

Original Article

The mediating role of marital boredom in the relationship between emotional divorce with self-differentiation and communication patterns of couples

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Abstract

Background: Emotional divorce by creating an emotional rift in the family can be the main cause of family frustration. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional divorce and self-differentiation and the mediating role of marital boredom in couples referring to counseling centers.

Methods: This practical research was carried out on couples referred to counseling centers in Tehran, in 2021. In this study, one hundred people were selected by convenience sampling. The data were gathered by the Emotional Divorce, Self-Differentiation (DSI-SF), Communication Patterns (CPQ) and Marital Boredom Questionnaires. Data analysis was done using the Pearson correlation test and structural equation modeling (SEM).

Results: The results of the Pearson correlation test indicated positive and significant relationships between all research variables. According to the results of SEM, the variables of differentiation and communication patterns of couples had a direct effect on emotional divorce. Moreover, differentiation and communication patterns showed an indirect effect on marital divorce through marital boredom.

Conclusion: The findings showed that the factors of differentiation, behavioral patterns and boredom could cause emotional divorce between couples. It is recommended to pay much attention to the differentiation of people during marriage so that they can prevent marital boredom and emotional divorce by creating appropriate communication patterns with their spouses.

Keywords: Communication Pattern; Couples; Emotional Divorce; Marital Boredom; Self-Differentiation.

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Introduction

The own family is the first and the most particular social institution that considers the health and well-being of a society to be depending on the health and pleasure of its participants, and the effect of no different institution or courting has this kind of deep and intense sturdiness

(1). What occurs in a family and its overall performance may be a key aspect in creating flexibility and lowering modern and destiny dangers in facing unfavourable occasions and conditions (2). Cohabitation is tormented by many factors, a number of which may cause couples to face

differences and conflicts, heartbreak, and even divorce (3). Divorce is one of the maximum critical own family injuries that results in private, family and social fall apart and has greater negative consequences for girls than for guys (4).

Divorce, as the most reliable indicator of marital conflict, has now become widespread in Western societies (5). The increasing number of divorces in today's world has also included our society. According to the statistics of the victims' office of the country's welfare organization, the ratio of divorce to marriage in 2009 increased from 12.5 to 77.31 in 2019, which is a sign of the deterioration of this index in the country. Some people call divorce liberating in a circumstances where the family is burning in conflict and chaos and the kids are exposed to permanent emotional illnesses; while some couples are not willing to separate due to the cultural structure of the society and continue to live a cold life for many years with mental and emotional and even physical erosion (6).

Divorce can be open and formal, during which the family collapses, and it can also take a hidden form Failure in married life and the reduction of relations between couples do not always lead to formal divorce, because sometimes couples are forced to live next to each other due to social and cultural conditions. In this situation, only the outer structure is preserved, however the circle of family is empty from the inner.. Families are faced with the reduction of emotional space and the cooling of the family environment, which leads to emotional divorce. In this case, the couple is forced to live with each other, but they do not have a constructive and appropriate emotional relationship (7). Since emotional divorce is not registered anywhere, no accurate statistics can be obtained regarding it. Although this type of divorce does not have an objective appearance, it brings many damages (8). The prelude to official and legitimate divorce is usually emotional divorce, so

emotional divorce has hidden angles that need to be studied and understood.

One factor that seems to be related to emotional divorce is self-differentiation. The idea of self-differentiation refers to the ability to enjoy intimacy with others and to remain in an emotional environment whilst being impartial from different people.. In fact, self-differentiation is formed in the shadow of psychological independence and emotional maturity, in the sense that people are constantly trying to maintain their psychological integrity (9, 10). In the marital system, when the differentiation of couples is high, the possibility of proper adaptation to conflicts increases for couples, and emotional reactions also decrease (11). According to Bowen, self-differentiation is a broad construct that includes aspects of interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning. The individual is fully differentiated, and integrates independence in relationships, demonstrates control of emotional responses, and maintains a stable sense of self (12). Rezvani and Saemi (2018) found that self-differentiation have a negative effect on emotional divorce, and neuroticism have a positive and significant effect on emotional divorce (9). Skoworon revealed that couples who have more differentiation, their marital compatibility is also higher (13). Kazemian Moghaddam et al. (14) also showed that differentiation plays a role in explaining and predicting marital boredom.

It also seems that the quality and manner of communication between couples can be related to emotional divorce between them. The conversation pattern of couple's manner the communicate channel via which couples interact with each other (11), and during it they can establish verbal and non-verbal interaction (15). The relationship between couples consists of many and wide dimensions, which differentiates it from all human relationships. This relationship has all psycho-social, economic, biological and emotional dimensions. The significance of

communicate between couples is so awesome that researches have shown that marital quality is effective in a strong relationship with marriage, and in case of inefficiency, it can cause a lot of dissatisfaction (16). Christensen et al., (17) have divided communication patterns between couples into three categories: communication of mutual productive, demand-withdraw, and mutual avoidance. Kazemian Moghaddam et al., (18) came to the conclusion that if a couple can communicate with the correct methods, not only will they have an effective relationship, but their boredom will decrease. In general, if there is incompatibility in a marital relationship, it leads to consequences such as coldness of relationships, tension, lack of unity in the family, breakdown of cohesion, etc. This causes mental disturbances, problems and mental discomforts in the family members and somehow the mental health of the family is endangered (19).

Many researches have confirmed that by increasing the mutually constructive pattern, decreasing the patterns of expectation/withdrawal and mutual avoidance, the level of satisfaction and marital satisfaction of couples increases. On the other hand, poor communication and problem solving patterns are the background of marital conflict; therefore, communication can be used as a valid criterion to distinguish happy and unhappy couples (20, 21). The research of Parvandi et al., (15) showed that couples' communication patterns predict marital satisfaction. In Narimani et al., study (22), the communication pattern of conversation and listening and the communication pattern of congruence had a positive correlation with life satisfaction, while showed a negative and significant correlation with emotional divorce. Rezaeian et al. (23) stated that communication patterns and the level of sexual satisfaction of couples determine the tendency or lack of tendency of couples towards divorce. Abbasi et al., (24) studied

the impact of social capital dimensions on emotional divorce in Masjid Suleiman city and concluded that more attention should be paid to the potential of social capital in changing the incompatibility of families.

According to Qavami et al., study (25), one of the most important psychological incompatibilities among couples is marital burnout. Research shows that the prevalence of boredom has increased today; in such a way that 50 percent of couples face heartbreak in their marriage (26). Heartbreak is a painful state of bodily, and intellectual exhaustion and influences folks that anticipate dream love to give that means to their lives (27). In other words, it can be said that marital boredom is a slow lower in emotional attachment to one's partner, which is accompanied by way of a sense of alienation, disinterest and indifference to each other and the substitution of negative emotions instead of positive ones. (28). Nejatian et al., (29) showed that marital dissatisfaction has a significant and negative effect on general health and marital intimacy. The results of Safoorai Parizi et al., research (30) also confirmed that constructive communication patterns have a considerable negative correlation with boredom (emotional and mental fatigue); while avoidant and expectant/withdrawn communication patterns have a significant positive correlation with physical, emotional and mental fatigue.

The high rate of divorce in societies determines the fact that many couples do not want to stay in failed marriages (31). Emotional divorce, which is a precursor to official divorce, is a phenomenon that may be rooted in the differentiation and quality and manner of communication between couples (32). Therefore, taking into account the damages caused by emotional divorce such as depression, despair, feeling alone and mistrust of the spouse, it is necessary to investigate the issues affecting the incidence of emotional divorce to prevent it. According to the study of previous

researches that have investigated the effect of variables on compatibility or marital conflicts, while the relationship of these variables with the emotional divorce of couples has not been considered. Also, in previous studies, less attention has been paid to the issue of emotional divorce as a hidden dimension of couples' divorce. Therefore, this study was done with the goal of the relationship between emotional divorce with self-differentiation and communication patterns in couples with the mediation of marital boredom.

Methods

This practical research was carried out on all couples referred to the counseling centers in the 9th district of Tehran in 2021. In order to determine the sample size, the Tabachnick and Fidell method was used and one hundred people were selected as a sample using convenience sampling approach. Inclusion criteria for the study included being married, no death of loved ones or divorce in their families in the last three months, and the exclusion criteria were having any history of taking psychiatric drugs and unwillingness to participate in the study.

To accumulate data, the researcher was present at the counseling centers and after explaining the motive of the study to the individuals for you to follow the ethical concepts, while obtaining knowledgeable consent from absolutely everyone, the subjects had been confident that their information will remain confidential. Also, ethical considerations such as prioritizing the mental health of the subjects, emphasizing its potential benefits for each subject more than its risks, and the possibility of stopping the test for the subject in case of danger were also considered and observed in the research. The process of conducting the research was that after coordination with the management of the centers, the questionnaires were provided to the individuals to complete them during their free time, and after completion by the

subjects; they were gathered by the researcher. In order to collect data, the Emotional Divorce, Self-Differentiation (DSI-SF), Communication Patterns (CPQ) and Marital Boredom Questionnaires were used.

Emotional Divorce Questionnaire:

Emotional Divorce Questionnaire was designed by Gottman in 1999 to measure the level of emotional divorce of people (33). This single-factor questionnaire has 24 items and is arranged in the form of 2 options (yes or no). In this tool, positive answers equal to eight and above indicate that the person's married life is issue to separation and there is a possibility of emotional divorce. In Mousavi and Rahiminezhad research, the Persian version of the questionnaire was validated and its total reliability was obtained by Cronbach's alpha, 0.93 (34).

Differentiation of Self Inventory—Short Form (DSI-SF):

The DSI scale was developed by Drake (2011). This scale includes 20 items primarily based on a 6-option Likert scale from 1 completely false to 6 completely true. This inventory has four subscales that measure intrapsychic factors including self-situation and emotional reactivity and interpersonal factors including emotional escape and fusion with others. A high score on the total scale indicates high differentiation. The validity of the scale was investigated by Rasoli et al., and results showed that the structure of the questionnaire has an acceptable internal consistency (35). In addition, the reliability of the entire inventory was obtained 0.741 by Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ):

This questionnaire was created by Christensen et al., at the University of California in 1984. CPQ has 35 questions with a 9-point Likert scale and consists of three communication subscales: mutual constructive, mutual avoidance, and expectation/withdrawal. This tool estimates the conduct of couples during three levels

of marital struggle. These steps are: 1. while a trouble arises inside the couple's dating. 2. The period of time the verbal exchange trouble is mentioned. 3. After discussing the couple's verbal exchange problem. The minimum rating of this scale for every person is 35, the most score is 315, and the common score is 165. Heavey et al., (36) estimated the reliability of it subscales from 0.50 to 0.78 via Cronbach's alpha. This questionnaire was translated by Ibadatpour in 2019, and the reliability of the scales of mutual promotion, mutual avoidance, female expectation/male withdrawal, male expectation/female withdrawal and expectation/withdrawal using alpha Cronbach was estimated 0.70, 0.71, 0.51, 0.52 and 0.66, respectively.

Marital Boredom questionnaire: Marital boredom questionnaire was developed by Pines (1996) and contains 21 questions that indicate the symptoms of boredom (37). This questionnaire has three components: emotional fatigue, mental fatigue and physical fatigue. In this scale, higher scores suggest extra sadness and its scores range from 21 (lower restrict) to 147 (upper restrict). The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire for one-month period, two-month period, and four-month period were 1.89, 0.76, and 0.66, respectively, and also its Cronbach's alpha coefficient was obtained between 0.91 and 0.93 (38).

The collected data were analyzed in SPSS version 21 and AMOS software version 26. Pearson's correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling (SEM) were applied to check the relationship between variables.

Results

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and normality of study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Kolmogorov-Smirnov value	P-value
Self-differentiation	134.76	6.723	0.886	0.390
Communication pattern	60.32	2.674	0.447	0.216
Marital boredom	69.48	4.678	0.968	0.546
Emotional divorce	16.14	3.75	0.890	0.428

The average age of the studied couples was 34 ± 3.78 years and the average duration of their marriage was 7 ± 2.37 years. Table 1 indicates the mean of the study variables and their normality. The normality of the variables determined by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and according to the results, the distribution of the study variables was normal.

According to the results Pearson's correlation test, as shown in Table 2, there is a positive and significant correlation between differentiation and communication patterns with emotional divorce. Likewise, there is a positive and significant correlation between marital boredom as a mediating variable and emotional divorce.

To check the assumptions of linearity and non-alignment between independent variables and correlation between research variables, the tests of tolerance statistic, variance inflation, conditional index and special size were used. The results revealed that the tolerance statistic value for all variables is higher than 0.4 and the variance inflation value is less than 10. Therefore, there is no multicollinearity between the independent variables. Moreover, due to the fact that the value of the conditional specific measure is between zero and thirty, as a result, the assumption of collinearity between the independent variables is rejected.

In order to examine the path analysis, the variance-covariance matrix was applied as input data to test the non-standard research model. Also, the method of greatest precision was used.

Table 2. Correlation matrix between the studied variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Self-differentiation	1	0.730**	0.628*	0.616**
2. Communication pattern	0.730**	1	0.603**	0.50*
3. Marital boredom	0.628*	0.603**	1	0.621**
4. Emotional divorce	0.616**	0.50*	0.621**	1

Finally, the final research model was obtained according to Figure 1. Therefore, the factor loadings are significant at the confidence level of 0.95.

The model fit criteria were checked, which the fit indices of the final measurement model is shown in Table 3. The results revealed that the fit indices of the final measurement model are favorable. Therefore, the effects of variables were calculated in direct and indirect mode, and the results of direct and indirect effects between variables are presented in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, the variables of differentiation, communication pattern and marital boredom have a direct effect on

emotional divorce. Also, the indirect investigation shows that self-improvement has been able to have a meaningful effect on the emotional divorce of couples through boredom. Also, the communication pattern through marital boredom had an indirect and meaningful effect on emotional divorce.

Discussion

In this research, the association between emotional divorce and self-differentiation and communication patterns in couples with the mediation of marital burnout was investigated.

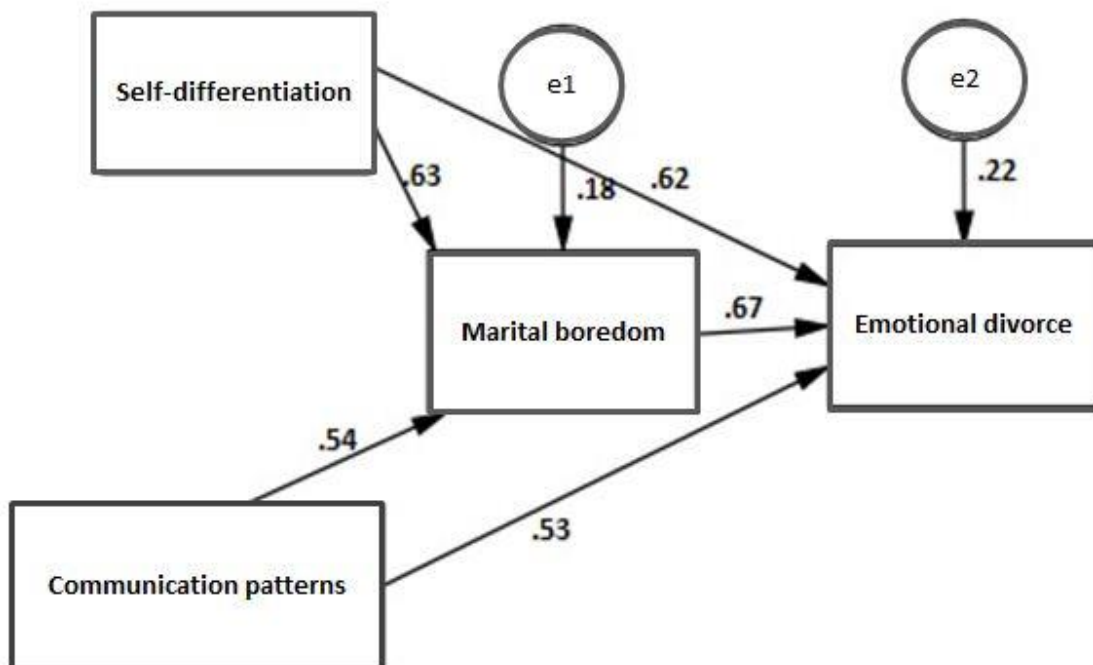


Figure 1. The final research model in the case of standardized coefficients

Table 3. Appropriateness criteria of model fit

Index	Symbol	Final pattern	Acceptable range	Results
The chi-square to the degrees of freedom ratio	X ² /df	2.1	2 - 5	Confirmed
The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	RMSEA	0.028	0 - 0.05	Confirmed
The Root mean square residual	RMR	0.24	0 - 0.5	Confirmed
The goodness of fit index	GFI	0.931	0.9 - 1	Confirmed
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index	AGFI	0.98	0.9 - 1	Confirmed
Bentler and Bonnet's Normed Fit Index	NFI	0.937	0.9 - 1	Confirmed
The comparative fit index	CFI	0.94	0.9 - 1	Confirmed
The Incremental Fit Index	IFI	0.923	0.9 - 1	Confirmed

The findings of this study indicated that self-differentiation has a direct and meaningful effect on emotional divorce. In addition, self-differentiation through marital boredom had an indirect effect on emotional divorce. These results confirmed the findings of Rashidi et al. (39), Khosravi et al. (40), Nikoogoftar et al. (41), and Sheikh et al., (42). However, in the studies of Rezvani and Saemi (9) and Kazemian Moghaddam et al., (14) a negative relationship between emotional divorce and self-differentiation was reported and is not consistent with the findings of our study, which can be pointed to the difference in the study environment. The behaviors and actions that emotional divorce brings, such as anger, sadness, blaming the spouse, unforgiveness of the spouse, are associated with a reduction in the dynamics of relationships and also an improve in hostile relations between couples (43-45). One of the social issues that can be discussed in

societies is the issue of family conflict and divorce, the number of which is increasing in the society. In addition, the ever-increasing progress of technology, industry and urbanization has caused an increase in many issues such as deviations, delinquencies and suicides, and divorce is also affected by the structural changes in society (46). With the transition of society from traditional to industrial, the roles assigned to men and women in the family have undergone significant changes. Women are no longer connected with the society only through their husbands, but they themselves are facing new roles that their role in married life has changed surprisingly (47). In emotional divorce, the husband and wife do not have an intimate relationship with each other and cannot talk about their feelings and emotions with each other, and they do not have a proper marital relationship.

Table 4. Results related to direct and indirect effects in research variables

Pathway	Effect	Estimated amount	Standard value	Standard error	t	P-value
Self-differentiation → emotional divorce	Direct	0.64	0.57	0.08	6.436	0.002
Communication pattern → emotional divorce	Direct	0.62	0.48	0.21	11.834	0.001
Marital boredom → emotional divorce	Direct	0.73	0.65	0.27	7.341	0.001
Self-differentiation → marital boredom → emotional divorce	Indirect	0.67	0.63	0.19	12.123	0.003
Communication pattern → marital boredom → emotional divorce	Indirect	0.58	0.51	0.34	7.467	0.003

This issue puts a lot of psychological pressure on them in the long run and their life is boring (45, 48). Since it can be said that the existence of self-differentiation in people can prevent the occurrence of many problems, including emotional divorce. On the contrary, people who have low discrimination become extremely emotional in dealing with issues instead of logical and rational decisions, and they aggravate problems with their stress and anxiety. Although some problems in married life do not cause the couple to divorce, but gradually it will cause the emotional divorce of the couple, which can be rooted in the lack of differentiation in the couple. Emotional divorce can make life difficult for people and cause many other problems. As a result, it can be said that by training and increasing your differentiation and knowing how to solve problems logically, you can reduce emotional divorce in married life and prevent many problems from occurring.

In the present study, the couples' communication patterns showed an indirect effect on emotional divorce through marital boredom. The findings of the research are consistent with the results of Narimani et al. (22), Zare Baghbidi et al. (49), D'Agostino (50), and Barry et al., (51). Communication patterns of couples are among the elements that are used to solve the problems of marital boredom. The mutually constructive pattern should be increased as one of the patterns of marital communication because this pattern forms an optimistic relationship and is very necessary to inhibit the decline of psychological health (52, 53). Also, the communication model of expectation/withdrawal is a negative communication model because one of the spouses tries to withdraw from the relationship despite being humiliated by the other party (54). Siffert and Schwarz (2011) by examining the relationship between the expectation/withdrawal patterns among couples showed that creditor behavior in women and men is related to men's

psychological well-being. In addition, conflicting behavior in couples is indirectly related to psychological well-being and marital satisfaction (55). In emotional divorce, although the fact that husband and spouse may remain collectively as a social institution, their enchantment and accept as true with in the direction of every other is long gone. Therefore, motional divorce plays an important role in endangering family and individual health, although this issue has received less attention (56).

The results of structural relationships between variables showed that communication patterns have a direct effect on emotional divorce. The findings of this research are accordance with the researches of Rezaeian et al. (23), Asgari et al. (57), and Lavner et al. (16). Emotional divorce usually starts with couples complaining and complaining about each other. Expectations that are said but not met, in fact, the needs of both parties are not met from each other. A person who has suffered an emotional divorce neglects himself and his personal health and even cares less about the health of other family members. He does not perform his duties properly and performs his responsibilities in front of other members of the family coldly and without any desire (58). Mentally, a person is in a situation where he has no desire to be happy or to be in happy groups, and he generally prefers to be alone, which will ultimately lead to the emotional divorce of the couple and their emotional and psychological distance, and finally the breakup of the psychological foundation of the family. Therefore, it can be said that the communication pattern of mutual avoidance and expectation/withdrawal as destructive patterns in marital relations, the couple is applying for divorce (59).

So that in these ineffective communication patterns, both couples and one of them refuse to communicate with each other when there is a conflict, and the problem and conflict remain unresolved. This causes a decline in marital satisfaction and an

increase in the possibility of emotional divorce among couples (60). Khandani and et al, believed that the pattern of expectation/withdrawal in marital union is associated with marital unhappiness, depression, anxiety and separation (61). In fact, clear and effective communication between couples leads to the growth of feelings and values and forms the foundation stone of a healthy and successful family.

Also, the findings of structural relationships between variables revealed that marital boredom has a direct effect on emotional divorce. The results confirmed the researches of Abbasi et al. (24), Narimani et al. (22), Barry et al. (51), and Darbandi et al., (62). Boredom is not due to something wrong with one or both people. In boredom, couples' love gradually fades and along with it comes general fatigue, which in its most severe form, boredom is equal to the collapse of the relationship (63). In explaining the findings of this research, it can be said that emotional divorce is one of the cases that is likely to occur in most couples' problems, and one of the cases of its occurrence is marital boredom. Also, despite a lot of effort, the intimacy and love in a couple's relationship gradually decreases and marital boredom appears, and in its most severe form, this boredom causes the relationship to collapse. The presence of a calm atmosphere and respectful reflection between couples increases marital satisfaction, and the creation of a tense and aggressive atmosphere decreases marital satisfaction and eventually leads to marital boredom and emotional divorce. If the couple is successful in their relationship, the atmosphere of intimacy between the couple will increase, and if the couple is weak in their relationship, it will lead to an increase in marital boredom and disagreements, and finally lead to an emotional divorce.

The current research was faced with limitations that can be mentioned as follows: Considering that the sample in this

research is specific to Tehran city, the possibility of generalizing the findings to other cities can be limited. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct other researches in different cities in this regard. Also, written questionnaires were used to collect data, which can have different interpretations of the questions and be associated with bias. In order to expand knowledge and empirical insight in the field of how different variables affect emotional divorce, other conceptual models and considering other variables can be helpful. Here, the fitting of the model compiled based on the conceptual model of emotional divorce, communication patterns and self-differentiation in explaining marital boredom does not mean that it is not effective and ignores other variables affecting marital dissatisfaction. It is suggested that in the future research, new models be developed by considering other variables and other conceptual models. Furthermore, it is necessary to pay attention to people's social associations and their modeling paths in order to guide them in a path that they have in mind appropriate patterns in how to communicate with their spouse throughout their lives. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct a research on the expectations from the spouse in people who have experienced an emotional divorce.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicated that self-differentiation and communication patterns can have a direct effect on emotional divorce and an indirect effect through marital boredom on emotional divorce of couples. Therefore, at the time of marriage, one should pay much attention to the differentiation of people in order to prevent marital boredom and emotional divorce by creating appropriate communication patterns with their spouses. Also, on a wider level, it is recommended that training courses on communication patterns of couples before marriage be held.

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Authors' contribution

Rasti MS and Ghaznavi S developed the study concept and design. Rasti MS acquired the data. Amirshahi M and Ghaznavi S analyzed and interpreted the data, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the intellectual content, manuscript editing and read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical considerations

Questionnaires were filled with the people satisfaction and written consent was obtained from the participants in this study.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that have no conflict of interests.

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