KMAN PUBLISHING INSTITUTE
Journal Website

Article history:
Received 08 July 2026
Revised 21 October 2026
Accepted 28 October 2026
Initial Publication 28 October 2026
Final Publication 01 January 2027

KMAN Counseling & Psychology Nexus

Volume 5, pp 1-18

E-ISSN: 3041-9026

# Predicting Emotional Divorce Based on Early Maladaptive Schemas and Frustration Tolerance in Married Women: The Mediating Role of Cognitive Flexibility

Mahsa. Izadi[1], Elham. Zohrabnia[1*], Zahra. Atarandovom[2], Mozhgan. Maghsoodi[1]

[1] Department of Counseling, ST.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
[2] Department of Counseling, ST.C, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: elham.zohrabnia@iau.ir

A r t i c l e  I n f o

**Article type:**
*Original Research*
**Section:**
*Family and Couple Therapy*

**How to cite this article:**
Izadi, M., Zohrabnia, E., Atarandovom, Z., & Maghsoodi, M. (2027). Predicting Emotional Divorce Based on Early Maladaptive Schemas and Frustration Tolerance in Married Women: The Mediating Role of Cognitive Flexibility. *KMAN Conseling and Psychology Nexus, 5*, 1-18.
http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.psynexus.6553

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to predict emotional divorce based on early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance in married women, with cognitive flexibility examined as a mediating variable. The present study was applied in purpose and descriptive-correlational in design, using partial least squares structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of married women aged 20–50 years residing in District 5 of Tehran, Iran, who had been married for at least two years. Using purposive sampling, 350 women were included in the final analysis. Data were collected using the Emotional Divorce Questionnaire, Young Schema Questionnaire–Short Form, Cognitive Flexibility Inventory, and Frustration Tolerance Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were analyzed in SPSS version 26, while the measurement and structural models were evaluated using SmartPLS version 4. The mediating effects were tested through bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. Early maladaptive schemas significantly and positively predicted emotional divorce ($\beta$ = .199, t = 6.038, p = .001), whereas frustration tolerance significantly and negatively predicted emotional divorce ($\beta$ = −.115, t = 2.309, p = .021). Early maladaptive schemas significantly and negatively predicted cognitive flexibility ($\beta$ = −.643, t = 12.376, p = .001), while frustration tolerance significantly and positively predicted cognitive flexibility ($\beta$ = .243, t = 2.749, p = .006). Cognitive flexibility significantly predicted emotional divorce ($\beta$ = .112, t = 3.299, p = .001). The indirect effect of early maladaptive schemas on emotional divorce through cognitive flexibility was significant ($\beta$ = −.072, t = 3.312, p = .001), as was the indirect effect of frustration tolerance through cognitive flexibility ($\beta$ = .027, t = 2.178, p = .029). The findings indicate that early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance are significant predictors of emotional divorce and that cognitive flexibility plays a meaningful mediating role in these relationships, highlighting the importance of targeting cognitive rigidity and frustration management in marital counseling interventions.

***Keywords:*** *Emotional Divorce, Early Maladaptive Schemas, Frustration Tolerance, Cognitive Flexibility, Married Women, Structural Equation Modeling*

## 1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most influential interpersonal contexts in adult life, shaping psychological well-being, identity development, emotional security, social functioning, and family stability. Although marital relationships are often established with expectations of intimacy, companionship, mutual support, and emotional reciprocity, these expectations may gradually weaken under the influence of chronic conflict, unmet emotional needs, maladaptive cognitive patterns, poor communication, and persistent psychological distress. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes that deterioration in marital functioning does not always immediately culminate in legal separation. In many couples, relational disengagement develops gradually while the formal marital bond remains intact. This condition is commonly conceptualized as emotional divorce, a state characterized by emotional detachment, reduced intimacy, weakened communication, diminished mutual responsiveness, and psychological distancing between spouses. Emotional divorce is particularly important because it may represent a prolonged and often hidden stage of marital breakdown in which couples continue living together while experiencing substantial emotional separation. Recent evidence has linked emotional divorce with dysfunctional interaction patterns, low emotional maturity, marital burnout, and impaired relational functioning (Karimi & Parandin, 2025; Pourrahimi et al., 2025).

Emotional divorce is a multidimensional relational phenomenon that extends beyond dissatisfaction alone. It may involve emotional numbness, reduced empathy, avoidance of meaningful interaction, diminished affection, loss of trust, and a growing perception that the marital relationship no longer provides emotional safety. Research among married women has shown that emotional divorce is associated with deficits in emotional awareness and expression, including alexithymia, suggesting that difficulty identifying and communicating emotions can contribute to progressive emotional estrangement within marriage (Al-Shahrani & Ahmed Hammad, 2023). Studies of women experiencing severe marital distress have similarly demonstrated that body image concerns, emotional maturity, and rejection sensitivity may be associated with emotional divorce, indicating that both intrapersonal vulnerabilities and interpersonal processes are relevant to its development (Marvi et al., 2026). Domestic violence and psychological maltreatment can further destabilize intimate relationships and contribute to divorce-related outcomes by undermining emotional security, trust, and relational attachment (Najafi Tavana & Jamshidi, 2023). These findings underscore that emotional divorce should be understood as the product of interacting cognitive, emotional, and relational mechanisms rather than as a single behavioral outcome.

Changes in marital satisfaction also do not necessarily occur in a smooth or linear manner. Longitudinal evidence indicates that marital satisfaction may fluctuate through both gradual and abrupt changes across the course of marriage, reflecting the dynamic nature of intimate relationships and the influence of stressful events, repeated interactions, and accumulated relational experiences (Joiner et al., 2024). This variability suggests that some couples may remain functionally stable for long periods before experiencing marked emotional deterioration, whereas others may gradually disengage through repeated patterns of disappointment, criticism, unmet needs, and reduced responsiveness. From this perspective, identifying stable psychological structures that predispose individuals to interpret marital experiences negatively may provide an important framework for understanding why some relationships are more vulnerable to emotional breakdown than others. One such framework is schema theory, particularly the concept of early maladaptive schemas.

Early maladaptive schemas are broad, pervasive cognitive-emotional patterns concerning the self, others, and relationships that typically develop through unmet emotional needs and adverse developmental experiences. These schemas influence how individuals perceive interpersonal events, interpret ambiguity, regulate emotions, and respond to perceived threats or rejection. When activated in intimate relationships, maladaptive schemas may bias attention toward negative relational cues, intensify sensitivity to abandonment or criticism, and promote dysfunctional coping responses such as avoidance, overcompensation, submission, hostility, or emotional withdrawal. Recent theoretical work has continued to expand schema therapy by integrating broader existential and emotional perspectives, emphasizing that maladaptive schemas are not merely dysfunctional beliefs but deeply organized structures shaping personal meaning and emotional experience (Laing, 2026; Prasko et al., 2026). Accordingly, schema activation within marriage may influence how spouses interpret conflict, intimacy, frustration, and relational disappointment.

A substantial body of evidence supports the relevance of early maladaptive schemas to couple functioning. Meta-



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analytic research indicates that maladaptive schemas are consistently associated with poorer indicators of romantic and marital relationships, suggesting that schema-related vulnerabilities play a meaningful role in relationship dissatisfaction and maladjustment (Ostovar, 2024). Similarly, research has found significant associations between early maladaptive schemas and romantic relationship satisfaction, reinforcing the proposition that maladaptive cognitive-emotional structures can undermine the quality of intimate relationships (Kover et al., 2024). In married women, maladaptive schemas have been shown to predict marital relationship quality and marital adjustment, demonstrating their relevance to both relational functioning and adaptation within marriage (Pourmoghadad et al., 2024). Structural models have also linked early maladaptive schemas to sexual dissatisfaction through irrational beliefs, indicating that schemas may affect multiple domains of marital intimacy through their influence on cognitive appraisal processes (Sadeghi et al., 2024). Research on women has further shown that early maladaptive schemas can mediate the association between intimate relationship experiences and sexual satisfaction (Güler & Özer, 2025).

Certain schema domains may be especially relevant to emotional divorce. Schemas involving disconnection and rejection may predispose individuals to expect abandonment, emotional deprivation, mistrust, social isolation, or defectiveness, thereby increasing the likelihood that ordinary marital disagreements will be interpreted as evidence of rejection or lack of love. Research has demonstrated that schemas in the disconnection and rejection domain are associated with psychological maltreatment and adverse developmental experiences, supporting their role as enduring vulnerability factors for later interpersonal dysfunction (Rajaei et al., 2024). Family boundary problems have also been observed among individuals with maladaptive schemas, suggesting that schema-related patterns may be embedded in broader dysfunctional family processes and interpersonal organization (Rezapur Chors et al., 2024). Furthermore, early maladaptive schemas have been shown to mediate the association between family communication patterns, self-differentiation, and emotional divorce, directly linking schema mechanisms to emotional disengagement within marriage (Askari & Ghasemifard, 2024). Recent evidence has also associated incompatible mental schemas and emotional divorce with marital infidelity among women attending counseling centers, further illustrating how schema-related vulnerabilities may interact with severe forms of marital dysfunction (Shoaa Kazemi et al., 2026).

Beyond schema-related vulnerabilities, the capacity to tolerate frustration may represent another important psychological determinant of marital functioning. Frustration tolerance refers to the ability to endure discomfort, delay gratification, manage unmet expectations, and remain psychologically regulated when goals or needs are obstructed. Marriage inevitably involves disagreement, compromise, unmet preferences, role strain, and emotional disappointments; therefore, individuals with limited tolerance for frustration may respond to ordinary marital stress with greater irritability, avoidance, rigid demands, or emotional withdrawal. Research on distress tolerance has shown that low capacity to tolerate negative emotional states is associated with greater vulnerability to relationship difficulties, whereas stronger tolerance may support adaptive conflict management and emotional regulation. In married women, distress tolerance has been identified as an important predictor of the tendency toward emotional divorce, with emotional failure experiences functioning as an additional explanatory mechanism (Parseh et al., 2025).

Frustration and distress tolerance are also closely related to broader psychological needs and maladaptive cognitive patterns. Research has demonstrated that early maladaptive schemas can predict both satisfaction and frustration of psychological needs, suggesting that schema activation may shape individuals' capacity to experience and manage unmet needs (Thimm, 2024). Within marriage, repeated unmet expectations may intensify schema activation and reduce tolerance for emotional discomfort, potentially creating reciprocal cycles of conflict and withdrawal. Studies of marital satisfaction have further shown that distress tolerance can function alongside cognitive flexibility as a mediating mechanism linking emotion regulation and conflict resolution to marital satisfaction (Yıldırım & Özkamalı, 2025). These findings suggest that frustration tolerance should not be viewed as an isolated trait, but rather as part of a broader regulatory system through which individuals manage interpersonal stress and adapt to changing relational demands.

A key construct within this regulatory system is cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility refers to the capacity to modify cognitive strategies, generate alternative interpretations, shift perspectives, and adapt behavior in response to changing situational demands. Individuals with greater cognitive flexibility are better able to consider multiple explanations for interpersonal events, revise


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ineffective responses, tolerate ambiguity, and perceive stressful situations as manageable. Conversely, cognitive rigidity may promote repetitive negative interpretations, inflexible expectations, and maladaptive reactions to marital conflict. Research in affective and social cognition has shown that cognitive flexibility is associated with more adaptive processing of social information and may protect against biased interpretations in emotionally challenging contexts (Deng et al., 2023). Cognitive flexibility has also been shown to moderate the association between social anxiety and depression, highlighting its broader protective role in emotional adjustment (Özdemir & Yıldırım, 2024).

The importance of cognitive flexibility in intimate relationships is increasingly supported by empirical evidence. Among young adults, cognitive flexibility has been identified as a mediator in the relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and attitudes toward marriage, suggesting that flexible thinking may facilitate healthier evaluations of intimate relationships (Ekinci & Canpolat, 2025). In marital contexts, cognitive flexibility and distress tolerance have been found to mediate the relationships of emotion regulation and conflict resolution with marital satisfaction, indicating that relational outcomes may depend partly on the ability to adapt cognitive responses during interpersonal stress (Yıldırım & Özkamalı, 2025). Psychological flexibility has similarly been emphasized as a resource for enhancing marital resilience, particularly within acceptance- and commitment-based interventions (Nallepalli & Murugesan, 2025). These findings support the view that cognitive flexibility may operate as a protective psychological mechanism that buffers the effects of maladaptive schemas and low frustration tolerance on marital functioning.

Evidence from intervention research further demonstrates that cognitive flexibility is modifiable rather than fixed. Acceptance and commitment therapy has been shown to improve cognitive flexibility and cognitive emotion regulation, suggesting that flexibility can be strengthened through interventions targeting experiential avoidance and rigid cognitive responses (Karimi et al., 2026). Mindfulness-based and virtual reality-assisted interventions have also demonstrated beneficial effects on cognitive flexibility among individuals with anxiety disorders, reinforcing its responsiveness to psychological treatment (Masoumi et al., 2025). Schema therapy-based training has similarly been associated with increased cognitive flexibility and self-compassion among divorced women, suggesting that modifying maladaptive schema processes may simultaneously enhance flexible cognitive functioning (Mirahmadi & Amini, 2025). Meta-analytic evidence from psychological interventions among Iranian children and adolescents further supports the general modifiability of cognitive flexibility across diverse populations and treatment approaches (Alipour, 2024). These findings are particularly relevant because they indicate that cognitive flexibility may not only explain marital outcomes but also represent a clinically meaningful intervention target.

Cognitive flexibility may be especially important in understanding how early maladaptive schemas affect emotional divorce. Schemas are inherently rigid cognitive-emotional structures, and their activation can narrow the range of interpretations available to an individual during interpersonal stress. A spouse with strong abandonment, mistrust, defectiveness, or emotional deprivation schemas may interpret ambiguous marital behaviors through a highly constrained cognitive framework. Greater cognitive flexibility may enable the individual to consider alternative explanations, reduce automatic schema-driven responses, and generate more adaptive relational behaviors. Conversely, lower flexibility may strengthen the translation of maladaptive schemas into emotional withdrawal, resentment, and relational disengagement. This theoretical link is consistent with evidence that schema-focused interventions can improve cognitive flexibility (Mirahmadi & Amini, 2025) and with research showing that maladaptive schemas are associated with numerous indicators of relationship dysfunction (Kover et al., 2024; Ostovar, 2024).

A similar mechanism may explain the association between frustration tolerance and emotional divorce. Individuals with greater tolerance for frustration may be more capable of enduring temporary dissatisfaction and considering alternative ways of responding to conflict. This capacity is likely to be supported by cognitive flexibility, which facilitates perspective shifting, adaptation, and problem solving. By contrast, low frustration tolerance combined with cognitive rigidity may lead to rapid escalation of negative affect, absolutistic thinking, and withdrawal from relational problem solving. Therapeutic studies showing that psychological flexibility contributes to marital resilience and that mindfulness-based approaches improve cognitive flexibility provide indirect support for this mechanism (Masoumi et al., 2025; Nallepalli & Murugesan, 2025). Moreover, interventions targeting emotional divorce have demonstrated that modifying dysfunctional attitudes and emotional processes can reduce marital burnout, indicating that cognitive-emotional


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mechanisms are central to improving distressed relationships (Pourrahimi et al., 2025).

The consequences of emotional divorce extend beyond the couple itself. Children living in families characterized by emotional divorce may be exposed to persistent emotional tension, low warmth, inconsistent parental interactions, and relational insecurity. Psychological interventions designed for children from families experiencing emotional divorce have therefore focused on improving adaptive outcomes such as hope, suggesting that emotional divorce can have broader family-level consequences requiring preventive and therapeutic attention (Sheikh Bahaei & Ghamarani, 2024). In addition, marital disengagement may intersect with emotional immaturity, dysfunctional interaction patterns, infidelity, rejection sensitivity, and other clinically relevant difficulties (Karimi & Parandin, 2025; Marvi et al., 2026; Shoaa Kazemi et al., 2026). These implications make the identification of modifiable predictors and mediating mechanisms particularly important for family counseling and marital intervention.

Despite the growing body of research on emotional divorce, early maladaptive schemas, distress tolerance, and cognitive flexibility, these variables have often been studied separately or in partial models. Previous research has examined schemas in relation to emotional divorce (Askari & Ghasemifard, 2024), relationship satisfaction (Kover et al., 2024), marital adjustment (Pourmoghadad et al., 2024), sexual satisfaction (Güler & Özer, 2025; Sadeghi et al., 2024), psychological need frustration (Thimm, 2024), and infidelity (Shoaa Kazemi et al., 2026). Other studies have focused on distress tolerance and emotional divorce (Parseh et al., 2025), or cognitive flexibility in relation to marital satisfaction and conflict regulation (Ekinci & Canpolat, 2025; Yıldırım & Özkamalı, 2025). At the same time, intervention studies indicate that cognitive flexibility can be strengthened through schema-focused, acceptance-based, and mindfulness-oriented approaches (Karimi et al., 2026; Masoumi et al., 2025; Mirahmadi & Amini, 2025). Collectively, these findings provide a strong theoretical basis for examining cognitive flexibility as a mediator that may explain how deep cognitive vulnerabilities and tolerance for frustration are translated into emotional disengagement within marriage.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to predict emotional divorce based on early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance in married women, with cognitive flexibility examined as a mediating variable.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### *2.1. Study Design and Participants*

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of research design. Structural equation modeling was employed to examine the hypothesized relationships among emotional divorce, early maladaptive schemas, frustration tolerance, and cognitive flexibility. More specifically, the study adopted a partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach because the conceptual model involved multiple direct and indirect relationships and included cognitive flexibility as a mediating variable. This analytical framework made it possible to investigate simultaneously the direct effects of early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance on emotional divorce as well as their indirect effects through cognitive flexibility.

The statistical population consisted of all married women residing in District 5 of Tehran, Iran, who were between 20 and 50 years of age and had been married for at least two years. District 5 was selected because of its relatively diverse social, cultural, and socioeconomic composition, which provided an appropriate context for examining psychological and marital variables associated with emotional divorce. Participants were selected using purposive, or judgmental, sampling. This non-probability sampling procedure was considered appropriate because the study required participants with specific characteristics, particularly sufficient experience of married life to allow relatively stable interpersonal and marital patterns to have developed. Moreover, no comprehensive sampling frame of all married women residing in District 5 was available, which made probability-based random sampling impractical.

Eligibility criteria included being female and legally married at the time of participation, being between 20 and 50 years of age, having resided in District 5 of Tehran for at least two years, having been married for at least two years, being able to read and write Persian, providing informed consent for participation, and reporting no acute psychiatric disorder that could substantially interfere with questionnaire completion. Participants were excluded if more than 10% of the items on any questionnaire were left unanswered, if the response pattern indicated indiscriminate or invariant responding, if an acute psychiatric condition was reported during the data-collection process, if the participant voluntarily withdrew from the study, or if the questionnaires


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were judged to be incomplete or invalid during data screening.

Potential participants were recruited from locations frequently attended by married women in District 5, including cultural centers, community health centers, local parks, large residential complexes, family counseling centers, and kindergartens. Recruitment announcements were also distributed through local social-media networks and neighborhood-based online channels. Women who volunteered to participate were initially screened according to the eligibility criteria. Among eligible volunteers, participants were purposively selected while attempting to maintain variation in age, educational attainment, and duration of marriage. Demographic characteristics including age, duration of marriage, educational level, employment status, and number of children were collected to describe the sample. Because the principal objective was to test a predictive psychological model rather than to compare demographic subgroups, these characteristics were not entered as control variables in the primary structural model.

The required sample size was determined with consideration of the complexity of the structural model and the requirements of structural equation modeling. Based on the recommendation of approximately 5 to 20 observations for each estimated model parameter and considering approximately 40 free parameters in the proposed model, a minimum sample of approximately 250 participants was considered necessary. A final sample size of 350 was targeted to improve statistical power, provide sufficient precision for estimation of indirect effects, and ensure adequate statistical stability for bootstrap analyses. To compensate for potentially incomplete, distorted, or unusable questionnaires, 400 questionnaire packages were distributed. Following screening and exclusion of invalid or incomplete responses, 350 questionnaires were retained for final statistical analysis.

Data were collected using a field-based survey procedure. Before questionnaire administration, the purpose and general procedure of the study were explained to potential participants, and informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their information would be treated confidentially and analyzed collectively. The questionnaires were administered either in person or electronically through a dedicated online link. The questionnaire package contained measures of emotional divorce, early maladaptive schemas, cognitive flexibility, and frustration tolerance. Prior to statistical analysis, the returned questionnaires were screened for excessive missing data, invalid response patterns, and other indications of inadequate data quality.

### *2.2. Data Collection Tools*

**Emotional Divorce Questionnaire.** Emotional divorce was assessed using the Emotional Divorce Questionnaire attributed to Gottman (1999). The instrument consists of 24 dichotomously scored items and is designed to assess signs of emotional disengagement and psychological separation within marital relationships. The questionnaire is unidimensional and does not contain separate subscales. Participants respond to each item using a yes/no format, with a “yes” response receiving a score of 1 and a “no” response receiving a score of 0. Consequently, total scores range from 0 to 24, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of emotional divorce and a higher risk of marital separation. Scores from 0 to below 8 indicate a relatively low probability of emotional separation, scores within the intermediate range indicate a moderate level of risk, and higher scores represent stronger indications of emotional divorce. A total of eight or more affirmative responses has also been suggested as an indicator that the marital relationship may be at risk and may warrant professional attention. The reliability coefficient reported for the original instrument was approximately .70. Iranian studies have reported stronger internal consistency coefficients, including a Cronbach's alpha of .93 reported by Mousavi et al. and an alpha coefficient of .802 reported by Jalalvand. Evidence for the face and content validity of the Persian version has also been reported through expert evaluation. In the measurement model of the present study, emotional divorce demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .956, composite reliability of .962, and an average variance extracted value of .584.

**Young Schema Questionnaire–Short Form.** Early maladaptive schemas were measured using the Young Schema Questionnaire–Short Form developed by Young (1998). The instrument used in this study contains 75 items representing five broad schema domains: disconnection and rejection, impaired autonomy and performance, other-directedness, overvigilance and inhibition, and impaired limits. The disconnection and rejection domain is represented by Items 1–25, impaired autonomy and performance by Items 26–45, other-directedness by Items 46–55, overvigilance and inhibition by Items 56–65, and impaired limits by Items 66–75. Participants evaluate the extent to which each statement describes them using a six-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 to 6, with



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higher scores reflecting stronger endorsement of maladaptive schema-related beliefs. The total score therefore ranges from 75 to 450. Scores can also be calculated separately for each schema domain, with higher domain scores indicating greater activation or prominence of maladaptive schemas within that domain. Strong endorsement of several items belonging to a particular schema, particularly responses at the upper end of the scale, can be interpreted as indicating a more salient schema pattern.

Psychometric investigations have generally supported the reliability and validity of the Young Schema Questionnaire. Smith, Joiner, Young, and Telch reported acceptable internal consistency for its schema scales and demonstrated meaningful associations with measures of psychological distress and personality pathology, providing evidence for construct validity. Waller and colleagues similarly reported satisfactory psychometric properties, with reliability coefficients for the major domains generally exceeding .80. The Persian version has also been extensively examined. Ahi evaluated the instrument among 387 university students and reported very high overall internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .97 for women and .98 for men. Zolfaghari, Fatehizadeh, and Abedi subsequently reported an overall Cronbach's alpha of .94 and coefficients ranging from .67 to .91 across the five major schema domains. In the present study, the measurement model showed strong reliability and convergent validity for the schema domains. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted were .979, .980, and .689 for disconnection and rejection; .971, .973, and .694 for impaired autonomy and performance; .948, .956, and .706 for other-directedness; .935, .947, and .719 for overvigilance and inhibition; and .939, .950, and .702 for impaired limits, respectively.

**Cognitive Flexibility Inventory.** Cognitive flexibility was assessed using the Cognitive Flexibility Inventory developed by Dennis and Vander Wal (2010). The instrument contains 20 items and is intended to assess individuals' perceived capacity to consider alternative interpretations and behavioral responses and to perceive difficult situations as controllable. Participants respond to the items using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, indicating strong disagreement, to 7, indicating strong agreement. Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, and 17 are reverse-scored. After appropriate reverse coding, the item scores are summed to obtain a total cognitive flexibility score ranging from 20 to 140, with higher scores indicating greater cognitive flexibility. The questionnaire encompasses three components described in the Persian adaptation as alternatives, control, and alternatives for human behavior. The alternatives component is assessed by Items 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, and 20; the control component by Items 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 15, and 17; and alternatives for human behavior by Items 8 and 10.

The original validation study provided satisfactory evidence for reliability and validity. Dennis and Vander Wal reported an internal consistency coefficient of approximately .90 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .71. Evidence of convergent validity was demonstrated by a correlation of approximately .75 with the cognitive flexibility measure developed by Martin and Rubin, while a negative association of approximately −.39 with the Beck Depression Inventory-II supported the expected relationship between greater cognitive flexibility and lower depressive symptomatology. The Persian version has also demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties. Iranian research has reported a test-retest coefficient of .71 and Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from approximately .75 to .90 for the total scale. Fazeli et al. reported an overall alpha coefficient of .75, with coefficients of .72 for alternatives, .55 for control, and .57 for alternatives for human behavior. Within the measurement model of the present study, the alternatives component yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .969, composite reliability of .973, and average variance extracted of .786. The control component yielded corresponding values of .949, .959, and .796, while the alternatives for human behavior component showed values of .847, .929, and .867, respectively.

**Frustration Tolerance Questionnaire.** Frustration tolerance was assessed using the questionnaire developed by Harrington (2005). The instrument consists of 35 items designed to assess individual differences in the capacity to tolerate frustration and aversive emotional experiences. It evaluates four principal dimensions: emotional intolerance, intolerance of distressing emotional experiences, achievement-related frustration, and entitlement. Responses are provided on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, representing strong disagreement, to 5, representing strong agreement. Total scores can range from 35 to 175. According to the scoring framework employed in the present study, lower scores indicate lower frustration tolerance, whereas higher scores reflect a greater capacity to tolerate frustrating or undesirable situations. Psychometric examinations of the questionnaire have supported its factorial validity, with item factor loadings generally



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exceeding .30 and significant relationships between the overall score and its constituent dimensions. The instrument was validated in Iran by Nabizadeh and Liaqat, who reported an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .90. Reliability coefficients for the four components were reported as .89 for emotional intolerance, .73 for intolerance of distressing emotional experiences, .75 for achievement-related frustration, and .85 for entitlement. Their factor-analytic findings supported a four-factor structure accounting for approximately 50% of the total variance. In the present study, frustration tolerance demonstrated exceptionally high internal consistency and convergent reliability in the measurement model, with a Cronbach's alpha of .995, composite reliability of .994, and average variance extracted of .837.

### *2.3. Data Analysis*

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. Initially, all returned questionnaires were screened for completeness and response quality. Questionnaires containing more than 10% missing responses on any measure, clearly repetitive or invariant response patterns, or other evidence of invalid completion were excluded. The remaining data were coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the distributions of the principal study variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were subsequently calculated to examine the preliminary magnitude and direction of the bivariate relationships among emotional divorce, early maladaptive schemas, frustration tolerance, and cognitive flexibility.

Before structural modeling, relevant statistical assumptions and data characteristics were examined. Distributional normality was evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The resulting significance levels indicated departures from normality for the principal variables. Linearity of the relationships was evaluated through scatterplots, while multicollinearity was examined using tolerance and variance inflation factor statistics. Tolerance values above .10 and variance inflation factor values below 10 were regarded as indicative of an acceptable absence of problematic multicollinearity. Because the data departed from multivariate normality, the proposed model contained a mediating construct and several simultaneous predictive relationships, and the principal objective of the study was predictive rather than exclusively confirmatory, partial least squares structural equation modeling was selected instead of covariance-based structural equation modeling.

The structural model was analyzed using SmartPLS version 4. Analysis proceeded through evaluation of both the measurement and structural models. The measurement model was evaluated using indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients above .70 were considered evidence of adequate internal consistency, while average variance extracted values above .50 were interpreted as supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also examined using appropriate PLS-SEM criteria, including the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The observed measurement indices supported acceptable reliability and convergent validity for all constructs included in the model, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding .70 and average variance extracted values exceeding .50.

Following confirmation of the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated by examining standardized path coefficients, coefficients of determination ($R^2$), predictive relevance using the Stone-Geisser $Q^2$ criterion, and model-fit indices applicable to PLS-SEM. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI) were also examined as supplementary indices of overall model adequacy. Direct paths from early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance to emotional divorce were evaluated together with their relationships with cognitive flexibility and the path from cognitive flexibility to emotional divorce.

The mediating role of cognitive flexibility was tested using a nonparametric bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. The significance of indirect effects was determined by examining the bootstrap estimates and their confidence intervals. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its 95% confidence interval did not include zero. This procedure allowed the study to evaluate whether early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance predicted emotional divorce indirectly through cognitive flexibility in addition to any direct relationships observed between the predictor and outcome variables. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level. Descriptive analyses and preliminary correlations were performed in SPSS version 26, whereas measurement-model assessment, structural-model


E-ISSN: 3041-9026

evaluation, and mediation analyses were conducted using SmartPLS version 4.

## 3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 350 married women residing in District 5 of Tehran. Regarding employment status, 300 participants (85.7%) were homemakers and 50 (14.3%) were employed. In terms of age, 141 participants (40.3%) were between 20 and 30 years old, 116 (33.1%) were between 30 and 40 years old, and 93 (26.6%) were between 40 and 50 years old. Regarding educational attainment, 127 participants (36.3%) had an associate degree or lower level of education, 144 (41.1%) held a bachelor's degree, 62 (17.7%) held a master's degree, and 17 (4.9%) held a doctoral degree. With respect to duration of marriage, 161 women (46.0%) had been married for less than 10 years, 173 (49.4%) had been married for 10–15 years, and 16 (4.6%) had been married for more than 20 years. Thus, the sample was predominantly composed of homemakers, women aged 20–30 years, participants with bachelor's-level education, and women who had been married for 10–15 years.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N = 350)*

| Variable | M | Median | Mode | SD | Variance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional divorce | 19.637 | 22.000 | 22.000 | 6.545 | 42.839 |
| Disconnection and rejection | 79.777 | 84.000 | 25.000 | 26.406 | 697.297 |
| Impaired autonomy and performance | 63.146 | 64.500 | 20.000 | 21.104 | 445.391 |
| Other-directedness | 32.006 | 34.000 | 10.000 | 10.772 | 116.040 |
| Overvigilance and inhibition | 30.851 | 31.000 | 10.000 | 10.607 | 112.511 |
| Impaired limits | 31.323 | 32.000 | 10.000 | 10.608 | 112.540 |
| Early maladaptive schemas, total | 237.103 | 238.500 | 75.000 | 78.198 | 6114.946 |
| Alternatives | 32.551 | 33.000 | 50.000 | 11.340 | 128.592 |
| Control | 27.649 | 28.000 | 40.000 | 8.218 | 67.541 |
| Alternatives for human behavior | 6.674 | 6.000 | 6.000 | 2.239 | 5.011 |
| Cognitive flexibility, total | 66.874 | 65.000 | 100.000 | 19.253 | 370.683 |
| Frustration tolerance | 118.811 | 140.000 | 35.000 | 47.339 | 2241.019 |

As shown in Table 1, the mean emotional divorce score was 19.64 (SD = 6.55). The overall early maladaptive schema score had a mean of 237.10 (SD = 78.20). Among the schema domains, disconnection and rejection had the highest mean score (M = 79.78, SD = 26.41), followed by impaired autonomy and performance (M = 63.15, SD = 21.10), other-directedness (M = 32.01, SD = 10.77), impaired limits (M = 31.32, SD = 10.61), and overvigilance and inhibition (M = 30.85, SD = 10.61). The mean total cognitive flexibility score was 66.87 (SD = 19.25), with mean scores of 32.55 (SD = 11.34) for alternatives, 27.65 (SD = 8.22) for control, and 6.67 (SD = 2.24) for alternatives for human behavior. Frustration tolerance had a mean of 118.81 (SD = 47.34). The greatest variability was observed for the total early maladaptive schema score and frustration tolerance, whereas alternatives for human behavior showed the lowest dispersion.

Prior to structural equation modeling, the distributional characteristics and relevant statistical assumptions were examined. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was statistically significant for emotional divorce, all five early maladaptive schema domains, the total schema score, the three cognitive flexibility dimensions, total cognitive flexibility, and frustration tolerance (all p = .001), indicating significant departures from normality. Emotional divorce showed the largest negative skewness (skewness = −2.022) and positive kurtosis (kurtosis = 2.554), whereas the remaining variables also showed varying degrees of negative skewness and positive or negative kurtosis. Because the assumption of normality was not satisfied, PLS-SEM was considered appropriate for evaluation of the proposed model. Linearity and multicollinearity were additionally examined before structural analysis, and no problematic violation was identified based on the prespecified tolerance and variance inflation factor criteria. Examination of the measurement model further indicated that indicators with inadequate loadings were removed during model refinement, while the retained indicators generally demonstrated standardized factor loadings above .70. The reliability and convergent validity indices for the retained constructs were also within acceptable ranges.



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**Table 2**

*Structural Model Fit and Predictive Power*

| Endogenous Construct | $R^2$ | GoF |
|---|---|---|
| Cognitive flexibility | .375 | .798 |
| Emotional divorce | .160 | .798 |

As presented in Table 2, the coefficient of determination for cognitive flexibility was $R^2 = .375$, indicating that early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance jointly explained 37.5% of the variance in cognitive flexibility. The $R^2$ value for emotional divorce was .160, indicating that the predictors included in the structural model explained 16.0% of the variance in emotional divorce. The overall goodness-of-fit index was .798. Based on the conventional PLS-SEM criterion according to which a GoF value greater than .36 represents strong overall fit, the obtained GoF suggested a strong overall fit of the proposed model.

**Table 3**

*Direct and Indirect Effects in the Structural Model*

| Path | β | SE | t | p | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Early maladaptive schemas → Emotional divorce | .199 | .033 | 6.038 | .001 | Significant |
| Frustration tolerance → Emotional divorce | −.115 | .050 | 2.309 | .021 | Significant |
| Early maladaptive schemas → Cognitive flexibility | −.643 | .052 | 12.376 | .001 | Significant |
| Frustration tolerance → Cognitive flexibility | .243 | .088 | 2.749 | .006 | Significant |
| Cognitive flexibility → Emotional divorce | .112 | .034 | 3.299 | .001 | Significant |
| Early maladaptive schemas → Cognitive flexibility → Emotional divorce | −.072 | .022 | 3.312 | .001 | Significant indirect effect |
| Frustration tolerance → Cognitive flexibility → Emotional divorce | .027 | .013 | 2.178 | .029 | Significant indirect effect |

As shown in Table 3, early maladaptive schemas significantly and positively predicted emotional divorce (β = .199, SE = .033, t = 6.038, p = .001), indicating that greater endorsement of maladaptive schemas was associated with higher emotional divorce. Frustration tolerance significantly and negatively predicted emotional divorce (β = −.115, SE = .050, t = 2.309, p = .021), indicating that higher frustration tolerance was associated with lower emotional divorce. Early maladaptive schemas also significantly and negatively predicted cognitive flexibility (β = −.643, SE = .052, t = 12.376, p = .001), whereas frustration tolerance significantly and positively predicted cognitive flexibility (β = .243, SE = .088, t = 2.749, p = .006). Cognitive flexibility, in turn, showed a statistically significant association with emotional divorce (β = .112, SE = .034, t = 3.299, p = .001). The bootstrapped mediation analysis further demonstrated a significant indirect effect of early maladaptive schemas on emotional divorce through cognitive flexibility (β = −.072, SE = .022, t = 3.312, p = .001). The indirect effect of frustration tolerance on emotional divorce through cognitive flexibility was also statistically significant (β = .027, SE = .013, t = 2.178, p = .029). Thus, cognitive flexibility significantly mediated the relationships of both early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance with emotional divorce.

**Figure 1**

*Final structural model with standardized path coefficients (β values).*

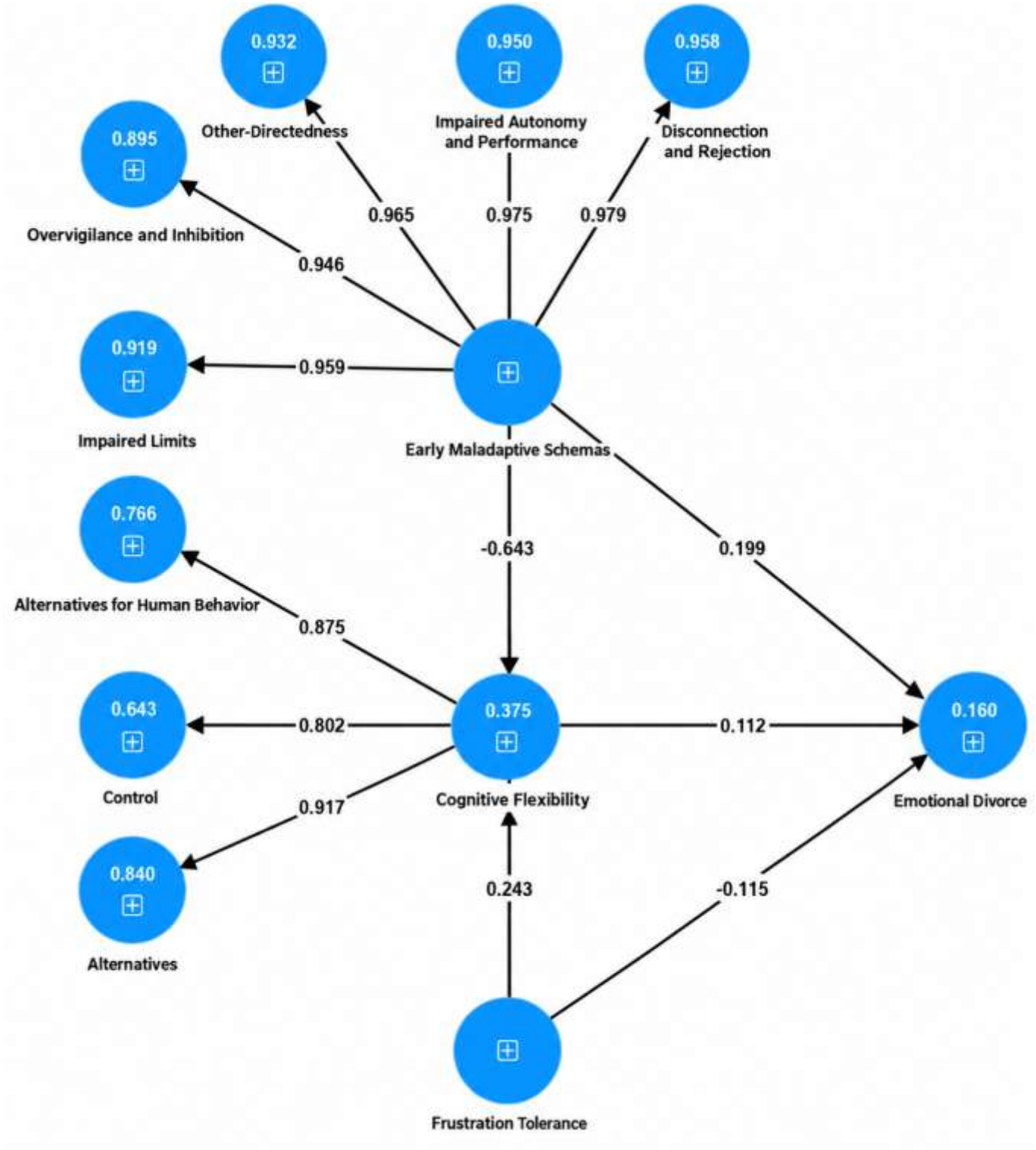
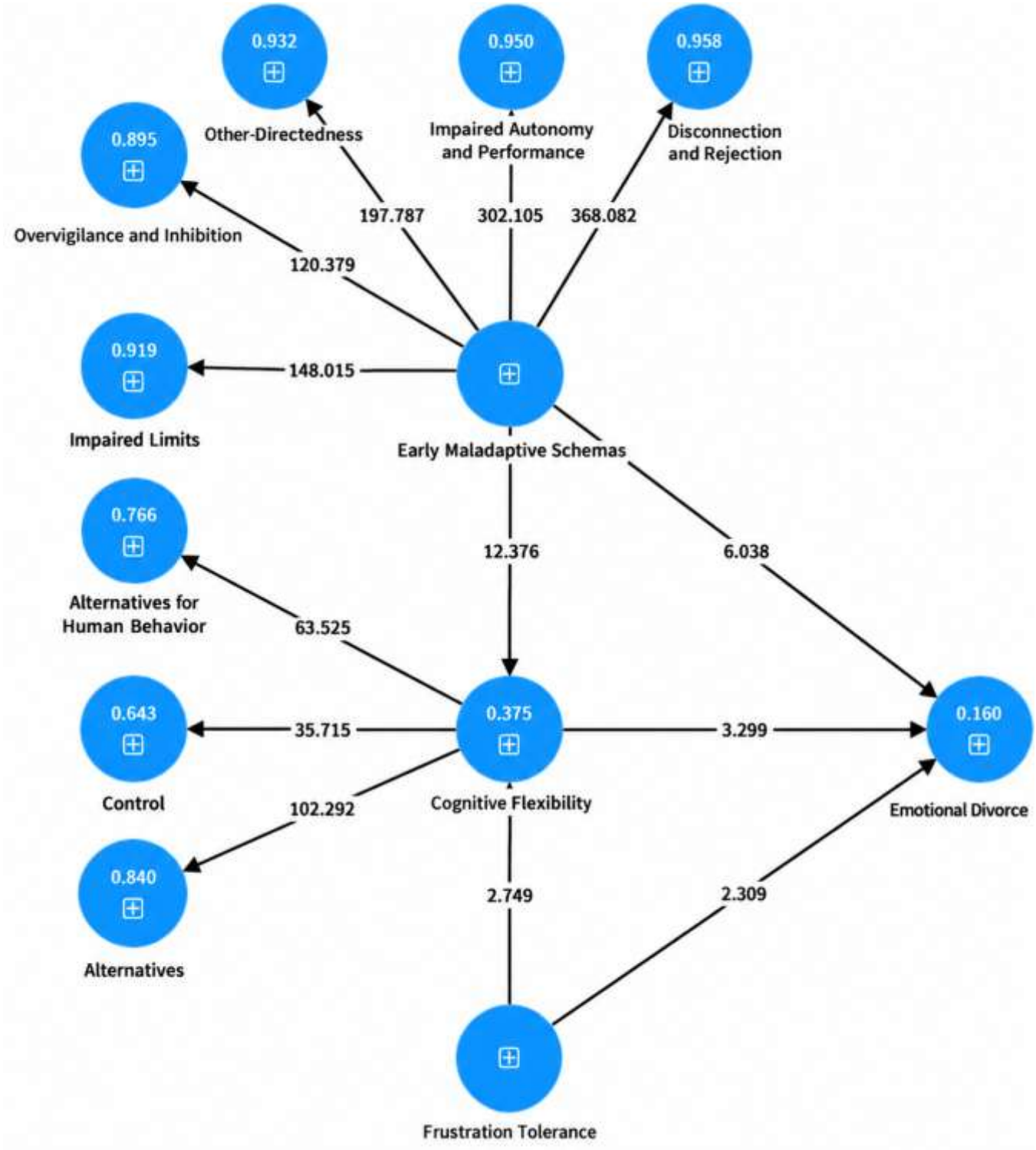


**Figure 2**

*Final structural model with bootstrapped t values for the hypothesized paths.*




## 4. Discussion

The present study examined the prediction of emotional divorce based on early maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance among married women, with cognitive flexibility considered as a mediating variable. The structural model indicated that early maladaptive schemas significantly and positively predicted emotional divorce, frustration tolerance significantly and negatively predicted emotional divorce, early maladaptive schemas significantly and negatively

predicted cognitive flexibility, and frustration tolerance significantly and positively predicted cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility was also significantly associated with emotional divorce. In addition, the indirect effect of early maladaptive schemas on emotional divorce through cognitive flexibility was statistically significant, as was the indirect effect of frustration tolerance on emotional divorce through cognitive flexibility. Collectively, these findings support the proposed conceptual model and suggest that emotional divorce is influenced not only by relatively enduring cognitive-emotional vulnerabilities but also by individuals' capacities to tolerate frustration and flexibly process stressful interpersonal experiences.

The finding that early maladaptive schemas positively predicted emotional divorce is consistent with a substantial body of research indicating that maladaptive cognitive-emotional structures are closely associated with difficulties in marital and romantic functioning. Previous studies have shown that early maladaptive schemas are related to lower relationship satisfaction, poorer marital adjustment, dysfunctional communication, and other indicators of relational distress (Kover et al., 2024; Ostovar, 2024; Pourmoghadad et al., 2024). The present finding is also consistent with research showing that early maladaptive schemas mediate the relationship between family communication patterns, self-differentiation, and emotional divorce (Askari & Ghasemifard, 2024). In addition, evidence that maladaptive schemas are related to marital infidelity and emotional divorce further supports the proposition that schema activation can contribute to severe deterioration in intimate relationships (Shoaa Kazemi et al., 2026).

From a schema-based perspective, this result can be explained by the tendency of early maladaptive schemas to shape how individuals interpret relational events and respond to interpersonal stress. Schemas related to abandonment, mistrust, emotional deprivation, defectiveness, dependence, subjugation, or unrelenting standards may cause ordinary marital disagreements to be experienced as confirmation of deeper fears about rejection, inadequacy, or lack of emotional security. Over time, repeated schema activation may produce defensive responses such as withdrawal, hostility, avoidance, emotional inhibition, or excessive demands, all of which can weaken intimacy and reciprocal responsiveness. Research on the disconnection and rejection schema domain has demonstrated its association with psychological maltreatment and adverse interpersonal experiences, suggesting that this domain in particular may create persistent expectations of rejection and emotional insecurity (Rajaei et al., 2024). Similarly, findings concerning dysfunctional family boundaries among individuals with maladaptive schemas suggest that schema-related patterns may influence the broader organization of close relationships and the ability to maintain adaptive intimacy (Rezapur Chors et al., 2024).

The positive association between early maladaptive schemas and emotional divorce is also compatible with studies linking schemas to other dimensions of marital functioning. For example, early maladaptive schemas have been found to predict marital relationship quality and marital adjustment among married women (Pourmoghadad et al., 2024). They have also been linked to sexual satisfaction through cognitive mediators such as irrational beliefs (Sadeghi et al., 2024), and to sexual satisfaction through the mediating role of schema processes in women's intimate relationship experiences (Güler & Özer, 2025). These findings imply that maladaptive schemas may not affect only one aspect of marriage but may influence emotional intimacy, communication, sexuality, trust, and conflict regulation simultaneously. When these negative patterns become chronic, emotional divorce may emerge as a broader manifestation of accumulated relational disengagement.

The present study also found that frustration tolerance negatively predicted emotional divorce. This finding suggests that married women with a greater capacity to tolerate frustration, disappointment, and unmet expectations were less likely to report emotional disengagement from their spouses. This result is consistent with previous findings showing that distress tolerance is associated with emotional divorce and may play a meaningful role in how married women respond to emotionally painful experiences within relationships (Parseh et al., 2025). It also converges with evidence that distress tolerance contributes to marital satisfaction by facilitating more adaptive emotion regulation and conflict resolution (Yıldırım & Özkamalı, 2025). Together, these findings indicate that the capacity to remain psychologically regulated in the presence of frustration may reduce the likelihood that marital stress escalates into persistent emotional withdrawal.

Marriage inevitably involves compromise, delayed gratification, disagreement, and periods in which personal expectations are not fully met. Individuals with low frustration tolerance may perceive such experiences as unbearable, unfair, or intolerable and may therefore react with greater anger, avoidance, impulsivity, or disengagement. By contrast, individuals with greater


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frustration tolerance are more likely to remain engaged with relational problems long enough to consider alternative responses, negotiate disagreements, and regulate negative affect. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature on psychological flexibility and marital resilience, in which adaptive tolerance of internal discomfort has been identified as an important resource for sustaining relationships during stressful periods (Nallepalli & Murugesan, 2025). It is also theoretically compatible with research indicating that early maladaptive schemas can contribute to psychological need frustration, suggesting that cognitive vulnerability and low tolerance for unmet needs may jointly intensify interpersonal distress (Thimm, 2024).

Another important finding was that early maladaptive schemas significantly and negatively predicted cognitive flexibility. This result indicates that stronger maladaptive schema patterns were associated with lower capacity to consider alternative interpretations, shift perspectives, and adapt cognitive responses to changing circumstances. Such a relationship is theoretically expected because early maladaptive schemas are by definition rigid, pervasive, and self-maintaining cognitive-emotional patterns. Once activated, they tend to direct attention toward schema-congruent information and reduce openness to alternative explanations. The finding is consistent with evidence that schema-based interventions can enhance cognitive flexibility, suggesting that reducing schema rigidity may improve the ability to generate alternative perspectives (Mirahmadi & Amini, 2025). The broader schema therapy literature likewise emphasizes the importance of modifying deeply entrenched cognitive structures in order to increase adaptive responding and psychological openness (Prasko et al., 2026).

The negative association between early maladaptive schemas and cognitive flexibility can also be understood through the mechanisms of cognitive bias and emotional processing. When a maladaptive schema is activated, the individual may interpret ambiguous marital behaviors through an inflexible cognitive filter. For instance, delayed communication by a spouse may be interpreted as rejection, a disagreement may be interpreted as evidence of lack of love, and criticism may be interpreted as proof of personal inadequacy. Cognitive flexibility would allow alternative interpretations of such situations, whereas schema rigidity limits this capacity. Research has shown that cognitive flexibility contributes to more adaptive social information processing and reduces rigid negative biases in emotionally relevant contexts (Deng et al., 2023). Similarly, cognitive flexibility has been identified as a protective factor in the relationship between social anxiety and depression, indicating that flexible cognitive processing may reduce the psychological impact of negative interpretations (Özdemir & Yıldırım, 2024).

Frustration tolerance was also found to positively predict cognitive flexibility. This finding suggests that individuals who can better tolerate unpleasant emotional states and blocked goals may also be better able to shift perspectives and generate alternative responses. This association is theoretically plausible because cognitive flexibility requires the individual to remain engaged with a difficult situation rather than react immediately to discomfort. If frustration is experienced as intolerable, cognitive processing may narrow and become more rigid; however, greater tolerance may create the psychological space necessary for reconsideration, perspective taking, and problem solving. This interpretation is supported by evidence demonstrating that cognitive flexibility and distress tolerance jointly contribute to adaptive marital functioning (Yıldırım & Özkamalı, 2025). It is also consistent with intervention studies showing that mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches can improve cognitive flexibility by increasing willingness to remain in contact with difficult internal experiences (Karimi et al., 2026; Masoumi et al., 2025).

The significant association between cognitive flexibility and emotional divorce represents another important aspect of the findings. Although cognitive flexibility is generally considered a protective psychological resource, the direction observed in the present structural model should be interpreted in relation to the scoring characteristics of the measures, the simultaneous effects of the other predictors, and the multivariate nature of the model. In general, previous literature suggests that greater cognitive flexibility is associated with healthier relationship functioning, better emotion regulation, and more adaptive conflict resolution. Cognitive flexibility has been identified as a mediator between relationship satisfaction and attitudes toward marriage (Ekinci & Canpolat, 2025), and it has also been shown to operate together with distress tolerance in explaining marital satisfaction (Yıldırım & Özkamalı, 2025). Similarly, psychological flexibility has been associated with greater marital resilience and improved capacity to remain engaged with relational challenges (Nallepalli & Murugesan, 2025). Therefore, the present finding should not be interpreted in isolation but in the context of the indirect pathways and the simultaneous


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contribution of maladaptive schemas and frustration tolerance.

The mediation analysis showed that cognitive flexibility significantly mediated the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and emotional divorce. This finding suggests that one mechanism through which maladaptive schemas influence emotional disengagement is by reducing the individual's ability to think flexibly about relational experiences. In other words, schemas may not lead directly to emotional divorce only through their content; they may also impair the cognitive processes required to reinterpret conflict, revise expectations, and generate adaptive alternatives. This finding is supported by studies showing that schema-focused interventions improve cognitive flexibility (Mirahmadi & Amini, 2025) and by research demonstrating the broad association of maladaptive schemas with poor romantic relationship outcomes (Kover et al., 2024; Ostovar, 2024). The result also extends previous structural research linking early maladaptive schemas to emotional divorce by identifying cognitive flexibility as a potentially important explanatory process (Askari & Ghasemifard, 2024).

A plausible explanation is that maladaptive schemas create rigid expectations regarding the self and the spouse, while reduced cognitive flexibility prevents those expectations from being revised in response to new evidence. A woman with strong mistrust or emotional deprivation schemas, for example, may selectively notice interactions that confirm perceived neglect while discounting behaviors that contradict the schema. When cognitive flexibility is low, alternative interpretations are less accessible, and repeated schema-confirming appraisals may gradually intensify resentment and emotional distance. Such a process can contribute to emotional divorce even when the legal and structural aspects of the marriage remain unchanged. This explanation is compatible with contemporary perspectives that conceptualize emotional schemas and maladaptive schemas as organized systems through which emotional experiences acquire meaning (Laing, 2026; Prasko et al., 2026).

The indirect effect of frustration tolerance on emotional divorce through cognitive flexibility was also significant. This result suggests that frustration tolerance may influence emotional divorce partly by affecting the capacity for flexible cognition. Women who are more capable of tolerating relational disappointment may remain cognitively open during conflict and may be more likely to consider alternative explanations, adjust expectations, and search for adaptive solutions. By contrast, low frustration tolerance may narrow cognition and reinforce inflexible responses, increasing the probability of emotional withdrawal. This result is consistent with research emphasizing the combined role of distress tolerance and cognitive flexibility in marital satisfaction and conflict management (Yıldırım & Özkamalı, 2025). It also fits with acceptance-based conceptualizations in which psychological flexibility enables individuals to tolerate distress without abandoning valued relational behavior (Nallepalli & Murugesan, 2025).

The present findings also have implications when considered alongside research on the broader consequences of emotional divorce. Emotional divorce has been associated with alexithymia, rejection sensitivity, emotional immaturity, and dysfunctional interaction patterns (Al-Shahrani & Ahmed Hammad, 2023; Karimi & Parandin, 2025; Marvi et al., 2026). Emotional disengagement may therefore reflect not merely a decline in marital satisfaction but a more comprehensive breakdown in emotional processing and interpersonal responsiveness. Moreover, the consequences can extend beyond the marital dyad. Interventions designed for children in families experiencing emotional divorce demonstrate that prolonged relational disconnection between parents may affect the psychological environment of the entire family system (Sheikh Bahaei & Ghamarani, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of identifying early cognitive and emotional risk factors before emotional divorce becomes entrenched.

## 5. Conclusion

The results are consistent with intervention literature demonstrating that the processes identified in this study are potentially modifiable. Cognitive flexibility can be enhanced through acceptance and commitment therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, and schema-focused training (Karimi et al., 2026; Masoumi et al., 2025; Mirahmadi & Amini, 2025). Meta-analytic evidence further indicates that psychological interventions can improve cognitive flexibility across different populations (Alipour, 2024). Similarly, emotion-focused couple therapy has been shown to reduce marital burnout and dysfunctional attitudes among couples experiencing emotional divorce (Pourrahimi et al., 2025). Therefore, the present model has practical relevance because it identifies psychological mechanisms that may be targeted through counseling rather than merely describing fixed risk characteristics.



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The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the cross-sectional correlational design does not permit causal conclusions regarding the relationships among early maladaptive schemas, frustration tolerance, cognitive flexibility, and emotional divorce. Although structural equation modeling allows simultaneous assessment of theoretically specified pathways, temporal precedence cannot be established without longitudinal or experimental data. Second, the participants were married women living in District 5 of Tehran and were selected through purposive sampling; therefore, the findings may not generalize to married men, couples from other geographical areas, rural populations, or individuals with different socioeconomic and cultural characteristics. Third, all principal variables were measured using self-report questionnaires, making the findings potentially vulnerable to social desirability, recall bias, common-method variance, and individual differences in interpretation of questionnaire items. Fourth, the study examined individual-level psychological variables but did not include potentially important relational factors such as spouses' attachment styles, communication behavior, marital conflict severity, sexual relationship quality, economic stress, or partner psychopathology. Finally, the relatively low proportion of explained variance in emotional divorce indicates that additional interpersonal, contextual, and dyadic variables likely contribute substantially to emotional disengagement.

Future studies should examine the proposed model longitudinally to clarify the temporal order through which maladaptive schemas, frustration tolerance, and cognitive flexibility influence the development or reduction of emotional divorce. Dyadic designs that simultaneously assess both spouses would be particularly valuable because marital processes arise from reciprocal interaction rather than the characteristics of one partner alone. Future research could also replicate the model among men, couples seeking therapy, individuals from different regions and cultural groups, and populations with varying durations of marriage. Incorporating observational assessments of couple communication, clinician-rated measures, or partner reports would reduce reliance on self-report data. Researchers should additionally investigate other potential mediators and moderators, including emotion regulation, attachment insecurity, self-differentiation, empathy, rejection sensitivity, psychological flexibility, marital forgiveness, resilience, and conflict-resolution styles. Experimental and intervention studies could test whether deliberate enhancement of cognitive flexibility or frustration tolerance weakens the relationship between maladaptive schemas and emotional divorce. Comparative models examining specific schema domains rather than only the overall schema construct may also clarify which schemas are most influential in emotional disengagement.

The findings suggest that marital counselors, psychologists, and family therapists should assess early maladaptive schemas, frustration tolerance, and cognitive flexibility when working with couples showing signs of emotional disengagement. Treatment may be strengthened by helping clients identify schema-driven interpretations of their spouses' behavior, distinguish current relational events from earlier emotional experiences, and generate alternative explanations for ambiguous interpersonal situations. Interventions designed to increase frustration tolerance may help clients remain engaged during conflict without rapidly withdrawing, retaliating, or interpreting temporary dissatisfaction as evidence that the relationship is irreparable. Cognitive flexibility training can be incorporated through perspective-taking exercises, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness practices, acceptance-based strategies, problem-solving tasks, and behavioral experiments. Because emotional divorce often develops gradually, screening for these psychological risk factors in counseling centers, family health services, and premarital or marital education programs may facilitate earlier intervention before emotional distance becomes entrenched. Couple-based interventions should also emphasize reciprocal communication, emotional validation, adaptive conflict management, and the development of flexible responses to unmet expectations and relational stress.

## Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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E-ISSN: 3041-9026