

Relationship between early maladaptive schemas and safe communications in married students

Fatemeh Mahmoudi¹, Abdolreza Mahmoudi², Roghieh Nooripour³

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1. **Correspondence to:** Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education & Psychology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

E-mail: fatemehmahmoodi1@yahoo.com

2. Department of Islamic Education, Faculty of Medicine, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

3. Department of Counseling, Faculty of Education & Psychology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

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Abstract

Early maladaptive schemata are patterns or profound themes which include memories, excitements, cognitions and physical emotions which are formed in childhood or adolescence, sustain in journey of life. This study aimed to investigate relationship between early maladaptive schemas and safe communications in students. 226 married students (113 women and 113 men) in 23-33 age range were selected and filled young schema questionnaire - short form with 75 items and 14 sub-scales and scale of safe communications including religious attitudes, efforts to improve relations and emotional relationship. Results indicated that there is significant negative relationship between early maladaptive schemas and total score of safe communications. As well as all aspects of early maladaptive schemas (except loss and disease vulnerability and sacrifice) have significant negative correlation with emotional relationship aspect and all aspects of early maladaptive schemas (except suffering and sacrifice aspect) have significant negative correlation with religious attitude. Moreover, all aspects of early maladaptive schemas (except loss and disease vulnerability and sacrifice) have significant negative correlation with effort to improve relations aspect. This study showed that early maladaptive schemas affect safe communications between couples in adulthood.

Keywords: Adult, Communications, Marriage, Student

Introduction

Continuum of human mental life, its changes and affecting factors is an issue that has long preoccupied the curious mind of human. The impact of childhood and the mechanism of this influence are important in many ways. One of these factors is schemata and especially early maladaptive schemata.

Early maladaptive schemata are patterns

or profound and universal themes which include memories, excitements, cognitions and physical emotions which are formed in childhood or adolescence, sustain in the journey of life, are about self and in the relationship with others and are especially highly dysfunctional [1,2]

Schemes are created because of unsatisfied

psychological core needs of childhood. These psychological cores needs include: 1) secure attachment to others, 2) autonomy, 3) freedom to express safe emotional needs and excitements, 4) spontaneity and fun and 5) realistic limits and self-control [3]. Child's emotional temperament in interaction with traumatic events in childhood can also lead to the formation of early maladaptive schemata and it is important because of the fact that children could be exposed to different conditions [4].

In Young's opinion [1], four types of early experiences affect formation of early maladaptive schemata, including: 1) Toxic frustration needs, 2) Traumatization and victimization, 3) Extreme satisfaction of needs and 4) Selective internalization and replication of important people of life [5].

On the basis of his clinical experiences, Young has introduced eighteen early maladaptive schemas and divided those into five wider areas based on five emotional needs [6]. "Schemata domains" includes the followings:

- 1) *The first domain:* Disconnection and Rejection (including schemata of Abandonment/ Instability, Mistrust/Abuse, Emotional Deprivation, Defectiveness/Shame, Social Isolation/ Alienation)
- 2) *The second domain:* Impaired Autonomy and Performance (including Dependence/ Incompetence, Vulnerability to harm or illness, Undeveloped Self /Enmeshment, Failure)
- 3) *The third domain:* Impaired limits (including Competence/Grandiosity, Self-discipline/ Insufficient self-control)
- 4) *The fourth domain:* Other-directedness (including Subjugation, Self-sacrifice, Approval seeking/ Recognition-seeking)
- 5) *The fifth domain:* Over vigilance and Inhibition (including Negativity/Pessimism, Emotional Inhibition, Unrelenting standards/ Hyper criticalness, Positives).

Many studies have investigated the role of schemes in making people vulnerable to a variety of disorders and have reached the conclusion that early maladaptive schemata have role in many disorders such as anxiety,

dysfunctional relationships, drug abuse, eating disorders, impaired panic with agoraphobia, chronic depression and social anxiety disorder [7-10].

Based on studies, schemata affect various fields of life such as intimate relationships especially in marriage. According to Bagarozzi's definition, Intimacy is the closeness, similarity and a personal romantic or emotional relationship with another person which requires a deep understanding of the other person in order to express thoughts and feelings that are used to as sources of similarity and proximity [11]. According to the mentioned definition, the components of intimacy can be divided into nine categories: emotional, psychological, intellectual, sexual, physical, aesthetic, social, recreational and temporal intimacy.

One of the performance component of the family and the psychological and emotional needs of the members is to create effective communication among family members. Clear and strong relationship between the family members may result in developing of emotions, values, emotional maturity and functionality in the family system. Effective communication is cornerstone of healthy and successful family. The main cores of a family are husband and wife, whose relationship together is influenced by various factors in the past (including the type of formed schemas) and influence children and future issues (e.g. marital satisfaction).

Undoubtedly, behavior is impressively influenced by cognitive factors within relationships' frame. The existence of incorrect and reality nonconforming thoughts about self and the world is the main reason to a variety of differences, especially in couples' relationship, which leads the relationships to be cool, disappointment and mistrust [12]. These wrong thoughts can be caused by the maladaptive schemas.

Investigation of safe communications between couples and its influence ability by early maladaptive schemata are important aims of current study.

Although the relationship between early maladaptive schemata with some variables, such as Marital intimacy, and Life satisfaction have been investigated but relationship between early maladaptive schemata and safe communications still remains unclear [13-17].

This necessity to conducting current study can be expressed in the following categories:

1- The theoretical necessity: the interaction of parents with children is an infrastructure of formation of schemata for children. These major conceptual schemata will be effective in adulthood and real life situations. Therefore, in order to investigate the schemata, it is important to evaluate how they are formed by the interaction of parent – child, how adults act and also those effects on life. The importance of these issues will be clearer when early maladaptive schemata and those detrimental long-term effects are investigated.

2- The practical necessity: if by reviewing researches like current study, it is concluded that schemata especially early maladaptive schemata, influence variables like safe communications and the effect is striking, now programs should be prepared to improve situations. The program covers two wide ranges; first alternatives should be planned and used to improve interaction of parent-child and prevent the formation of early maladaptive schemata. Second, alternatives should be planned to reform formed and stabilized schemata in adulthood which is one of the effective approaches in the context of schema therapy approach. Both ranges are notable due to prevention of negative, damaging, time consuming and costly effects of unsafe schemata and early maladaptive schemata. Researchers evaluated the effectiveness of schema model on improvement of marital satisfaction and concluded that early maladaptive schemata are associated with marital satisfaction. Also schema-based intervention was effective in improving marital satisfaction [18].

The research's questions are as follow:

- 1- Do early maladaptive schemata have relationship with safe communications?
- 2- Which of early maladaptive schemas are more important in predicting safe communications?

Method

The population of the current study was all married students at Tehran University in 2011-2012 who were at age range of 23-33. The participants included 226 married students from Tehran University whom were selected using simple random sampling. The participants was selected according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. inclusion criteria were: 1- Being interviewed at least after one year of marriage, 2- age 23-33, 3- the respondent lives with his/her spouse during the interview and 4- the respondent is prepared to fill out the questionnaire and exclusion criteria consisted of: 1- History of psychiatric disorders, 2- previous marriage and 3- existence of diseases affecting the sexual relations.

The study design was descriptive and correlational upon which the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and safe communications were examined.

Data collecting tools were Schema Young Questionnaire-Short Form (SYQ-SF) [1] and Safe Communications Scale [19].

The Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF): The original version of Schema Questionnaire was developed by Young to measure early maladaptive schemas, and it was a 205-item self-report measure designed to assess most of the 18 schemas [1]. The Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF) was also designed to measure 15 maladaptive schemas and it is briefer (75-item) instrument. Relative to the original 205-item version, the 75-item version of Young Schema Questionnaire clearly has practical advantages for the clinician or researcher who wishes to investigate the core beliefs of individuals with psychological disorders [19-24]. Participants are instructed to rate each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6, where 1 is “completely untrue of me” and 6 “describes me perfectly”. It was found that YSQ-SF has high internal consistency and that it may be used with confidence in place of the more unwieldy 205-item version [20-25]. Soygüt et al.’s findings showed that the factor

structure of the Turkish version of the YSQ-SF was generally consistent with previous studies and that it had acceptable levels of reliability and validity [25]. In addition, Pearson coefficients for sub-scales varied between $r=0.66$ and $r=0.82$ ($p<0.01$). According to the test-retest reliability analysis, Pearson's correlation coefficients for schema domains varied between $r = 0.66$ and $r = 0.83$ ($p<0.01$). These results show that the coefficients obtained are significant and in the acceptable range. The internal consistency coefficient for the YSQ-SF3 sub-scales varied between $\alpha=0.53$ and $\alpha=0.81$. Thus it is possible to say that the scale has a medium level of internal consistency.

Safe communications scale: it was designed by Bahrami about relationships and obligations of spouses to each other and has been evaluated by a number of professors. This scale is a general evaluation of sexual; relationships such as emotional relations, personal attempts to improve relations, religious attitude in marital relationship, emotional relationship management and spouse-base management [26]. In general, the scale will evaluate the following sub-components such as: honesty, respect, compassion, cooperation, forgiveness, patience, good suspect, consultation, expectation on the basis of capabilities, covering of defects, humor, self and spouse's anger management, hospitality, traveling with spouse's family, giving advice to worship God, harmony with spouse, attention to growth and development and evolution of each other, attention to each other's rights and obligations, being proud of each other, expression of problems and internal emotions, contentment, good behavior to deal with matters, mutual understanding, obey the husband, attention to the effect of sin in relationships [26].

The scale has 68 questions in three sections; the first section consists of 46 questions that are common to both men and women, the second section consists of 10 questions that only women answer, the third section includes 9 questions that only men answer. The last three questions are also common between men and women. The questionnaire is a five-

choice type (which is actually a Likert-type attitude). The validity of this scale has been evaluated using the internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha. The results have shown the scale is high value as well as that alpha content (0.93).

After collecting research data, SPSS-19 statistical program has been used to analyze the data with significance level at <0.05 .

Results

The participants included 113 women (mean age of 26) and 113 men (mean age of 28).

The data sample of education is as follows: 53.1% of women ($n=60$ participants) and 6.2% of men (7 participants) had bachelor degree, 33.6% of women (38 participants) and 33.6% of men (38 participants) had master's degree and 13% of women ($n=15$), 2.60% of men (68 participants) had PhD.

Also the most frequent education of subjects in women category is Bachelor of Science and in men category is PhD (Table 1).

Based on Table1, Schema of The strict criteria has the highest mean (18.11) among early maladaptive schemas' aspects.

Table 2 shows descriptive indicators of participants in aspects of safe communications.

The first question: Do early maladaptive schemata have relationship with safe communications?

As Table 3 showed there is significant negative relationship between Early maladaptive schemas and total score of safe communications ($r=-0.27$, $p=0.05$). As well as all aspects of early maladaptive schemas (except loss and disease vulnerability and sacrifice) have significant negative correlation with emotional relationship aspect and all aspects of early maladaptive schemas (except the suffering and sacrifice aspect) have significant negative correlation with religious attitude. Moreover, all aspects of early maladaptive schemas (except loss and disease vulnerability and sacrifice) have significant negative correlation with the effort to improve relations aspect.

Table 1 Descriptive characteristics of participants in terms of early maladaptive schemas' aspects (N=226)

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Total Score of early maladaptive schemas	160	45.83	75	318
Emotional deprivation	10.08	5.29	4	29
Abandonment	11.43	5.18	5	29
Mistrust/ Abuse	10.30	4.79	4	29
Social isolation/ Alienation	8.85	4.27	4	26
Defectiveness/ Shame	7.25	3.49	5	23
Failure	7.95	4.05	5	23
Dependence/ Incompetence	8.11	4.88	5	30
Vulnerability to damage and disease	7.95	4.91	4	30
Involved	8.53	4.58	3	30
Obey	8.50	4.04	5	30
Sacrifice	15.41	5.33	4	28
Emotional inhibition	11.13	5.40	5	25
The strict criteria	18.11	6.25	5	29
Entitlement	14.37	5.37	5	29
Restraint / Inadequate self discipline	12.03	4.80	4	24

Table 2 Descriptive indicators of participants in aspects of safe communications (N=226)

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Total score of safe communications	137.90	16.16	77	172
Emotional relationship	84.92	10.37	56	109
Efforts to improve relations	33.37	5.09	10	45
The religious attitudes on marital relationship	19.68	5.39	7	57

The second question: Which of early maladaptive schemas are more important in predicting safe communications?

Stepwise regression was to determine the role of early maladaptive schemas in prediction of safe communications used to as was shown in Table 4.

As Table 4, in the first step isolation is entered into regression equation. This variable explains 0.07 percent of variance in safe communications.

In the next step variables were entered in order to importance in the equation and overall 22% of the variance predicted normal relations. Deprivation, failure, dependency and self-control variables had no significant role in predicting safe communications and so were not entered to equation.

Eleven schemes of isolation, prevention, vulnerability, obey, sacrifice and mistrust,

Defect, Entitlement, Criteria, Abandonment and Involved had more determining role in prediction of safe communications respectively.

Discussion

Safe marital relations and interactions are keys of desired family process; in other words when a family uses effective patterns of communication, it has a clear understanding of the content and intent of each message, satisfies psychological demands of family and strengths couple's relationship and participation in society perpetuates [27]. Dynamic connections, provides a sense of safety for couples in intimate relationships. Accordingly therapists' family often treat communication skills' defect and believe that many of the issues will be resolved by improving communication between

Table 3 Correlation matrix of early maladaptive schemas and safe communication

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Total Score of early maladaptive schemas	1																			
emotional deprivation	0.67**	1																		
Abandonment	0.53**	0.43**	1																	
mistrust / abuse	0.67**	0.49**	0.33**	1																
social isolation / alienation	0.69**	0.44**	0.35**	0.49**	1															
defectiveness / shame	0.69**	0.43**	0.35**	0.47**	0.68**	1														
failure	0.73**	0.54**	0.44**	0.43**	0.52**	0.61**	1													
Dependence / incompetence	0.87**	0.49**	0.50**	0.49**	0.63**	0.70**	0.73**	1												
vulnerability to damage and disease	0.69**	0.48**	0.38**	0.51**	0.56**	0.57**	0.59**	0.72**	1											
Involved	0.62**	0.34**	0.41**	0.43**	0.35**	0.44**	0.58**	0.64**	0.58**	1										
ObeY	0.72**	0.45**	0.42**	0.46**	0.37**	0.52**	0.55**	0.64**	0.49**	0.50**	1									
Sacrifice	0.46**	0.17**	0.08*	0.22**	0.16**	0.18**	0.16**	0.12**	0.03**	0.11**	0.30**	1								
Emotional Inhibition	0.65**	0.38**	0.20**	0.30**	0.38**	0.39**	0.42**	0.54**	0.37**	0.27**	0.45**	0.34**	1							
The strict criteria	0.49**	0.17**	0.11**	0.24**	0.14**	0.12**	0.12**	0.10**	0.07**	0.10**	0.26**	0.48**	0.37**	1						
Entitlement	0.56**	0.29**	0.04	0.35**	0.41**	0.22**	0.21**	0.22**	0.17**	0.11**	0.23**	0.41**	0.34**	0.55**	1					
Restraint / inadequate self-discipline	0.58**	0.35**	0.12**	0.24**	0.31**	0.28**	0.32**	0.26**	0.27**	0.21**	0.40**	0.37**	0.33**	0.41**	0.53**	1				
Total score of safe communications	0.27**	0.21**	0.16**	0.22**	0.27**	0.22**	0.20**	0.22**	0.05**	0.05**	0.25**	0.03**	0.26**	0.06**	0.21**	0.15**	1			
religious attitudes	0.18**	0.12**	0.09**	0.10**	0.25**	0.16**	0.05**	0.20**	0.06**	0.03**	0.07**	0.02**	0.16**	0.04**	0.31**	0.13**	0.58**	1		
Emotional relationship	0.25**	0.19**	0.14**	0.23**	0.26**	0.27**	0.22**	0.20**	0.04**	0.06**	0.26**	0.05**	0.30**	0.04**	0.12**	0.10**	0.90**	0.31**	1	
efforts to improve relations	0.18**	0.19**	0.15**	0.13**	0.06**	0.12**	0.14**	0.10**	0.04**	0.07**	0.21**	0.01**	0.06**	0.09**	0.15**	0.16**	0.70**	0.19**	0.47**	1

* Correlation is significant at the level 0.01

** Correlation is significant at the level 0.01

couples [28]. Since the components of safe communications and transactions are in accordance with Islamic viewpoint and religious attitudes, studies have well shown the effects of religious-based communications on adjustment and marital satisfaction. Because religion includes guidelines for life and provides a system of beliefs and values that these characteristics can affect marital life [29]. For example, Sullivan, Orathinkal and Vansteewegen showed that people who have higher levels of religiosity than those with lower religious level, have greater marital stability and are more satisfied with their marriages [30,31]. In another study, Hansen examined marital adjustment of 64 couples and found that religious relates positively to higher adjustment, happiness and satisfaction, also concluded that religion is an important factor to prevent divorces [32]. Also based on his studies in the field of family mental health, Robinson reported that religious orientation can affect the quality and stability of marriage through moral guidance and social, emotional and spiritual supports [33]. Ahmadi Nodeh also reached the conclusion that marital adjustment among people who have very religious adherence, is significantly more than those who have a little [34].

The formation of schemata is one of the major problems in childhood and effective ones on different issues in adulthood such as safe communications. Remedy to improve schemata formation and modification of probabilistic formed early maladaptive schemata is one of important issues.

Strength and stability of a family depends on marriage and stable and fundamentally marital relationship, hence any instability and laxity in marital satisfaction or existence of an unhappy marriage will threaten the stability of family besides disturbs couples' mind [26]. Relationship is one of the factors and components related to conflicts and spouses' marital satisfaction in pathology of marriage and marital life. Communication problems and poor skills in effective communications have been proved as a major source of conflicts and family problems and marital conflicts [11,35]. If couples do not discuss their problems with

each other, they will not reach to a positive solution they both agreed, and this can provide stresses. It must be acknowledged that the root of most problems begins from context of inappropriate marital relationships [26]. Indeed, couples can improve their own relationships and resolve their issues and problems in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and good willing by learning and applying communication skills [36].

In order to explore safe communications, safe communication scale has been used [37]. According to question; the findings showed that there is a negative and significant correlation between most aspects of early maladaptive schemata and most aspects of safe communications (emotional relationship (emotional management), attempts to improve relationships (spouse-based relation) and religious attitudes in marital relationship); increase in early maladaptive schemata cause decrease in safe communication rate and vice versa.

As about the second question, we have achieved these results that

Eleven schemes of isolation, prevention, vulnerability, obey, Sacrifice and mistrust, defect, entitlement, criteria, abandonment and involved had more determining role in prediction of safe communications respectively.

The one of study's limitations is that since the population of this study is limited to married students of Tehran University, so this could be restrictions on the generalization of the results and interpretation of variables. Also, design of this study was correlation that some limitations should be considered for cause of studied variable.

Conclusion

Considering the fact that early maladaptive schemata and safe communications are affected by various factors including individual, family, and cultural and etc., it has been proposed for future research to assess other affecting aspects on these variables to use those studies' results to further improve the psychological intervention.

Also according to the importance of type

of created schemata, children's education and training can be useful for parents to learn and according to the importance of type of interaction and communications between couples and the necessity of safe communications, it is proposed to design and carry out appropriate educational programs for young boys and girls who are going to get married.

Contribution

Study design: FM, AM, RN

Data collection and analysis: FM, RN, AM

Manuscript preparation: FM, AM, RN

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Conflict of Interest

"The authors declare that they have no competing interests."

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