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Marital Adjustment Model Based on Irrational Beliefs and Conflict Resolution Strategies Mediated by Cognitive Flexibility in Married Women

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: This study aimed to examine a structural model of marital adjustment based on irrational beliefs and conflict resolution strategies, with the mediating role of cognitive flexibility in married women.

Methods and Materials: The research utilized a descriptive-correlational design based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population comprised married female university students aged 18–35 living in Tehran. A total of 456 participants were selected using convenience sampling according to inclusion criteria (e.g., marriage duration and parental status). Data were collected via online questionnaires including the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1986), Irrational Beliefs Questionnaire (Jones, 1968), Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus et al., 1996), and the Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010). SPSS version 21 and AMOS version 24 were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation were applied. Model fit was evaluated using indices such as χ^2/df, GFI, AGFI, CFI, and RMSEA. Assumptions of normality and multicollinearity were checked using skewness, kurtosis, tolerance, and VIF values.

Findings: The results indicated that irrational beliefs ($\beta = -0.36$, $p < 0.001$) and maladaptive conflict resolution strategies ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$) were significant negative predictors of marital adjustment. Adaptive conflict resolution strategies showed a weaker but positive relationship ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.127$). Cognitive flexibility mediated the effects of both irrational beliefs ($\beta = -0.097$, $p < 0.001$) and conflict resolution strategies ($\beta = -0.094$ to 0.077, $p < 0.01$) on marital adjustment. The model demonstrated acceptable fit indices (e.g., CFI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.048), explaining 65% of the variance in marital adjustment.

Conclusion: The findings underscore the central role of cognitive flexibility in enhancing marital adjustment by mitigating the negative effects of irrational beliefs and maladaptive conflict behaviors. Interventions targeting cognitive restructuring and flexibility training may improve relational outcomes in married women.

Keywords: *Marital adjustment model, irrational beliefs, conflict resolution strategies, cognitive flexibility, marital life.*

1. Introduction

Marital adjustment is a multidimensional psychological construct that reflects the degree to which couples successfully adapt to marital roles, resolve conflicts, and maintain satisfaction within their relationship. The quality of marital adjustment plays a vital role in both partners' mental well-being and overall relational functioning. Numerous studies have emphasized the intricate interplay of psychological, emotional, and interpersonal factors that contribute to marital harmony or discord. Among these, irrational beliefs and conflict resolution strategies have emerged as salient predictors of marital adjustment, particularly when examined through the lens of cognitive-behavioral and interpersonal theories (Gonji et al., 2016; Pourmohammadrezay Tajrishi et al., 2014; Tikdari Nejad & Khezri Moghadam, 2017).

Irrational beliefs, as conceptualized within Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, represent maladaptive cognitive schemas that distort reality and contribute to dysfunctional emotional responses and interpersonal behaviors. These beliefs can include demandingness, catastrophizing, low frustration tolerance, and global evaluations of self and others, all of which can negatively influence how individuals interpret and react to marital stressors (Pourmohammadrezay Tajrishi et al., 2014). Studies have shown that the presence of such beliefs in one or both partners can exacerbate misunderstandings, emotional dysregulation, and interpersonal conflict, thereby undermining marital satisfaction and adaptability (Gonji et al., 2016; Mesrat Mashhadi et al., 2017).

Conflict resolution strategies—whether adaptive (e.g., negotiation and cooperation) or maladaptive (e.g., aggression and withdrawal)—also significantly determine the trajectory of marital interactions. Couples who employ constructive strategies are more likely to resolve disagreements without emotional escalation, which is a core component of marital adjustment (Hashemi et al., 2021; Omrani et al., 2018). Conversely, the repeated use of maladaptive strategies such as verbal hostility or emotional disengagement can diminish relational quality over time (Bolluk UĞUr & ÇAkmak Tolan, 2024). Conflict resolution is not only a behavioral outcome but also reflects underlying cognitive and emotional capacities, such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and flexibility (Jalil & Muazzam, 2013; Parameswari, 2016).

Cognitive flexibility, defined as the capacity to shift perspectives and adapt one's cognitive and behavioral responses to new or challenging situations, has been identified as a critical mediator in the link between cognitive-emotional variables and relational outcomes (Shahabi et al., 2020; Shareh & Eshaghi Sani, 2019). It enables individuals to reinterpret conflictual interactions, regulate emotional arousal, and consider their partner's point of view—facilitating the use of adaptive conflict resolution strategies and reducing the influence of irrational beliefs (Akbarzadeh & Zahrkar, 2022; Shareh & Es'hagh Sani, 2018). In this regard, cognitive flexibility may act as a protective mechanism that buffers the deleterious effects of cognitive distortions and ineffective behavioral responses on marital quality.

In addition, several personal and contextual variables further shape the dynamics of marital adjustment. For example, personality traits have been shown to influence both emotion regulation and conflict management styles, which in turn affect satisfaction and adaptation within marriage (Hashemi et al., 2021; Hosseini Nasab, Hashemi, et al., 2009). Similarly, emotional intelligence has been consistently linked to more effective conflict resolution and higher marital satisfaction across diverse populations (Jalil & Muazzam, 2013; Parameswari, 2016). In couples facing fertility issues or caregiving responsibilities (e.g., raising a child with autism), flexibility, compassion, and constructive conflict management become even more crucial for maintaining relational harmony (Shahabi et al., 2020; Shahbazi & Khadem Ali, 2018).

Cultural and demographic contexts also contribute to variations in marital adjustment. In Iran, studies have shown that marital satisfaction is influenced not only by psychological traits but also by religious beliefs, cultural expectations, and life transitions such as parenthood or employment shifts (Amanollahi et al., 2018; Ebrahimi Abadi et al., 2019). For instance, religious orientation has been found to mediate the effects of psychological constructs on marital adjustment, offering a value-laden framework for managing interpersonal difficulties (Hosseini Nasab, Badri, et al., 2009; Najafi Fard, 2013). Moreover, studies comparing couples with and without children suggest that parenting responsibilities may modulate the relationship between cognitive-emotional factors and marital outcomes (Ebrahimi Abadi et al., 2019).

The mediating role of cognitive and psychological flexibility in marital functioning has gained considerable empirical attention. Research has highlighted that psychological flexibility—closely related to cognitive flexibility—is associated with better tolerance of ambiguity

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

and greater resilience in the face of interpersonal stress (Montazer & Razavi Nematollahi, 2024). This capacity enables individuals to disengage from rigid thought patterns, reducing the impact of irrational beliefs and fostering constructive engagement in marital conflicts (Akbarzadeh & Zahrkar, 2022; Jabouri & Khoshnevisan, 2022). As such, models that incorporate cognitive flexibility as a mediator offer a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological processes that underpin marital adjustment.

In a related vein, mindfulness and emotion regulation have been examined as mechanisms through which individuals regulate their reactions to marital role expectations and conflicts. For example, Bolluk UĞUr and Çakmak Tolan (2024) demonstrated that mindfulness mediates the relationship between role expectations, forgiveness, and adjustment in married couples (Bolluk UĞUr & ÇAkmak Tolan, 2024). Similarly, Bloch, Haase, and Levenson (2014) found that emotion regulation was a stronger predictor of marital satisfaction than other personality factors, particularly in long-term marriages (Bloch et al., 2014). These findings converge on the idea that internal regulatory mechanisms such as flexibility, awareness, and control are essential for sustaining a satisfying marital relationship.

Notably, gender and age also influence the expression and impact of psychological variables in marriage. Studies have found that middle-aged women's marital satisfaction is significantly predicted by their cognitive flexibility and emotion regulation abilities (Shareh & Es'hagh Sani, 2018; Shareh & Eshaghi Sani, 2019). Similarly, emotional maturity and spiritual beliefs have been identified as critical factors in promoting marital satisfaction across different stages of life (Seili et al., 2015). As highlighted by Abreu-Afonso et al. (2022), long-term marital satisfaction is sustained by a complex interplay of emotional intimacy, constructive communication, and adaptability to evolving relationship challenges (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022).

The present study builds upon these theoretical and empirical foundations by proposing a structural model in which irrational beliefs and conflict resolution strategies predict marital adjustment, mediated by cognitive flexibility. This model is grounded in cognitive-behavioral theory, systemic relationship theory, and the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of internal psychological resources in navigating marital challenges. The investigation focuses on married women—a demographic particularly sensitive to relational stressors due to the convergence of emotional, social, and often caretaking roles (Amani & Davood, 2012; Yavari & Habibi, 2024).

By integrating multiple psychological constructs into a unified framework, the current study addresses a gap in the literature where previous studies have examined the variables in isolation or with limited interactional depth. It aims to provide empirical support for a mediated model of marital adjustment that can inform therapeutic interventions, premarital counseling, and educational programs targeting cognitive and emotional flexibility, especially in women navigating critical phases of marital development (Ahmadi et al., 2010; Polit & Beck, 2013).

In sum, the theoretical justification for this study rests on the robust empirical evidence linking irrational beliefs and conflict resolution to marital satisfaction, as well as the growing consensus around the mediating role of cognitive flexibility.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research method in this study is applied in terms of its objective and descriptive based on correlational models in terms of data collection. The statistical population consisted of all married female university students between the ages of 18 and 35 residing in Tehran. To determine the sample size, convenience sampling was used, based on specific inclusion criteria (women who have been married for one to four years and are childless, and women who have been married for more than five years and have children). A total of 456 participants completed the questionnaires through an online survey.

2.2. Measures

1. Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) – Spanier: This scale, developed by Spanier (1986), is used to assess the adjustment between married couples. The goal of the instrument is to measure the level of adjustment within dyadic relationships. It consists of 32 items designed to evaluate the quality of marital relationships, serving multiple purposes. By summing the total scores, the scale can be used to assess overall marital adjustment. Factor analysis shows that the scale measures four dimensions: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression (Sanaii, 2000). Spanier (1986) reported the internal consistency of the total scale as 0.96 using Cronbach's alpha. The internal consistency of the subscales

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

ranges from good to excellent: dyadic satisfaction = 0.94, dyadic cohesion = 0.81, dyadic consensus = 0.90, and affectional expression = 0.73 (Sanaii, 2000). This scale was translated and standardized in Iran by Amoozegar and Hosseinnejad in 1995. The test–retest correlations for women and men were 0.86 for the total score, 0.68 for the first subscale, 0.75 for the second, 0.71 for the third, and 0.61 for the fourth.

2. Irrational Beliefs Questionnaire – Jones (IBQ-40): The 40-item version of the Irrational Beliefs Questionnaire was developed by Jones in 1968 based on Ellis's theory (1962). It is one of the most widely used tools for assessing irrational beliefs. The original version includes 100 items, grouped into 10 factors, each evaluating a specific type of irrational thinking. These factors are: need for approval, high self-expectations, self and other condemnation, emotional irresponsibility, helplessness in the face of frustration, anxious over-concern, problem avoidance, dependency, helplessness regarding change, and perfectionism. A shortened 40-item version of the questionnaire was developed by Ebadi and Mo'tamedi in 2005 through factor analysis. Jones (1968) reported internal consistency of the original 10 factors ranging from 0.45 to 0.72, a test–retest reliability of 0.92, and a concurrent validity of 0.61 with psychiatric symptoms. For the 40-item version, Ebadi and Mo'tamedi (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75. For the four retained factors, the alpha coefficients were: helplessness = 0.80, need for approval = 0.81, problem avoidance = 0.73, and emotional irresponsibility = 0.75.

3. Conflict Tactics Scale – Straus et al. (CTS2): Originally developed by Straus et al. (1979) and revised in 1990 and 1996, this instrument measures physical and psychological violence between partners over the previous 12 months (Straus et al., 1996). Widely used internationally, by 1996 it had been completed by approximately 70,000 people. The current multidimensional version used in this study consists of five subscales: negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury. The Persian version was translated by Panaghi et al. in 2011 with 13 items removed, and a full version was later translated by Azizi-Moghaddam in 2015, which was used in the current study. The scale consists of two parallel forms—aggressor and victim—assessing both self and partner behavior. The 78-item questionnaire includes five subscales: negotiation (6 items), psychological aggression (8 items), physical assault (12 items), sexual coercion (7 items), and injury (6 items). Straus et al. (1996) reported internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.79 to 0.95. A meta-analysis of 41 studies found alpha coefficients ranging from 0.34 to 0.94, with a mean of 0.77 (Straus, 2007). Validity was supported through correlations with physical abuse and injury scales (Straus, 2004), and with scales of abuse, physical violence, and domination in romantic relationships (Mohammadkhani et al., 2010). Cronbach's alphas for the five subscales were: psychological aggression = 0.79, negotiation = 0.86, physical assault = 0.86, sexual coercion = 0.87, and injury = 0.95 (Straus et al., as cited in Mohammadi, 2010). In Iran, alpha coefficients ranged from 0.79 (psychological aggression) to 0.91 (negotiation) (Mohammadkhani et al., 2010). The total score, ranging from 0 to 546, is interpreted as follows: 0–182 = weak conflict resolution, 182–273 = moderate, above 273 = strong conflict resolution.

4. Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI-I): Developed by Dennis and Vander Wal (2010), this is a 20-item self-report scale designed to assess cognitive flexibility, which is essential for successfully responding to challenges and replacing maladaptive thoughts with more adaptive ones. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater flexibility. The scale measures three dimensions of cognitive flexibility: (1) the tendency to perceive difficult situations as controllable, (2) the ability to perceive multiple alternative explanations for human behavior and events, and (3) the capacity to generate multiple alternative solutions to challenging situations. Dennis and Vander Wal (2010) reported good factorial structure, convergent and concurrent validity. They identified two primary factors: awareness of alternatives and perception of justification, and defined controllability as the second subscale. The concurrent validity with the Beck Depression Inventory was −0.39, and divergent validity with the Martin and Rubin Cognitive Flexibility Scale was 0.75. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale and subscales were 0.91, 0.91, and 0.84, respectively, with test–retest reliability of 0.81, 0.75, and 0.77. In an Iranian sample, Shareh, Farmani, and Soltani reported test–retest reliability of 0.71 for the total scale and 0.55, 0.72, and 0.57 for the subscales of controllability, awareness of alternatives, and perception of justification, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha for the Persian version was 0.90 overall and 0.87, 0.89, and 0.55 for the three subscales. The Persian version demonstrated good factorial, convergent, and concurrent validity. Unlike the original two-factor version, the Persian version includes three subscales: controllability, awareness of alternatives, and perception of justification. Its convergent validity with

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

the Resilience Questionnaire was 0.67, and its concurrent validity with the Beck Depression Inventory was −0.50.

2.3. *Data Analysis*

Data analysis in this study was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Initially, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were calculated for all variables. To examine the relationships among irrational beliefs, conflict resolution strategies, cognitive flexibility, and marital adjustment, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. To assess the fit of the conceptual model and test the hypothesized direct and indirect paths, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed using AMOS version 24. Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) was used for model fitting, and multiple indices—including chi-square/df ratio, GFI, AGFI, CFI, and RMSEA—were applied to evaluate model adequacy. Additionally, the assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed through skewness, kurtosis, tolerance values, VIF, and Mahalanobis distance to ensure the robustness of the results.

3. Findings and Results

In the present study, 456 married women participated, with a mean age of 30.27 years and a standard deviation of 4.86 years. The mean duration of marriage was 5.05 years with a standard deviation of 2.49 years. Regarding education level, 85 participants (18.6%) had less than a high school diploma, 142 (31.2%) held a diploma, 41 (9%) had an associate degree, 115 (25%) held a bachelor's degree, and 74 (16.2%) had a master's degree or higher. Employment status revealed that 149 participants (32.7%) were homemakers, 201 (44.1%) were employed, and 106 (23.2%) were self-employed.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients among the research variables, including irrational beliefs; maladaptive conflict resolution strategies (victim/aggression, aggressor/aggression, victim/psychological violence, and aggressor/psychological violence); adaptive conflict resolution strategies (victim/negotiation and aggressor/negotiation); cognitive flexibility (perceived controllability, awareness of alternatives, and perception of justification); and marital adjustment (dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients Among Research Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Irrational Beliefs	–													
2. Maladaptive Conflict – Victim/Aggression	.15	–												
3. Maladaptive Conflict – Aggressor/Aggression	.14	.61	–											
4. Maladaptive Conflict – Victim/Psych. Violence	.15	.48	.64	–										
5. Maladaptive Conflict – Aggressor/Psych. Violence	.07	.30	.36	.40	–									
6. Adaptive Conflict – Victim/Negotiation	*−.11*	−.06	*−.12*	−.12	−.05	–								
7. Adaptive Conflict – Aggressor/Negotiation	−.08	−.01	−.07	−.19	−.08	.47	–							
8. Cog. Flexibility – Controllability	−.23	−.13	−.18	−.14	−.20	.18	.13	–						
9. Cog. Flexibility – Awareness of Alternatives	−.34	−.17	−.24	−.30	−.16	.18	.18	.60	–					
10. Cog. Flexibility – Perception of Justification	−.22	−.14	−.23	−.26	−.18	.14	.21	.62	.71	–				
11. Marital Adjustment – Dyadic Satisfaction	−.39	−.25	−.31	−.31	−.29	.17	.19	.36	.38	.33	–			
12. Marital Adjustment – Dyadic Cohesion	−.24	−.16	−.36	−.28	−.13	.05	.14	.22	.29	.26	.37	–		
13. Marital Adjustment – Dyadic Consensus	−.36	−.20	−.23	−.21	−.20	.17	.19	.30	.37	.35	.44	.18	–	
14. Marital Adjustment – Affectional Expression	−.29	−.18	−.20	−.17	−.12	.03	.06	.19	.31	.20	.32	.30	.44	–
Mean	73.90	31.26	29.35	26.27	26.18	14.82	16.91	40.19	29.17	8.62	31.43	16.00	42.79	7.67
Std. Deviation	12.94	7.75	6.98	6.49	5.91	3.18	3.99	4.90	8.53	2.05	6.36	3.88	10.14	2.04

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

As shown in Table 1, the correlation coefficients between the research variables were in the expected directions and aligned with theoretical frameworks in the relevant field. As Table 2 (not shown here) further demonstrates, to assess the assumption of normality in data distribution, values of skewness and kurtosis were evaluated. Additionally, to examine the assumption of multicollinearity, variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance indices for predictor variables were analyzed.

Table 2

Examination of Normality and Multicollinearity Assumptions

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis	Tolerance	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
Irrational Beliefs	−0.24	−0.73	0.87	1.15
Maladaptive Conflict – Victim/Aggression	−0.11	−0.67	0.61	1.65
Maladaptive Conflict – Aggressor/Aggression	−0.04	−0.87	0.46	2.18
Maladaptive Conflict – Victim/Psych. Violence	0.14	−0.33	0.53	1.90
Maladaptive Conflict – Aggressor/Psych. Violence	−0.13	−0.55	0.80	1.25
Adaptive Conflict – Victim/Negotiation	−0.39	−0.32	0.76	1.32
Adaptive Conflict – Aggressor/Negotiation	0.26	0.42	0.76	1.32
Cognitive Flexibility – Controllability	−0.15	−0.04	0.55	1.81
Cognitive Flexibility – Awareness of Alternatives	−0.14	−0.25	0.42	2.37
Cognitive Flexibility – Perception of Justification	−0.19	−0.05	0.43	2.32
Marital Adjustment – Dyadic Satisfaction	−0.07	0.24	–	–
Marital Adjustment – Dyadic Cohesion	0.03	−0.31	–	–
Marital Adjustment – Dyadic Consensus	−0.12	−0.01	–	–
Marital Adjustment – Affectional Expression	0.17	−0.13	–	–

Table 2 shows that the values for skewness and kurtosis of all components and variables fall within the acceptable ±2 range. Therefore, the assumption of univariate normality is met. Moreover, Table 2 also indicates that the assumption of multicollinearity is satisfied, as all tolerance values exceed 0.10 and all variance inflation factors (VIFs) are below 10.

To assess the assumption of multivariate normality, Mahalanobis distance statistics were used. The skewness and kurtosis values for Mahalanobis distance were 1.22 and 1.73, respectively, both within the ±2 acceptable range. Thus, the assumption of multivariate normality was also confirmed.

Finally, scatterplots of standardized residual variances indicated that the assumption of homoscedasticity was also met in the present data.

In the measurement model, 13 observed indicators were used to reflect four latent constructs. Based on the model in Figure 1, it was hypothesized that:

- *Victim/Aggression*, *Aggressor/Aggression*, *Victim/Psychological Violence*, and *Aggressor/Psychological Violence* were indicators of the latent variable Maladaptive Conflict Resolution Strategies.
- *Victim/Negotiation* and *Aggressor/Negotiation* indicated the latent variable Adaptive Conflict Resolution Strategies.
- *Controllability*, *Awareness of Alternatives*, and *Perception of Justification* measured the latent variable Cognitive Flexibility.
- *Dyadic Satisfaction*, *Dyadic Cohesion*, *Dyadic Consensus*, and *Affectional Expression* indicated the latent variable Marital Adjustment.

Model fit for the measurement model was assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), maximum likelihood estimation (ML), and AMOS version 24.0.

Table 3

Fit Indices for Measurement and Structural Models

Fit Index	Measurement Model	Structural Model	Cut-off Criteria
Chi-square (χ^2)	128.02	140.71	–
Degrees of Freedom (df)	59	68	–
χ^2/df	2.17	2.08	< 3
GFI	0.959	0.958	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.937	0.936	≥ 0.85
CFI	0.961	0.962	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.051	0.048	≤ 0.08

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

Table 3 shows that all fit indices obtained from CFA supported an acceptable fit of the measurement model to the collected data. In this model, the highest factor loading belonged to the *Aggressor/Aggression* indicator (β = 0.857), and the lowest belonged to *Aggressor/Psychological Violence* (β = 0.464). Since all factor loadings exceeded the 0.32 threshold, all indicators adequately measured their respective latent variables.

Following the evaluation of the measurement model, the second stage involved assessing the structural model's fit. The structural model hypothesized that irrational beliefs and conflict resolution strategies are related to marital adjustment through the mediating role of cognitive flexibility.

As shown in Table 3, all model fit indices indicated an acceptable fit of the structural model to the data.

Table 4

Direct, Indirect, and Total Path Coefficients in the Structural Model

Path	b	S.E.	β	p
Direct Effects				
Irrational Beliefs → Cognitive Flexibility	−0.066	0.014	−0.258	0.001
Adaptive Conflict Strategies → Cognitive Flexibility	0.263	0.103	0.204	0.009
Maladaptive Conflict Strategies → Cognitive Flexibility	−0.166	0.042	−0.251	0.001
Cognitive Flexibility → Marital Adjustment	0.269	0.053	0.376	0.001
Irrational Beliefs → Marital Adjustment	−0.066	0.011	−0.359	0.001
Adaptive Conflict Strategies → Marital Adjustment	0.112	0.072	0.121	0.127
Maladaptive Conflict Strategies → Marital Adjustment	−0.149	0.031	−0.316	0.001
Indirect Effects				
Irrational Beliefs → Marital Adjustment	−0.018	0.005	−0.097	0.001
Adaptive Conflict Strategies → Marital Adjustment	0.071	0.032	0.077	0.009
Maladaptive Conflict Strategies → Marital Adjustment	−0.045	0.014	−0.094	0.001
Total Effects				
Irrational Beliefs → Marital Adjustment	−0.084	0.011	−0.456	0.001
Adaptive Conflict Strategies → Marital Adjustment	0.182	0.082	0.197	0.021
Maladaptive Conflict Strategies → Marital Adjustment	−0.194	0.034	−0.411	0.001

As shown in Table 4, the total path coefficient between irrational beliefs and marital adjustment was negative and significant (β = −0.456, p = 0.001), as was the total coefficient between maladaptive conflict strategies and marital adjustment (β = −0.411, p = 0.001). The total path from adaptive conflict strategies to marital adjustment was positive and significant (β = 0.197, p = 0.021).

Consistent with Table 4, the direct path from cognitive flexibility to marital adjustment was also positive and significant (β = 0.376, p = 0.001).

Regarding indirect effects, the paths from irrational beliefs (β = −0.097, p = 0.001) and maladaptive conflict strategies (β = −0.094, p = 0.001) to marital adjustment were negative and significant. Meanwhile, the indirect path from adaptive conflict strategies to marital adjustment was positive and significant (β = 0.077, p = 0.009).

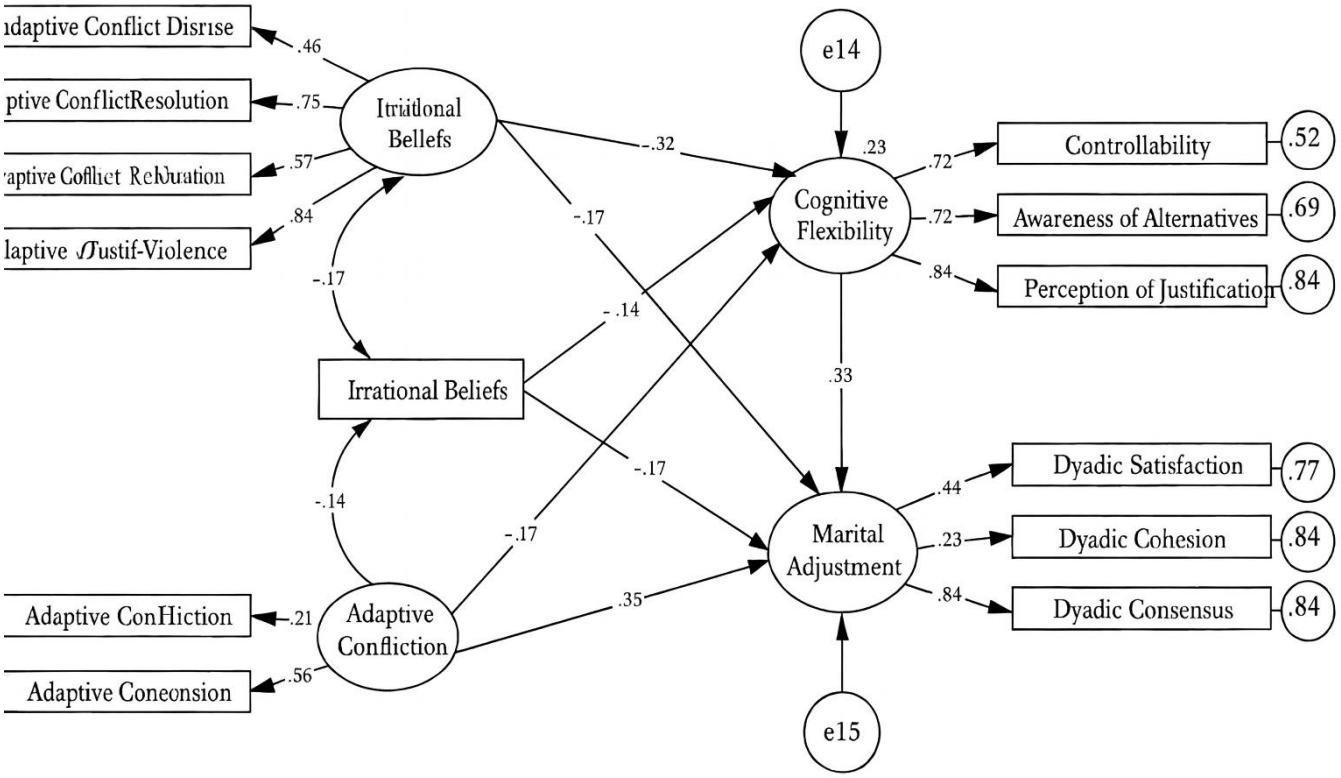
Thus, it was concluded that among married women, cognitive flexibility mediates the relationship between:

- Irrational beliefs and marital adjustment (negatively),
- Maladaptive conflict strategies and marital adjustment (negatively),
- Adaptive conflict strategies and marital adjustment (positively and significantly).

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

Figure 1

Standardized Parameters of the Structural Model



The structural model revealed that the coefficient of determination (R^2) for marital adjustment was 0.65, indicating that irrational beliefs, conflict resolution strategies, and cognitive flexibility collectively explained 65% of the variance in marital adjustment.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate a structural model of marital adjustment in married women, focusing on the predictive roles of irrational beliefs and conflict resolution strategies, with the mediating effect of cognitive flexibility. The findings provided strong empirical support for the proposed model, confirming both direct and indirect relationships among the studied variables. More specifically, the results demonstrated that irrational beliefs and maladaptive conflict resolution strategies negatively predicted marital adjustment, while adaptive conflict resolution strategies had a positive but comparatively weaker direct effect. Importantly, cognitive flexibility significantly mediated the relationship between irrational beliefs, conflict strategies, and marital adjustment.

The first major finding was the significant and negative direct path from irrational beliefs to marital adjustment. Women with more rigid, demanding, or perfectionistic beliefs reported lower levels of dyadic satisfaction, cohesion, consensus, and affectional expression. This result supports earlier findings that highlight the detrimental role of irrational cognitive schemas in shaping maladaptive emotional and behavioral responses within marital contexts (Gonji et al., 2016; Pourmohammadrezay Tajrishi et al., 2014; Tikdari Nejad & Khezri Moghadam, 2017). These cognitive distortions often manifest in unrealistic expectations, heightened sensitivity to conflict, and an inability to empathize or compromise during relational tensions. Similar findings by Mesrat Mashhadi et al. (2017) also demonstrated that irrational beliefs contribute to interpersonal rigidity and exacerbate conflict within romantic relationships, thereby eroding marital quality (Mesrat Mashhadi et al., 2017).

The results further revealed that maladaptive conflict resolution strategies, such as verbal aggression or emotional withdrawal, were significant negative predictors of marital

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

adjustment. This finding corroborates prior research indicating that conflict management styles marked by hostility or avoidance impair communication and mutual understanding between spouses (Hashemi et al., 2021; Hosseini Nasab, Hashemi, et al., 2009; Omrani et al., 2018). As shown in the current model, these maladaptive strategies not only directly predicted lower marital adjustment but also indirectly influenced adjustment through reduced cognitive flexibility. In contrast, the direct path from adaptive conflict resolution strategies to marital adjustment was weaker and marginally significant. This pattern suggests that although positive strategies like negotiation contribute to marital harmony, their effects may depend on underlying cognitive and emotional capacities, particularly flexibility.

A central contribution of this study was the identification of cognitive flexibility as a significant mediator between both irrational beliefs and conflict resolution strategies with marital adjustment. The results showed that higher cognitive flexibility—defined as the ability to adapt one's thinking in response to situational demands—buffered the negative effects of irrational beliefs and maladaptive behaviors. These findings are consistent with those of Shareh and Es'hagh Sani (2018; 2019), who found that cognitive flexibility significantly predicted marital satisfaction in middle-aged women, especially in emotionally intense situations (Shareh & Es'hagh Sani, 2018; Shareh & Eshaghi Sani, 2019). Similarly, Akbarzadeh and Zahrkar (2022) demonstrated that cognitive flexibility, alongside self-compassion, significantly predicted higher levels of marital adjustment in couples, reinforcing the psychological resilience conferred by flexible thinking (Akbarzadeh & Zahrkar, 2022).

Additionally, Shahabi et al. (2020) reported that cognitive flexibility was a core component of marital compatibility in parents of children with autism, a population likely to encounter chronic stress (Shahabi et al., 2020). The mediating role of flexibility in the present study supports the theoretical premise that flexible individuals can more easily reframe negative interactions, manage their emotional responses, and generate constructive solutions to marital problems (Montazer & Razavi Nematollahi, 2024). This adaptive capacity appears particularly vital when individuals hold irrational beliefs or lack effective conflict management skills.

The total effect sizes in the model also affirm the multidimensional impact of irrational beliefs and conflict strategies on marital adjustment. The model explained 65% of the variance in marital adjustment, which is notably high and suggests that cognitive-emotional factors remain pivotal in shaping relational well-being. These findings align with those of Bolluk UĞUr and Çakmak Tolan (2024), who showed that internal regulatory mechanisms such as mindfulness significantly mediate the relationship between marital role expectations, forgiveness, and adjustment (Bolluk UĞUr & ÇAkmak Tolan, 2024). Moreover, Bloch et al. (2014) emphasized that emotion regulation skills, closely related to cognitive flexibility, serve as more reliable predictors of long-term marital satisfaction than static personality traits (Bloch et al., 2014).

Further supporting the findings, Jabouri and Khoshnevisan (2022) identified cognitive flexibility as a strong predictor of marital adjustment in women, especially when mental well-being was low (Jabouri & Khoshnevisan, 2022). This interactional framework is echoed in the work of Abreu-Afonso et al. (2022), who presented a dynamic model in which emotional intimacy, adaptability, and mutual respect sustain long-term marital satisfaction (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022). It appears that in modern relational contexts, where gender roles, communication styles, and life stressors constantly shift, the internal capacity for flexible and nuanced thinking is essential for relationship survival and growth.

Contextual variables such as gender, age, and marital duration were not the primary focus of this study but remain relevant. For instance, Shahbazi and Khadem Ali (2018) observed that women with more than five years of marital experience reported different levels of life satisfaction, happiness, and hope compared to newly married women, suggesting that adjustment evolves over time (Shahbazi & Khadem Ali, 2018). Similarly, Yavari and Habibi (2024) emphasized that commitment and marital satisfaction act as buffers in the relationship between conflict resolution and adjustment, particularly in childless couples (Yavari & Habibi, 2024). This insight parallels the present study's inclusion criteria (e.g., marital duration and parenting status) and points toward the contextual complexity of marital functioning.

Findings from the current research also resonate with those of Onabamiro et al. (2017), who found that psychological resources such as emotional intelligence and conflict competence significantly predicted marital adjustment in diverse cultural settings (Onabamiro et al., 2017). Amani and Davood (2012) further argued that the motivations for marriage—whether pragmatic or romantic—can influence expectations and later adjustment processes (Amani & Davood, 2012). These findings underscore that marital satisfaction is not only an outcome of dyadic

E-ISSN: 2980-9681

processes but also a function of individual expectations, values, and beliefs.

Finally, spiritual and cultural variables, although not directly assessed in this study, have been shown to shape marital interaction patterns. Seili et al. (2015) proposed a hypothetical model in which communication and spiritual beliefs predicted marital satisfaction through relationship quality and age, highlighting the broader sociocultural context of intimate relationships (Seili et al., 2015). Likewise, Najafi Fard (2013) emphasized the importance of religion in promoting both physical and mental health in relational contexts (Najafi Fard, 2013). These findings suggest potential moderators that future studies might explore to deepen the explanatory power of cognitive-emotional models of marital adjustment.

Despite the robustness of the structural model and the consistency of findings with prior literature, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes any definitive conclusions about causality. Longitudinal research is necessary to determine whether changes in irrational beliefs and cognitive flexibility precede or follow shifts in marital adjustment. Second, the sample consisted exclusively of married women in Tehran, which limits the generalizability of results to men or couples from different regions, cultures, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Third, all measures were self-reported, increasing the risk of response biases such as social desirability or self-enhancement. Lastly, other variables known to influence marital adjustment—such as attachment styles, trauma history, or sexual satisfaction—were not included in the model, which may have limited the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Future studies should incorporate longitudinal or experimental designs to better establish causal pathways among irrational beliefs, conflict strategies, cognitive flexibility, and marital adjustment. Expanding the participant pool to include male partners, same-sex couples, or culturally diverse populations would also enhance the external validity of the model. Furthermore, mixed-methods approaches—such as combining quantitative modeling with qualitative interviews—could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of couples and the nuanced ways cognitive flexibility functions in relational contexts. Researchers are also encouraged to examine potential moderating variables, such as spiritual orientation, resilience, or attachment styles, which may condition the relationships identified in the present study.

Based on the results, it is recommended that marital counseling and educational programs prioritize the assessment and restructuring of irrational beliefs in clients. Therapists should also focus on enhancing cognitive flexibility through cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness training, and emotion regulation skills. Teaching adaptive conflict resolution strategies in psychoeducational settings could empower couples to navigate relational challenges more constructively. Given the importance of internal psychological resources, individual-level interventions aimed at building self-awareness, empathy, and flexible thinking may significantly improve marital outcomes, especially among women facing relational stress or life transitions.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the study and participated in the research with informed consent.

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