting greater resilience. [Mohammadi, Jazayeri, Rafieii, Jokar and Porshahbaz \(2006\)](#) obtained the

scale reliability coefficient of 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. [Samani, Jokar and Sahragard \(2007\)](#) in a cross-sectional study using Cronbach's alpha coefficient achieved the scale reliability of 0.87. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.88.

**2) HEXACO-Personality-Inventory (HEXACO-P-I).** HEXACO-Personality-Inventory (HEXACO-P-I) is a model of personality factor dimensions that includes 100 questions and six broad dimensions: Honesty-Humility (H), Emotionality (E), Extraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O). The scoring of this questionnaire is in the form of Likert with a range of scores between 1 and 5 (score 1 = strongly disagree and score 5 = strongly agree). In the study of [Ashton and Lee \(2009\)](#), Cronbach's alpha for Honesty-Humility (H), Emotionality (E), Extraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O) were 0.92, 0.90, 0.92, 0.89, 0.89 and 0.90, respectively. The alpha obtained in Iranian society about the subscales of Honesty-Humility (H), Emotionality (E), Extraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O) were 0.80, 0.74, 0.81, 0.73, 0.71 and 0.76, respectively (2010). [Ashton and Lee \(2009\)](#) called the personality dimensions derived from studies a term HEXACO, which stands for: honesty-humility, excitement, extroversion, adaptability, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Despite the appropriate psychometric properties of the five-factor model and the NEO questionnaire, they believe that the five-factor model has some limitations. Their research, which was conducted in different languages, revealed six factors instead of five. In addition, the varimax rotational modes of these studies differ from the five major factors and the five models. But they stated that their proposed model has good explanations for this alternative.

**3) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS).** Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) is a 32-item measure designed by Spanier in 1976. This scale is a tool to measure an individual's perceptions of his/her relationship with an intimate partner. There are four subscales: Dyadic Consensus (the degree to which the couple agrees on matters of importance to the relationship), Dyadic Satisfaction (the degree to which the couple is satisfied with their relationship), Dyadic Cohesion (the degree of closeness and shared activities experienced by the couple), and Affective Expression (the degree of demonstrations of affection and sexual relationships) ([Spanier, 1976](#)). [Sanai, Alaghemand,](#)

and Falahati (2017) used Cronbach's alpha for the final study of the scale. The results of their study showed that the total score of the scale had a significant internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha. The internal sensibility of the subscales was between good and excellent: two-person satisfaction (0.94), correlation and one-person (0.81), two-person agreement, and expression of love (0.73). In the present study, internal consistency was investigated by Cronbach's alpha method. Also, experts have confirmed the content of marital compatibility according to the purpose of this scale, and have stated that each item of this scale was consistent with the principles of scientific theory. The Couple Compatibility Scale has shown its validity for known groups to distinguish between married and divorced couples in each question. This scale also has concurrent validity, and this was correlated with the Locke-Wallace Marital Satisfaction Scale. Falahzadeh and Sanaei (2012) in their research using Cronbach's alpha coefficient have reported the reliability of this scale 0.81. The reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha was 0.91 in the present study.

The questionnaires were distributed among 400 married students after taking the list of them and coordinating with them. Based on the data obtained from the demographic information questionnaire, out of 400 people who participated in this study as a

sample, 84 women in the age range of 20-25 years; 63 women in the age range of 25 to 30 years and 46 women in the age range of 31 to 35 years and also 93 men in the age range of 20-25 years; 82 men were in the age range of 25 to 30 years and 32 men were in the age range of 31 to 35 years. The mean age of women and men were 28.4 and 27.8, respectively. In order to determine the relationship between research variables with marital adjustment, and also the contribution of each of them in predicting it, Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression were used simultaneously. Inclusion criteria included satisfaction with the research, marital status, and the age range of 20 to 40 years. Exclusion criteria were dissatisfaction with the continuation of the research. Ethical considerations were given to participants regarding the confidentiality of information. Incomplete questionnaires were discarded for statistical analysis and the rest of the information extracted from the questionnaires were prepared for analysis. Data was analyzed simultaneously through Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression by SPSS-21.

### 3. Results

Descriptive indicators of research variables after elimination of outliers were presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive indicators of marital adjustment, personality dimensions and action flexibility**

	Variable	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Skew	Elongation
Marital adjustment	Satisfaction	400	19	32	25.33	3.18	0.27	-0.24
	Dyadic correlation	400	8	17	12.16	2.35	0.12	-0.62
	Dyadic consensus	400	26	44	35.76	4.65	-0.09	0.58
	Affective expression	400	8	17	12.66	2.17	-0.08	0.34
	Marital adjustment	400	70	98	85.93	6.44	-0.11	0.21
	Action flexibility	400	17	94	55.6	12.8	0.31	-0.49
Personality dimensions	Honesty and humility	400	12	50	27.02	8.89	0.64	-0.02
	Emotionality	400	16	44	31.30	5.17	0.48	-0.54
	Extraversion	400	11	44	22.83	5.70	-0.22	0.42
	Acceptance	400	10	48	28.45	7.81	0.24	-0.83
	Conscientiousness	400	14	40	25.74	6.10	-0.21	-0.27
	Openness to new experiences	400	15	38	26.31	5.32	0.32	-0.23

According to the results of table (2), the correlation coefficient of action flexibility with marital adjustment was 0.68 ( $P < 0.001$ ). Therefore, there was a relatively strong correlation between predictor and criterion variables. Also, the relationship between personality dimensions of extraversion, openness to

experience and agreeableness with marital adjustment were 0.66, 0.68 and 0.71, respectively ( $P < 0.001$ ). But there was no significant correlation between the components of honesty-humility, emotionality and conscientiousness with marital adjustment.



**Table 2. Correlation matrix of the relationship between action flexibility, personality dimensions and marital adjustment**

No.	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Action flexibility	1							
2	Honesty - Humility	**0.21	1						
3	Emotionality	0.43	**0.34	1					
4	Extraversion	**0.60	0.14	**0.20	1				
5	Agreeableness	**0.25	**0.44	*0.49	**0.44	1			
6	Conscientiousness	**0.56	**0.67	**0.55	*0.49	**0.29	1		
7	Openness to experience	0.25	**0.21	**0.60	**0.29	*0.79	*0.24	1	
8	Marital adjustment	**0.67	0.10	0.09	**0.66	**0.71	0.11	**0.68	1

\*\*P<0.001, \*P<0.05

According to Table (3), the multiple correlation coefficient of predictor variables with marital adjustment is 0.68. These variables predict a total of 47% of changes in marital adjustment. The significance level of F statistic is less than 0.05, so it

can be concluded that predictor variables (action flexibility and personality dimensions) have the ability to predict the criterion variable, i.e. marital adjustment. Standardized and non-standardized coefficients have been reported in table (4).

**Table 3. The results of the marital adjustment prediction model based on the predictor variables**

Model	coefficient R	The coefficient of determination	Standard determination coefficient	Degrees of freedom	Sum of Squares	Coefficient F	Significance level
Simultaneous	0.688	0.473	0.461	5	5291.436	17.992	0.000

According to the results of Table 4, the effect of action flexibility (0.52), extraversion (0.36), agreeableness (0.59) and openness to experience (0.50) on marital adjustment was positive and significant. Based on these findings, the main hypothesis was confirmed and it can be said that the

two variables of action flexibility and personality dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness and openness to experience) played a positive and significant role in predicting marital adjustment. In total, these variables were able to explain 47 of the variance of marital adjustment.

**Table 4. Non-standardized and standardized regression coefficients of marital adjustment prediction model based on variables of action flexibility and personality dimensions**

Model	Non-standard coefficients			Coefficient T	Significance level
	Coefficient B	Error estimation	Beta		
y-intercept value	35.716	7.219	...	4.981	0.000
Honesty - Humility	0.216	0.211	0.113	1.235	0.137
Emotionality	0.148	0.091	0.078	0.971	0.492
Extraversion	0.571	0.167	0.369	4.356	0.000
Agreeableness	0.659	0.104	0.593	5.428	0.000
Conscientiousness	0.214	0.169	0.142	1.023	0.238
Openness to experience	0.628	0.131	0.508	5.173	0.000
Action flexibility	0.623	0.129	0.527	5.619	0.000

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between action flexibility and personality traits with marital adjustment. The results showed that action flexibility was related to marital adjustment. These results were consistent with the findings of Noal et al. (2011), Share and Ishaqi Thani (2018), Ahmadi, Panghi, Sadat Sadeghi and Zamani Zarchi (2020) and Costa and Mosmann (2021). In explaining this finding, it can be said that action flexibility is the ability to be

in the present, to give space to thoughts and feelings, and to do what is important. According to early theories, flexibility was more focused on the understanding and characteristics of resilient individuals, through which individuals could achieve positive adjustment and outcomes in the face of adversity, but later, research in this area expanded to include social contexts, abuse, violence, parental mental disorders, and traumatic life events that can lead to reduced flexibility (Luthar, 2000).

New theories look at flexibility as a multidimensional structure that includes fundamental variables such as temperament, personality, and specific skills such as problem-solving skills. These skills allow an individual to adapt well to traumatic life events and to positively respond to stress and traumatic events. Therefore, it is logical that flexibility is a significant predictor of marital adjustment quality. Adjustment as one of the most important factors in determining the stability and durability of marital relationship was related to many psychological components. One of these variables is action flexibility. People with less flexibility can hardly forget their initial learning, they insist on their previous learning which has negative and inconsistent consequences for them, and this insistence damages their adaptation to new conditions. Sometimes these adjustments can be marital.

The results also showed that the personality traits of extroversion, agreeableness and openness to experience are related to marital adjustment. These results are consistent with the findings of [Shakarian et al. \(2012\)](#), [Abbasi and Rasoulzadeh \(2009\)](#), [Ahmadi et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Costa et al. \(2021\)](#). In explaining this finding, we can say that the tendency to be positive, bold and energetic are the characteristics of extraversion. Agreeableness allows individuals to control their emotions and interact calmly in their interactions with others. Individuals who get high scores of openness have more flexibility, so they express more empathy and eagerness to help others, have higher marital adjustment in their life and the quality of marriage increases in these people. Individuals seeking adjustment have strong tendencies in interpersonal relationships and are therefore helpful. As a result, by having this characteristic, they are more stable and adaptable in their marital relationships. Extraversion is associated with positive emotions such as optimism, love and intimacy. Also, the sociality and activity of extroverts in aggregation with other traits have positive effects on marital relationships and consequently on marital adjustment ([Ahmadi et al., 2020](#)). Marital adjustment is one of the consequences of the interpersonal process. According to the results of the present study, personality traits of individuals can be a good predictor of marital adjustment.

Acceptance without judgment is very important in marital adjustment. At high levels of acceptance, people notice their psychological arousals (thoughts and feelings) without trying to control or avoid them. This reduces the impact of these thoughts and feelings on their behavioral performance. At low levels of acceptance, individuals with psychological arousals

engage in self-control strategies to reshape thoughts and feelings, which lead to the destruction of their behavior and performance. Therefore, when faced with stressful and challenging events due to acceptance without judgment, individuals evaluate them correctly and in addition, with the commitment they made, they take the right path, which includes appropriate behavioral measures in the face of stressful and challenging events. ([Moradzadeh and Pirkhaefi, 2017](#)). Thus, couples with the action flexibility have the special skill to look at a problem as an issue that they can explore, change, tolerate or solve in other ways, and this case and their endurance in the face of problems lead to a positive outlook and marital adjustment.

Another component affecting marital adjustment is personality traits. This study showed that there was a significant relationship between action flexibility and personality traits. There was a significant correlation between the components of extraversion, agreeableness and openness to experience with marital adjustment; but there was no significant correlation between the components of honesty-humility, emotionality and conscientiousness with marital adjustment.

Explaining this finding, it can be said that personality traits cause people to react differently in the face of life problems and issues. The more individuals are able to control stress, the less they use emotion-based coping techniques that lead to maladjustment.

According to HEXACO, people who score high on neuroticism are more likely to experience negative emotions such as anger, impulsivity, failure, aggression, and vulnerability, react negatively to events and overestimate their negativity. Regarding the negative role of neuroticism on marital adjustment, it should be said that personality traits such as emotional instability lead to permanent vulnerabilities that affect how couples adapt to stressful experiences ([Dargis, Newman and Koenigs, 2015](#)). In explaining the relationship between extraversion and marital adjustment, it can be said that the desire to experience positive emotions and having social attention (as the most important feature of extraversion) and social support can be effective in marital adjustment. Therefore, family and social support is important factors of reducing stress and psychological tension, using appropriate and active ways to deal with stress and marital problems, facilitating problem-based coping behaviors. In our country where the family is a unit of social network and where people learn appropriate methods of behavior and problem solving,

plays an important role on marital adjustment of couples especially on the early years after marriage (Lee et al., 2019).

There is also a significant relationship between openness to experience and marital adjustment. Openness to experience is associated with traits such as flexibility in problem solving, more attention to the spouse, and the use of divergent thinking in problem solving, which can be effective in reducing marital conflicts.

One of the special limitations that the researchers faced in the present study was the use of convenience sampling and the questionnaire in the form of a self-report. It is also suggested that the variables of this research be semi-experimental and fully experimental in the form of protocols and treatment programs used in organizations and clinics.

## 5. Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles are considered in this article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and were free to leave the study whenever they wished, and if desired, the research results would be available to them.

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### Authors' contributions

All authors have participated in the design, implementation and writing of all sections of the present study.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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