

## Communication patterns of married women with a shared incompatible schema

### Abstract

This study aimed to study the communication patterns of married women with maladaptive schemas in Isfahan. The research method was performed qualitatively using the content analysis method. Data were obtained from 10 married women with a shared maladaptive schema and relatively low marital satisfaction. The sampling method was purposeful and somewhat saturated. The semi-structured interview method was used for data collection, and the collateral analysis method was used for data analysis. Findings show that after analyzing the content of the data, five main categories were obtained: secrecy, withdrawal and unwillingness to communicate, aggressive behavior, independent behavior, and relieving dependence and begging for love (loving behavior). The present study results show that maladaptive schemas lead to inappropriate communication patterns in married women. Decreased efficiency in individual and couple relationships is one of its consequences.

**Keywords:** *communication, patterns, married women, maladaptive schema*

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### Introduction

A marital relationship is the central core of the family system. If a marital relationship is disturbed, it is a serious threat to the family's survival and how its quality affects the couple, children, and the efficiency level of the whole family (Bean et al., 2020). In addition, it is one of the oldest and most complex human bonds that develop human personality, and the family's foundation is based on it (Bornstein and Schaefer, 2017). Cohabitation is affected by many factors that cause differences, conflicts, emotional separation, and divorce (Fye et al., 2020). The relationship's importance is more evident when they are a source of happiness and satisfaction or distress and discomfort. Therefore, psychology researchers are interested in factors that cause the continuation or failure of marriages (Bean et al., 2020).

Effective communication is very important in marital life. Couples expressed that disruption in marital life is one of the most important problematic factors and common problems (Jibeen, 2019). When people do not have the necessary communication skills, they cannot resolve disputes and establish intimate relationships and express their needs and interests correctly. This relationship will eventually lead to a parallel relationship without intimacy (Eldridge, Cencirulo, and Edwards, 2017). Women have an actual role in this issue. They can solve problems with their spouses through effective communication and increase empathy and mutual understanding (Lim and Lee, 2020). Resentment, annoyance, anger, and dissatisfaction are created when they have differences of opinion and incompatibility in their relationships and do not have the communication skills to improve the relationship (Nowrouzi, Rezakhani, Vakili, 2019). Nowadays, despite lifestyle advancements, some people lack basic skills in dealing with life issues. People as spouses react in certain ways when faced with unmet needs or

disagreements. In other words, their strategy in facing problems determines their dominant communication pattern (Alavimoghadam, Mafakheri, & Jahangiri, 2021).

There are various classifications based on communication patterns. Christian and Sulawi divide couples' communication patterns into mutually constructive communication, mutual avoidance, and demand/ Withdraw. People try to understand each other and solve their problems in the constructive communication model; therefore, there is better communication and more satisfaction (Tadpatrikar, 2021). In the model of mutual avoidance, defects in communication lead to a lack of support, not listening to each other's words, and avoiding marital problems (De Rock & Périlleux, 2021). In the demand /withdrawal communication pattern, one of the couples tries to solve the problem by suggesting, complaining, or criticizing, and the other tries to end the problem by avoiding the discussion; therefore, the problem is still available (Lee, 2020). The types of communication cognitions are affected by communication performance. Schemas are one of the cognitions types that has a significant role (Hampson & Beavers, 2019). Primary maladaptive schemas are cognitive, and emotional patterns and self-destructive physical reactions that are formed in early childhood and are repeated throughout life (Yang, 2012). Humans have five basic emotional needs: secure attachments to others, independence, efficacy and identity sense, free expression of acceptable needs and emotions, spontaneity, realistic limits, and self-inhibition (Young, Jeffery; Klosko, Janet, Vishar and Marjorie, 2012; Hamidporou Andoz, 2016). Not meeting these needs in a person creates primary maladaptive schemas, which ultimately cause people's communication problems (Yang, 2012), especially compatible and incompatible interactions in common life. Schemas are the result of people's efforts to adapt to life events. A schema changes to the command room of

negative spontaneous thoughts and negatively causes the exploitation of information when activated (Bahrami et al., 2022).

Due to the cases mentioned above, the importance of communication patterns that indicate our behavior and performance, and helping married women to better understand the communication patterns that are used in married life, an effective step should be taken to establish a healthy and productive relationship and improve the quality of married life through improving and correcting communication and identifying unhealthy communication styles.

No research has studied the communication patterns of married women with maladaptive schemas. Therefore, the present study studied the qualitative communication patterns of married women with a shared maladaptive schema.

## **Method**

This research used a qualitative thematic or theme analysis method to study the communication patterns of married women with maladaptive schemas. The samples were selected in a purposeful method. The research participants were 10 married women living in Isfahan city with shared maladaptive schemas and low marital satisfaction. Research entry criteria were having a shared maladaptive schema (emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust/misbehavior) and low marital satisfaction. The research exclusion condition was the presence of all schemas in the participants. Yang's schema and Enrich's marital satisfaction questionnaires were used in this regard.

The participants were selected from those referred to counseling centers, and the research purpose was explained to them. The interviews began after they declared their written consent. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes, which could be reduced or increased depending on the situation. Before conducting each interview, the researcher introduced himself and explained the study's topic and objectives to the participants. The interview started with demographic questions and then with open-ended questions (for example: What problems do you have in your married life? And what was your solution to solve it?...). Further explanation and examples were requested when there was a misunderstanding. The new questions were discovered from the answers provided and used for the next participants. Then the review process continued to determine whether this category applies to them. The data was written after each session. These meetings continued until the saturation of the data and the lack of new improvements. The researcher extracted and classified the available information to prepare for the analysis stage after completing the data collection stage. Claysey's method was used to analyze the data. First, each interview was listened to carefully; then, all

the words were written down to analyze the findings. Important phrases and sentences were determined, and primary categories were set. After searching among the primary categories, those with the same theme were separated and named. The secondary categories were also obtained after several times of checking and re-reading. Finally, the categories were revised. The final and core categories were obtained from one or more secondary categories, and the relevant report was prepared after naming.

## **Tool Measurement**

### **Maladaptive Schemas Questionnaire (1994) (YSQSF)**

Young (1994) developed the original version of the Schemas Questionnaire (SQ) to measure early maladaptive schemas. The schemas questionnaire short form (SQ-SF) has also been prepared to measure 15 primary maladaptive schemas based on the original form. The long form has 205 questions, and the short form has 75 questions. Each question is scored on a 6-point scale (completely false 1, almost false 2, more true than false 3, slightly true 4, almost true 5, completely true 6) (Yang, 2006).

In the short form, each schema is measured by five questions; a high score indicates the early maladaptive schemas. This research uses the short form of the questionnaire to measure primary maladaptive schemas, which measures 15 primary maladaptive schemas in 5 domains. These schemas include: rejection & disconnection (abandonment/instability, mistrust/misbehavior, emotional deprivation, defect/shame, social isolation/alienation), autonomy and impaired performance (dependence/incompetence, vulnerability to harm/disease, self-untransformed/trapped, failure). Impaired limits: (entitlement/secretary, insufficient restraint and self-discipline) other direction (obedience, self-sacrifice), over vigilance and inhibition (emotional inhibition, stubborn standards/extreme fault-finding) (Sero, Nelson and Gileh, 2004).

A high score on each subscale indicates a greater maladaptive schema. Several studies have investigated the psychometric properties of YSQ-SF. Smith et al. (1995) conducted the first comprehensive research on the characteristics of the questionnaire. This research obtained the alpha coefficient for each initial maladaptive schema from 0.83 (self-untransformed/trapped schema) to 0.96 (defect/shame schema). This questionnaire has a good convergent and discriminant validity with psychological distress scales, sense of worth, cognitive vulnerability to depression, and personality disorder symptomatology (Rickbro and Vandenberg, 2006). The questionnaire's internal consistency was obtained by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire and its five domains: rejection & disconnection 0.91, autonomy and impaired performance 0.90, impaired

limits 0.73, other direction 0.67, over vigilance and inhibition 0.78. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was obtained for five domains: rejection & disconnection 0.87, autonomy and impaired performance 0.71, impaired limits 0.83, other direction 0.71, over vigilance and inhibition 0.81. (Zulfiqari, Fatehifar and Abedi, 2018).

**Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (ENRICH):**

The alpha coefficient of the Enrich questionnaire in the report of Elson, Furinor Druckman (1989) for the subscales of ideal distortion, marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, money management, leisure activities, sexual relation, children and parenting, family and friends, egalitarian roles are as follows: 0.9, 0.81, 0.73, 0.68, 0.75, 0.74, 0.76, 0.48, 0.77, 0.72, 0.71. A research was conducted entitled Investigation of Irrational Thoughts on Marital Dissatisfaction. This study states that this questionnaire validity was used in the research. First, the questionnaire was translated, and then the psychological experts confirmed its content validity. In the next step, the questionnaire was implemented on 11 people, its reliability coefficient was calculated through the alpha coefficient, and the number was 0.93. It was decided to prepare a short form because the high number of questions tired the subjects. Therefore, each question's correlation with the whole questionnaire was calculated through the correlation

coefficient, then the questions with a relatively high correlation were selected. Forty-seven questions were finally selected. The reliability coefficient of the 47-question form was calculated again on a group of 11 people using the alpha coefficient, and its reliability coefficient was 0.95. The correlation coefficient of Enrich questionnaire with family satisfaction scales is from 0.41 to 0.61 and with life satisfaction scales from 0.32 to 0.41, which is a sign of construct validity. All subscales of Enrich questionnaire distinguish satisfied and dissatisfied couples, which shows good criterion validity.

**Finding**

This research investigated 10 married women with an average age of 33.1. The average duration of the interviewees' marriage was 8 years and 6 months. The emotional deprivation schema average was 74.6, the misbehavior and mistrust schema was 66.7, and the abandonment schema average was 66.1. The average marital satisfaction score was 21.52, which showed the participants' low marital satisfaction. The researcher extracted and classified the available information and prepared them for the analysis stage after completing the data collection stage. The Clayseey method was used to analyze the data. The interviews' findings were coded and categorized; their description is observed in the table below.

Table 1 shows the main themes and sub-themes extracted from the interviews.

Table 1. Main themes and sub-themes extracted from the interviews

Main themes	Sub-themes	Main themes	Sub-themes
Secrecy	Hiding capital from the spouse Hiding events Hiding the disease	Aggressive behavior	Verbal aggression Physical aggression
Withdrawal and unwillingness to communicate	Reducing commutes Entertaining yourself not to be actively present in the crowd Lack of sincere behavior in public Avoiding communicating with your spouse Frequent conflicts and reconciliations	begging for affection	Doing others wishes to gain their satisfaction Begging and trying to please others Working hard and serving well despite the inner desire Ignoring your wishes for the others
Independent behavior and dependence removal	Trying to gain financial independence Acquiring competence and skills		

### **1-The first main theme: Secrecy**

This concept includes 3 sub-themes.

**Hiding capital from spouse:** Most of the interviewees mentioned financial secrecy. I bought myself a house, but my wife does not know (interviewee number 1). I did not tell my wife about the profit I received from the investment (Interviewee 8). Monthly, I save some money that nobody knows (interviewee 4).

**Hiding events:** It refers to hiding events cases. I aborted a child and hid it from my wife (Interviewee 2). No one is aware of my engagement and relationship (Interviewee 3). If I told my wife what the car driver did on the way to work, he would make excuses and not let me go to work, and I didn't tell him as usual (interviewee number 5). I did not tell my family about my disagreement with my wife (Interviewee 7).

**Hiding the disease:** The interviewees stated that I didn't tell anyone I was taking pills (interviewee 6). I consulted a psychiatrist and am taking anti-depressants, but no one knows (interviewee 9). I have depression and did not tell anyone (Interviewee 1).

### **2. The second main theme: The withdrawal and unwillingness to communicate**

This theme includes 5 sub-themes as follows.

**Reducing communication:** I make excuses for some parties not to go (Interviewee 3). I don't invite my wife's family for birthdays and occasions (interviewee 5). As the last one, I try to go to my mother-in-law's house. I leave the party early with the excuse that I must wake up early in the morning (Interviewee 8). I did not go to family parks on weekends (Interviewee 9).

**Entertaining myself not to be actively present in the crowd:** I amuse myself with the phone to talk less in the crowd (Interviewee 1). I do my daughter's homework there (interviewee 4). I usually sit beside my husband and talk to him (interviewee 6).

**Lack of sincere behavior in public:** I don't joke, I'm selfish, and I'm not friendly. (Interviewee 2). I don't wake up in the morning for my wife, and he makes breakfast himself (interviewee 3). When my curious colleague asks a question, I look at him and don't answer (Interviewee 1). I don't joke; I only smile (interviewee 10).

**Avoid communicating with my wife:** I should be careful when I talk with my wife; otherwise, he will label me (Interviewee 7). I make myself busy when he comes home from work (interviewee 4). I read books to talk less and work overtime to be less at home (interviewee 9).

**Frequent violence and reconciliation:** We are violent for several days and do not talk to each other (interviewee number 1). We were fighting all the time during our marriage (Interviewee 7). When we are angry, I don't take the first step toward reconciliation (Interviewee 8). It is normal to be angry in our house (interviewee 5).

### **3. The third main theme: Aggressive behavior.**

It has 2 sub-themes.

**Verbal aggression:** I threatened my wife with divorce (Interviewee 8). Due to a lack of money and economic management, I often humiliated my wife in front of my children (interviewee 9). I blame my spouse because he is shorter than me (interviewee 4).

**Physical aggression:** My wife and I beat each other when we are in a fight (interviewee 1). I threatened my husband to kill myself (interviewee 2). I got angry and threw the glass (interviewee 7). I forcefully closed the door (interviewee 3). I beat my children (interviewee 10).

### **4. Fourth main theme: Independent behavior and dependence removal.**

It includes 3 sub-themes.

**Trying to gain financial independence:** I bought a car for myself (Interviewee 8). I tried to find a suitable job (interviewee 10). I opened a separate account for savings (interviewee 4).

**Acquiring competence and skills:** I got a driver's license (Interviewee 7). I went to cooking and sewing classes (interviewee 9). I decided to continue my studies (Interviewee 3).

**Self-sufficiency and dependencies removal:** I learned to go shopping alone (interviewee 6). I tried to do my work alone (interviewee 2). I take my car to the gas station (interviewee 1). I went for eye surgery alone (interviewee 4).

### **5. The fifth main theme: begging for affection (kindness behaviors)**

It includes 4 sub-themes.

**Doing others' wishes to gain their satisfaction:** I always sit in the car's back seat due to my mother-in-law (interviewee 4). Despite my inner desire, I go to my sister-in-law's house a few nights a week (Interviewee 3). I will do anything to make my wife happy (interviewee number 2).

**Begging and trying to please others:** If my mother-in-law gets nervous, I apologize; maybe she is angry at me (Interviewee 7). I always make money (interviewee 1).

I call my husband until he answers when he leaves the house nervously (interviewee 9).

**Working hard and serving well despite the inner desire:** I usually make dessert when they have a party (Interviewee 5). I help my mother-in-law with cleaning every year (Interviewee 8). During other people's parties, I am usually in the kitchen and serve (interviewee 4).

**Ignoring your wishes for the others:** I sold my car due to my family's need for money (Interviewee 6). I like to be out late at night, but even in the middle of a party, I have to come home early because I cannot leave my mother-in-law alone (interviewee 8). I sold my gold for my wife (interviewee 10).

## Discussion and conclusion

The present study was conducted to qualitatively study the communication patterns of married women with shared maladaptive schemas. According to findings, five main categories were obtained: Concealment, withdrawing and unwillingness to communicate, aggressive behavior, independent behavior, and dependence removal and begging for affection (kindness behaviors).

The current research findings are consistent with the results of Fathi Ashtiani and Mohammadi (2016); Ahmadi et al. (2020); Thanagoei et al. (2010); Purvi and Bahrami (2016); Seifzadeh et al. (2018); Ledbetter (2019); Genkozeb and Egichi (2011); Hyun et al. (2006); Pym and Falk (2018). They indicate a relationship between people's initial maladaptive schemas, communication patterns, conflicts, and marital compatibility. In addition, Judith and Finney (1994) stated that communication patterns for spouses mainly mediated the relationship between attachment dimensions and relationship satisfaction. For both husbands and wives, a scale of mutually constructive communication developed as the strongest correlate of relationship satisfaction. Babcock et al. (1993) showed a significant correlation between the pattern of husband's demand/wife's withdrawal and male physical violence. Perundi, Arefi, and Moradi (2016) stated that it is possible to predict the teachers' marital satisfaction by knowing the family's functioning and the couple's communication patterns.

Communication is the main part of life, which begins with its existence and ends with its absence. Communication helps humans grow and develop, and happiness depends on how a person benefits from communication (Amati et al., 2018). Communication becomes your life essence and has a decisive role in the married life quality and peace when your goal is finding peace with your spouse and in your common life.

Establishing a bond and reaching a common concept is the main goal of communication. Communication will be a source of compatibility and satisfaction if people are equipped with their skills. In addition, a lack of knowledge about this basic skill creates many misunderstandings and tension. The parties' consent will not be obtained in a joint (Stratton & Low, 2020). Knowing different types of family communication patterns helps to predict performance and related comments. People seek treatment for communication problems. People's interpersonal problems are often influenced due to their image of themselves and others. This way of thinking is called schema (Yang et al., 2012).

People with abandonment schema are afraid of losing or leaving important people in their lives. In addition, they find their support network unstable or unreliable (Lockwood et al., 2018). This feeling is sometimes brought to married life. In this case, when her spouse gets angry with her, she worries about the distance created. When the mistrust schema is activated, she feels her spouse has an opportunity to hurt her. A person interprets misbehavior, damage, lies, and profit-seeking as intentional actions and can expect them (Lim and Lee, 2020). A person expects to be loved. When others and the spouse cannot sufficiently satisfy the person's desires and needs for emotional support, three important types of deprivation happen deprivation of affection, empathy, and support (Ahmadi & Mahmoudi, 2020). The reports explain that the schemas of fear of abandonment and lack of emotional support from others affect people's communication patterns. People always look for loving behaviors to avoid convulsions and rejection. The affectionate personality strongly desires to attract others' love and attention and will not ignore anything to get it (Ismaili, Mohammadi, and Hakimi, 2016). Some of the people's reports related to this communication pattern are as follows: I am usually in the kitchen and serving during parties. When my husband angrily leaves the house, I call until he answers. According to Karen Horne's theory (1954), someone has an affectionate character if he overcomes anxiety-provoking factors by getting others' support (Rezaei, Zirak, and Azar, 2020). Chaotic and unusual relationships within the family lead to abnormal behaviors such as violence and lack of communication. These behaviors' consequences cause physical and psychological problems for the individual and also prevent him from socializing in his social relationships. Consequently, the person becomes vulnerable and avoids interactions instead of communicating and interacting (Haslam et al., 2022).

Therefore, in explaining the findings, it is said that the primarily maladaptive schemas cause inappropriate communication patterns in the family. According to the

research findings, these behaviors include people's concealment from each other and unwillingness to communicate.

Concealment is an important issue that weakens the relationship between men and women. There is a high communication pattern of dialogue and eavesdropping and no concealment in families where members can freely interact, share their thoughts and feelings and make decisions on various issues. (Jeanfreau et al., 2020). The clients mentioned things in terms of pre-marital relationships, mental and physical problems and diseases, and the amount of financial income.

Aggression is one of the most common behavioral problems that cause distress and harm to others (Allen, Anderson, and Bushman, 2018). There are examples in people's interviews; I closed the door, we fought, I threatened my wife, and I humiliated her in front of others. These examples show a lack of intimacy and weak communication patterns in the family. The interviews show that women with a pattern of mutual avoidance had a severe conflicts and refused to communicate. These people had independent behavior and used statements like "I bought a car for myself" or "I prepared a house for myself" in the interviews. Yang (2006) states that people with rejection & disconnection schemas cannot establish secure and satisfying attachments with others. Their main families are usually unstable (abandonment/ disconnection), abusive (distrust, abuse), cold and heartless (emotional deprivation). Disagreement and conflict with a spouse can impose psychological problems on married women (Penagarijo and Monfort Sprig, 2020) and cause them psychological problems and maladaptive behaviors (Rafaeli, 2020).

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