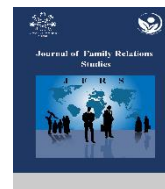




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## Research Paper

### Predicting marital instability based on relational maintenance strategies and love schemas in working women



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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Marital instability affects couple relationships and family structure. Although widely studied, the roles of love schemas and relational maintenance strategies in predicting marital instability have received less attention. This study aimed to examine the role of relational maintenance strategies and love schemas in marital instability among working women.

**Methods:** This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The statistical population included married women employed at health centers in Ahvaz. A total of 158 participants were selected through a multi-stage cluster random sampling method during the 2024–2025 years. The research instruments included: Marital Instability Index (Edwards et al., 1987), Relational Maintenance Strategy Measure (Stafford et al., 2000), Love Schema Scale (Singelis et al., 1995). Data analysis was conducted using the Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis with the use of SPSS27 software.

**Results:** The findings showed that relationship maintenance strategies, including assurance and task sharing, were predictors of marital instability, while love schemas were not able to predict marital instability.

**Conclusion:** Based on these findings, it can be concluded that relational maintenance strategies influence marital instability. These results support clinical and educational interventions in the field of couples therapy that emphasize the enhancement of practical and behavioral skills.

## 1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most fundamental decisions in the life of every person (Gholami Gherashiran et al., 2022). However, attaining satisfaction and stability in marriage can be challenging, and many marriages are vulnerable to breakdown (Mojarrad et al., 2024). Marital and relational instability has been a defining characteristic of the last three decades of the 20th century. The concept of marital instability refers to couples' tendency toward divorce, which manifests in

two forms: a cognitive state—where individuals question whether their marriage is in trouble and consider the possibility of divorce—and a behavioral state—where actions are taken based on those thoughts or during discussions with the spouse about divorce (Chukwu, 2025; Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018). This phenomenon typically emerges sometime after marriage, when one or both partners begin to perceive the relationship as unsuccessful or lacking in satisfaction.

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Today, marital instability has become a significant concern in many countries around the world (Gholami Gherashiran et al., 2022). The term marital instability is a situation in which a couple in a home is going through relational difficulties. It implies marital crisis or problems between couples that could result in marriage breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce (Chukwu, 2025). Although there is a negative societal attitude toward divorce, its rate continues to rise, and Iran has been identified as one of the countries with a high susceptibility to divorce (Montazeri, 2022). Given the high prevalence of marital instability (Azad Armaki, 2017). And the fact that addressing the social, individual, and cultural consequences of divorce is far more difficult than preventing it, identifying the contributing factors to this phenomenon becomes essential. Recognizing the underlying causes of a crisis is widely acknowledged as a fundamental step in its prevention and management. Therefore, studying marital instability and identifying its influencing factors is of great importance in understanding and preventing divorce (Mojarrad et al., 2024).

It appears that one of the key factors influencing marital instability is the use of relational maintenance strategies. Relationship maintenance strategies are conceptualized as dynamic behaviors aimed at protecting and sustaining close relationships (Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018). These strategies involve a range of processes that help preserve partners' interdependence and thus contribute significantly to the continuity and stability of the relationship (Machia, 2020). Stafford and Canary aiming to identify the strategies couples use to maintain their relationships, identified several key strategies: positivity (adopting a positive attitude toward the relationship, such as expressing happiness and hope, providing mutual support, and minimizing negative or hostile interpretations); openness (engaging in direct conversations about the relationship); assurance (emphasizing acceptance, love, and commitment to one's partner); social networks (relying on family, friends, and other social connections to support the relationship) and shared tasks (focusing on fulfilling responsibilities and being satisfied with the division of duties) (Ghezelseflo, 2020; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Stafford, Dainton, and Haas introduced two additional strategies: advice (coordinating, consulting, and sharing opinions with one another, as well as offering and receiving perspectives on both shared and individual matters) and conflict management (the ability to resolve and manage conflicts). These strategies represent conscious or unconscious activities individuals engage in to maintain their marital relationships (Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018; Stafford et al., 2000). (Arjmandi & Jalali, 2023) research results show that positivity, social networks, task sharing, and assurance are the best predictors of marital stability among employed women. (Momeni et al., 2014) In a study aimed at examining the role of leisure patterns in marital stability through the

mediation of relationship maintenance strategies and marital happiness, it was found that relationship maintenance strategies are related to both marital happiness and marital stability. The findings of another study also highlighted the effective role of relationship maintenance strategies in preserving the marital stability of employed women (Golmohammadian & Salimi, 2023). Moreover, individuals whose partners use more relationship maintenance strategies report higher satisfaction with their relationships, greater assurance in their relationship, and less uncertainty about the future of their relationship (Ghezelseflo et al., 2018; Momeni et al., 2014).

Love schemas are another factor that may play a significant role in marital instability. Love is considered one of the key factors in achieving a satisfying marital life. It is defined as an intense and deep emotional affection, typically expressed by individuals involved in romantic relationships, and is regarded as a crucial component of fulfilling and satisfying partnerships (Yaarmohammadi Vasel et al., 2021). Recently, social psychologists have increasingly focused on the role of schemas in shaping individuals' cognitions, emotions, and behaviors within interpersonal relationships. Schemas are cognitive structures that play a critical role in interpreting information and guiding behavior across various situations (Shahmoradi et al., 2021). In this context (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996) proposed the model of love schemas by integrating Erikson's stage theory (1982) and attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 2017). According to their model, an individual's love schema is defined based on their level of comfort with intimacy, autonomy, and desire for engaging in romantic relationships (Shahmoradi et al., 2021). Individuals who are inclined toward forming romantic relationships often fall into one of four love schema categories: Secure, Clingy, Skittish, and Fickle. Individuals with a secure love schema are comfortable with both emotional closeness and independence. Individuals with a clingy love schema desire a high level of emotional closeness but tend to fear independence (Mikaeili et al., 2023). The skittish love schema characterizes individuals who are uncomfortable with deep emotional closeness but are at ease with independence. The fickle love schema includes individuals who struggle with both emotional closeness and independence, often feeling uncertain about their relational needs. Individuals who are not inclined toward relationships with others typically fall into two categories of love schemas: casual, those who only enter relationships when there are no issues and avoid making significant commitments and uninterested; those who are generally uninterested in relationships and view them as meaningless (Adibi, 2021; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). The three love schemas (secure, clingy, and skittish) correspond to the three attachment styles: secure, anxious,

and avoidant (Shahmoradi et al., 2021; Singelis et al., 1995). Attachment styles of couples are crucial factors in marital relationships, as they provide a framework that aids in understanding marital dynamics and coping strategies for couples' challenges (Yaarmohammadi vassel et al., 2021; Mikaeili and Salmani, 2021). Multiple pieces of evidence support the relationship between attachment styles and love schemas, as well as the connection between attachment styles and marital phenomena, such as marital stability (Ardenghi et al., 2020; Azin & Salehpour, 2017; Fatemi et al., 2022; Hajiloo et al., 2021; Nazari et al., 2010). The results of (Gharehbaghy & Tavakoli, 2019) study indicated that early maladaptive schemas and irrational beliefs are predictors of marital instability or the likelihood of divorce. Additionally, other studies have shown a direct relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital instability among couples seeking divorce (Asghari et al., 2015).

With the growing rate of women's employment driven by higher education levels and economic needs, women are now managing both professional responsibilities and traditional roles such as child-rearing and responding to their husbands' needs. This dual burden has led to increased marital conflicts in dual-income families (Golmohammadian & Salimi, 2023). Given the critical role of the family unit and the rising number of marriages ending in divorce, alongside the significant consequences of divorce, identifying the underlying factors contributing to marital instability is essential. Furthermore, considering the existing research gap regarding the relationship between marital instability and both relationship maintenance strategies and love schemas, the present study aims to examine and compare the predictive power of these two variables on marital instability among married employed women working in health centers in Ahvaz, Iran.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationships between relationship maintenance strategies and love schemas and marital instability. Additionally, the predictive power of these psychological constructs in relation to marital instability was assessed. The statistical population included married women employed at health centers in Ahvaz with an estimated population size of approximately 1,200 individuals based on records from local health authorities. The statistical population included married women employed at health centers. A total of 158 participants were selected through a multi-stage cluster random sampling method during the 2024–2025 years. The sample size was determined based on the

correlational nature of the study, prior related research, and accessibility to the target population, as well as using Cochran's formula for determining the required sample size with a confidence level of 95% and an estimated response distribution, which supported a minimum of 150 participants to ensure statistical validity. In addition, the Krejcie and Morgan sample size table was consulted for populations of around 1,200, which confirmed that a sample size of approximately 150–160 would be sufficient for generalizability and statistical inference. Inclusion criteria were: willingness to participate in the study, being in a first marriage, having a minimum of three years of marital experience, and being within the age range of 25 to 50 years. Exclusion criteria included: unwillingness to participate, incomplete questionnaire responses, a history of divorce, having a spouse with substance use problems, or the presence of severe psychological or physical disorders.

Data collection was conducted using standardized questionnaires administered in person. To ensure representativeness, sampling was conducted across various health centers in Ahvaz. In cases where questionnaires were returned incomplete or invalid, additional participants were recruited to maintain the intended sample size. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships among love schemas, relationship maintenance strategies, and marital instability. Furthermore, stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which love schemas and relationship maintenance strategies could predict marital instability. Statistical significance was evaluated using appropriate inferential methods, including *t*-tests, *F*-tests, and *Z*-tests. All analyses were conducted using SPSS software (version 27) to ensure computational accuracy and efficiency.

### Instruments

**Marital Instability Index:** This questionnaire was developed (Edwards et al., 1987) to assess the likelihood of marital instability. It comprises 22 items that evaluate both attitudinal and behavioral aspects of instability. The first 14 items are designed to measure marital stability, while the remaining 8 items assess perceived attractions to and obstacles against divorce. Attitudinal items reflect an individual's emotional stance toward the marriage—such as thoughts about separation or doubts regarding the relationship—whereas behavioral items capture specific actions, including discussing divorce or living apart (Noroozi et al., 2019). Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale, typically ranging from “never” to “always,” depending on the content of each item. Total scores range from 14 to 56, with interpretative cutoffs as follows: scores between 14 and 28 indicate marital stability; scores between 28 and 42 suggest moderate marital

instability; and scores between 42 and 56 reflect high marital instability (Yavarizadeh et al., 2025). In a study conducted (Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018), the instrument demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88. (Yavarizadeh et al., 2025), reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73 for this scale in an Iranian sample. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was calculated to be 0.715.

**Relational Maintenance Strategy Measure:** The Relational Maintenance Strategies Questionnaire was developed by Stafford, Dainton, and Haas in 2000 (Stafford et al., 2000). This 31-item instrument assesses the strategies individuals use to maintain their relationships through various behaviors. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The questionnaire consists of seven subscales: Assurances (Items 1–8), Openness (Items 9–15), Conflict Management (Items 16–20), Sharing Tasks (Items 21–25), Positivity (Items 26–27), Advice (Items 28–29), and Social Networks (Items 30–31). Higher scores reflect more frequent use of relationship maintenance behaviors (Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018). In Iran (Abooe Mehrizi et al., 2020) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.97 for the total scale. Similarly, (Arjmandi & Jalali, 2023) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 in their study. In the present research, the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.973.

**Love Schema Scale:** The Love Schema Scale is a 6-item self-report instrument developed by (Singelis et al., 1995). It is designed to assess individuals' perceived tendencies and emotional experiences in romantic relationships, particularly focusing on the dimensions of closeness and independence. Each item on the scale describes feelings and experiences associated with one of six distinct love schemas. Respondents indicate how accurately each item reflects their own feelings using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("most accurately describes me") to 6 ("least accurately describes me"). The scale includes six subscales, each represented by a single item: (1) Secure Love schema, (2) Clingy Love schema, (3) Skittish Love schema, (4) Fickle Love schema, (5) Casual Love schema,

and (6) Uninterested Love schema (Mahdigholi et al., 2023). The scale has demonstrated construct validity through significant correlations with related measures such as companionate love, mate selection scales, and attitudes and behaviors associated with committed romantic relationships (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). The Persian version was translated and validated by (Sharifi et al., 2013) and its content validity was confirmed by faculty members at the University of Isfahan. The standard error of the mean for the six items—Secure, Clingy, Skittish, Fickle, Casual and Uninterested Love schema—was reported as 0.122, 0.108, 0.105, 0.118, 0.117, and 0.105, respectively. In a study conducted by (Kolahdozipour et al., 2021), the composite reliability of the scale was calculated to be 0.78, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency.

### 3. Results

Descriptive and demographic characteristics of the participants are presented first. The participants were in the following age groups: 25–29 years (13.5%), 30–34 years (25.2%), 35–40 years (27.7%), 41–45 years (18.7%), 46–50 years (9.7%), and 51–55 years (5.2%). Regarding educational attainment, 10% of participants held an associate degree, 52% had a bachelor's degree, 33.5% held a master's degree, and 4.5% held a PhD. In terms of the number of children, 27.7% of the women reported having no children, 36.8% had one child, 21.9% had two children, and 13.5% had three children. As for the duration of marriage, 44.5% had been married for 3 to 5 years, 23.2% for 6 to 10 years, 21.3% for 11 to 20 years, and 11% for 21 years or more. Before testing the research hypotheses, the means and standard deviations of the key variables (marital instability, love schemas, and relational maintenance strategies) were calculated and are presented in Table 1. To assess the normality of the data before performing inferential analyses, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was conducted for all key variables. The results indicated that the distribution of scores for marital instability, love schemas, and relational maintenance strategies did not significantly deviate from normality ( $P > 0.05$ ), confirming the assumption of normal distribution.

**Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of research variables**

| Variable              | mean  | SD     |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|
| 1.Marital Instability | 1.19  | 10.211 |
| 2.Assurances          | 48.22 | 10.053 |
| 3.Openness            | 41.83 | 8.308  |
| 4.Conflict Management | 29.15 | 5.836  |
| 5.Sharing Tasks       | 27.95 | 4.839  |
| 6.Positivity          | 11.97 | 2.412  |
| 7.Advice              | 11.99 | 2.279  |
| 8.Social Networks     | 11.27 | 2.429  |
| 9.Secure Love schema  | 2.22  | 1.402  |

| Variable                    | mean | SD    |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|
| 10.Clingy Love schema       | 2.73 | 1.625 |
| 11.Skittish Love schema     | 2.52 | 1.629 |
| 12.Fickle Love schema       | 4.45 | 1.702 |
| 13.Casual Love schema       | 3.21 | 1.662 |
| 14.Uninterested Love schema | 4.80 | 1.488 |

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients among the examined variables. Statistically, there is a significant negative correlation between all seven relational maintenance strategies and marital instability ( $P < 0.01$ ). This result suggests that as the use of various relational maintenance strategies increases, marital instability decreases. Specifically, higher levels of assurance ( $R = -.663, P < 0/01$ ), openness ( $R = -.619, P < 0/01$ ), conflict management ( $R = -.552, P < 0/01$ ), sharing tasks ( $R = -.310, P < 0/01$ ), positivity ( $R = -.540, P < 0/01$ ) and advice ( $R = -.414, P < 0/01$ ) are associated with lower levels of marital instability. These findings underscore the importance of effective communication, shared

responsibilities, and maintaining a positive attitude in relationships.

The results also indicate significant correlations between several love schemas and marital instability. Specifically, secure love is negatively correlated with marital instability ( $R = 0.531, p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that individuals with a secure attachment style are less likely to experience marital instability. In contrast, clingy love schema shows a significant positive correlation with marital instability ( $R = 0.170, p < 0.05$ ), as does Casual love schema ( $R = 0.168, p < 0.05$ ). However, Skittish Love schema, Fickle Love schema, and Uninterested Love schema do not show significant correlations with marital instability.

**Table 2. Correlation coefficients among the examined variables**

| Variable                    | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8      | 9      | 10     | 11    | 12     | 13   | 14 |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|------|----|
| 1.Marital Instability       | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 2.Assurances                | .663** | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 3.Openness                  | .619** | .941** | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 4.Conflict Management       | .552** | .830** | .853** | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 5.Sharing Tasks             | .310** | .641** | .679** | .714** | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 6.Positivity                | .540** | .816** | .777** | .808** | .686** | 1      |        |        |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 7.Advice                    | .414** | .719** | .769** | .743** | .678** | .752** | 1      |        |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 8.Social Networks           | .209** | .400** | .466** | .472** | .543** | .469** | .473** | 1      |        |        |       |        |      |    |
| 9.Secure Love schema        | .531** | .658** | .626** | .557** | .357** | .519** | .495** | .302** | 1      |        |       |        |      |    |
| 10.Clingy Love schema       | .170*  | -.152  | -.143  | -.174* | -.181* | -.096  | -.148  | -.103  | .240** | 1      |       |        |      |    |
| 11.Skittish Love schema     | -.039  | -.098  | -.118  | -.079  | .218** | -.165* | -.129  | -.133  | .089   | .478** | 1     |        |      |    |
| 12.Fickle Love schema       | .073   | .011   | .011   | -.014  | -.002  | -.007  | .027   | -.047  | -.049  | .093   | .115  | 1      |      |    |
| 13.Casual Love schema       | .168*  | -.127  | -.122  | -.095  | -.087  | -.167* | -.136  | -.012  | .181*  | .160*  | .058  | .185*  | 1    |    |
| 14.Uninterested Love schema | -.106  | .245** | .212** | .123   | .121   | .145   | .179   | .047   | -.159* | -.004  | .161* | .356** | .140 | 1  |

\*\* $P < 0/01$ , \* $P < 0/05$

To evaluate the predictive power of relationship maintenance strategies and love schemas on marital instability, a stepwise regression analysis and multivariate correlation were conducted. Additionally, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to assess the overall statistical significance of the model, considering two primary predictors. Before conducting ANOVA, the homogeneity of variances assumption was tested using Levene's test, which indicated that the variances across groups were not significantly different ( $P > 0.05$ ), thereby meeting the ANOVA assumption of

equal variances. As presented in Table 3, the results revealed a statistically significant F-value for two of the maintenance strategies—Assurances and Sharing Tasks—indicating that these variables significantly contribute to the explanation of marital instability. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) showed that the Assurances strategy alone accounted for 44% of the variance in marital instability. Furthermore, the Sharing Tasks strategy contributed an additional 2% to the explained variance, suggesting a modest but meaningful improvement in the model's predictive power.

**Table 3. Summary of correlation coefficients and variance analysis**

|   | Model         | DF | F       | R                 | R square | Sig  |
|---|---------------|----|---------|-------------------|----------|------|
| 1 | Assurances    | 1  | 120.150 | .663 <sup>a</sup> | .440     | .000 |
| 2 | Assurances    | 2  | 65.343  | .680 <sup>b</sup> | .462     | .000 |
|   | Sharing Tasks |    |         |                   |          | .013 |

Table 4 shows the Beta coefficients in the regression equation, further illustrating that these two relational

maintenance strategies reached statistical significance in the regression model.

**Table 4. Beta coefficients in the regression equation**

| Variable                 | Unstandardized Coefficients(β) | STD. ERROR | standardized Coefficients(β) | T      | Sig  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|--------|------|
| Assurances               | -.436                          | .210       | -.429                        | -2.077 | .040 |
| Openness                 | -.275                          | .254       | -.224                        | -1.085 | .280 |
| Conflict Management      | -.014                          | .236       | -.008                        | -.057  | .954 |
| Sharing Tasks            | .375                           | .202       | .178                         | 1.855  | .056 |
| Positivity               | -.892                          | .541       | -.211                        | -1.648 | .102 |
| Advice                   | .677                           | .467       | .151                         | 1.450  | .149 |
| Social Networks          | .136                           | .306       | .032                         | .446   | .656 |
| Secure Love schema       | .932                           | .592       | .128                         | 1.573  | .118 |
| Clingy Love schema       | .974                           | .451       | .155                         | 2.159  | .033 |
| Skittish Love schema     | -1.150                         | .451       | -.183                        | -2.549 | .012 |
| Fickle Love schema       | .400                           | .382       | .067                         | 1.045  | .298 |
| Casual Love schema       | .181                           | .385       | .029                         | .471   | .638 |
| Uninterested Love schema | .348                           | .462       | .051                         | .752   | .453 |

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of relational maintenance strategies and love schemas in predicting marital instability. The findings indicated that all seven relational maintenance strategies were significantly and negatively correlated with marital instability. Among these strategies, assurances and sharing tasks were found to be significant predictors of marital instability. These findings are in agreement with the results reported by (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020; Arjmandi & Jalali, 2023; Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018; Momeni et al., 2014). The relationship between relational maintenance strategies and marital instability can be explained as a bidirectional one. On the one hand, the use of maintenance strategies contributes to strengthening marital stability; on the other hand, the existing level of stability within the relationship influences the type and extent of these strategies employed by the partners (Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018). Couples who are unable to effectively employ these strategies gradually enter a cycle of destructive interactions such as criticism, blame, contempt, and withdrawal (Arjmandi & Jalali, 2023; Bahari et al., 2021). This leads to a decline in the quality of the relationship and an increased likelihood of marital breakdown. In contrast, the conscious use of relationship maintenance strategies requires continuous attention to the quality of couple interactions, as neglecting these strategies can result in emotional coldness, reduced hope for relationship improvement, and ultimately lead to emotional detachment and marital instability (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020). Individuals whose partners use more relational maintenance strategies are more satisfied with their relationships, feel more encouraged in their

relationship, and report less doubt about the future of their relationship (Ghezelseflo et al., 2018; Jomenia et al., 2018). The results of studies indicate that couples who effectively use these maintenance strategies experience higher levels of commitment, relationship satisfaction, happiness, affection, and sexual satisfaction (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020; Ghezelseflo, 2020; Momeni et al., 2014). Assurance is one of the most effective factors in improving the quality of marital relationships (Jomenia et al., 2018). This strategy, through open discussions about commitment and the desire to continue the relationship, reduces feelings of insecurity and doubt, leading to the creation of trust, acceptance, and affection between partners. This process plays a crucial role in reducing negative emotions and increasing relationship stability (Momeni et al., 2014; Nimitz, 2011). Couples who interact positively with each other, allocate time for conversation, share responsibilities, and work towards common goals experience a deeper and higher quality relationship (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020; Momeni et al., 2014). Under such conditions, individuals are more likely to engage in cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at preserving and sustaining the relationship. A salient expression of this engagement involves participating in shared and meaningful tasks, which can foster greater relational cohesion and solidarity, ultimately enhancing the partners' sense of belonging and connectedness (Abbasi et al., 2025; Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020). On the other hand, the presence of stability, commitment, and hope for the future encourages couples to use more constructive communication strategies, significantly enhancing the quality and stability of their relationship (Belus et al., 2019).

The results of the study also showed that there is a significant negative correlation between the secure love schema and marital instability, while a significant positive correlation was found between the clingy and casual love schema and marital instability. However, no significant correlation was found between Skittish, Fickle and Uninterested love schemas and marital instability. Furthermore, none of the love schemas were able to predict marital instability. This finding is inconsistent with the results of studies by (Kolahdozipour et al., 2021; Mahdigholi et al., 2023; Sharifi et al., 2013; Yaarmohammadi vassel et al., 2021). In interpreting these findings, it can be argued that although some love schemas are correlated with marital instability, their predictive power may not be sufficient on their own. This may be due to the fact that marital instability is influenced by more complex factors, including communication patterns (Noroozi et al., 2019), emotional regulation skills (Soliemanian et al., 2016), attachment styles (Abooie Mehrizi et al., 2020), personality traits (Javadi Koma et al., 2024), and the level of intimacy between spouses (Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018). Moreover, Young and many others believe that while love may create an intense mutual attraction between a man and a woman, such love is often not enduring. Once the initial passion fades, a marital relationship founded solely on this type of love is likely to become unstable and ultimately fall apart (Mahdigholi et al., 2023).

The findings of this study indicated that relationship maintenance strategies significantly predicted marital instability, whereas love schemas did not show a significant effect. This suggests that how couples manage and sustain their relationship, through behaviors such as expressing affection, constructive conflict resolution, and maintaining commitment, plays a key role in reducing feelings of instability and strengthening marital longevity. In contrast, individuals' cognitive beliefs about love alone appear insufficient to explain relationship stability. Accordingly, clinical and educational interventions in the field of couples therapy should shift their focus from merely addressing romantic beliefs to enhancing practical behavioral skills that support relationship maintenance. One of the limitations of this study is the use of a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw causal conclusions. Additionally, the cultural characteristics of the sample may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. For future research, it is recommended to use qualitative methods and semi-structured in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the factors associated with marital instability, and to conduct studies in different populations.

## 5. Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

This article considered all ethical principles. The participants were informed about the research objective and its implementation phases. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and allowed to leave the study whenever they wished. Moreover, the research results would be available if they desired.

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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 have no conflicts of interest.

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