Research Paper: Prediction of Emotional Divorce based on Family Communication Patterns with the Mediating Role of Marital Burnout in Married Female Teachers of Darab City

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Abstract

Objective: This study aimed to predict emotional divorce among married female teachers in Darab City by analyzing family communication patterns and examining the mediation effect of marital burnout.

Methods: Descriptive and correlational analyses were used. All married female instructors employed at the Darab primary schools during the academic year 2023-2024 were the study's population. The census technique was employed to estimate the sample, estimating the population of 176 individuals. The Revised Family Communication Patterns Scale (RFCP), Couple Burnout Measure (CBM), and Gottmanns Emotional Divorce Scale (GEDS) were used to collect data. The data were analyzed using structural equations (SEM) and Pearson's correlation test, and the findings were examined using Lisrel 9 and SPSS25 statistical software.

Results: Marital boredom had a direct and significant association with emotional divorce, and it had an inverse and significant relationship with communication orientation and compliance orientation. There was a direct and significant correlation between emotional divorce and conformity orientation, and an inverse and significant correlation between emotional divorce and communication orientation. Marital boredom also acted as a mediator in the interaction between emotional divorce and family communication styles (p<0.05).

Conclusion: Thus, it can be anticipated that as the family's conformance orientation increases, the rate of marital discontent will rise as well, and that as this variable rises, so too will the emotional divorce rate.

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1. Introduction

Marriage and marital relationships are widely recognized as significant sources of social support, intimacy, and emotional fulfillment. They promote cooperation, empathy, and a sense of unity and affection within the family unit. Successful marriages, characterized by achieving shared goals, are associated with satisfaction and happiness. Conversely, marital discord and dissatisfaction can negatively affect individual well-being and the overall quality of the marital relationship (Lotfi et al., 2019).

Emotional divorce occurs when the functions of a family break down, and the system faces numerous challenges. This state indicates the family's failure to cultivate values, cultural beliefs, and emotional, sexual, and social behaviors. A dysfunctional family is characterized by disorganization, a disregard for rules, neglect of one another, maladaptive behaviors, conflict, violence, and irresponsibility (Dehghani Tafti et al., 2019).

In an emotional divorce, couples grapple with various issues such as destructive verbal and physical arguments, prolonged silences, emotional and physical distance, sexual dissatisfaction, psychosomatic illnesses, and decreased self-esteem (Rezaei Moghadam, 2019). The emotional divorce precedes the legal divorce and is the most significant factor contributing to the disintegration of the family, the most fundamental unit of society. Emotional divorce is not a singular phenomenon but rather a result of a confluence of factors. The impact of these factors on causing emotional divorce varies.

For instance, the unmet emotional needs of one spouse may play a more significant role in disrupting a marital relationship than the other. The suppression and unfulfilled needs over a prolonged period of shared life lead to the individual's defeat, isolation, and a fundamental psychological separation from the spouse, resulting in extensive personal and familial harm (Enayatpour, 2016).

One factor that seems to be linked to emotional divorce is marital apathy (Pokorska et al., 2013). Apathy is a state of physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion that results from a mismatch between expectations and reality. Apathy arises from failed love and is a response to existential issues. The accumulation of debilitating psychological pressures, a gradual increase in fatigue and monotony, and the hardening of small pains contribute to the development of apathy (Hadian & Amini, 2019).

Apathy is an unfulfilled desire for a satisfying mental activity, a repugnant state characterized by poor self-regulation. There is ample evidence that daily physical and mental fatigue is associated with inattention (Yakobi et al., 2021). Marital apathy is a gradual decrease in emotional desire and interest in one's spouse, accompanied by feelings of alienation, indifference, and apathy towards each other, with negative emotions replacing positive ones (Poorhejazi et al., 2021).

In addition, it appears that family factors, such as family communication patterns (organizational indifference), also influence emotional divorce in couples. The

communication pattern of couples is the communication channel through which husbands and wives interact with each other. It is also expected that one of the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional factors affecting the quality of marital relationships is family communication patterns (Buser et al., 2019). Couples' communication patterns in families are a process through which husbands and wives interact with each other verbally and nonverbally (Parvandi et al., 2016).

Two fundamental dimensions have been proposed in family communication patterns: conversation orientation and conformity orientation (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). In families with a conversation orientation, family members interact frequently and spontaneously, discuss various topics freely, and make family decisions through collaboration. However, in a conformity orientation, family relationships emphasize similar feedback, values, beliefs, and avoidance of conflict (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Malekizade et al. (2016) found a significant relationship between dimensions of family communication patterns and emotion regulation, indicating that these dimensions can predict emotion regulation in couples.

Emotional divorce is a sensitive issue in both our society and others, and it becomes even more significant when considering a group like teachers. The potential negative consequences of neglecting this issue are far-reaching and could soon affect society. Given the importance of teacher well-being in modern societies, understanding teachers' psychological, emotional, and social needs and abilities is crucial. While previous research has explored emotional divorce, it has been unable to provide a comprehensive explanation of the relationships between this variable and influential factors such as marital dissatisfaction and family communication patterns. Therefore, given the characteristics of emotional divorce, it is expected that there is a relationship between family communication patterns and emotional divorce, with marital dissatisfaction acting as a mediator. The primary objective of this study is to answer the following question: Does marital dissatisfaction mediate the relationship between emotional divorce and family communication patterns?
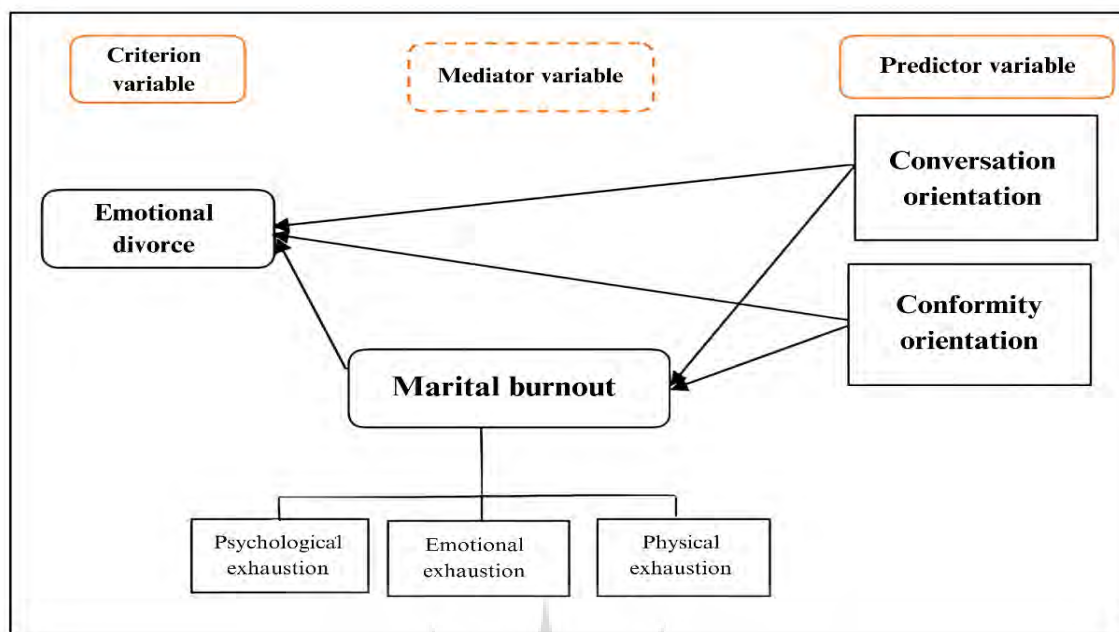
Diagram 1: Conceptual Model of the Study

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design, Statistical Population, Sample, Sampling Method and Data Analysis Procedure

This study is an applied, descriptive-correlational research. The target population comprised all married female elementary school teachers in Darab City during the 2023-2024 academic year, totaling 176 individuals, as per the education department. Given the relatively small population size, a census method was employed to select the entire population as the sample. Data analysis involved using Pearson correlation and structural equation modeling (SEM), with SPSS 25 and LISREL 9 software utilized for statistical analysis.

2.2. Instruments

Gottman Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (GEDS): For this study, the Gottman Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (2008) was employed to measure emotional divorce. This instrument comprises 24 items designed to assess the degree of emotional detachment within marital relationships. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from very low (1) to very high (5)). The total score ranged from 24 to 120, with higher scores signifying a greater likelihood of emotional divorce.

Previous research by Mami and Safarnia (2018) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83, indicating the questionnaire's reliability. Furthermore, field experts have positively evaluated the questionnaire's content validity. In the present study, the questionnaire's validity was further

confirmed through expert review by doctoral-level professors in educational sciences and psychology at Azad University of Darab. To assess the scale's reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated on a sample of 30 participants, yielding a value of 0.92, thus demonstrating satisfactory reliability for the entire thesis.

Couple Burnout Measure (CBM): This self-report questionnaire was designed by Pines (2004) to measure marital boredom among couples. It comprises 20 items assessing symptoms of burnout across three primary dimensions: physical exhaustion (e.g., fatigue, weakness, sleep disturbances), emotional depletion (e.g., depression, hopelessness, entrapment), and psychological depletion (e.g., worthlessness, frustration, anger towards one's partner). Respondents rate each item on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (no experience) to 7 (significant experience).

The CBM has demonstrated strong psychometric properties. As measured by Cronbach's alpha, internal consistency typically ranges from 0.84 to 0.90. The instrument's validity has been supported by negative correlations with positive relationship characteristics. The CBM's cross-cultural applicability has been established through its successful use in various countries, including Norway, Hungary, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Finland, and Israel (Pines & Nunes, 2003). Adib Rad et al. (2005) found test-retest reliability coefficients of 0.89, 0.76, and 0.66 for one-, two-, and four-month intervals, respectively. The instrument's internal consistency, assessed by Cronbach's alpha, typically

ranges from 0.91 to 0.93 (Pines, 1996; translated by Shadab, 2001). In the current study, the validity of the questionnaires was evaluated by experts in educational sciences and psychology. Cronbach's alpha, calculated for a sample of 30 participants, yielded a value of 0.85, indicating the questionnaire's reliability.

The Revised Family Communication Patterns Scale (RFCP): This scale originally developed by Ritchie (1972) and later revised by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002), is a self-report instrument that measures individuals' perceptions of family communication patterns. The scale consists of 26 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The RFCP assesses two primary dimensions: conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Conversation orientation reflects the degree to which family members are encouraged to communicate frequently and openly; however, conformity orientation measures the extent to which family members are expected to adhere to shared values and beliefs.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) reported satisfactory psychometric properties for the scale, including content validity, criterion validity, construct validity, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha and test-retest reliability). Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) further supported the scale's content validity. Criterion validity has been demonstrated through correlations between family types and underlying dimensions of the typology with theoretically related measures (Koerner

& Fitzpatrick, 2002). In the Iranian context, Koroushnia and Latifiyan (2006) employed principal component analysis to assess the scale's validity. The factor loading was found to be 0.85, and Bartlett's sphericity test yielded a significant result (p < 0.005), indicating satisfactory validity.

Koroshnia & Latifian (2008) reported satisfactory reliability for the Family Communication Patterns Questionnaire, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.87 and 0.81 for the conversation and conformity orientation subscales, respectively. Test-retest reliability coefficients were 0.84 and 0.78, respectively. In the present study, content validity was established through expert review by university professors in education and psychology. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.88 and 0.91 for the conformity and conversation orientation subscales, respectively, indicated satisfactory internal consistency reliability.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics section presented demographic information on the participants, including gender, age, and education level. The majority of respondents (65.9%) were aged 20-30, significantly outnumbering other age groups. Regarding marital duration, 53.9% of participants had been married for 6 months to 2 years, followed by 24.4% for 2-5 years, and 21.7% for 5 years or more.

The primary variables were described using mean and standard deviation. The emotional divorce and communication patterns variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with a neutral midpoint of 3. Conversely, the marital boredom variable was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), with a neutral midpoint of 4.

Table 1

Operational Definitions of Primary Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Divorce	2.89	0.651
Marital Burnout	4.23	0.743
Communication Orientation	2.41	0.542
Conformity Orientation	2.09	0.724

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicated that the means of the study variables ranged from a low of 2.09 for conformity orientation to a high of 4.23 for marital dissatisfaction. Notably, the mean score for marital dissatisfaction was slightly above the average, while the means of the

other variables were slightly below the average.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed to assess the normality of the data distribution. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the Z-statistics for the variables of emotional divorce, marital

burnout, communication orientation, and conformity orientation were 0.112, 0.094, 0.142, and 0.104, respectively, which in all cases had a significance level higher than 0.05; therefore, the data have a normal explanation. Consequently, based on the outcomes of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, it can be inferred that the distribution of all variables approximated a normal distribution, thereby validating the application of

parametric statistical tests, such as Pearson correlation and structural equation modeling with LISREL.

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients, demonstrating the relationships between the study variables. Since the normality assumption was met, as confirmed by the normality test, the Pearson correlation coefficient was employed for data analysis.

Table 2

Matrix of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients for the Study Variables

Variables	Conversation	Conformity	Marital Burnout
Conversation Orientation	1		
Conformity Orientation	**-0.26	1	
Marital Burnout	**-0.45	**0.35	1
Emotional Divorce	**-0.23	**0.27	**0.63

* p≤0.05 ** p≤0.01

The findings revealed significant correlations among all four primary variables (p < 0.05). Notably, the dependent variable, *emotional divorce*, demonstrated significant associations with all the other variables. A particularly strong correlation was observed between *emotional divorce* and *marital disenchantment*, with a correlation coefficient of 0.63.

The proposed research model was empirically tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with LISREL 9 software. Figure 1 illustrates the research model with significant t-values, while Figure 2 depicts the model with standardized coefficients.
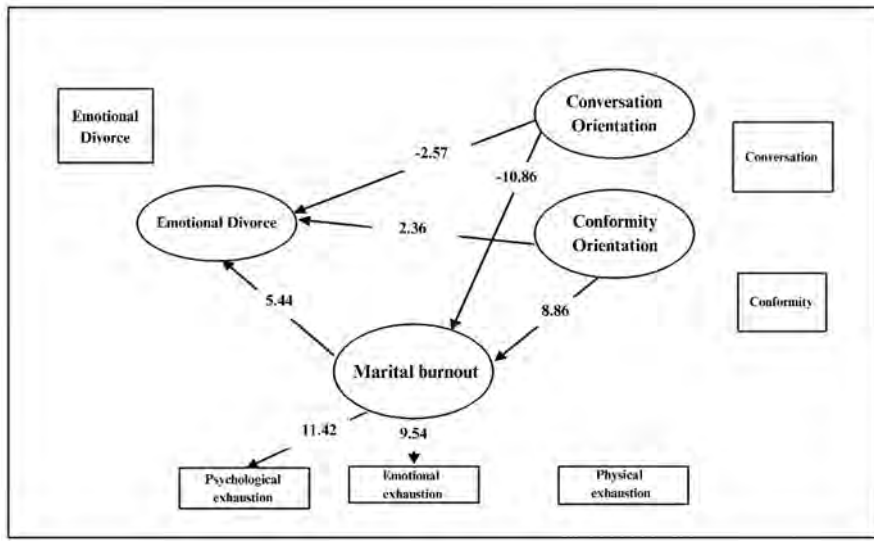
Figure 1

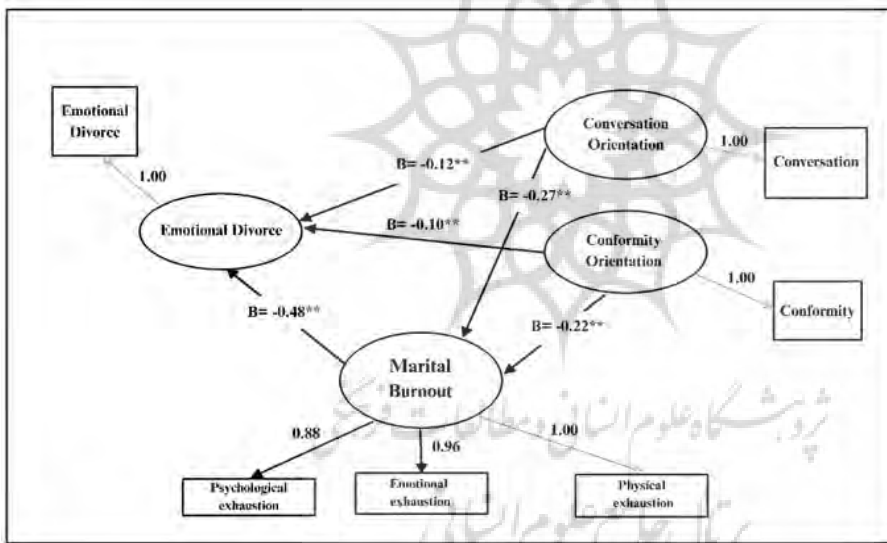*Standardized Coefficient Estimates of the Empirical Model*

Figure 2

Value Estimates of the Empirical Model

Figure 1 illustrated the model, highlighting the t-values for each path at significance levels. A t-value exceeding 1.96 indicated a statistically significant relationship at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). The presented t-values confirmed the significance of all relationships within the model ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 2 displayed the model with standardized coefficients, which provided a standardized measure of the strength of the relationships between variables. Higher

coefficient values signify stronger relationships. Among the relationships in the model, the strongest influence is observed between marital disillusionment and emotional divorce, with a standardized coefficient of 0.48.

Table 3 presents the model fit indices. After estimating the model parameters, it is

essential to assess the model's fit to the data. This involves evaluating various fit indices to determine the extent to which the proposed model aligns with the observed data. As Kalantari (2012) emphasizes, ensuring a good model fit is crucial before interpreting the parameter estimates.

Table 3

Model Fit Indices

Indices	Acceptable Value	Result	Interpretation
GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	>0.90	0.93	Acceptable Fit
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	<0.80	0.70	Acceptable Fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	>0.90	0.92	Acceptable Fit
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	>0.90	0.93	Acceptable Fit
IFI (Incremental Fit Index)	>0.90	0.92	Acceptable Fit
AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index)	>0.50	0.91	Acceptable Fit
PGFI (Parsimonious Goodness of Fit Index)	>0.50	0.78	Acceptable Fit
Chi-Square /Df (Chi-Square divided by degrees of freedom)	1 ≤index≤ 5	2.81	Acceptable Fit

As shown in Table 3, the fit indices collectively indicated a satisfactory model fit to the data. Given these results, the proposed model was deemed acceptable.

Table 4 presents the results of the structural model assessment. The structural equation modeling analysis confirmed the hypothesized relationships between the variables ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4
Structural Equation Modeling Results (Coefficient Table)

Type of Relationship	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
Communication Orientation → Marital Burnout	-0.27	-10.86	0.001<0	Supported
Conformity Orientation → Marital Burnout	0.22	8.86	0.001<0	Supported
Marital Burnout → Emotional Divorce	0.48	5.44	0.001<0	Supported
Communication Orientation → Emotional Divorce	-0.12	-2.57	0.001<0	Supported
Conformity Orientation → Emotional Divorce	0.10	2.36	0.001<0	Supported

Given the research hypothesis that marital burnout mediates the relationship between family communication patterns (conversation-oriented and conformity-oriented) and emotional divorce among married female teachers in Darab City, Table 5 presents the results of the indirect effect analysis. The table details the direct, indirect, and total effects of conversation-oriented and conformity-oriented communication patterns on emotional divorce.

Table 5
Mediation Analysis: The Impact of Family Communication Patterns and Marital Burnout on Emotional Divorce

Mediator	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Result
Marital Burnout	Emotional Divorce	Communication Orientation	**-0.12	**-0.13	-0.25	Mediation Supported
		Conformity Orientation	0.10	0.11	0.21	Mediation Supported

* p≤0.05 ** p≤0.01

The findings of this study confirm the mediating role of marital alienation in predicting emotional divorce among married female teachers in Darab City, as influenced by communication patterns of conversation and harmony (p < 0.05). Specifically, the research model analysis revealed that the direct effect of conversation orientation on emotional divorce increased from -0.12 to -0.25 when marital alienation was introduced as a mediator. This supported the hypothesis that marital alienation mediates the relationship between conversation orientation and emotional divorce. Consequently, it can be inferred that as conversation orientation within families

increases, marital alienation decreases, leading to a reduction in emotional divorce.

Similarly, the direct effect of harmony orientation on emotional divorce increased from 0.10 to 0.21 with the introduction of marital alienation as a mediator. This finding further substantiated the mediating role of marital alienation in the relationship between harmony orientation and emotional divorce. Therefore, it can be anticipated that as harmony orientation within families increases, marital alienation increases, ultimately leading to an increase in emotional divorce.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated the significant mediating role of marital alienation in predicting emotional divorce based on the communication patterns of families of married female teachers in Darab City.

4. Discussion

The results of this study confirmed the mediating role of marital alienation in predicting emotional divorce among married female teachers in Darab, based on communication patterns. Specifically, the research model revealed that conversation-oriented communication had a direct negative effect on emotional divorce which was further amplified to -0.25 when marital alienation was included as a mediator. This indicated that marital alienation mediated the relationship between conversation-oriented communication and emotional divorce. Consequently, it can be inferred that as conversation-oriented communication

increases, marital alienation decreases, leading to a reduction in emotional divorce.Similarly, conformity-oriented communication had a direct positive effect on emotional divorce (0.10), which was further exacerbated to 0.21 when marital alienation was included as a mediator. This suggested that marital alienation mediated the relationship between consensus-oriented communication and emotional divorce. Therefore, it can be predicted that as consensus-oriented communication increases, marital alienation also increases, increasing emotional divorce.

Overall, these findings highlighted the mediating role of marital alienation in predicting emotional divorce based on communication patterns among married female teachers in Darab. These results are consistent with previous research by Enayatpour (2016), Malekizade (2016), Hadian and Amini (2019), Poorhejazi (2021), Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002), Pokorska (2013), Buser (2019), Yakobi (2021).

To explain these findings, it can be argued that family communication patterns, as the foundation of family interactions, significantly influence the functioning of family members in various aspects. Previous research has demonstrated that these impacts also extend to interpersonal relationships between spouses. Spousal communication patterns involve verbal and nonverbal interactions between husbands and wives (Parvandi et al., 2016). Families are characterized by a conversation-oriented communication pattern exhibiting frequent and spontaneous interactions among

members, open discussions on various topics, and collaborative decision-making. This open communication fosters stronger relationships and intimacy, enabling individuals to seek support and guidance from one another when facing challenges (Enayatpour, 2016). As a result, individuals in such families tend to possess greater intellectual independence and are more likely to resolve marital issues through open dialogue. This reduces the risk of marital alienation, often exacerbated by poor communication skills.

In contrast, families with a consensus-oriented communication pattern prioritize conformity in feedback, values, beliefs, and conflict avoidance (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). This can lead individuals who value consensus and rely on the approval of others to experience dissatisfaction with their relationships and gradually become alienated.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggested that increased family communication patterns were associated with decreased marital dissatisfaction. This, in turn, contributes to better emotional regulation, reduced emotional and cognitive difficulties within relationships, and ultimately, lower levels of marital dissatisfaction and emotional divorce. Conversely, increased conformity within families is linked to higher levels of marital disillusionment, which over time can lead to psychological distress, emotional and cognitive turmoil, and ultimately, emotional divorce.

The research highlighted the negative correlation between family communication orientation and emotional divorce. Given that these communication patterns are often established during childhood and can significantly impact an individual's personality and adult relationships, it is recommended that parents, particularly mothers, receive training in effective communication strategies and implement them in their family lives.

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