



The Inter-Structural Relationships between Early Maladaptive Schemas and Marital Commitment of Couples: The Mediating Role of Communication Patterns

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Abstract

Background: Marital commitment has been identified as one of the effective components in the development and stability of marital relationships. This study aimed to investigate the inter-structural relationships between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment mediated by communication patterns in couples.

Methods: This correlational study was performed on married students of Mashhad Islamic Azad university with more than 3 years of marital life in 2019-2020. 300 people participated according to the research statistical method based on hidden variables. Data were collected using Adams and Jones marital commitment questionnaire (1997), Young early maladaptive schema questionnaire (1998), and Christensen and Sullaway communication patterns questionnaire (1984). Data analysis was performed by the structural equation method.

Results: The results of path coefficients revealed that the direct effect of early maladaptive schemas on communication patterns is positive and significant ($P \leq 0.01$, $\gamma = 0.71$) and its effect on marital commitment is negative and significant ($P \text{ value} \leq 0.01$, $\gamma = -0.45$). Also, the direct effect of communication patterns on marital commitment is significant and negative ($P \text{ value} \leq 0.01$, $\beta = -0.41$). Examining of standardized coefficients of indirect effects showed that the indirect effect of early maladaptive schemas on marital commitment is significant with the mediating role of communication patterns ($P \text{ value} < 0.01$, $IF = -0.51$). The explained variance of marital commitment in terms of early maladaptive schemas and communication patterns was equal to 0.59.

Conclusions: According to the results, communication patterns act as a mediating variable in the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment. Furthermore, two variables of communication patterns and early maladaptive schemas can predict marital commitment.

Keywords: Commitment, Early maladaptive schema, Communication, Marital.

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Introduction

Undoubtedly, marriage is the greatest and most important event in the life of every person. A healthy marriage requires the existence of several elements, including intimacy, commitment, satisfaction, and communication, as well as the absence of elements such as violence and infidelity.¹ Commitment to the marriage contract is also one of the most important issues between couples.² Commitment is the most

important qualitative aspect of this relationship, and successful and lasting marriage requires the presence of marital commitment. Marital commitment has been identified as one of the effective components in the growth and stability of marital relationships and reflects the nature of each couple's dependence in the marital relationship.³ According to Dew and Jackson,⁴ although commitment and intention to continue the relationship is often considered a general construct, it confirms the view of Adams and Jones⁵ and regards marital commitment to be a vital part of any marriage. Tariveh et al, consider marital commitment as an essential element in the stability and durability of marriage and believe that interpersonal factors of couples such as beliefs, criticisms, thoughts, emotions, and intimacy and marital conflicts affect marital commitment.⁶ Although for many people, the marriage begins with consent and desire and intention to have committed relationships, gradually several factors disrupt marital commitment.⁷ Yu, Wu, Wang, and Wang emphasize the importance of identifying the factors that cause anxiety and distress in committed marital relationships and believe that individual characteristics and cognitive factors are certainly effective in this aspect of married life.⁸

Couples' communication patterns are one of the important cognitive variables that influence marital commitment. Constructive and effective communication is a prerequisite for mental-emotional health, happiness, and survival of marital relationships.⁹ The constructive communication of couples is widely recognized as an effective component of the functioning of a successful marital relationship. Communication in the relationship between couples covers a wide range of behaviors and behavioral patterns. In this regard, Christensen and Shenk apply the concept of communication patterns and consider them as communication channels through which people interact with each other and couples establish a set of communication patterns that include mutual productive communication, mutual avoidance communication, and demand-withdraw communication patterns.¹⁰ The effective pattern for marital relationships is the productive communication pattern, which includes having a mutual discussion, trying to understand each other, and negotiating to reach a solution, and the two non-productive patterns are mutual avoidance communication, and demand-withdraw communication patterns. Mutual avoidance communication and demand-withdraw communication patterns are behavioral patterns that perpetuate and exacerbate conflicts and are associated with negative emotions during the interaction between couples. Mutual avoidance communication

includes having avoidant behaviors in times of conflict and distancing oneself after stressful discussions, and describes the process during which both spouses avoid conflict, for example by remaining silent, changing the subject, or withdrawing from each other. In mutual avoidance, there is no objection to a spouse's withdrawal from the other party because he/she also seeks withdrawal. In the demand-withdraw communication pattern, one couple seeks change, negotiation, and problem-solving, and the other seeks to avoid negotiating the issue. One spouse blames, criticizes, complains, or otherwise tries to make a change while the other spouse refuses to interact, terminates it, or withdraws from the interaction.¹¹ These patterns determine how couples communicate with each other and what happens in the context of their marital relationship.¹² Non-productive patterns also have a destructive effect on the marital relationship and the problematic behaviors of couples are due to the implementation of a non-productive form of these patterns. In couples who suffer from relationship distress, it is often observed that their communication pattern is non-productive and is a demand/withdrawal pattern.¹³ The research by Epstein and Dattilio suggests that cognitive components and dysfunctional communication patterns are inversely related to success in committed relationships.¹⁴ It is observed that communication variables have a positive and significant mediating effect in most couples and are a strong predictor of marital commitment due to other variables such as sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction.¹⁵

In the meanwhile, there is an extensive and comprehensive pattern consisting of memories, emotions, cognitions and bodily feelings related to oneself and others called early maladaptive schemas that subjugate people's relationships and behavioral patterns and cause harm. Further, in etiology, decreased commitment in relationships has also been taken into account.¹⁶ Early maladaptive schemas refer to the root of deep negative beliefs about oneself, others, and the world that is severely dysfunctional, are formed in childhood or adolescence, and continue into adulthood, affecting one's relationship with oneself, others, and the world around.¹⁷ Schemas always show their maladaptive nature in relationships. Over time, early maladaptive schemas cause cognitive errors in relationships and especially affect marital relationships, causing more dissatisfaction and disruption in relationships and reducing feelings of trust and commitment. Maladaptive schemas lead to bias in the interpretation of events. These biases in psychological pathology arise in spouses in the form of misunderstandings, distorted attitudes, incorrect assumptions, and unrealistic goals and expectations, and these misconceptions affect the spouses' subsequent perceptions and evaluations because schemas continue throughout life and affect how one relates to oneself and others, especially one's life partner.¹⁸

In recent years, one of the social harms of societies has been the instability of marriage. Research in this area has recognized marital commitment as one of the main components of stability and durability of marriage. The role of married men and women in maintaining a marriage and effective intrapersonal and interpersonal variables in this field has always been the main concern of family researchers. The extent to which spouses tend unfaithfulness because of their early

maladaptive schemas or dysfunctional communication patterns is an important and thought-provoking issue that necessitates this research. Among the achievements of this study, one can refer to the prevention of separations due to infidelity and avoidance of incurring excessive financial, emotional, and psychological costs to the family and society. Therefore, the present research was conducted to investigate the inter-structural relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment mediated by communication patterns.

Research hypotheses are as follows: 1. Communication patterns mediate the relationship between marital commitment and early maladaptive schemas. 2. Communication patterns have a direct effect on marital commitment. 3. Early maladaptive schemas have a direct effect on marital commitment. 4. Early maladaptive schemas have a direct effect on communication patterns.

Materials and Methods

This study was correlational research using structural equation modeling. The research statistical population comprised all married students of Islamic Azad university of Mashhad in the academic year 2019-2020 who had more than 3 years of marital life. According to university officials, there were 1200 people. The sample size was determined to be 300 subjects according to the number of input variables to the model and 15 observations for each¹⁹ and for increasing the validity of the research findings. Cluster and multi-stage methods were used for sampling so that initially, two faculties were randomly selected from among the faculties of Mashhad branch. Then, 14 courses from each faculty and 8 classes from each course were randomly selected.

Inclusion criteria were having mental health, being a university student, and being married and passing at least 3 years from the married life. Exclusion criteria also included observing the obvious effects of physical and mental illness, having drug abuse, receiving educational programs and psychological treatments during the marital years, and refusing to continue cooperation.

This research was approved at Bojnord Islamic Azad university and after obtaining the consent to conduct the research and selecting the samples participating in the research, the objectives of the study and the project steps were explained to the participants. Written informed consent was obtained from the subjects while ensuring respect for privacy and confidentiality at all stages of the research. In this study, marital commitment questionnaire (MCQ), communication patterns questionnaire (CPQ), and Young schema questionnaire- short form (SQ-SF) were used. These questionnaires were provided to the subjects simultaneously, and the participants were asked to complete all the questions in the questionnaires; while they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Marital commitment questionnaire (MCQ): The questionnaire has been developed by Adams and Jones in 1997 for research purposes and measures individuals' commitment to their spouse and marriage in three dimensions of personal commitment, moral commitment, and structural commitment.

It has 44 questions whose answers are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire has a total score. The highest score that the subject obtains is 172 and the lowest score is 44. A score of close to 172 indicates high marital commitment and a score of close to 44 suggests low marital commitment. Adams and Jones evaluated the validity of the marital commitment questionnaire based on the validity of the correlation of subscales with each other and with the desired total score and obtained its reliability coefficients based on Cronbach's alpha to be 91%, 89%, and 86%, respectively, for the subscales of commitment to spouse, commitment to marriage and mandatory commitment.⁵ The Persian version of this questionnaire by Shahsiah et al was validated and its content validity was confirmed by the counseling professors at the university of Isfahan. Moreover, the reliability of MCQ based on Cronbach's alpha and test-retest methods was 85% and 86%, respectively.²⁰ Mohammadi et al,²¹ reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.79, 0.82, and 0.84, respectively, for the components of personal commitment, moral commitment, and mandatory commitment.

Communication patterns questionnaire (CPQ): The questionnaire was designed by Christensen and Sullaway in 1984 at the university of California to assess couples' communication patterns.²² It has 35 items and includes mutual productive communication, mutual avoidance communication, and demand-withdraw communication patterns that measure couples' communication in three phases of conflict: 1) when a problem occurs; 2) when discussing the problem, and 3) after discussing the problem. Answers are rated on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from (1 not possible to 9 quite possible). Christensen and Sullaway estimated the validity of the three subscales of this questionnaire and Cronbach's alpha was reported for the five scales of the communication patterns questionnaire, ranging from 0.44 to 0.85. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha obtained in the study was reported to be between 0.74 and 0.78 for Swiss and German subjects.²³ In Iran, in the study by Ebadatpour,²⁴ Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.70, 0.71, and 0.66 were obtained, respectively, for mutual productive communication patterns, mutual avoidance communication patterns, and demand-withdraw communication patterns. Besides, in the research conducted by Seyedi and Shah Nazari, the internal consistency of the three factors of the questionnaire has been reported between 0.82 to 0.86.²⁵

Schema questionnaire- short form (SQ-SF): Schema questionnaire- short form (SQ-SF) was developed by Young in 1988 from its original form (205 questions). Its short-form has 75 questions designed to evaluate 15 subscales (schemas) that are classified into 5 domains. This questionnaire covers the disconnection and rejection domain, which includes the schemas of emotional deprivation, abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, social isolation, and shame/defectiveness, with questions 1 to 25, the impaired autonomy and performance domain, which includes schemas of failure, dependence/incompetence, vulnerability to harm or illness and enmeshment/entrapment, with questions 26 to 45, the directedness domain, which includes schemas of subjugation and self-sacrifice, with questions 46 to 55, the over vigilance

domain, which includes schemas of emotional inhibition and unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness, with questions 56 to 65 and the impaired limits domain, which includes schemas of entitlement and insufficient self-control/self-discipline, with questions 66 to 75. The questions are rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely false about me) to 6 (completely true about me). Waller et al, reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of above 0.83 for all subscales and indicated that the questionnaire has a favorable discriminant validity.²⁶ The standardization of this questionnaire in Iran has been performed by Ahei et al, on the students of the university of Tehran. Its internal consistency was reported to be 0.96 for the whole scale and above 0.85 for all subscales using Cronbach's alpha.²⁷ Further, Khorasani Zadeh et al recently conducted this questionnaire for 420 university students and reported its internal consistency coefficients to be 0.93, 0.89, 0.82, 0.83, and 0.79, respectively,²⁸ for the five mentioned domains through calculating Cronbach's alpha.

The statistical analyses were done using SPSS.25 and AMOS.24 software. Quantitative data were reported as frequency (percentage), and quantitative data were stated as mean \pm standard deviation. Data were analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient of structural equation type.

Results

In this study, out of 300 subjects, 173 (57.7%) were female and 127 (42.3%) were male. 100 people (33.3%) were undergraduates and 200 people (66.7%) were postgraduates. 200 subjects (66.7%) were employed and 100 subjects (33.3%) were unemployed. The mean age was 33.47 with a standard deviation of 3.99, ranging from 24 to 45 years. The mean years of common life were 8.03 with a standard deviation of 2.23, ranging from 4 to 14 years. In total, 27.3% had no children, 47.3% had one child, 24.7% had two children and 0.7% had three or more children. Table 1 displays the mean and standard deviation of the studied variables. Before performing the statistical analysis, the data were screened and univariate outliers were identified with a box plot. The results suggested that there is no univariate outlier. Multivariate outliers were also identified using Mahalanobis statistics. Then, the desired distances were modified based on the degrees of freedom (the number of variables, which were the eight predictor variables in the model) in the chi-square test (χ^2) and were examined at the level of $\alpha=0.001$. The results demonstrated the existence of a multivariate outlier. By deleting this item, the analysis was repeated. The modified index was greater than $\alpha=0.001$ for all participants.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of the studied variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Disconnection and rejection	3.26	1.27
Autonomy	3.61	1.22
Directedness	3.53	1.26
Over vigilance	3.53	1.24
Impaired limits	3.55	1.32
Mutual productive	-1.76	18.51
Demand-withdraw	48.54	15.88
Mutual avoidance	16.05	5.47
Personal commitment	42.64	18.38
Moral commitment	37.00	15.12
Structural commitment	37.24	13.94
Marital commitment	116.97	37.86

The structural equation modeling performed in this research requires the examination of some basic assumptions such as univariate and multivariate normality of distribution of variables, non-multicollinearity, and independence of errors. The information provided in table 1 shows that in examining the normality of the distribution of variables, considering the skewness of ± 2 and kurtosis of ± 7 , the skewness and kurtosis in all variables are at a desirable level and the univariate normality has been achieved. In examining the multivariate normality, after calculating the values of standardized residuals, the residual distribution was investigated by a one-sided Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results revealed that the distribution of residues is normal ($Pvalue \geq 0.05$, $df=300$, $Z=0.03$).

In the study of non-collinearity of the model predictor variables, the results showed that the tolerance coefficients varied between 0.41 and 0.79 and the variance inflation varied from 1.16 to 1.60. Accordingly, the assumption is established. Durbin-Watson statistic was used to examine the assumption of independence of errors. Coefficients between 1.5 and 2.5 and close to 2 for this statistic indicate the independence of errors. This coefficient in the path model of the present study was equal to 1.81. Descriptive indices and correlation coefficients of early maladaptive schemas, communication patterns, and marital commitment are presented in table 2.

The results of table 2 indicate that there is a significant negative relationship between early maladaptive schemas and mutual productive communication patterns and there is a significant positive relationship between early maladaptive schemas and demand-withdrawal and mutual avoidance communication patterns ($Pvalue < 0.01$).

After the establishment of the assumptions, the research conceptual model was tested by estimating the maximum likelihood method. There are several indicators to check the model fit. The non-significance of chi-square statistic is one of the model fit indices. But this index is affected by the sample

size. Accordingly, other fit indices should be used. Values between 1 and 3 for the ratio of the chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), values of 0.05 and lower for root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and values of 0.95 and higher for the goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and normed fit index (NFI) indicate the desired fit of the model.²⁹ The results are provided in table 3.

According to the results of Table 3, the fit indices of the initial model indicate that the research model does not have a very good fit. A study of the proposed software modification indices suggested that by establishing covariance between the errors of some model indicators, the fit indices are improved. Thus, the establishment of these relationships was addressed. The results displayed an improvement in the model fit indices. The path diagram of the modified model is shown in Figure 1.

The study of path coefficients disclosed that the direct effect of early maladaptive schemas on communication patterns ($Pvalue < 0.01$, $\gamma=0.71$) was positive and significant and its effect on marital commitment ($Pvalue \leq 0.01$, $\gamma=-0.45$) was negative and significant. The direct effect of communication patterns on marital commitment is also negative and significant ($Pvalue \leq 0.01$, $\beta=-0.41$). The study of standardized coefficients of indirect effects revealed that the indirect effect of early maladaptive schemas on marital commitment with the mediating role of communication patterns is significant ($Pvalue < 0.01$, $IF=-0.51$), meaning that communication patterns mediate the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment so that with an increase in early maladaptive schemas, non-productive communication patterns increase and thus marital commitment decreases. The explained variance of marital commitment in terms of early maladaptive schemas and communication patterns was 0.59. This means that 59% of changes in marital commitment can be explained in terms of early maladaptive schemas and communication patterns.

Table 2. Descriptive indices and correlation coefficients of early maladaptive schemas, communication patterns and marital commitment

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Disconnection and rejection	-											
Autonomy	0.55**	-										
Directedness	0.59**	0.67**	-									
Over vigilance	0.50**	0.56**	0.55**	-								
Impaired limits	0.45**	0.63**	0.62**	0.44**	-							
Mutual productive	-0.31**	0.35**	-0.34**	0.38**	0.44**	-						
Demand-withdrawal	0.28**	0.46**	0.33**	0.37**	0.37**	-0.55**	-					
Mutual avoidance	0.37**	0.49**	0.44**	0.50**	0.46**	-0.35**	0.23**	-				
Personal commitment	-0.45**	0.38**	-0.40**	0.37**	0.49**	0.38**	0.39**	0.35**	-			
Moral commitment	-0.37**	0.46**	-0.46**	0.41**	0.49**	0.45**	0.32**	0.28**	0.36**	-		
Structural commitment	-0.42**	0.46**	-0.44**	0.46**	0.46**	0.35**	0.34**	0.24**	0.55**	0.45**	-	
Marital commitment	-0.51**	0.54**	-0.54**	0.51**	0.60**	0.49**	0.44**	0.34**	0.83**	0.74**	0.81**	-

Table 3. The research conceptual model fit indices

Model	χ^2	Df	Pvalue	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Initial	88.67	41	0.0001	2.16	0.94	0.95	0.92	0.06
Establishment of error covariance	66.56	39	0.004	1.71	0.96	0.97	0.95	0.049

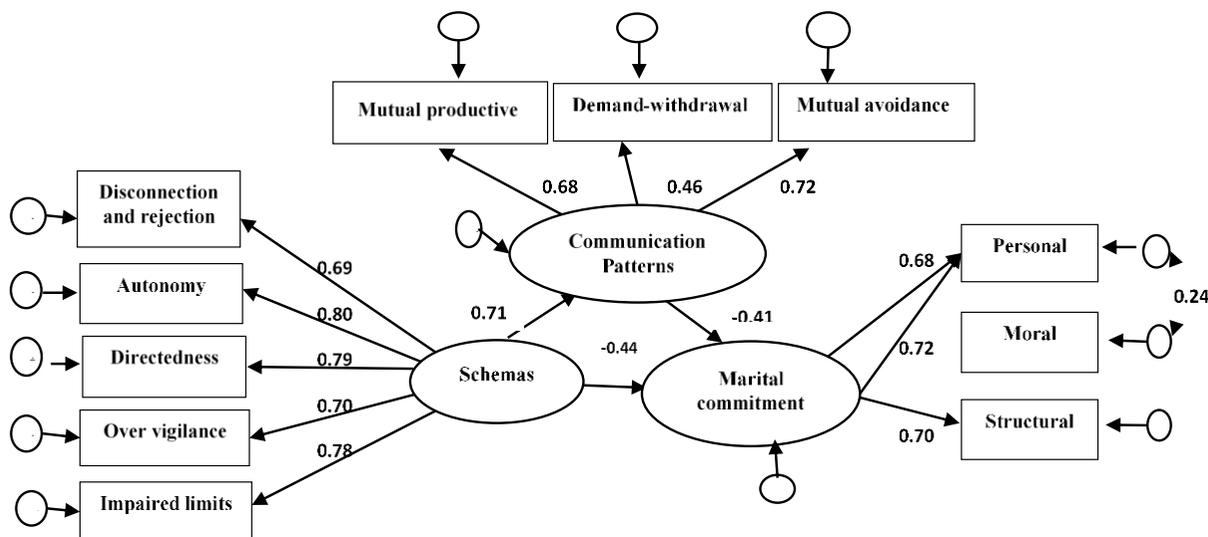


Figure 1. Modified model of predicting marital commitment in terms of early maladaptive schemas and communication patterns

Discussion

The present study was conducted to investigate the inter-structural relationships between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment mediated by couples' communication patterns. Studies have demonstrated that the proposed conceptual model has a good fit. Further, the direct effect of early maladaptive schemas on communication patterns is significant. The direct effect of communication patterns on marital commitment is also significant. The direct effect of early maladaptive schemas on communication patterns is significant. Communication patterns mediate the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment. Therefore, the research hypotheses were confirmed. Analysis of the research data indicated the direct effect of early maladaptive schemas on communication patterns. This effect is positive, meaning that with increased early maladaptive schemas, dysfunctional communication patterns also increase. These research findings are consistent with the results of the research by Zabeti and Jafari,³⁰ Ghavami,³¹ and Taherian.³² Zabeti and Jafari stated that early maladaptive schemas have an effective role in making people's communication patterns dysfunctional. Early maladaptive schemas that are formed based on unpleasant experiences in early childhood and adolescence are considered as the most fundamental cognitive structure and undermine communication patterns of individuals directly or as a mediator, resulting in non-productive communication responses in them.³¹ Early maladaptive schemas as one of the effective factors that undermine couples'

relationships lead to the formation of non-productive communication patterns in people.³²

In explaining this research finding, it can be mentioned that early experiences remain deeply in the individual's cognitive structures under the title of schema. When people are constantly interacting or communicating with a close person (spouse), their schemas are activated, and based on their previous structure, they distinguish, evaluate and encrypt the information obtained from the relationship, and this affects the type of one's attitude toward oneself and others and their interaction and patterns in relationships, leading to the development and emergence of psychological and interpersonal problems.¹⁷

Additionally, in a separate analysis of the direct effects of early maladaptive schemas on marital commitment and also the direct effect of communication patterns on marital commitment, the results suggested a significant negative relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment and a significant negative relationship between communication patterns and marital commitment. Both variables were able to predict 0.56% of changes in marital commitment. Regarding the significant effect of early maladaptive schemas on marital commitment, these results are consistent with the findings of previous studies such as those of Daciana et al.³³ and Saboonchi et al.³⁴. In line with these findings, Daciana et al., in examining the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and the level of marital satisfaction, revealed that increasing the level of early maladaptive schemas

leads to decreased marital satisfaction and infidelity. Most interpersonal problems that couples experience are influenced by their conception in their relationships with their spouses. Saboonchi et al, research indicated that when schemas are distorted, it can lead to family dysfunction and they can be a predictor of marital dissatisfaction and infidelity in couple's relationships. In explaining these findings, it can be said that cognitions are effective in the marital relationship and schemas are one of the important and effective cognitions in marital relationships. These schemas affect people's behavioral responses and are effective in perpetuating and weakening relationships. Early maladaptive schemas are associated with the dissolution of marriage and the instability of life.³⁵ Cognitive-behavioral family therapy also embraces this notion and claims that the schemas and life experiences that a couple brings into a marital relationship penetrate the relationship between them and exert their influence on the entire marital structure. These old and deep-rooted schemas are preserved by each of the couples in the marital relationship.¹⁴ Young also believes that early maladaptive schemas are deep patterns or themes that are highly dysfunctional. These beliefs and schemas manifest themselves in adulthood and in marital relationships and have a detrimental effect on them. Early maladaptive schemas are related to the disintegration of marital life and the instability of life.¹⁷

The results of this study on the direct effect of communication patterns on marital commitment are in line with the results obtained by Yubo and Jiang¹, Yoo,³⁶ and Lotfi and Rasouli.³⁷ According to Yubo and Jiang, communication patterns mediate the relationship between marital commitment and marital satisfaction, and the commitment of spouses to each other is correlated with patterns of communication and marital satisfaction, and specifically, in comparing these couples, spouses with higher marital commitment and marital satisfaction have more consistent communication patterns. Yoo believed that communication patterns have a direct effect on marital satisfaction and lasting commitment in marital relationships and also mediate the relationship between gender attitudes and marital satisfaction. According to Lotfi and Rasouli, there is a significant relationship between the quality of marital life and communication patterns so that the use of three communication patterns (productive, demand-withdrawal, and mutual avoidance) in couples in a way affects the quality of marital life patterns, including marital commitment. Mutual productive communication patterns have a positive effect and demand-withdrawal and mutual avoidance communication patterns have a significant negative effect on the dimensions and total score of marital quality as well as marital commitment. Couples who use productive communication patterns in their relationships are more committed to maintaining their marital bond and striving to improve their quality of life, and on the contrary, people whose communication patterns include demand-withdrawal and mutual avoidance are less committed to maintaining their marital relationship and improving marital quality.

In explaining this finding, the theoretical background shows that disturbed communication patterns have a significant effect on couples' mental health.⁹ Couples' communication patterns indicate the dynamics of their relationship and

problematic behaviors are caused by the implementation of the non-productive form of these patterns.¹⁰ Gottman et al. believed that dysfunctional communication patterns reduce couples' proper understanding of each other and make spouses unable to support one another, try to satisfy each other's needs, and understand each other's views on conflicting issues, ultimately resulting in marital breakdown.³⁸ Donato considers the type of couple communication pattern important in marital relationships and argues that productive communication can enhance couples' interpersonal bonds.³⁹ Negative communication behaviors such as avoiding intimacy, withdrawing with anger, participating in conflict, and avoiding and being defensive in the relationship will destroy the opportunity for mutual understanding and respect between couples and will bring stress, anxiety, helplessness and eventually divorce.⁴⁰

On the other hand, the research results demonstrated that communication patterns mediate the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital commitment. These results are congruent with the findings of Hayes and Parsonnet⁴¹ and Young.¹⁷ Early maladaptive schemas, in addition to directly affecting marital commitment, influence marital commitment with the mediation of communication patterns. In line with this research, Hayes and Parsonnet consider communication between couples as an important mediating factor in conflicts and functions of couples and believe that early maladaptive schemas are an important source of non-functional strategies and attitudes that affect these patterns and thereby disrupt marital relationships.

In explaining this research finding, Epstein and Zheng believe that communication is a fundamental variable in marital life, and research shows the strong effect of cognitive factors in this regard⁴² and based on Young's view, early maladaptive schemas are the cognitive variable that is important in marital relationship.¹⁷ Schemas are psychological phenomena that influence a person's external behavior by creating coping strategies and early maladaptive schemas always show themselves in a relationship and cause the relationship to function. When early maladaptive schemas are activated, levels of emotion are released and directly or indirectly lead to various forms of cognitive and functional disturbances in the communication channels between couples or, namely, communication patterns.⁴³ On the other hand, Christensen and Sherk believe that communication patterns are formed as a result of upbringing, experience, education, and modeling in the main family and during childhood.¹⁰ This view seems to be related to Young's theory about the formation of early maladaptive schemas in childhood and adolescence. Young believes that early maladaptive experiences remain deeply embedded in the individual's cognitive structures and lead to the development and emergence of psychological and interpersonal problems. Maladaptive schemas essentially cause bias in interpreting the situation because they distinguish, evaluate and encrypt information based on their previous structure. These biases are seen in the form of misunderstandings, distorted attitudes, incorrect assumptions, and unrealistic goals and expectations in the relationship between spouses and affect their perceptions and evaluations of the relationship. Since communication is necessary for any

marriage, maladaptive schemas influence the level of people's interactions and communication expectations. Distorting communication patterns leads to dissatisfaction in marital relationships and provides the ground for separation. One of the main features of maladaptive schemas is the creation of insecurity and conflict in communication patterns, which cause inefficiency in relationships and non-formation of healthy and productive communication patterns by affecting cognitive and perceptual systems of individuals.¹⁷

Communication problems are the most common and destructive causes of failed and unsatisfactory marriages⁹ because dysfunctional communication patterns lead to a lack of transmission and understanding of the content and intentions of spouses during conversations, making them unable to satisfy each other's mental needs and preventing the continuation of a satisfactory relationship. Gottman et al.³⁸ believe that dysfunctional communication patterns reduce couples' proper understanding of each other and make spouses unable to support each other and strive for satisfying one another, ultimately leading to the disintegration of their committed relationships. Christensen and Shenk argue that problematic behaviors in couples are merely the use of non-productive patterns.¹⁰ Dysfunctional communication patterns, by distorting the interaction methods of couples, lead their relationships to psychological and emotional separation and prepare the ground for infidelity and other disorders of marital relationships. According to the theories by Christensen and Shenk, one of the communication channels through which couples interact is communication patterns.¹⁰ Couples establish a set of communication patterns between themselves. They are established in the form of productive and non-productive (mutual avoidance and demand-withdrawal) patterns, and problematic behaviors arise from the implementation of the non-productive form of these patterns.

One of the limitations of this study is its cross-sectional nature. Since this research is correlational, care should be taken in causal inference, and in using the results, it should be noted that the research findings are limited to married students of Mashhad Azad university, so in generalizing the results to other married university students in other cities and ethnicities, caution should be exercised. In addition, the short duration of the research and the limitation of the research population to married students of Mashhad Azad university made it difficult to generalize the results to other groups. The use of self-report instruments limits the results that can be reached using the research although the majority of studies in this area are based on self-reported data. Lack of control over some characteristics of the subjects such as social and cultural status and the influence of the main families are other limitations of the present study.

The results of this study revealed that marital commitment is influenced by the early maladaptive schemas and communication patterns of individuals. Early maladaptive schemas, in addition to directly reducing marital commitment in couples, affect the level of interactions and communication expectations of people and cause inefficiency in relationships and non-formation of healthy and productive communication patterns by creating insecurity and conflict in relationships and affecting the perceptual and cognitive system of individuals

and in this way, relationships are disturbed and the ground is prepared for burnout and infidelity in relationships. It is recommended that in premarital counseling, these variables be measured and examined in each couple and the necessary training be provided to married people who refer with marital complaints. It is also necessary to conduct further studies in different communities with different cultures to better generalize the results.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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