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Predicting the Tendency to Divorce Based on Narcissism and Self-Mutilation in Married, Employed Women

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to predict the tendency to divorce based on indicators of narcissism and self-mutilation in married, employed women.
Method: This study is a descriptive correlational study and its statistical population includes all married working women living in Qom city. Based on the statistics of the General Directorate of Labor Cooperatives and Social Welfare, the number of these people was estimated to be 1651. Sampling was done using the convenience method and 338 people were selected as a sample. Data were collected through standard questionnaires of narcissism (Ames et al. 2006), divorce tendency (Roslett et al. 1986), and self-mutilation (Jack et al. 1992). Data analysis was performed using simultaneous multivariate regression.
Findings: The results of the study showed that narcissism and self-mutilation can predict the tendency to divorce in married working women ($p<0.05$). It is concluded that the two variables narcissism and self-mutilation can be effective in the tendency of married women to divorce. These findings indicate a significant effect of these two variables on the tendency of women to divorce.
Conclusion: Identifying factors that predict the tendency towards divorce and marital adjustment disorders highlights the importance of education and psychological interventions for couples seeking marriage. Thus, education based on the findings of this study can lead to a reduction in the rate of failed marriages and ultimately a reduction in social harms and family abnormalities.

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Introduction

The family is known as the most fundamental social institution that plays an important role in shaping personality and developing individual capabilities (1). In the family structure, factors such as satisfaction, desirability, quality of relationships, and positive performance are among the factors that influence the growth and prosperity of family members (2). The way couples deal with conflicts and their ability to adapt to each other's needs to play complementary roles can be a predictive factor for the stability of a marriage and its adaptation to different life circumstances (3).

Stable and satisfying marital relationships have positive effects, including improved mental and physical health and personal growth for family members. These types of relationships also provide a suitable environment for children to grow up and increase the overall health of the family (4). In contrast, marital conflict and divorce are considered to be the most important threats to family stability, as they can reduce the quality of relationships and cause negative psychological, physical, social, and economic consequences. These consequences include decreased physical health,

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depression, and decreased job performance in adults (5).

Among them, the variable of narcissism has been recognized as one of the factors affecting marital conflicts and tendency towards divorce (6). Narcissistic personality disorder, which is in group B of the DSM-5 classification, is of great importance in terms of diagnosis and treatment, and its prevalence in clinical populations has been reported to be up to 17% and in the general population between 0 and 6.2% (7). This disorder is characterized by features such as feelings of grandiosity, a high need for admiration, and a lack of empathy, and usually begins in early adulthood (8).

The conceptualization of this disorder in the DSM-5 alternative model includes traits in different dimensions such as identity, mood swings, self-esteem regulation, and the ability to empathize, which provides a more comprehensive view of the disorder. Characteristics such as a sense of excessive self-importance, preoccupation with success and power, belief in specialness, need for intense admiration, a sense of entitlement, exploitation of others, lack of empathy, jealousy, and self-centered behaviors are associated with decreased life satisfaction and increased likelihood of self-harm and suicidal tendencies (9).

In this regard, the research of Mohammad Sharoni Shokri Hosseinzadeh Taqvaei Danesh and Borj Ali (2020) showed that there is a significant relationship between marital conflict and attachment and narcissistic styles in couples referring to counseling centers (10). Also, Lavner et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study on newly married couples with a sample of 146 people during the first four years of marriage and showed that narcissism can act as a factor affecting the durability of marriage (11).

Another variable that contributes to the tendency to divorce is self-mutilation. Self-mutilation refers to the neglect or suppression of one's needs and feelings in everyday social relationships, often rooted in gender stereotypes (12). These beliefs encourage individuals, especially women, to avoid conflict and prioritize the needs of others, leading them to evaluate themselves in accordance with social expectations (13). According to the psychological perspective, self-mutilation can occur at different levels. People with high levels of self-mutilation, unlike people with low levels, make great efforts to maintain their relationships, but often do not express their true feelings and control their behavior to gain social approval (14).

In this context, Parvaei (2021) in a study titled "Investigating the relationship between self-mutilation and the tendency to divorce through the mediation of marital conflict in married women" pointed out a positive relationship between these variables (15). Chisale (2018) also reported a significant relationship between self-mutilation and marital instability (16).

The present study is of great importance from a theoretical and practical perspective. In the current conditions of society, many couples face numerous challenges in maintaining their emotional relationships, and marital instability is one of the main reasons for referral to psychological service centers. Increasing the level of marital adjustment and relationship stability is not only effective in reducing psychological, emotional, and social problems of families, but can also provide a suitable platform for cultural, economic, and social growth. Given the research gap in simultaneously examining narcissism and self-mutilation as predictors of divorce tendency in working women, this study was designed to investigate this relationship to pave the way for preventive interventions and strengthening the family foundation. Accordingly, the main research question is: What is the relationship between narcissism and self-mutilation with divorce tendency?

Narcissism

Narcissism is a personality trait or disorder characterized by self-importance, a strong need for admiration, and a lack of empathy for others. Narcissistic individuals typically have an exaggerated view of their own abilities and importance, and in interpersonal interactions tend to view others as a means to achieve their goals and desires (7). In the context of marital relationships, narcissism can lead to conflict, decreased intimacy, control, and disregard for the partner's needs. These individuals often experience unstable and tense relationships due to their lack of empathy, inability to accept responsibility, and high sensitivity to criticism (6). According to personality psychology models, narcissism can be shaped by the interaction between biological factors, childhood learning, and early attachment styles. Empirical research has shown that high levels of narcissism, especially in men, are associated with reduced marital satisfaction and increased likelihood of infidelity, infidelity, and ultimately a tendency toward divorce.

Narcissistic traits have also been identified in longitudinal studies as a risk factor for instability in long-term marriages. Therefore, psychological interventions in this area should focus on increasing self-awareness, improving empathic abilities, and reducing domineering behaviors (9).

Self-mutilation

Mutilation is a concept that has been proposed in the field of social psychology and gender studies and refers to the internal process of suppressing personal needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires in interpersonal relationships, especially by women. This phenomenon is

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often the result of accepting traditional gender roles, according to which women refrain from expressing disagreement, expressing anger, or even stating needs in order to maintain relationships (12). People with high self-mutilation usually exhibit passive and adaptive behaviors to please others and avoid conflict, which can lead to feelings of emotional exhaustion, depression, anxiety, and alienation in relationships in the long run. In marital relationships, self-mutilation can lead to lack of communication clarity, dissatisfaction with the relationship, and a decrease in the individual's sense of worth within the marriage. These individuals often ignore their own needs due to fear of rejection or criticism, which increases their level of dissatisfaction and their tendency to divorce (16). Research has shown that self-mutilation is directly related to decreased intimacy and marital satisfaction and indirectly related to increased conflict and separation. Therapeutic interventions in this area should focus on strengthening assertiveness skills, teaching assertiveness, and promoting emotional self-awareness so that individuals can express their true selves in relationships without guilt or fear (15).

Tendency to divorce

Divorce intention as a psychological construct refers to an individual's internal desire to end a marital relationship. This tendency can manifest itself in the form of indirect thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors and often stems from marital dissatisfaction, unresolved conflicts, psychological stress, lack of emotional support, or inconsistency in values and goals of cohabitation. Divorce intention does not necessarily mean actual divorce, but it can be considered a strong predictor of future relationship failure (12). The presence of this tendency in one of the couples can be a sign of emotional exhaustion, decreased commitment, and weakness in resolving interpersonal conflicts. In family psychology, examining the tendency towards divorce is known as an indicator for assessing the stability of the marital relationship, and psychotherapeutic interventions can prevent family breakdown by identifying this tendency and the factors affecting it. Also, the tendency to divorce can be analyzed within the framework of theories of marital commitment, attachment styles, communication patterns, and psychological adjustment of individuals, and its application in designing premarital counseling and couples therapy programs is very important (5).

The Method of Research

The present study is in the category of descriptive-correlational research. The statistical population included all employed and married women in the city of Qom, which, according to statistics from the General Directorate of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, was reported to be 1,651. Considering the variables involved in the tendency to divorce and examining the role of the variables, and based on the Morgan and Krejci table, a sample size of 338 people was considered, who were selected using the convenience method. The research tools include:

- Shortened version of the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory: This questionnaire was developed by Ames et al. (2006) to assess narcissistic personality traits. This questionnaire has no subscales and assesses narcissism based on a unidimensional approach. The NPI-16 consists of pairs of items from which the respondent must choose one. The test-retest reliability coefficients reported by the original test developers are 0.85 over a 5-week period. Mohammadzadeh (2009) tested this questionnaire on 342 students in a cross-sectional exploratory study in 2008. The test-retest reliability coefficient, the correlation coefficient in determining split-half reliability, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient in measuring internal consistency were calculated to be 0.84, 0.74, and 0.79, respectively (17). The Cronbach's alpha reported in the present study was 0.812.
- Self-mutilation Questionnaire: The self-mutilation scale was developed by Jack and Dale in 1992. This scale has 31 questions and its validity and reliability have been confirmed by evidence. This questionnaire covers four domains of self-mutilation, self-perception in appearance, concern about sacrifice, and divided self. In Iran, it was used for the first time in the study of Salimi and Jokar (2008) and its reliability and validity were assessed. The overall reliability of the scale in different samples is from 0.88 to 0.93. In the study of Zabihi Dan (2010), factor analysis method was used to determine validity. The results of factor analysis using the principal factors method with Varimax rotation confirmed the existence of a factor in the items. In order to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha method was used and the coefficient was 0.87 (18). The Cronbach's alpha reported in the present study was 0.901.
- Divorce Propensity Questionnaire: The Divorce Propensity Scale is a questionnaire that was first designed by Roslet, Johnson, and Morrow (1986). This questionnaire consists of 28 questions that are used to assess couples who are prone to divorce and has 4 dimensions, each dimension having 7 questions. It includes the tendency to leave (prone to divorce), the tendency to neglect, the expression of feelings, and the loyalty. Each item is scored on a 7-point scale (never=1, rarely=2, very rarely=3, rarely=4, often=5, very often=6, always=7); therefore, the score for each dimension is the sum of the scores for the questions related to that dimension. A high score in the main component, i.e., tendency to divorce, indicates a high

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level of tendency to divorce in the subjects. If a person scores high in the dimensions of emotion and loyalty, his/her tendency to divorce score decreases. The scoring of questions related to these two dimensions is inversely related to calculating the total score. In a statistical analysis of this questionnaire, Roslet et al. (1986) reported alpha coefficients for the withdrawal dimension (tendency to divorce), the expression of emotions dimension (0.76), the loyalty dimension (0.63), and the forgiveness dimension (0.86). This questionnaire was standardized by Davari et al. (2009) in Iran, and its validity using Cronbach's alpha for the entire sample was 0.89 for women and 0.87 for men, and Cronbach's alpha for the subscale of tendency to leave was 0.89, expression of emotions was 0.90, loyalty was 0.86, and neglect was 0.72; also, the validity of the questionnaire was examined by content analysis by 5 psychology and counseling experts (19). The Cronbach's alpha reported in the present study was 0.873.

Data analysis in this study was carried out at two levels of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. After collecting the information, the data will be entered into SPSS software version 26. Considering the nature of the variables and research hypotheses, multivariate regression analysis using the simultaneous method (Enter) and Pearson correlation were used.

Findings

The descriptive statistics of the research variables are as follows:

Table 1: Descriptive indicators of the narcissism variable

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Narcissism	14.7	2.52	-0.155	-0.311

The mean and standard deviation of the variables can be seen in Table 1. In addition, according to this table, the values of skewness and kurtosis of the variables are in the range of +2 and -2, which indicates that the data are normal.

Table 2: Descriptive indices of the components of the self-mutilation variable

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
self-mutilation	12.01	2.98	0.220	-0.501
perception of self in appearance	16.1	3.01	-0.186	0.598
concern about sacrificing	15.8	3.55	0.987	0.409
self	16.02	2.65	-0.589	0.237
total				

The mean and standard deviation of the variables can be seen in Table 2. In addition, according to this table, the values of skewness and kurtosis of the variables are in the range of +2 and -2, which indicates that the data is normal.

Table 3: Descriptive indicators of the divorce tendency variable

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Narcissism	58.8	8.35	-1.12	1.35

The mean and standard deviation of the tendency to divorce can be seen in Table 3. In addition, according to this table, the values of skewness and kurtosis of the variables are in the range of +2 and -2, which indicates that the data are normal.

The research hypotheses are examined below.

Main hypothesis: The tendency to divorce is predicted by narcissism and self-mutilation in married, employed women.

The main hypothesis was tested through univariate regression analysis using the simultaneous method (Enter).

As Table (4) shows, the results of univariate regression analysis with the simultaneous method have shown that narcissism (β=0.145, p<0.01), self-mutilation (β=0.340, p<0.01), self-perception in terms of appearance (β=0.256, p<0.01), concern about sacrifice (β=0.360, p<0.01), and self (β=0.268, p<0.01) have the ability to predict the tendency to divorce in married, employed women.

Sub-hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between narcissism and tendency to divorce in married, employed women.

The first sub-hypothesis was also tested through univariate regression analysis using the simultaneous method (Enter).

As Table (5) shows, the results of univariate regression analysis with the simultaneous method have shown that narcissism (β=0.144, p<0.01) has the ability to predict the tendency to divorce in married, employed women.

Second Sub-Hypothesis: There is a relationship between self-mutilation and the tendency to divorce in married, employed women.

The second sub-hypothesis was also tested through univariate regression analysis using the simultaneous method (Enter).

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As Table (6) shows, the results of univariate regression analysis with the simultaneous method have shown that self-mutilation (β=0.337, p<0.01), self-perception in appearance (β=0.266, p<0.01), concern about sacrifice (β=0.352, p<0.01), and self (β=0.269, p<0.01) have the ability to predict the tendency to divorce in married, employed women.

Table 4: Results of univariate regression analysis of narcissism and divorce using the simultaneous method

Predictor variable	R	R^2 Adjusted	B	Standard error	Beta	t	P
			16.08	3.97		4.04	0.001
Narcissism			0.479	0.140	0.145	3.43	0.001
self-mutilation			0.952	0.118	0.340	8.07	0.001
Self-perception in appearance	0.644	0.414	0.709	0.129	0.256	5.49	0.001
Concern about sacrifice			0.845	0.100	0.360	8.47	0.001
Self			0.809	0.147	0.286	5.76	0.001

Table 5: Results of univariate regression analysis of narcissism and tendency to divorce using the simultaneous method

Predictor variable	R	R^2 Adjusted	B	Standard error	Beta	t	P
	0.144	0.21	65.8	2.66		24.7	0.001
Narcissism			0.476	0.179	0.144	2.66	0.008

Table 6: Results of multivariate regression analysis of self-mutilation and tendency to divorce using the simultaneous method

Predictor variable	R	R^2 Adjusted	B	Standard error	Beta	t	P
			8.95	3.44		2.59	0.01
self-mutilation			0.943	0.120	0.337	7.88	0.001
Perception of self in appearance	0.627	0.394	0.737	0.131	0.266	5.62	0.001
Concern about sacrifice			0.828	0.101	0.352	8.18	0.001
Self			0.848	0.149	0.269	5.68	0.001

Discussion

The present study aimed to predict the tendency towards divorce based on narcissism and self-mutilation in married, employed women. The findings of the study are presented as follows:

The results of the main hypothesis test showed that the tendency to divorce is predictable based on narcissism and self-mutilation in married working women. The results are consistent with the results of (20-23). The results of the first sub-hypothesis test showed that there is a relationship between narcissism and the tendency to divorce in married women. The results are consistent with the results of researchers such as the results of the second sub-hypothesis test that narcissism has a direct effect on marital conflicts. The results are consistent with the results of (20-22).

The results of the second sub-hypothesis test showed that there is a relationship between self-mutilation and the tendency to divorce in married, employed women. The results are consistent with the results of researchers (20, 22). In explaining the relationship between these two variables, it can be said that self-mutilation causes depression by leading women to obey and accept the needs of others, censoring experiences, suppressing violence and anger, preventing self-leadership activities, and judging themselves based on a self that agrees with the culture's definition of a (good woman). This situation puts women in a psychologically neutral state, as a result of which women blame themselves when faced with problems. Self-mutilation is an interpersonal style that develops as a result of trying too hard to please others; but this silence leads to rejection of important people, for example, causing rejection by a romantic partner or his coldness and indifference. Thus, the relationship between the tendency to divorce and self-mutilation can be explained. Moreover, the long-term continuation of self-mutilation gradually erodes emotional intimacy and mutual understanding within marital relationships. When women consistently silence their needs and emotions, unresolved conflicts accumulate and remain unexpressed, creating emotional distance between partners. Over time, this pattern may reduce marital satisfaction and weaken attachment bonds. The partner may interpret this silence as emotional withdrawal or lack of engagement, which further intensifies relational strain. In such conditions, communication becomes increasingly ineffective, and misunderstandings become more frequent. As emotional disconnection deepens, the likelihood of chronic dissatisfaction and conflict increases. Consequently, self-mutilation not only affects individual mental health but also undermines marital stability. This process ultimately increases the tendency toward divorce as a maladaptive response to prolonged relational distress [14].

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Conclusion

Narcissists tend to feel ashamed because they have hidden entitlement expectations and are less likely to express themselves and make their needs known. They are less likely to use overt self-reinforcing strategies to protect their fragile self-esteem; therefore, they tend to deny entitlement expectations when their needs are ignored. This denial of expectations leads to a combination of repressed anger and outbursts of situational hostility (25). In explaining the link between self-mutilation and divorce, it can also be said that this phenomenon has widespread negative psychological consequences for both men and women, including emotional detachment from others and a reduced sense of self-worth. The need to establish secure and intimate connections with others is a basic human need and not limited to women; therefore, silence and self-mutilation, which lead to reduced social connection, are harmful to both men and women (26).

According to researchers, narcissism is one of the strongest predictors of life dissatisfaction. The presence of unhealthy narcissism can significantly differentiate people who are satisfied with their lives from those who are less satisfied. Pessimistic attitudes towards life, including the belief that others lack empathy and understanding, do not provide the necessary emotional support, or even intend to hurt or lie, as well as feelings of failure and the expectation of failure in various areas of life, all cause negative emotions and reduce a person's ability to cope with life's problems. This situation ultimately leads to reduced life satisfaction and discouragement and boredom with life. Narcissistic traits cause bias in interpreting and changing events, which manifests in psychopathology in the form of distorted attitudes, false assumptions, and unrealistic perspectives in marital relationships. These misconceptions, in turn, influence subsequent evaluations and perceptions, and since unhealthy narcissism is dysfunctional, it can lead to relationship dissatisfaction and ultimately divorce (27).

Women's reasoning and belief that they should have certain feelings or behaviors creates a split self in them, in which they appear compliant and submissive on the outside, while on the inside they feel upset, angry, and confused. This division arises from their efforts to maintain an intimate relationship. As a result, women are driven to adopt compliant and responsive attitudes. As they try to behave and feel according to social standards, they become trapped in tense and eroding relationships by suppressing their emotions and silencing their inner voice. This process ultimately leads them to perceive themselves as helpless, useless, and depressed (28). Thus, according to the narratives of women with depression, they express that they have lost their identity in the attempt to create close relationships that were never real. This has led to the limitation of their growth and self-leadership. Depressed women have reported that their feelings of helplessness stem from a failure to achieve an important life goal, intimacy, while the persistent suppression of thoughts and feelings has led to feelings of separation, loss, and hopelessness that are strongly linked to social contexts (15). Thus, the relationship between self-mutilation and divorce tendencies is well-explained.

One of the major limitations beyond the researcher's control was the difficulty in accessing the required samples. In addition, the data were collected solely using a questionnaire and the responses were based on the participants' self-report and honesty. This method inherently has limitations such as distraction, imprecision, judgmental errors, and misinterpretation of instructions that can affect the research results. In order to enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings, it is suggested that future studies use complementary data collection methods such as in-depth interviews and observation. It is also recommended that mediating or moderating variables, such as the influence of subcultures and economic and social conditions, be examined in future research.

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Authors conceptualized the study objectives and design.

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