



Original Article

Investigating the mediating role of psychological flexibility in the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of couples

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Researchers believe that emotional intelligence is an important factor in determining a person's success in life and directly affects the variables related to a person's "self". Emotional intelligence causes the appropriate processing of information that has an emotional charge and its use is necessary to guide cognitive activity. Therefore, This study aimed to investigate the mediator role of psychological flexibility in the relationship between emotional intelligence and the psychological well-being of couples. **Methods:** The current research is descriptive and correlational in terms of applied purpose and study method. The statistical population of this research included all the couples referred to couples therapy and counseling centers in Tehran's 7th district in 1401, and 150 people were selected as the statistical sample of the research. Then, the participants completed the questionnaires mentioned in the research tool section. Finally, SPSS and AMOS software and Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation path analysis were used for statistical data analysis. **Results:** The findings showed that the direct effect of emotional intelligence on psychological flexibility is significant ($\beta = 0.28$ and $t = 3.82$). Also, the direct effect of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.36$ and $t = 3.40$) is significant. The direct effect of psychological flexibility on psychological well-being ($\beta=0.40$ and $t=4.14$) is also significant. Finally, the indirect effect of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being is 0.29 and the total effect is 0.65. **Conclusion:** Therefore, it can be concluded that in the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, the variable of psychological flexibility as a mediator can strengthen this relationship.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, cognitive flexibility, couples.

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Introduction

Family is the most important institution of human society, which is the most fundamental and the first institution of society, and the first step to establish this social institution is marriage. Marriage is considered an important issue in all societies, and having a successful married life is considered a major and ideal goal for most people. In other words, the family is known as the most important unit of societies, and marriage is the most basic human relationship; because it forms the primary structure of family relationships and the growth of the next generations (Darbani & Parsakia, 2022). Therefore, it is important to study different psychosocial variables and find the relationship between them in the study of couples.

Today, emotional intelligence is the topic of discussion in many researches related to the investigation of individual differences and has added to the studies related to emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is understanding, describing, receiving and controlling emotions (Navabinejad, Rostami, & Parsakia, 2023). Salovy & Mayer (1990) believe that emotional intelligence is an important factor in determining a person's success in life and directly affects the variables related to a person's "self". Emotional intelligence causes the appropriate processing of information that has an emotional charge and its use is necessary to guide cognitive activity (Hoshmandi, Fatolahzadeh, & Rostami, 2019). Emotional intelligence can be effective in creating and maintaining personal relationships between couples (Mehdigholi, Dokaneifard, & Jahangir, 2022). Skills or abilities that enable awareness of self and others' emotional states and the ability to regulate or use emotions to positively influence one's performance and role (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). Emotional intelligence is theoretically and empirically related to the ability to manage and regulate personal emotions (Zysberg & Raz, 2019). In fact, mutual understanding is one of the most important factors contributing to couples' long-term happiness (Mulay & Jaganathan, 2020). The role of emotional intelligence in married life has been examined in various

researches (Mehdigholi, Dokaneifard, & Jahangir, 2022) and studies show the important role of this variable in marital relationships.

Another important variable that has received many studies today is psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility as the ability to choose the most suitable actions from among different options and not actions that are chosen only to avoid disturbing thoughts, feelings, memories or tendencies or are actually imposed on a person, is one of the variables that can be effective in the relationship between couples (Østergaard, Lundgren, Zettle, Landrø & Haaland, 2020). The more people accept the problem, the more psychological flexibility they show (Rahimzadegan & Atadokht, 2021). People with flexible thinking, use alternative justifications, positively reconstruct their thinking framework, accept stressful events in challenging situations, and are psychologically more tolerant and tolerant than inflexible people (Gloster, Meyer, & Lieb, 2017). These people have less psychological resilience and it can be said that when inflexible people are in a chaotic and stressful situation, they need psychological interventions more than ever (Ravanpoor et al., 2022).

In addition, psychological well-being is an important variable in evaluating mental health and quality of life. Psychological well-being means having a positive feeling in life in which a person tries to develop his talents and potential (Lee & Park, 2016). Ryff & Singer (1998) presented the theory of psychological well-being. According to Ryff's model, psychological well-being consists of six factors: self-acceptance (having a positive attitude towards oneself), positive relationship with others (establishing warm and intimate relationships with others and the ability to empathize), autonomy (a sense of independence and the ability to stand up to pressures) social, purposeful life (having a purpose in life and giving it), personal growth (feeling of continuous growth) and environmental mastery (the ability of a person to manage the environment) (Seligman, 2015). The feeling of well-being has both emotional and cognitive components. Abused

couples with a high sense of well-being mainly experience positive emotions and have a positive self-evaluation of the surrounding incidents and events, while couples with a low sense of well-being evaluate the events and their life situation as unfavorable and most negative emotions such as; They experience anxiety, depression and anger (Roepke & Seligman, 2015). Psychological well-being is the objective feeling of satisfaction, satisfaction and pleasure experienced by men and women concerning all aspects of the marital relationship. Psychological well-being is one of couples' most important components of emotional stability (Galla & Duckworth, 2015). Studies have shown that an unsuccessful marriage and divorce, whose characteristics include anger, stress, and incompatibility, negatively affect psychological well-being, so people who have had a successful marriage have more psychological well-being than those who have not been married. and have (Pagnini et al., 2015).

Research has shown that emotional intelligence can predict psychological well-being (Carmeli, Yitzhak-Havely, & Weisberg, 2009; Augusto-Landa et al., 2010) and there is a high correlation between these two variables (Guerra-Bustamane et al., 2019; Lucas-Mangas et al., 2022; Augusto-Landa et al., 2011; Ahmadi et al., 2014; Presteyo, Zulaika, & Marsem, 2023). In addition, psychological flexibility is also related to well-being, mental health, and emotional intelligence (Østergaard, Lundgren, Zettle, Landrø & Haaland, 2020). According to the mentioned research background and theoretical foundations, it seems that variables can mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. Therefore, according to what was said and the statistical population of the current study, this research was conducted to investigate the mediating role of psychological flexibility in the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.

Research method

The current research is descriptive and correlational in terms of applied purpose and

study method. The statistical population of this research included all the couples who were referred to couples therapy and counseling centers in the 7th district of Tehran in 1401. According to Klein (2011), the research sample size was determined to be 150 people (75 couples). For sampling, counseling centers were first selected using the cluster sampling method and then the statistical sample of the research was selected using the available sampling method. Then, the participants completed the questionnaires mentioned in the research tool section. Finally, SPSS and AMOS software and Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation path analysis were used for statistical data analysis.

Research tools

1. Psychological well-being scale.

Psychological well-being questionnaire was prepared and compiled by Ryff (1998). This questionnaire has 18 questions and its purpose is to evaluate and examine psychological well-being from different dimensions (independence, control over the environment, personal growth, positive relationship with others, purposefulness in life, self-acceptance). The scoring of this questionnaire is based on a six-point Likert scale and the range of scores is between 18 and 108. This questionnaire has 6 dimensions (independence, control over the environment, personal growth, positive relationship with others, purposefulness in life and self-acceptance). In order to standardize the scale of psychological well-being, the creators of this questionnaire conducted this test on a sample of 321 people. They reported the similarity coefficient of the subscales of this questionnaire as follows: autonomy 76%, mastery of the environment 90%, personal growth 87%, communication Positive with others 91%, purposeful life 90% and self-acceptance 93%, the reliability of the retest method of the subscales was also between 81% and 85% in a sample of 117 people and within 6 weeks (Ryff & Singer, 2006). Also, Cronbach's alpha for the entire questionnaire in the present study was 0.80.

2. Psychological flexibility questionnaire.

This questionnaire was created by Dennis & Vander Wal in 2010. This questionnaire

consists of 20 questions. The scoring of this questionnaire is based on a seven-point Likert scale. This questionnaire is used to evaluate a person's progress in clinical and non-clinical work and to evaluate a person's progress in developing flexible thinking in the cognitive-behavioral treatment of depression and other mental illnesses. In the research, the creators of the questionnaire obtained the concurrent validity of this questionnaire with the Beck depression questionnaire equal to 0.39 and its convergent validity with the Martin & Robin cognitive flexibility scale of 0.75.

3. Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. This test has 90 questions that measure 15 components of emotional intelligence. Baran first developed this test to show its greater importance than the cognitive intelligence test. In this questionnaire, emotional intelligence is divided into 5 subscales: the scale of intrapersonal skills, which includes the components of emotional awareness, self-expression, self-respect, self-improvement, and independence. The

interpersonal skills subscale includes the components of empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationships, the coping with pressure scale includes; Stress tolerance and impulse control. The adaptability subscale includes flexibility, problem solving and realism. The subscale of general mood includes components of happiness and optimism. In the research of Raghibi & Gharehchahi (2013), the reliability of this test was conducted using the even-odd method of 88 for 95 people, and the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method and the coefficient was 88%.

Results

In terms of the demographic variables of the present study, the average (standard deviation) age of the participants of the present study was 36.37 (6.23) years. The table below shows the descriptive findings from the data collected by the questionnaires.

Table 1. Findings of descriptive statistics of research variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
emotional intelligence	50/43	5/92	-0/62	0/50
psychological wellbeing	261/52	30/19	1/14	-1/01
psychological flexibility	70/20	7/64	1/19	0/33

Based on the contents of the above table, the mean (standard deviation) scores of psychological well-being are 50.43 (5.92), emotional intelligence 261.52 (30.19) and

psychological flexibility 70.20 (7.64). Also, the kurtosis and skewness values showed that the collected data have a normal distribution.

Table 2. Results of correlation coefficients of research variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. emotional intelligence	1		
2. psychological wellbeing	*0/36	1	
3. psychological flexibility	*0/41	*0/32	1

* $p < 0.05$

The above table shows the correlation coefficients between the research variables. The results showed a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, psychological

well-being and psychological flexibility, and emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility ($P < 0.05$). In the following, fit indices were used to check the model's fit.

Table 3. Goodness indices of model fit

Model	χ^2	Df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	NNFI
Three factors	2/82	1	2/82	0/090	0/91	0/93	0/94	0/93	0/92

If the index of chi-square ratio to the degree of freedom is less than 3 and the GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI indices are higher than 0.9 and the RMSEA index is less than 0.1, it can be said

that the model has a very good fit. Based on the findings reported in the table above, the proposed model is a good fit.

Table 4. Estimation of coefficients of direct effects between research variables

	Estimation Variable	Standardized parameter	Std. error	t	Result
emotional intelligence	psychological flexibility	0/28	0/01	3/82	P <0/05
	psychological wellbeing	0/36	0/04	3/40	P <0/05
psychological flexibility	psychological wellbeing	0/40	0/03	4/14	P <0/05

In Table No. 4, the standardized parameter, the standard error of estimation and the results of the t-test are reported. As shown, the direct effect of emotional intelligence on psychological flexibility ($\beta = 0.28$ and $t = 3.82$) is significant. Also, the direct effect of

emotional intelligence on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.36$ and $t = 3.40$) is significant. Finally, the direct effect of psychological flexibility on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.40$ and $t = 4.14$) is also significant.

Table 5. Standardized coefficients of direct effects, indirect effects and total effects of model variables

	Estimation Variables	Effects			Result
		Direct	Indirect	Total	
emotional intelligence	psychological flexibility	0/28	-	0/28	P <0/05
	psychological wellbeing	0/36	0/29	0/65	P <0/05
psychological flexibility	psychological wellbeing	0/40		0/40	P <0/05

As seen in the above table, the indirect effect of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being is 0.29 and the total effect is 0.65. Therefore, in the relationship between

emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, the variable of psychological flexibility as a mediator can strengthen this relationship.

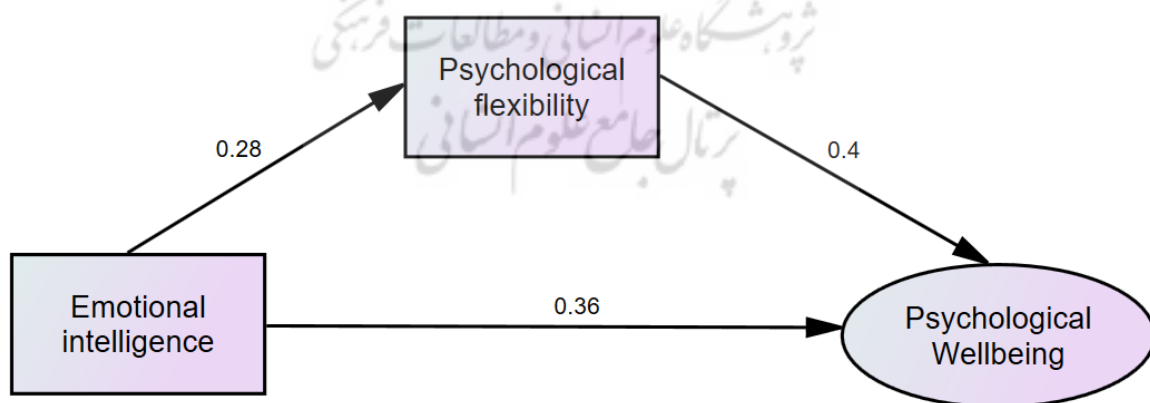


Figure 1. Final model of research

Discussion and conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between marital conflicts and the desire for marital infidelity. The results of

the statistical analysis of the data showed that psychological flexibility can strengthen the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being as a mediating variable. The results obtained from this research were aligned with the findings of

Carmela et al (2009), Guerra-Bustamante et al (2019), Augusto-Landa et al (2011), Ahmadi et al (2014), Presteyo, Zulaika & Marsenn (2023), Lucas-Mangas et al (2022), Salehi, Hosseinian, & Yazdi (2022), Ghorbani et al (2022), Gloster, Meyer & Lieb (2017), Fathi Ashtiani & Sheikholeslami (2019) and Asghari Ebrahimadab & Mamizadeh (2018). In explaining the findings, emotional intelligence is the meeting point of a person's abilities, skills and emotional and social facilitators that are mutually related. This set determines how effective we are in understanding and expressing ourselves, understanding others, communicating with them, and coping with the needs and problems of daily life (Navabinejad, Rostami, & Parsakia, 2023). People with high emotional intelligence act in a way that leads to positive experiences and prevents negative emotional experiences. In fact, these people have more skills in managing emotional problems and thus experience fewer marital problems (Hadian & Amini, 2019). In fact, emotional intelligence provides psychological well-being by providing positive emotions and experiences. On the other hand, emotional intelligence is an ability that has an important effect on other abilities of a person. People who have high emotional intelligence have more adaptability, self-confidence and self-awareness, which are necessary to achieve psychological well-being (Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010). Although emotional intelligence can predict psychological well-being, psychological flexibility indicates an individual's effort to perceive difficult situations and circumstances as situations under control (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010). Psychological flexibility, where high emotional intelligence does not have enough power to achieve psychological well-being, can help achieve psychological well-being as a mediator. In other words, people with high emotional intelligence but lack of psychological flexibility are more likely to fail in difficult and stressful situations. In this case, high psychological flexibility can help and lead to psychological well-being. In addition, the well-being of psychological flexibility as the ability to adapt, find

alternative solutions for difficult situations, discover different justifications to interpret each situation and try to control difficult situations and master the environment paves the way to achieve psychological well-being. In general, people who can think flexibly, use alternative justifications, positively reconstruct their thinking framework, and accept challenging situations or stressful events, and have more psychological well-being than people who are not flexible. Asghari & Mamizadeh, 2018).

The current research had limitations like any other study. One of the current research's limitations was using a questionnaire as a means of data collection. Since the respondents may need to be more accurate and honest in completing the questionnaires, the collected data may not be valid. Also, the available sampling method lowers the generalization power of the findings.

According to the obtained results, it is suggested that counselors and psychotherapists use emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility training in their treatment protocols.

Ethical principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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Conflict of interest

The authors of this study declared no conflict of interest.

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