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# Predicting Marital Stability Based on Attachment Style, Differentiation and Conflict Resolution Strategies in Couples with and without Stable Marriages

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**Abstract**

## Abstract

Marital stability is a key concept in marital relationships, referring to the continuity and durability of the marital bond over time. The present study aimed to distinguish between couples with stable and unstable marriages based on attachment styles, self-differentiation and conflict resolution styles in Bushehr Province, Iran. This study employed a descriptive–correlational design with a predictive approach. Discriminant function analysis was conducted to identify the variables that best distinguished couples with stable marriages from those with unstable marriages. The statistical population consisted of married individuals residing in Bushehr Province, Iran, in 2024. Based on the cutoff score of the Marital Instability Index (MII), 113 participants were classified into the stable-marriage group and 113 into the unstable-marriage group. Data were collected using the Marital Instability Index (MII), the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), the Differentiation of Self Inventory–Short Form (DSI–SF), and the Rahim Resolution Styles (RRS). The data were analyzed using discriminant function analysis in SPSS. The results indicated that attachment styles (avoidant and anxious), self-differentiation and conflict resolution styles (integrating, avoiding, dominating, compromising, and obliging) significantly discriminated between the stable- and unstable-marriage groups (Wilks' Lambda = .68, $\chi^2 = 83.71$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that the identified variables play an important role in differentiating individuals with stable marriages from those with unstable marriages and may serve as key indicators in the assessment of marital stability.

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## Introduction

Marriage is a legally binding and enduring partnership characterized by mutual emotional and legal commitments, wherein spouses engage in shared life experiences to achieve individual growth and reciprocal well-being (Justina et al., 2022; Zulfa et al., 2024). As a foundational social institution, successful marriage not only represents a central personal milestone but also contributes to family and societal stability (Karegar et al., 2024). Marital stability is a core determinant of marital success, encompassing the couple's ability to maintain commitment, manage interpersonal conflicts, and adapt to internal and external stressors over time (Piao et al., 2020; Okonkwo, 2024). Attachment patterns play a pivotal role in this process: secure attachment promotes relational security and positive self-perception, whereas insecure attachment (anxious or avoidant) is linked to emotional dysregulation and decreased marital satisfaction (Huang et al., 2020; Park and Harris, 2023; Moitinho, 2022).

Differentiation of self-further supports marital resilience by enabling partners to balance emotional intimacy and autonomy, maintain psychological boundaries, and regulate affective responses effectively, thereby facilitating constructive conflict resolution (Rodríguez et al., 2023; Talmon et al., 2020). Similarly, marital conflict significantly influences relational stability: unresolved or maladaptive conflict impairs cooperation, emotional bonding, and sexual satisfaction, while adaptive conflict-resolution strategies enhance both relationship quality and persistence (Ali et al., 2025; Bahramian et al., 2024).

Although prior research has largely examined attachment, differentiation, and conflict management independently, few studies have explored their combined impact on marital stability. The present study addresses this gap by applying discriminant analysis to identify how these three key relational factors distinguish stable from unstable couples, providing an empirically grounded framework for understanding and promoting enduring marital relationships.

## Method

This study used a correlational predictive design aimed at predicting group membership of couples with stable versus unstable marital relationships and developing a discriminant function. The study population included married individuals in Bushehr Province in 2024. The sample included 226 participants (i.e, couples with stable (n= 113) and unstable (n= 113) marital relationships). Individuals with unstable marriages were drawn from divorce-seeking clients attending specialized family counseling centers, dispute resolution councils and family courts, who scored above the cutoff point of 28 on the Marital Instability Index (MII). Conversely, participants with stable marriages were recruited from the general population and scored below the cutoff on the MII. Both groups were selected using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Data were collected using four standardized questionnaires: Adult Attachment Styles Questionnaire (RAAS), Differentiation of Self Inventory –Short Form (DSI–SF), Rahim Resolution Styles (RRS), and Marital Instability Index (MII) Questionnaire. The sample size met the minimum requirement of 20 participants per independent variable as recommended for discriminant analysis (Cramer, 2004).

## Findings

The mean age (SD) of participants in the stable and unstable marital groups was 41.16 (8.98) and 39.26 (7.62) years, respectively. The average duration of marriage (SD) was 16.04 (8.08) years for the stable group and 12.28 (7.90) years for the unstable group. Preliminary analyses confirmed that all variables met the assumptions of normality (skewness < |3|; kurtosis < |10|), supporting the use of discriminant analysis. Discriminant analysis was conducted using both simultaneous and stepwise approaches. In the stepwise model, three variables—integrated conflict-resolution, dominant conflict-resolution, and avoidant attachment—emerged as the strongest predictors of marital group membership. Their discriminative power was significant, with F-values of 87.53, 47.39, and 33.40, respectively ($p < .001$).

In the simultaneous model, which included nine variables, Wilks' Lambda was .68 and $\chi^2 = 83.71$. In the stepwise model, with three retained variables, Wilks' Lambda was .68 and $\chi^2 = 82.88$. Both discriminant functions were statistically significant ($p < .001$), demonstrating robust predictive validity. Classification accuracy was high, with 74.7% of cases correctly classified in the simultaneous model and 75.2% in the

stepwise model. Coefficient analyses further confirmed that integrated conflict-resolution, dominant conflict-resolution, and avoidant attachment were the primary contributors to differentiate stable from unstable marital groups. These results indicate that specific attachment styles and conflict-resolution strategies were key determinants of marital stability, highlighting their potential utility in designing interventions to strengthen long-term marital resilience.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that attachment styles, differentiation of self, and conflict-resolution strategies significantly distinguished couples with stable versus unstable marriages, supporting the main research hypothesis. These results are consistent with previous studies (Kim and Woo, 2025; Wilson et al., 2024; Sheng et al., 2023; Mozas Alonso et al., 2022; Yahya et al., 2021).

Attachment behaviors play a central role in fostering positive spousal interactions. Secure attachment promotes constructive perceptions of self and partner, facilitates emotional expression, and encourages warm, intimate relationships, creating a safe relational base that supports marital stability (Dehghani et al., 2025; Yahya et al., 2021). Couples with secure attachment also show higher commitment, loyalty, and mutual emotional support, which further strengthens satisfaction and resilience in the marriage (Nikmanesh et al., 2023).

Differentiation of self allows spouses to maintain autonomy while experiencing intimacy without overdependence or emotional withdrawal. Highly differentiated couples demonstrate better emotion regulation, conflict management, transparency, and adaptability, leading to greater marital satisfaction and stability. In contrast, low differentiation is linked to distrust, insecurity, reduced initiative, and relational dissatisfaction, which may ultimately undermine marital stability (Kim and Woo, 2025; Mozas Alonso et al., 2022; Askari and Ghasemfard, 2025). Effective conflict-resolution strategies—such as constructive dialogue, active listening, problem-solving, and respectful feedback—enhance relational quality, commitment, and cohesion. Couples who handle conflicts poorly often experience lower life satisfaction, increased tension, and compromised psychological well-being, which threaten marital stability (Delatore and Wagner, 2018; Fereidoni Golian et al., 2024; Wilson et al., 2024). Successful conflict management requires empathy, mutual respect, and forgiveness, contributing directly to relational resilience. This study had some limitations, including challenges in accessing participants with unstable marriages, which prevented random sampling. It also focused on legally married couples in Bushehr Province, limiting generalizability to other cultural contexts. Future research should use stratified or multi-stage sampling across diverse regions and examine additional psychological variables such as sexual functioning, marital resilience, and problem-solving skills. Intervention studies targeting secure attachment, differentiation of self, and effective conflict-resolution strategies may improve marital quality and provide practical guidance for family counseling and psychotherapy.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this study. All ethical standards were strictly followed, including ensuring participants' confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of their rights.
Participation in this research posed no potential risk or harm. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Bushehr University of Medical Sciences under the ethical code IR.BPUMS.REC.1404.262.

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