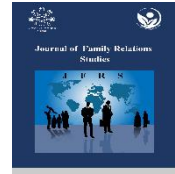




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Research Paper

The Role of Dysfunctional Schemas, Dark Personality Traits, Emotional Inhibition and Shame in Predicting Unsatisfactory Sexual Relationships



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the current research was to investigate the role of dysfunctional schemas, dark personality traits, emotional inhibition, and shame in predicting unsatisfactory sexual relations of couples.

Methods: The current research is practical in terms of its purpose and in terms of its implementation method; it is a descriptive and correlational study. In the current research, the research community was formed by all couples with sexual dissatisfaction in Tabriz city in 1401. 160 of these couples were selected by voluntary sampling method and Hudson et al. (1981) sexual satisfaction scale questionnaires, Jonason and Webster's Dirty Dozen questionnaire (2010), Yang schema questionnaire (2003), Kellner's emotional inhibition questionnaire (1986) and Cohen, Wolff, Guilt, and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP). In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistics methods (mean and standard deviation), correlation coefficient, and regression were used, observing the statistical assumptions in regression theories. Penter and Insko (2011) were completed. The results were analyzed using SPSS software version 26.

Results: The findings showed that the relationship between dysfunctional schemas with sexual dissatisfaction ($r=-0.431$, $P<0.01$), narcissism ($r=-0.355$, $P<0.01$), emotional inhibition ($r=0.367$, $P<0.01$) and shame ($r=0.342$, $P<0.01$) were positive and significant, but with Machiavellianism ($r=0.250$, $P<0.01$) and antisocialism ($r=0.238$, $P<0.01$), was not significant. The correlation coefficient results showed that the relationship between dysfunctional schemas with sexual dissatisfaction ($r=-0.431$, $P<0.01$), narcissism ($r=-0.355$, $P<0.01$), emotional inhibition ($r=0.367$, $P<0.01$) and shame ($r=0.342$, $P<0.01$) was positive and significant, but with Machiavellianism ($r=0.250$, $P<0.01$) and antisocialism ($r=0.238$, $P<0.01$), was not significant. The results of regression analysis showed that The value of the coefficient of determination for the variables of ineffective schemas, narcissism, emotional inhibition, and shame had been obtained as 0.403, 0.336, 0.347 and 0.329, respectively, and it means that sexual dissatisfaction variable is 40.3% by Dysfunctional schemas can be predicted by 33.6% narcissism, 34.7% by emotional inhibition and 32.9% by shame; where the significance level for these variables was less than 0.05, it can be concluded that this effect is significant.

Conclusion: It is possible to reduce sexual dissatisfaction in couples with programs that reduce dysfunctional schemas, dark personalities, emotional inhibition, and shame.

1. Introduction

Appropriate relationships in society are formed based on appropriate relationships in the family, and the more appropriate the relationships within the family are, the

more stable and stronger the family and, consequently, the society is. No society can claim health without having a healthy family (Du et al., 2022).

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One of the important factors that play a fundamental role in the health of the family and society is the quality of sexual intercourse and the level of satisfaction with it, sexual health, and its proper functioning within the framework of the family. Therefore, sexual satisfaction is one of the most important needs of every person in life (Borjali & Khanjani, 2022), which is considered as one of the main factors affecting the overall quality of life (Kalka, 2018). Sexual satisfaction is the physical and emotional act of sexual intercourse, which includes different aspects of intercourse and emphasizes the positive or negative feelings after intercourse. Satisfying positive sexual experiences are considered as rewards, and negative sexual experiences combined with dissatisfaction are considered as costs, which can affect the quality of the couple's relationship (van den Brink et al., 2018). Couples' sexual dissatisfaction refers to the couple's perception of dissatisfaction with sex life. Sexual dissatisfaction is a variable that can be separated from sexual performance and pleasure and goes beyond it. So that a couple can have a good sexual performance in each of the stages of sexual response, including desire, arousal, and orgasm, and experience sexual pleasure resulting from sexual performance (Cybulski et al., 2018). Dissatisfaction with sexual performance and the occurrence of problems in it causes physical and mental pressures in couples and brings dissatisfaction and dysfunction in health. Disruption in the sexual system of couples is the main source of communication conflicts between couples, which can cause doubt about love and affection, and increase the couple's concern about the stability of the relationship, and may lead to divorce and separation of husband and wife (Farhadi et al., 2020).

One of the effective factors in sexual satisfaction and, consequently, marital satisfaction in couples is dysfunctional schemas (Shirkhani et al., 2023). Schemas are cognitive structures for selecting, encoding, and evaluating stimuli that affect people. These schemas can be created through early disturbing experiences and can arouse people in similar situations. Inefficient schemas are deep, pervasive, and highly ineffective and derived from memories, emotions and cognitions, and bodily sensations (Orang et al., 2017). Young (1998) proposed fifteen maladaptive schemas organized into five groups: the first domain (disconnection/rejection) includes the subcategories of emotional deprivation, abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, social isolation/alienation, and defectiveness/Shame. The second area (impaired Autonomy and performance) includes failure, dependence/incompetence, and vulnerability to harm or illness. The third area (impaired limits) includes entitlement/grandiosity and insufficient self-control/self-discipline. The fourth area (other-

directedness) includes an extreme focus on the needs, desires, and feelings of others, obedience, and self-sacrifice. Finally, the fifth domain (over vigilance) includes emotional inhibition and unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness criteria (Talebian et al., 2023). Primary maladaptive schemas that cause emotional disorders are more inflexible, dry, and objective than the schemas of normal people (Basile et al., 2019). Rodriguez et al. (2020) showed in their research that dysfunctional schema acts as a predictor for relationship satisfaction.

Among other variables that can influence the relationship between couples and their sexual satisfaction or lack of satisfaction is the personality of the couple (Khaksari, 2021). One of the relatively new concepts in personality is the dark traits of personality, known as James Bond psychology, which has been proposed in the field of personality pathology models in the last two decades. These personality traits introduced and conceptualized by Paulhus and Williams (2002) include narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, which form the three corners of the dark triangle of personality (Zahed & Yaghoobi, 2024). These traits are defined as the tendency to be deceptive and exert control over others (Machiavellianism), feeling entitled and feeling superior to others (narcissism), and lack of empathy and impulsiveness (antisocial) (Womick et al., 2019). A deceptive personality is an interest and desire to deceive, exploit others, and have a pessimistic view of life and interpersonal relationships. Narcissism is characterized by a sense of entitlement and a feeling of a distinct status compared to others. Antisocial behavior is also characterized by impulsivity, unstable emotions, aggression, drug use, sensation-seeking (Malesza et al., 2019). In research, the relationship between dark personality traits is related to marital disturbances (Khaksari, 2021), emotional divorce, and sexual self-esteem (Basharpoor et al., 2021).

Another component related to sexual dissatisfaction is emotional inhibition. Emotional inhibition refers to the tendency to inhibit the expression of emotion in a conscious way during emotional arousal (Liu et al., 2021). Emotional inhibition is characterized by unemotional language, reduced expressiveness, and shyness (Zhang et al., 2021). Most patients learn these behavioral patterns in early childhood as coping strategies to protect themselves from painful emotions such as fear, sadness, or shame, emotional inhibition in a wide range of disorders, and mental health problems such as personality disorders (Dimaggio et al., 2018), eating (Ferrer et al., 2017), depression and suicide, and (Burdette et al., 2021; Burke et al., 2021).

The final component under consideration is shame.

Negative self-conscious emotions such as shame are evoked when the evaluation of behavior and actions is in conflict with one's moral values and standards, and since negative evaluations are harmful, therefore people avoid behaviors that arouse these negative self-conscious emotions (Spruit et al., 2016). Sassover et al. (2023) showed in their research that there is a relationship between shame, guilt, self-criticism, and women's sexual dissatisfaction.

Considering the inevitable role of sexual dissatisfaction in the communication functions of spouses, there are few specific studies about the relationship between dissatisfaction and other psychological components; therefore, there is a gap in research in this field and the use of more research to understand it deeply. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the role of dysfunctional schemas, dark dimensions of personality, emotional inhibition, and shame in predicting unsatisfactory sexual relationships of couples.

2. Materials and Methods

In terms of purpose, the present research is applied, and in terms of execution method, it is a descriptive and correlational study. Couples with sexual dissatisfaction in Tabriz city in 1401 formed the statistical population of the present study. 160 of these couples were selected using a voluntary sampling method. In this way, after embedding the internet link for the questionnaires, this link was made available to the counseling centers, and the couples referring to those centers completed the questionnaires by referring to the desired link. Of course, before answering the questions, explanations were given to the subjects regarding the objectives of the research, how to complete the questionnaires, and to ensure the confidentiality of the entered information and the optionality of writing the name and surname.

Sexual satisfaction scale: It was created by Hudson et al. (1981) to evaluate the sexual satisfaction levels of couples. This scale has 25 questions and is considered part of self-report questionnaires. The subject's answer to each item of the test is graded on a 7-point scale between never 0 to always 6 and the total score in the whole scale fluctuates between 0 and 150. The scale's reliability was calculated by the retest method with an interval of one week and was equal to 0.93. Its validity, through discriminant validity, showed that the scale has the ability to distinguish between couples with and without sexual problems (Hudson et al., 1981). Its validity and reliability have been confirmed by (Maack et al., 2012). In the present study, the value of alpha was 0.87. Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire in the present study was calculated as 0.90.

Dirty Dozen Questionnaire: This questionnaire was created by Jonason and Webster (2010) to prepare a short and comprehensive questionnaire to measure the dark triad of personality. This questionnaire has 12 items in such a way that each dark character trait is measured by 4 items. In this way, narcissism is measured by items 1 to 4, Machiavellianism by items 5 to 8, and antisociality by items 9 to 12. The scoring of this test is in the form of a seven-option scale from completely disagree = 1 to completely agree = 7. Kajonius et al. (2016), calculated Cronbach's alpha for Machiavellianism, 0.83, antisociality, 0.64, and narcissism, 0.81. In Iran, Yousefi and Piri (2015), calculated Cronbach's alpha 0.77 for narcissism, 0.72 for Machiavellianism, and 0.68 for antisocialism. To evaluate the criterion validity of the Dirty Dozen Questionnaire, the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Questionnaire, the Short Version Antisocial Scale, the Minnesota Multifaceted Personality Questionnaire, and the Machiavellianism Questionnaire were used. The results indicated the confirmation of the criterion validity of this scale. In the present study, the alpha value was 0.79 for narcissism, 0.75 for Machiavellianism, and 0.71 for antisocialism.

Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ-SF): This questionnaire was created by Young (1998) to measure the initial incompatible schemas. The short form of the questionnaire was also prepared to measure 15 primary incompatible schemas based on the original form. Each item is scored on a 5-point scale (completely wrong, almost wrong, slightly right, almost right, and completely right). The scoring of this test is done in each of its 17 subscales separately. Such that the average is taken for each subscale. The scores of each scale are added together and divided by the number of statements in that subscale. If the obtained average is higher than 3 or compared to other subscales, that schema is the main schema considered. In this questionnaire, a high score indicates incompatible schemas. In examining the psychometric properties of this questionnaire in two Australian and Deaf groups, Baranoff et al. (2006) reported Cronbach's alpha as 0.94 (Deaf group) and 0.96 (Australian group). In Iran, in the research of Mahdavi and Azadi (2021), Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was 0.74, 0.70, 0.70, 0.78, and 0.73, respectively, for rejection/cut, self-direction, impaired limitation, redirection, and eavesdropping reported. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was obtained for rejection/cut, self-directedness, impaired limitation, other-oriented Ness, and eavesdropping, respectively, 0.71, 0.77, 0.79, 0.81, and 0.80.

Emotion inhibition questionnaire: Kellner's Emotional Inhibition Questionnaire (1986) contains 16 items that assess 4 subscales of verbal inhibition, shyness, hiding emotions, and self-control based on a 5-point Likert scale from 0=no to 4=always. In this questionnaire, to evaluate the level of emotion inhibition, the scores of the items are added together and then calculated. The total score of the scale is from 0 to 64. In the study of Grandi et al. (2011), Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the whole scale was equal to 0.79, which indicates the acceptable internal consistency of the emotional inhibition scale. Also, the results showed a distinction between the clinical and non-clinical populations. In the research of Asadollahi et al. (2022), Cronbach's alpha coefficient was obtained for the entire questionnaire at 0.79. The results of confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the four-factor structure of Kellner's Emotional Inhibition Questionnaire. The results of examining the correlation between Kellner's Emotional Inhibition Questionnaire and the executive dysfunction questionnaire indicated a significant correlation between the components of the two instruments and the concurrent validity of Kellner's Emotional Inhibition Questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire in the present study was calculated as 0.87.

Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP): This scale was prepared by Cohen et al. (2011), and includes 16 items that measure the differences of people in the extent of experiencing shame and guilt in the range of

personal violations. In this scale, scenarios are proposed regarding the situations people are likely to face daily, followed by common reactions to those situations. The participants are asked to imagine themselves in that situation and indicate the probability of their reaction based on a seven-point Likert scale (Cohen et al., 2011). The results of the factor analysis of the scale creators showed that guilt includes two sub-factors of negative behavior evaluation and compensatory responses following private violations, and shame includes two sub-factors of negative self-evaluation and avoidance responses following violations that are exposed. The public is located. In this scale, 8 items belong to shame and 8 to guilt emotion; in the second level, each sub-factor is measured with 4 items. In their research, Qaderi Bagajan et al. (2022), extracted two factors of guilt and shame, which include 12 items and 4 items, respectively, using the factor analysis method. Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire in the present study was calculated as 0.90.

3. Results

In the current research, among the 160 people in the sample, there were 91 women with an average age of 30.21 and 69 men with an average age of 35.38. The findings showed that since the skewness and elongation indices are in the range of ± 2 , the normality of the variables can be accepted. Table 1 shows the correlation of research variables.

Table 1. Correlation between research variables

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Inefficient schemas1	--						
2. Narcissism	0/235	--					
3. Machiavellianism	**0/279	0/191 -	--				
4. Anti-social	**0/336	**0/171	0/098-	--			
5. Emotional inhibition	0/246	0/313	**0/188	0/170	--		
6. Shame	**0/340	**0/229	**0/402-	-0/390**	**0/196-	--	
7. Sexual dissatisfaction	**0/431	**0/355	0/250	0/238	**0/367	**0/342	--

The findings of Table 1 showed that the relationship between dysfunctional schemas with sexual dissatisfaction ($r=-0.431$, $P<0.01$), narcissism ($r=-0.355$, $P<0.01$), emotional inhibition ($r=-0.367$, $P<0.01$)

and shame ($r=0.342$, $P<0.01$) was positive and significant, but with Machiavellianism ($r=0.250$, $P<0.01$) and antisocialism ($r=0.238$, $P<0.01$), was not significant.

Table 2. Standard and non-standard coefficients for predicting couples' unsatisfactory sexual relations according to the domains of dysfunctional schemas

Model	Non-standard co.		Standard co.	T	Sig.
	B	Mean stand. Er.	Beta		
Constant	102/406	2/681		46/697	0/001
cut and rejection	0/448	0/084	0/441	41/112	0/001
impaired limitations	0/326	0/077	0/339	33/702	0/004
impaired performance	0/344	0/080	0/336	37/704	0/003
Another direction	0/309	0/073	0/307	34/222	0/004
Alertness	0/436	0/090	0/431	43/801	0/001

According to the above table, the value of the coefficient of determination for the dimensions of cut and rejection, impaired limitations, impaired performance, another direction, and Alertness was obtained as 0.441, 0.319, 0.336, 0.307, and 0.431, respectively. That is, the sexual

dissatisfaction variable can be predicted as much as 1.44% by cutting and rejection, 31.9% by the dimension of impaired limitations, 33.6% by the dimension of impaired performance, 30.7% by other orientation, and 1.43% by eavesdropping.

Table 3. Standard and non-standard coefficients for predicting couples' unsatisfactory sexual relations on dark personality traits

Model	Non-standard co.		Standard co.	T	Sig.
	B	Mean stand. Er.	Beta		
Constant	240/883	3/106		81/301	0/005
narcissism	0/349	0/081	0/336	42/743	0/003
Machiavellianism	0/246	0/096	0/229	40/309	0/146
antisocialism	0/225	0/094	0/214	42/743	0/210

According to the table above, the coefficient of determination for the dimensions of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and antisocialism were obtained as

0.336, 0.229, and 0.214, respectively, which, according to the significance level, only the narcissism variable predicts 33.6% of sexual dissatisfaction.

Table 4. Standard and non-standard coefficients for predicting unsatisfactory sexual relations of couples according to the dimensions of emotional inhibition

Model	Non-standard co.		Standard co.	T	Sig.
	B	Mean stand. Er.	Beta		
Constant	188/219	2/903		60/554	0/001
verbal inhibition	0/490	0/098	0/479	59/226	0/001
shyness	0/386	0/081	0/380	49/343	0/003
hiding emotions	0/473	0/091	0/471	51/222	0/001
self-control	0/364	0/085	0/355	47/109	0/002

According to the table above, the coefficients of determination for the dimensions of verbal inhibition, shyness, hiding emotions, and self-control were obtained as 0.479, 0.380, 0.471, and 0.355, respectively.

This means that the variable of sexual dissatisfaction can be predicted as much as 47.9% by verbal inhibition, 0.38% by shyness, 47.1% by hiding emotions, and 35.5% by self-control.

Table 5. Standard and non-standard coefficients for predicting couples' unsatisfactory sexual relations according to the dimensions of shame

Model	Non-standard co.		Standard co.	T	Sig.
	B	Mean stand. Er.	Beta		
Constant	188/219	2/903		60/201	0/001
shame	0/229	0/069	0/226	37/203	0/001
guilt	0/260	0/080	0/253	39/409	0/001

According to the table above, the coefficient of determination for the dimensions of shame and guilt is 0.226 and 0.253, respectively, and it means that the variable of sexual dissatisfaction is prediction 22.6% by shame and 25.3% by guilt.

dysfunctional schemas and sexual dissatisfaction is significant, and the sexual dissatisfaction variable can be predicted by dysfunctional schemas. In the general classification, marital satisfaction can include cognitive factors, emotional and affective factors, physiological factors, behavioral patterns, social support, violence, having children, stress, Communication skills, and sex (Du et al., 2022; Shirkhani et al., 2023). From the point of view of these researchers, the first factor that is effective in marital satisfaction is the cognitive factor that the existence of ineffective schemas as a cognitive factor has significant effects in explaining life satisfaction (Kumagai & Kumagai, 2015); Because People with

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the current research was to investigate the role of dysfunctional schemas, dark personality traits, emotional inhibition, and shame in predicting unsatisfactory sexual relationships in couples. These findings can be considered in line with the studies of Shokrzadeh et al. (2023), and Akkol (2017), The first finding showed that the relationship between

dysfunctional schemas use incompatible and inappropriate solutions in their interactions, and on the other hand, incompatible schemas lead to bias in the interpretation of events, which causes damage to interpersonal relationships and, as a result, a lack of understanding and expectations.

It emerges realistically in relationships. It's probable that an increase in the level of dysfunctional schemas makes people prone to selectively look at the negative behaviors of their life partners and ignore or forget the positive ones. Also, dysfunctional schemas often cause conflicts between couples because they are a pattern imposed by the past on how to experience reality and mediate understanding and responding to events in the scene of couples' relationships, which ultimately leads to an increase in conflicts and a decrease in the level of marital satisfaction and sexual dissatisfaction of couples.

Women with dysfunctional schemas do not receive enough emotional support and protection from their husbands and feel abandoned by their husbands. Sometimes, they think of themselves as less or older than their spouses, and this causes couples to distance themselves and reduce their marital and sexual satisfaction (Bach et al., 2018).

The second finding of the research, based on the relationship between dark personality traits and sexual dissatisfaction, showed that only the narcissism dimension has a significant relationship with sexual dissatisfaction ($r=-0.355$, $P<0.01$) and the variable of sexual dissatisfaction was 33.6% predictable by narcissism. These results are in line with the results of Basharpour et al. (2021), and Alavi et al. (2018). In this regard, according to Altnok and Kılıç (2020), insecure attachment styles and damaged and low self-esteem, as well as narcissism, are factors that can predict people's tendency to extramarital relationships. Maybe because narcissists see themselves as sexual victims, they are more likely to cheat in emotional relationships with their spouses. Campbell (2005) shows high self-satisfaction with the relationship at first, but later reports less satisfaction. People with a narcissistic personality trait are characterized by low empathy in relationships, and by focusing on themselves and paying attention to their needs alone in all areas of shared life, including sexual relations, it causes marital disputes.

The third finding about the relationship between emotional inhibition and sexual dissatisfaction showed that sexual dissatisfaction is predicted by emotional inhibition as much as 34.7%. These results are in line with the results of Rick (2015), Easazadeh (2016), and Vater and Schröder-Abé (2015). In the general explanation of this hypothesis, it can be said that the majority of research on emotional control is based on the

assumption that the purpose of controlling emotions in people is to form self-esteem, personal efficiency, and individuality. These issues can be proposed with the aim of increasing positive emotions and avoiding negative emotions to form a person's happiness and satisfaction with life (Yoo et al., 2006).

The final finding about the relationship between shame and sexual dissatisfaction showed that sexual dissatisfaction is predicted by shame as much as 32.9%. These results are in line with the results of Davis et al. (2017). In the experiences of shame, different aspects of the psyche are in conflict with each other; being prone to shame arises from the difference between self and self-ideal. Feelings of shame include feelings of inferiority, weakness, and the desire to hide defects, so these feelings can play a role in reducing sexual satisfaction (Davis et al., 2017). All human beings experience emotions and feelings in their lives, and it is completely natural that they show different emotions and feelings when faced with various situations, but extreme negative emotions and feelings are abnormal and not only constructive but also destructive and it is harmful. Exaggeration of emotions leads to incompatibility, aggression, anger, hatred, and anxiety, which, in an uncontrolled manner, seriously threatens the mental and emotional health of people in the family. Couples who report these conditions will not have high sexual satisfaction in their married life. Couples also sometimes do not interpret each other's verbal and non-verbal messages correctly, and these misinterpretations can lead to feelings of shame and guilt and confusion of emotions and cause disruption in their communication. Disturbance in communication also lowers sexual satisfaction. In the end, it is necessary to mention the limitations of the research. The main limitation of the current research is non-probability sampling, which limits the generalization of the results. Despite the mentioned limitation, counselors and family therapists can benefit from the findings of this research in the field of reducing couples' sexual dissatisfaction.

The study investigated how dysfunctional schemas, dark personality traits, emotional inhibition, and shame predict unsatisfactory sexual relationships among couples. Results showed that dysfunctional schemas and narcissism significantly contribute to sexual dissatisfaction by fostering cognitive biases and conflicts. Emotional inhibition leads to suppressed emotions and reduced life satisfaction, negatively impacting sexual relationships. Additionally, shame-related feelings of inferiority and miscommunication between partners further decrease sexual satisfaction. These findings highlight the need for marital therapy to address cognitive, emotional, and personality factors to improve couples' sexual satisfaction.

5. Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

In the current research, ethical considerations, including confidentiality and informed consent were observed. The study was conducted without external financial support. Regarding authors' contributions, the research was written with the cooperation of all authors. This study does not have any conflicts of interest.

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Authors' contributions

All authors have participated in the design, implementation and writing of all sections of the present study.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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