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Causal Relationships of Differentiation, Latent Communicative Aggression, and Emotional Divorce in Conflicting Women with the Mediating Role of Marital Conflict

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Abstract

Abstract

Considering the negative effects of emotional divorce on the health of couples and family members, the objective of the present study was to examine the causal relationships of differentiation, Latent communication aggression, and emotional divorce in conflicting women with the mediating role of marital conflict. The research method was descriptive and correlational using structural equation modeling approach (SEM). The statistical population included women who were referred to Welfare Counseling centers in Khalkhal in 2023. From among them, 200 women were selected using the convenience sampling method. They filled out Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale (EDS), Skowron and Schmitt's Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI), Nelson and Carroll's Latent Communication Aggression Scale (CRAS), and Barati's Marital Conflict Scale (MCS). The results showed that differentiation had a direct and negative effect on marital conflict, and latent communicative aggression had a direct and positive effect on marital conflict ($p < 0.01$). Moreover, differentiation and latent communicative aggression had an indirect effect on emotional divorce with the mediating role of marital conflict ($p < 0.01$). According to the findings, both differentiation and latent communication aggression played an important role in the emotional divorce rate of conflicting women directly and indirectly (through changes in marital conflict). Therefore, therapists, especially in the field of couples therapy, can use the findings of this research study to reduce emotional divorce in couples.

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Introduction

A happy marriage is a key factor in promoting physical and mental health. However, sometimes neglecting marriage and its needs can lead to an unsuccessful marriage and negative consequences such as chaos and separation (Ayadi et al., 2022). One of the most important manifestations of turmoil and separation in the family and a serious threat to marital life is emotional divorce, which challenges the stability and quality of marriage and causes negative psychological, physical, and social consequences (Firouzjayaan et al., 2017). Studies have shown that families with emotional divorce are not able to solve their problems and conflicts compared to normal families; the emotional communication of family members is inefficient and disturbed. In addition, they generally perform poorly in terms of interaction of roles and performance (Salehi Amiri et al., 2014). Aggression in marital life is one of the most important factors of divorce, which causes erosion by accumulating frustrations and tensions of daily life. It has a negative and significant impact on the quality of life (Afshani et al., 2024). Latent communicative aggression refers to harming the marital life by manipulating social relationships through spreading rumors, withdrawing from affection, and provoking jealousy (Moroń & Mandal, 2021).

Conflicts in the marital life are usually the result of the mutual influence of the couple's original families (Khosravi et al., 2021). A review of the literature shows that emotional divorce occurs over time and is caused by severe conflicts and marital distress (Al-Dmour et al., 2024). Thus, to adopt suitable interventions, it is essential to identify the effective factors in the phenomenon of emotional divorce and the direct and indirect related variables which affect it. Therefore, according to the existing research gap, the objective of this study was to examine the causal relationships of differentiation, latent communicative aggression, and emotional divorce in women with the mediation of marital conflict. The conceptual model of the research hypothesis is presented below.

Methodology

The research method was descriptive and correlational using the structural equation modeling approach (SEM). The statistical population included all women who filed for divorce due to marital conflicts and were referred to Khalkhal's Welfare Counseling Center in 2023. From among them, 200 women were selected using available sampling method. To collect data, Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale (EDS), Skowron and Schmitt's Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI), Nelson and Carroll's Latent Communication Aggression Scale (CRAS), and **Barati**'s Marital Conflict Scale (MCS) were used. To consider ethical issues, the objective of the research study was explained to the participants, and to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' data, written and informed consent was obtained from the women who were interested in participating in the study. To analyze the data, correlation matrix and structural equation modeling (SEM) were estimated using SPSS (version 22) and Amos23 software.

Results

Among the 200 participants, the largest number was in the age range of 31-35 years, and the least number were in the age range of 46-50 years old. Furthermore, in terms of the level of education, 25% of the participants (50 women) had a bachelor's degree and the lowest number of the participants (13.5%; 27 women) held MA. In addition, with regard to the employment status, 46 women (23%) were self-employed, 50 women (25%) were employees, and 104 women (52%) were housewives.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the research variables

Factors	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional divorce	36	98	56.26	13.365	.433	-1.04
Differentiation	89	148	135.20	19.257	.080	1.12
Latent communicative aggression	13	56	47.35	9.457	-.874	.977
Marital conflict	51	194	130.04	32.858	.331	1.02

The results of examining the skewness and kurtosis of the research variables (in the range of -2 and +2) and the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for all research variables ($p \geq 0.05$) showed that **parametric tests can be used** in data analysis **without limitation.**

The results of the correlation matrix showed significant relationships between differentiation and marital conflict ($r = -0.626$, $p = 0.001$), latent communicative aggression and marital conflict ($r = 0.714$, $p = 0.001$), and marital conflict and emotional divorce ($p = 0.001$, $r = 0.591$).

The results of the examination of the general fit indices of the model showed that the fit indices of the final model were at the desired level. Therefore, it could be stated that the tested model had a good fit. Moreover, the results of examining the standard and direct coefficients of the variables showed that the direct effects of differentiation on marital conflict ($\beta = -0.397$ and $P = 0.001$) and emotional divorce ($\beta = -0.495$ and $P = 0.001$) were significant and negative. Moreover, the direct effects of latent communicative aggression on marital conflict ($\beta = 0.420$ and $P = 0.001$) and emotional divorce ($\beta = 0.591$ and $P = 0.001$) were significant and positive. In addition, the direct effect of marital conflict on emotional divorce was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.443$ and $P = 0.001$) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Standard coefficients and direct effect of variables in the proposed path model

Factors	Standard path coefficient	T	P-value
Differentiation → Marital conflict	-.397	2.422	.0001
Differentiation → emotional divorce	-.495	3.256	.0001
Latent communicative aggression→ Marital conflict	.420	2.654	.0001
Latent communicative aggression→ Marital conflict	.591	3.214	.0001
Differentiation	.443	3.115	.0001

The results of the bootstrap method showed that the marital conflict played an (indirect) mediating role in the relationship of differentiation and latent communicative aggression with emotional divorce because both high and low values were positive and did not include zero, which is proof of the indirect relationship of marital conflict in this direction ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3. The indirect effect of differentiation and latent communicative aggression on emotional divorce in women with the mediation of marital conflict

Independent variable	Mediator Variable	dependent variable	bootstrap	Standard error	Confidence Interval		P-value
					Min	Max	
Differentiation	Marital conflict	emotional divorce	- .212	.382	.033	.780	.027
Latent communicative aggression	Marital conflict	emotional divorce	.277	.471	.097	.491	.048

Conclusion

The present study, in line with the study of Dehno (2023), showed that the direct effect of differentiation on emotional divorce was negative and significant. Moreover, the direct effect of latent communicative aggression on emotional divorce was positive and significant, which is consistent with the results of Siadat et al. (2023) which showed that the higher the level of latent communicative aggression in the marital relationship, the higher the probability of experiencing an emotional divorce. In addition, the results of the indirect paths of the model showed that marital conflict played a mediating role in the relationship of differentiation and latent communicative aggression with emotional divorce in women. This finding is consistent with the results of the study by Dokuzlar et al. (2024). In addition, this finding is consistent with the results of Afshani et al.'s (2024) study which reported that violence in marital life led to erosion and had a significant negative impact on the quality of life by accumulating frustrations and tensions in daily life. In general, it could be concluded that differentiation and latent communicative aggression were important variables in the level of conflict between couples and resulted in their

emotional divorce. Therefore, the findings of the present research paved a clear path for therapists to reduce marital conflicts and emotional divorce among women.

Conflict of interest

No conflicts of interest have been reported by the authors.

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