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A Structural Equation Model of Psychological Distress according to Initial Maladaptive Schemas in Women with Domestic Violence Experiences

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A B S T R A C T

Introduction: Domestic violence is one of the social problems that has deep and widespread influences on the mental and social health of its victims, especially women. The goal of this research A Structural equation model of psychological distress according to initial maladaptive schemas in women with domestic violence experience.

Materials & Methods: The present research is a descriptive correlational study. The statistical society included 650 women referring to welfare social emergency departments in Tehran, in 2023 that were selected purposefully according to the criteria specified. In this research, 75-item questionnaires of Maladaptive Schema, short form of domestic violence screening scale) HITS (and psychological distress questionnaire and Demographic instrument were exploited. In this research, the structural equation model technique has been used. Model validity test, factor loading and path coefficients were also examined. The data was analyzed with the help of AMOS 24 software.

Results: according to the value of the path coefficient in the state of standard estimation between disconnection / rejection schema with psychological distress (β=0.47, P<0.05), self-direction schema with psychological distress (β=0.76, P<0.05), other-directedness schema with psychological distress (β=0.54, P<0.05) and hyper vigilance schema with psychological distress (β=0.61, P<0.05) in women with experience of domestic violence, a direct and significant relationship was observed. No significant relationship was found only in the impaired limitation schema and psychological distress.

Conclusion: The results of the research showed that initial maladaptive schemas can act as an important predictive factor in the psychological distress of women experienced domestic violence.

Keywords: Psychological Distress, Domestic Violence, Schemas

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Introduction

The World Health Organization has defined violence as “exploitation of physical force, intended or real, against oneself or the others, or against a group or a society which may cause wound, death, psychological trauma, inappropriate development or frustration” (1). This definition includes interpersonal, self-governed, or mass violence (1).

According to the results Sohanian Haghighi& faizi (2) total index of the prevalence of violence between couples is 81. 1% and its average intensity is 9. 06 on the scale. Of 0 to 100. Among the various dimensions of Domestic violence between couples, psychological violence with a prevalence of 75. 5% and an average intensity of 14. 42 has the highest prevalence and severity.

A recent systematic investigation and its meta-analysis illustrated the increased probability of mental health consequences related to the violence by the intimate partner including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide (3). Violence against women and the sexual violence are forms of trauma which can result in mental health disorders in individuals (4).

Mental distress is the index of the mental health that is fluctuating daily in response to ongoing stresses such as the stress in work place or the family (5). High levels of mental distress reveal disorders of mental health that can be reflective of prevailing mental disorders such as depression and anxiety disorders (6).

Mental disorders in Iran, Bahrain and Qatar have the highest rank and in Egypt, Iraq and Yemen had the least burden of disease. Also, the burden disease of depression and anxiety disorder, was significantly higher among women than men in all countries. The age group of 15-49 years had the highest DALY level of mental disorders (7).

The results obtained from a research by Skillgate and colleagues (8) showed that nearly 543 million individuals in 2016 had been infected by mental distress due to anxiety and depression. According to the researches performed, the women are more exposed to mental disorders, anxiety and depression than men (9). The experience of domestic violence can lead to psychological distresses such as anxiety and depression in the women who are the victims of the violence which, in turn, can disturb the individuals’ cognitive function (10).

Along with this, Jovanovic and colleagues (11) conducted a study on 6320 women between 20 and 75 years of age with the goal of the investigation of the effects of domestic violence on the women’s health. The results illustrated that the women having the experience of domestic violence reported more experiences of pain and illness, depression, and consumption of sedative drugs. In addition, as compared to the women who have not experienced domestic violence, the women who are the victims of domestic violence are more exposed to both physical and psychological disorders.

On the other hand, the cognitive studies deal with cognitive vulnerabilities in frequent exposure to violence, initial negative experiences, and the subsequent problems (12).

A systematic study and meta-analysis by Tariq et al. (13) on the relationship between initial maladaptive schemas and psychological distress showed that early maladaptive schemas are self-perpetuating, dysfunctional cognitive structures that are related to mental health and play an important role in creating and maintaining psychological distress, including anxiety symptoms.

According to the theoretical literature and as the research background shows, domestic violence is one of the important social and psychological problems that has deep and widespread effects on the lives of individuals, especially women. This form of violence not only leads to physical damage, but its psychological consequences can affect the individual's life and lead to the emergence of

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numerous psychological distresses. In the meantime, initial maladaptive schemas, as cognitive and behavioral patterns that are formed in childhood, can play an important role in the individual's interpretation and response to traumatic experiences. Thus, this study looked at how initial maladaptive schemas affects the psychological distresses in women with domestic violence experience.

Materials and methods

Study Design

The present study is descriptive structural equations research method. The society of this research included all of the women referring to Welfare social emergency departments (123) in (2023) in Tehran Province who suffered from domestic violence.

Setting and Participants

The subjects holding the criteria to participate in the research and personal consent completed the questionnaire. The criteria for the selection included: a) age range16-60, b) " with primary education", c) they hadn't Past Psychiatric History, d) living with the partner in the same place, and e) informed consent to participate in the research. The criteria to be excluded from the research included: a) confusion or alteration in the questionnaire, b) the emergence of unpredicted incidents (such as the alteration of marital status).

Sample Size

Sample size in structural equation modeling: The minimum sample size is determined based on the latent variables, not the observable variables. Here, 20 samples are required for each factor (latent variable). In general, a minimum of 200 samples is recommended. The latent variables are the factors or dimensions of the model, and the observable variables are the questions in the questionnaire (14). In this study, the sample size was considered to be 650 people, taking into account the questionnaire components and the error rate.

In this research, 650 subjects were selected through purposeful sampling method as the sample of the research.

Measurements & Validity and Reliability

Demographic instrument

This questionnaire includes data about the age, Age at first marriage, Current age of marriage, Number of male children, Number of female children, Total number of children, Marriage frequency education, occupation, and monthly income.

The Questionnaire of Psychological Distress

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale: this scale which investigates the subjects' psychological status within the recent month has been adjusted by Kessler and colleagues (2002) in ten-questions form. The scoring of the questions is done through five-point Likert scale. Ten items are summed together. Lower scores indicate less psychological distress, while higher scores indicate more psychological distress. Scores of 10-15 indicate mild distress, 16-21 indicate moderate distress, 22-30 indicate severe distress, and 31-50 indicate very severe distress.

The studies show the scale reliability for screening studies and recognition of psychological disorders. The content validity of this questionnaire has been confirmed by Kessler and colleagues and its reliability was reported to be 0.84 (15). In Iran, Ya'qoubi(16) reported its reliability to be 0.83. In this research the Cronbach alpha is 0.76.

Hurts Insults Threaten Screams

This instrument was designed by Sherin and colleagues in The United States in 1998 to screen domestic violence. This form contains 4 questions focusing on both verbal and physical violence. The answers to these questions is scored by five-point Likert scores (from never to always). The minimum score for each question is 1 and the maximum is 5 and the total points ranges from 4 to 20. The score higher than 10 is an indicator of the violence. The reliability

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of this questionnaire through alpha Cronbach was 0.88 in Sherin and colleagues' research and its content validity was reported ideal (17). In the study by Dastyar and colleagues (18) the reliability of screening domestic violence scale through internal similarity (Cronbach) was calculated and obtained to be 0.78 for the entire scale. In the present research the alpha Cronbach is 0.84.

Young's Maladaptive Schema (SQ-SF)

This questionnaire includes 75 items which has been designed by Young (1988) for assessing Initial Maladaptive Schema. Each item is scored by a six-point likert scale. The score of 0 for totally incorrect, 1 for almost incorrect, 2 for almost correct rather than incorrect, 3 for a little correct, 4 for almost correct, and 5 for totally correct. In this questionnaire every 5 questions measure one schema. The reliability of this questionnaire through Cronbach alpha in Young and colleagues' research was 0.87 and its content validity was reported desirable (19). In Iran, this questionnaire was normalized by Ahi, Mohammadifar and Basharat (20) among the students of Tehran Universities. Its face validity was reported desirable by psychologists and its reliability by Cronbach alpha was 0.87. In this research the Cronbach alpha is 0.79.

Statistical and Data Analysis

To analyze data descriptively, we used the mean and standard deviation methods and to analyze data inferentially to investigate the relationships between variables, we used Structural Equations Modeling. Significance level was set at 0.05.The software's used to analyze data were SPSS and AMOS version 24.

Results

There were 650 subjects (between 16 to 60 years old) in the research whose age in the first marriage, their current age of marriage, number of the children, number of the marriages, number of the months of marriage, education, occupation of the woman, occupation of the husband, and their income were investigated and their descriptive information is observable in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants.

Demographic variables	mean	standard deviation	Range
age (years)	30	11.0	44
Age at first marriage (years)	21	6.0	24
Current age of marriage (years)	20	4.25	17
Number of male children	2	1.0	4
Number of female children	2	0.75	3
Total number of children	3	1.0	4
Marriage frequency	2	0.5	2
Number of months of marriage (month)	207.32	176.5	706

This research analyzed the demographic features of 650 individuals. The participants' ages varied from 16 to 60 years, with a mean age of 30 years and a standard deviation of 11.0 years. The average age of first marriage was 21 years, while the average age of current marriage was 20 years, which shows that people in this group are getting married younger. The average number of boys and girls was 2 each, which means that the average number of children in a household was 3. In terms of educational attainment,

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the majority of participants had completed primary education, comprising 46.3% of the sample. Also, 25.4% had a high school diploma, 12.5% had an associate degree, and 12.5% had a bachelor's degree. Only 3.5% had a master's degree or above.

Examining women's occupational status revealed that the vast majority were housewives (92.9%), with only a small percentage engaged in employment such as clerical work or self-employment. On the other hand, males were more likely to work in labor (43.1%) or be self-employed (36.8%). Finally, statistics on household income showed that the biggest group of families (47.1%) made less than 100 million rials a month, while 40.5% made between 100 and 150 million rials, and 12.4% made between 150 and 300 million rials.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of research variables.

statistical indicators	average	standard deviation	minimum	maximum	skewness	kurtosis
disconnection / rejection	47.71	12.413	26	135	-0.389	-0.458
self-direction	38.28	10.101	20	112	-0.689	-0.365
impaired limitation	24.76	6.539	10	56	-0.451	-0.210
other-directedness	27.02	7.183	10	57	-0.182	-0.403
hypervigilance	23.80	5.257	10	55	-0.273	0.054
psychological distress	33.25	10.56	11	50	0.461	-0.470

As it can be obtained from table 2, the mean of the variables of disconnection / rejection, self-governance, disruptive limitation, other-directedness, hypervigilance, and psychological distress equal 47.71, 38.28, 24.76, 27.02, 23.80, and 33.25, respectively. In addition, as the values of skewness and kurtosis fall between +2 and -2, respectively, the data is of a normal distribution. To assess the presence of multiple collinearity between the variables of the research, tolerance indices and variance inflation factor were used. The value of tolerance less than 0.1 or higher than 10 showed the presence of Multiple Collinearity.

Table 3. Test Multi-collinearity.

Variables	statistical tolerance	VIF
disconnection / rejection	0.320	3.127
self-governance	0.336	2.979
impaired limitation	0.289	3.459
hypervigilance	0.443	2.256
psychological distress	0.600	1.666

Abbreviation: VIF (Variance Inflation Factor)

As it can be seen in the results of the above table, no deviation was found in the values of Tolerance Statistics and Variance Inflation Factor calculated from the supposed Multiple Collinearity.

Table 3 shows the results obtained from the tests of Value Indices of Causal Model of Psychological distress which is fit based on the Initial Maladaptive Schemas for the women who have experienced domestic violence.

Table 4. Test results of the model's validity indicators.

Model	*χ2*	*DF*	*χ2/ DF*	*RMSEA*	*GFI*	*CFI*	*NFI*

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Research model	574.392	126	3.630	0.068	0.963	0.974	0.905

Abbreviation: RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), GFI (Goodness of Fit Index), CFI (Comparative Fit Index) & NFI (Normed Fit Index)

Psychological Distress based on Initial Maladaptive Schemas for the women experienced domestic violence is less than desired level and the acceptable value is 4. Moreover, the value of RMSEA index is less than the significant acceptable value of 0.08 which shows the good fitness of the model. Similarly, the values of fitness of GFI, CFI, and NFI of the fitness of Causal Model of Psychological Distress, according to Initial Maladaptive Schemas for women experienced domestic violence are higher than 0.90 which are desirable and acceptable values.

In figure 1, the results of path coefficients and the factor loads of the causal model of psychological distress, based on initial maladaptive schemas for the women experienced domestic violence have been shown.

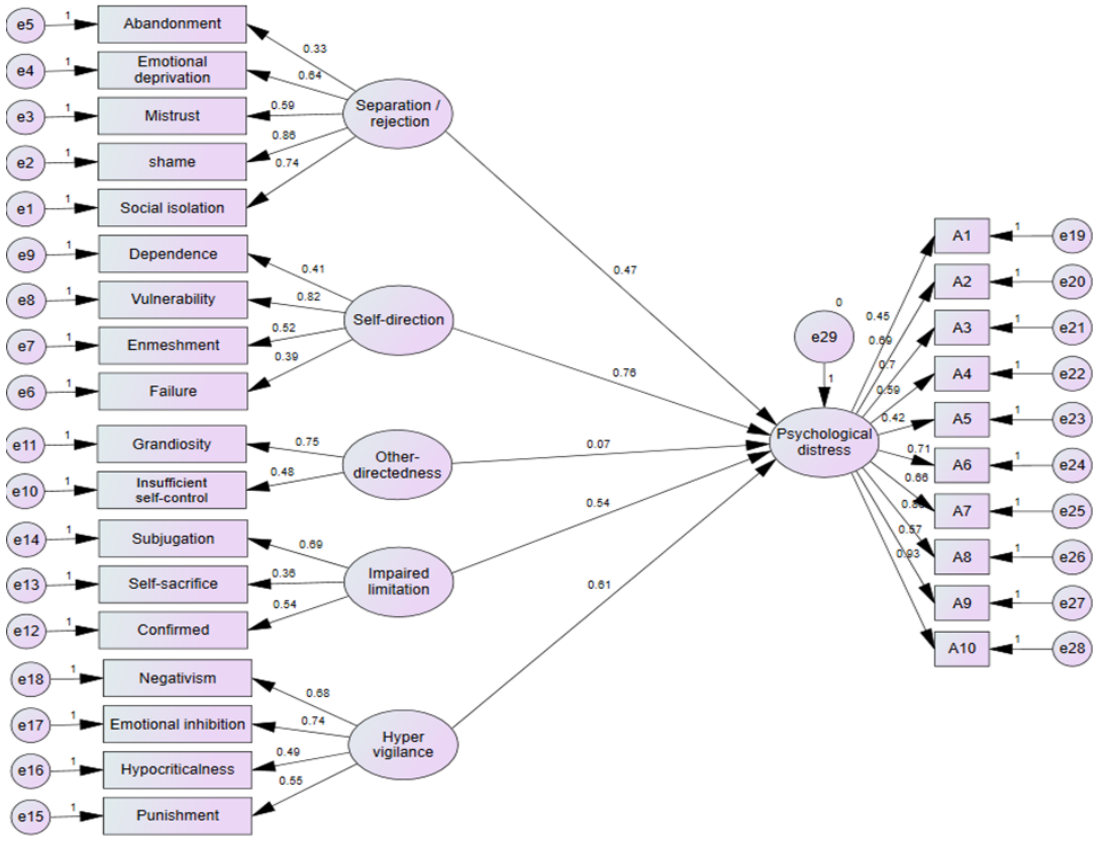


Figure 1. the results of the path coefficients and the factor load of the causal model of psychological distress according to initial maladaptive schemas for the women experienced domestic violence with the standard estimation.

Figure 1 shows that all of the factor loads between items, dimensions, and their related variables for all of the elements of the causal model of psychological distress based on initial maladaptive schemas for the women experienced domestic violence are higher than 0.40. So, the power of the relationship and explanation for each variable or dimension and their items according to initial maladaptive schemas for the women experienced domestic violence is desirable and ideal. According to this, the results of

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the estimation of both non-standard and standard path coefficients and their tests (C.R.) in the causal model of psychological distress, based on initial maladaptive schemas for the women experienced domestic violence, gave been reported in table 5.

Table 5. the results of path coefficients and their tests in causal model of psychological distress based on initial maladaptive schemas for the women experienced domestic violence.

			Standard beta	S.E.	C.R.	P
psychological distress	<---	separation / rejection	0.475	0.351	3.472	. ***
psychological distress	<---	self-direction	0.762	0.689	11.362	. ***
psychological distress	<---	impaired limitation	0.071	0.074	1.254	0.068
psychological distress	<---	other-directedness	0.541	0.521	9.632	. ***
psychological distress	<---	Hyper-vigilance	0.614	0.423	10.569	. ***

Abbreviation: S.E. (Standard Error), C.R. (Composite Reliability), P (probability value)

The results of Table 5 show that, in the structural model of psychological distress, most components of initial maladaptive schemas exhibited a significant and direct relationship with psychological distress. The components of disconnection/rejection (0.47), self-direction (0.76), other-directedness (0.54), and hyper vigilance (0.61) all demonstrated statistically significant path coefficients, with C.R. values outside the ±2 range and p-values less than 0.05

These findings suggest that these schema components play a significant role in elevating psychological distress among women who have experienced domestic violence. Conversely, only the impaired limitation component, with a path coefficient of 0.071, did not show a statistically significant relationship with psychological distress. Overall, the model demonstrated good statistical validity and explanatory power for psychological distress in this group of women

Discussion

The results of this research revealed a significant relationship between initial maladaptive schemas and the psychological distress in the women with domestic violence, except for disruptive limitation. This research was in line with other researches done by Roland and colleagues (21) Bar and colleagues (22), Vieria and colleagues (23), Onen and colleagues (24), Mohammadi & Neshat Doust (25), Gorji and Colleagues (26).

psychological distress emerges with the perception of a threat or prediction of a negative incident and the ones afflicted with psychological distress, compared to normal ones, estimate the possibility of a negative incident more frequently than what which is predicted. This cognitive item was, in fact, one of the main factors of psychological distress disorder, too (27).

Initial maladaptive schemas cause biases in one's interpretation of the events and incidents, and these misinterpretations show themselves in the form of unreal and incorrect inferences and, in the future, act as an important factor in interpretation of social incidents and lead to the development and sustainability of psychological distress in individuals (28). Initial maladaptive schemas can pave the way for psychological problems such as psychological distress through deviations in the ones' psychological distress (29).

Young believes that disconnection and rejection have been composed of schemas which have their roots in the beliefs that have been grown in the ground of relationship needs. The improper satisfaction of these needs results in the one's avoidance of close relations with others which, in turn, makes the grounds for failure in the establishment of social ties and satisfactory interactions with others (30).

Self s governance/impaired schema directs the individual to avoid collective activities and situations

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(31), which can explain the avoidance symptoms in individuals with psychological distress.

This field included too much attention to others' tendencies, emotions, and reactions so that it led to the ignorance of one's needs, the fear of rejection and the feelings that one should ignore and then suppress one's tendencies, needs, and emotions in order not to be confronted with other negative reactions(32). But, in this research the direct effect of disruptive limitation schema on psychological distress was not significant which was not in line with the most of the findings of previous research but in line with some of research findings of (25, 26).To explain this, it can be said that the women with the schema of the field of disruptive limitation who were victims of domestic violence have been grown in families where have not grown us mutual respect and continence sufficiently. The parents, without any hesitation and without the consideration of the conditions, have attempted to satisfy their children's needs. Therefore, the children have not learned to be patient and restrained or be patient. On the other hand, he/she may conclude that he/she is specific as the others have always been satisfying his/her needs. Moreover, it can be explained that the schema of insufficient self-control related to the third field, implied the lack of responsibility in relation to the observation the others' rights.

The studies have shown that the most important element of psychological distress was the fear of others' negative judgments. Therefore, the observation of others' rights to avoid negative evaluations and judgments was the problem which has been emphasized in cognitive models related to psychological distress (33).

According to Young's theory, hypervigilance schemas typically develop in families where anger, expectation, and sometimes punishment are prevalent. In these families, high performance, perfectionism, conscientiousness, following rules, concealing emotions, and avoiding mistakes were emphasized, while pleasure, happiness, and peace were not given much importance. (34).

Therefore, people with a hypervigilance schema usually experience constant anxiety and worry. This anxiety can result in feelings of insecurity and inability to control the environment. This hypervigilance can also act as a defense mechanism, but in the long run it can lead to psychological exhaustion and increased distress. In fact, it can be said that on the one hand, the hypervigilance schema can lead to an increased level of psychological distress, and on the other hand, psychological distress can increase the intensity of the alarmist schema. This vicious cycle can exacerbate symptoms and make a person unable to manage their emotions.

This study also had limitations; the use of self-report instruments to measure maladaptive schemas and psychological distress can lead to response bias, as participants may tend to report their feelings or experiences in a more positive light. Also, cultural, social, and economic factors that influence the experience of domestic violence and psychological distress may not have been taken into account in the research, which could have affected the results.

Conclusion

According to the findings of the present research, the women who were the victims of domestic violence, with the emotional deprivation schema had the higher possibility to be afflicted by psychological distress when exposed to stressful critical situations where the individual's conditions became unstable and the conditions were undesirable. In these situations, one's need of affection, empathy, protection, and be understood by others was higher. When they did not receive this support, they experienced psychological distress.

According to the results of the present study, ensuring women's mental health, which guarantees the mental health of the future generation, was of great importance. Therefore, it is suggested that more attention be paid to the mental health of women in

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society by activating counseling centers and conducting comprehensive planning to provide psychological treatment and counseling services to empower women affected by violence, preventive measures, and timely interventions.

In terms of suggestions, it can be claimed that this research can provide useful information to family and health officials and planners who, by recognizing the factors involved in domestic violence, especially violence against women, can take appropriate measures and approaches in this field. In terms of practical suggestions, it can also be mentioned to develop research and better understand the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and psychological distress in women who have experienced domestic violence, in order to pave the way for effective interventions to improve the mental state of this vulnerable group.

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Ethical Considerations

In order to observe moral principles in the research, the consent of the subjects of the research with the code of IR.IAU.CTB.REC.1402.201 was obtained and they were informed of all of the phases of the research. Moreover, the subjects were assured that their information would remain confidential and the results of the research would be published without personal information. The following tools were used to collect related data.

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Competing Interests' Disclosure

The present research does not conflict with the interests of anybody or organization.

Authors' contributions

Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Software, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing–Review & Editing, Visualization: ZB, Resources, Data Curation, and Writing–Original Draft Preparation: PGH, FH, ZB, Supervision, Project Administration: PGH, FH.

Writing Disclosure

The authors confirm that the writing and preparation of this manuscript were conducted independently and without the involvement of any professional writing services. The authors' contributions and original work are the sole focus of the content.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the conclusions of this investigation are accessible from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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