

# Research Paper: The Relationship Between Personality Traits and Marital Satisfaction With Mediating Positive and Negative Affects



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Various protective mechanisms have been proposed to explain how positive and negative emotions increase marital satisfaction.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to determine the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction with the mediating role of positive and negative affects.

**Materials and Methods:** The research method was descriptive and correlational. In this research, 300 married women living in the eastern part of Tehran City, Iran, were selected by the available sampling method. The study instruments were five factors personality trait, marital satisfaction scale, and positive and negative affective questionnaire. The obtained data were analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient and path analysis.

**Results:** The results of the test using Imus software showed that the indirect effect of personality traits on marital satisfaction was significant through the positive and negative affect mediators ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The results of this study support the effectiveness of interventions and training to remove and decrease negative emotions.

## 1. Introduction

**M**arriage is one of the most important events of everybody in life. It is also accompanied by different physical and psychological consequences for both men and women. In line with popular belief, research has shown that marriage is associated

with positive psychological outcomes such as higher psychological well-being [1]. For adults, having a happy and stable marriage is the best protector against disease and premature death [2].

The scientific study of marital satisfaction has drawn a lot of attention since 1990, and during this period, many definitions have been proposed for marital hap-

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piness. Spanier and Cole argued that marital satisfaction is an indicator of a couple's interactions in everyday life that embraces satisfaction, solidarity, agreement, and affection of that couple [3]. In other words, marital satisfaction is one of the broadest concepts that shows an amount of happiness and stability of a relationship [4]. Regarding the definition of marital satisfaction and compatibility, Griff states that compatible couples agree with each other, are satisfied with the type and quality of spending their time, and have proper management of their time and financial issues [5].

Researchers have worked for decades to identify important factors in relationships, conflicts, and marital problems. Various studies have focused on the effects of different personal and economic-cultural factors on marital satisfaction. One of the personal factors influencing marital satisfaction is the personality traits of the couples. According to Nakash-Eisikovits et al., character refers to the long-standing pattern of thought, excitement, motivation, and behavior expressed in different environments [6]. Character is also defined as the set of differences influenced by the growth of values, attitudes, personal memories, social relationships, habits, and competencies [7].

There has been an ever-increasing consensus on the higher order of personality structure over the past two decades, as most scholars now believe that the character can be divided into 5 general attributes known as the great 5 personality traits. The model provided by McCrae and Costa is known as the 5-factor model of the character or the 5 great [8]. These factors include flexibility, accountability, pleasure, psychoanalysis, and extraversion [9]. Flexibility reflects the interest of people in recent years and the acquisition of new experiences. Responsiveness is associated with controlling impulses, restraint, power of will, and success. This attribute signifies self-adaptation, action, and success. Neuroticism, which is a stable emotional state, indicates a negative emotional experience such as anger, anxiety, and depression [10].

An extroverted person enjoys being with people, is full of energy, and often experiences positive emotions. Agreeableness implies, in fact, the difference between humans in interpersonal cooperation and social harmony. People are cautious, friendly, gracious, helpless, and willing to compromise with others [11].

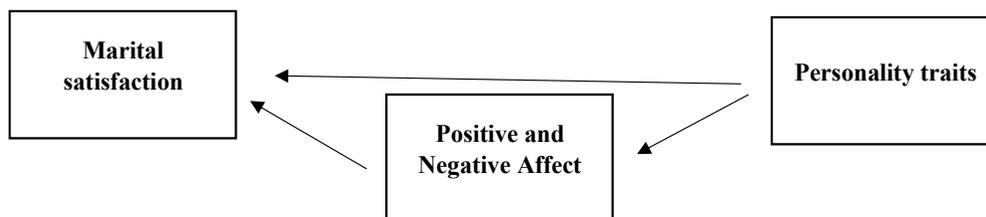
One of the objectives of this study is to identify the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction, but the question arises whether this relationship is direct or other psychological variables can play a

role in this respect. In this study, positive and negative affects are seen as intermediate variables. Positive emotions include pleasure, interest, trust, and awareness, which are part of the behavioral system of livelihoods, and direct the organism toward enjoyable stimuli [12]. If people have a positive emotion, they usually feel enthusiastic, energetic, alert, and optimistic, while people with low positive emotion, usually feel humor, indifference, and fatigue [7]. Negative emotions include fear/anxiety, sadness/depression, and anger/hostility. These emotions are part of a deterrent behavior system, whose primary purpose is to inhibit behaviors that lead to unpleasant outcomes [12].

Heller et al. reported the positive relationship of all five factors of personality with marital satisfaction, but the negative relationship of extraversion, responsiveness, pleasure, and flexibility factors with marital satisfaction [13]. In line with these results, Karney and Bradbury's longitudinal study showed that low-level psychosis is one of the most important predictors of marital satisfaction [14]. The relationship between psychosis and low marital satisfaction was also found in subsequent studies [15].

A great deal of research has been done on the relationship between personality and emotional dimensions, and most studies have investigated the relationship between extraversion and levels of positive affect, as well as neuroticism and negative emotional levels. For example, according to the Ising theory, neuroticism is associated with negative mood and extraversion with a positive attitude [16]. David et al. showed that positive and negative affects significantly predict extroversion and neuroticism, respectively. The researchers concluded that extroversion tends to make people feel positive, while neuroticism makes people vulnerable to negative emotions [17]. Besides, Costa and McCrae reported that neuroticism is strongly correlated with negative affect [18]. The relationship between positive and negative affects and marital satisfaction also indicates that depression is related to lower marital satisfaction [19]. Also, it showed that positive affect improves marital satisfaction because it causes couples to behave kindly toward each other and people with positive emotions form an ideal image of their spouse because they interpreted their spouse's behavior with an optimistic view [20].

Based on the findings of the research, we considered the relationship between personality traits, positive and negative affect, as well as marital satisfaction. Moreover, we determined the role of mediating positive and negative affect in the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction. Now, the question arises



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**Figure 1.** The hypothesized model of the role of the positive and negative emotions

whether positive and negative affects have a mediator role in the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction. This mediator role is tested based on the hypothesized model of research (Figure 1).

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study is developmental research in terms of the aim and a non-experimental and correlational one in terms of data collection and analysis. The proposed theoretical model is presented with regard to the objective of the present research. The research involves the study of structural equations. In the present study, the statistical population included married women residing in the east part of Tehran City (districts 4, 8, 13, 14, and 15) in 2018.

A total of 300 married women were selected as an available sample. Taking into account the estimated sample size in other studies such as Kelin [21] who divided participants into 3 groups of simple, complex and complex patterns, and according to the number of examined variables, this study is a complex and this study is a complex model with a sample size of at least 300 people.

For this purpose, a copy of the research questionnaire was submitted to each of the participants after obtaining consent. The inclusion criteria included being 20-45 years old, having no specific physical or mental health illness, and having the least competency to read and write. The exclusion criteria also included separate living in conditions such as being a widow, divorce, marital conflicts, long-term career travel, marriage contracts, and less than 6 months from the time of marriage until the completion of the questionnaire.

### Study instruments

#### Five-Factor Personality Questionnaire

It is a 60-point scale that measures the 5 main factors of the personality: flexibility, accountability, pleasure, psychoanalysis, and extraversion. On this scale, each

subject has 12 questions. The questions are answered on a scale from completely disagree to completely agree, and the minimum and the maximum scores are 0 and 240, respectively. The results of McCrae and Costa study showed that the correlation of the short form 5 sub-samples with the long-form ranges from 0.77 to 0.92 [10]. In addition, the internal consistency of the subscales of this questionnaire was 0.86 to 0.86 [22]. In Iran, Haghshenas translated this scale and verified its verbal validity [23]. By standardization of this test, which was carried out by Garousi Farshi on a 2000-person sample, the correlation coefficient of the 5 main factors was found between 0.56 and 0.87, and acceptable reliability was reported for it. The Cronbach alpha coefficients were 0.76, 0.81, 0.73, 0.76, and 0.89 for flexibility, accountability, pleasure, psychoanalysis, and extraversion factors, respectively [24].

#### Positive and Negative Affect List

Positive and Negative Affect List (PANAS) is a self-report scale. Questions 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, and 19 are related to the negative affects. Questions 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, and 20 are related to the PANAS. Watson et al. demonstrated that internal consistency is 0.86 to 0.90 in positive affect and 0.84 to 0.87 in negative affect [25]. PANAS test-retest reliability (1 week) was 0.79 for positive affect and 0.81 for negative affect. PANAS correlation with the Hopkins Symptom Checklist was 0.74 for negative and -0.19 for positive affect [25]. PANAS correlation with Beck Depression Inventory was 0.65 for negative affects and -0.29 for positive affect. All questions are rated as 1= Very slightly or not at all, 2= A little, 3= Moderately, 4=Quite a bit, and 5= Extremely. The total score is calculated by adding the 10 positive items and the 10 negative items. Scores for both sets of items range from 10 to 50. A higher score indicates a more positive affect on the overall positive score. For the total negative score, a lower score indicates less negative affect [25]. Cronbach's alpha coefficients in

this research were 0.70 for positive affect and 0.71 for negative affect.

### Marital Satisfaction Scale

The enrich marital satisfaction scale has 47 questions. It also has marital satisfaction in 12 components of the contractual response, marital satisfaction, personality issues, marital relationship, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relations, marriage and children, family and friends, the role of gender equality, and religious orientation. This scale is graded based on a Likert-type scale from "totally agree" to "completely disagree." Fowers and Olson conducted a study on 7261 couples in a national study between 1983 and 1985 to determine the validity and reliability of this questionnaire [26]. The reliability of the test was determined by calculating the reliability of the test in the 4-week interval from 0.97 for the subscale of religious orientation up to 0.65 for the subscale of marital satisfaction. In internal studies, the Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.93 for the test group and 0.04 for the women group [27]. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of marital satisfaction was 0.91 in this study.

To analyze the data, firstly, the correlations among personality traits, marital satisfaction, and positive and negative affects were calculated with a Pearson correlation coefficient in SPSS V. 21. Then, the path analysis was performed with latent variables in AMOS 18.

### 3. Results

**Table 1.** Demographic variables

Variables	Group	No. (%)
Age (y)	20-30	55 (18.3)
	31-40	172 (57.3)
	40-45	73 (24.3)
Education	Under the diploma	31 (10.3)
	Diploma	99 (33)
	Associate degree	25 (8.3)
	Undergraduate	81 (27)
	MA.	37 (12.3)
	PhD.	27 (9)

The demographic data analysis in [Table 1](#) shows that most of the sample population was between 30 and 40 years old. Regarding the degree of education, the most frequent is for women with a diploma.

One of the assumptions for structural equation modeling is the normalization of a multivariate distribution. For this purpose, the multi-variable multiplier Mardia is used in the AMOS software. Values larger than 5 for the Mardia coefficient represent the distribution of abnormal data. The value of the Mardia coefficient for the research data is 3.55, which shows the multivariate normalization assumption ([Table 2](#)).

According to the goodness of indices, the results of the implementation of the final research model after the required reforms, along with some of the most important indicators of fitting the original model were presented in [Table 3](#).

The Sobel test was used to investigate the effect of mediating positive and negative affect on the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction. Sobel argues that this asymptotic ratio has a normal distribution, and when this ratio is greater than  $\pm 1.96$ , for larger specimens, the zero assumption is rejected at the 0.05 level.

According to [Table 4](#), the hypothesis in relation to the indirect effect of positive and negative affections on marital satisfaction has been confirmed by positive and negative affects with 95% confidence. Also, the direct effect of personality traits on marital satisfaction was significant.

**Table 2.** Descriptive findings of research scales

Variables	Mean±SD
Neurotic	20.67±7.86
Extroversion	29.17±6.10
Flexibility	26.49±4.68
Agreeableness	33.26±5.73
Conscientiousness	35.80±6.53
Positive affection	30.50±4.44
Negative affection	32.69±4.98
Marital satisfaction	163.67±30.69

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**Table 3.** The goodness of fit proposed pattern based on the goodness of indicators

Indices	Value	Limit
df/χ <sup>2</sup>	2.11	>3
RMSEA	0.07	>0.1
CFI	0.95	<0.9
NFI	0.94	<0.9
The goodness of fit index	0.96	<0.9

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#### 4. Discussion

The results of the path analysis showed that the personality traits indirectly had a significant effect on marital satisfaction. Similar to the present research, studies show that individuals with higher grades in the factors of extroversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and flexibility report higher marital satisfaction. Regarding the results of the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction, the mediating role of positive and negative affects were confirmed. In addition, the direct effect of personality traits on marital satisfaction was significant.

Neurotic, characterized by negative emotions and mood changes, is associated with lower levels of proximity [28], greater sensitivity to negative events, fewer positive social interactions [29], higher emotional sensitivity over time in marital relationships, and friendliness [30]. Extroversion, which is the main characteristic of being social and

positive and negative affects were confirmed. In addition, the direct effect of personality traits on marital satisfaction was significant.

**Table 4.** The coefficients and significance of direct/indirect effect of personality traits and positive and negative affects on marital satisfaction

Criterion Variable	Predictive Variable	Type of Effect	B Standardized	Not Standardized B	f	Sig.
Marital satisfaction	Personality traits	Direct	0.32	0.66	3.89	0.001
	Neurotic	Direct	-0.32	-0.39	-3.44	0.001
	Personality traits	Indirect	0.11	0.10	2.22	0.01
	Positive and negative emotions	Direct	0.52	0.67	5.84	0.001

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overcoming positive emotions, can lead to positive social exchanges, in which couples behave more socially and, in line with this finding, outsourcing to widespread social networks [31], spending more time with people on these networks [32], and higher levels of self-esteem and intimacy [30]. On the other hand, there are few levels of extroversion associated with social avoidance and the lack of positive emotions [33].

In the study of Esfandiari et al. positive and negative affects were associated with high and low marital satisfaction, respectively [34]. Besharat et al. also showed a negative relationship between positive emotions and marital problems. Positive and negative emotions were also able to predict conflicts and marital dissatisfaction differently [35].

In line with this finding, Florian et al. showed that couples with higher levels of positive reaction experience a higher level of intimacy [36]. Marital researchers believe that positive emotions are negatively related to loneliness, self-harm, and harmful behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, high-risk sexual behaviors, and the lack of social communication [37]. Interestingly, what was mentioned above is from the reciprocal predictions of marital satisfaction [38]. Therefore, it is predictable that marital satisfaction will increase with increasing positive emotions. The topic was also reflected in the results of this study.

A lot of research has been conducted on the relationship between personality and emotional dimensions, and most studies have investigated the relationship between extraversion and positive emotional levels, as well as neuroticism and negative emotional levels. For example, David et al. reported that positive and negative affects significantly predict extroversion and neuroticism, respectively [19]. The researchers concluded that extroversion tends to make people feel positive, while neuroticism makes people susceptible to negative emotions. Besides, Costa and McCrae showed that neuroticism is strongly correlated with negative emotions [39].

In terms of positive and negative emotions, evidence suggests that turbulent marital relationships are associated with negative emotions, maladaptive communication practices, and poor listening skills [40]. In a study, Gerber et al. concluded that the negative (humiliation) and positive (interest) emotions created in the positive (love) and negative interactive context (conflict) could predict the quality and the durability of the relationship for both man and woman [41].

One of the limitations of this research is the study sample that was confined to the married women living in the eastern part of Tehran, so generalizing the results should be done cautiously. It is suggested that research on marital satisfaction and its advances in societies such as men and couples referring to counseling centers should be carried out to make it possible to compare the degree of marital satisfaction of personality traits in the different groups.

This study aimed to explain and predict marital satisfaction among married women in the form of a structural equation model. The personality traits on the role of exogenous variables and positive and negative affects on the role of exogenous had a direct and indirect effect as mediating variables on marital satisfaction. These effects were also statistically significant.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the current research structural model was effective in explaining and predicting the marital satisfaction of married women. The present study showed that positive and negative emotions play a mediating role in the prediction of married women's marital satisfaction. This variable, on the one hand, is affected by personality traits and communication patterns and, on the other hand, can have an important effect on the marital satisfaction of married women.

Also, considering the descriptiveness of the method of the present research, the researcher may not have been able to provide a complete picture of how the patterns of communication, personality traits, and positive and negative affects influence marital satisfaction. Other factors affecting marital satisfaction, including their physical condition and spouse, socioeconomic status, official and informal social support, and family status, are variables that the researcher could not fully control. On this basis, it is suggested that the relationship between the social and economic bases and marital satisfaction should be explored in future research, as these challenges provide grounds for dissatisfaction with marital life in married women and can be linked to the problems of marital satisfaction.

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were considered in this article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages; they were also as-

sured about the confidentiality of their information; Moreover, They were allowed to leave the study whenever they wish, and if desired, the results of the research would be available to them.

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### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed in designing, running, and writing all parts of the research.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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