

Research Paper: The Association between Attachment Styles and Marital Adjustment: The Moderating Role of Defense Mechanisms



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ABSTRACT

Background: Researches on attachment theory shows that attachment styles influence marital adjustment. However, some psychological factors moderate this correlation. The present study was aimed to examine the moderating role of defense mechanisms in the association between attachment styles and levels of marital adjustment.

Methods: This descriptive-correlational study collected data from a convenience sample of 300 married individuals (150 men, 150 women) using the Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI), Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS) and Defense Styles Questionnaire (DSQ).

Results: The results showed that the secure attachment style and mature defense mechanisms were significantly correlated with marital adjustment. Avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles and immature defense mechanisms were negatively correlated with marital adjustment. The neurotic defense mechanism was not significantly correlated with marital adjustment. The results showed that mature and immature defense mechanisms acts as a moderator in the association between secure attachment style and marital adjustment. Besides, mature defense mechanisms moderated the association between avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment. Furthermore, immature defense mechanisms had moderated the association between ambivalent attachment style and marital adjustment ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: Therefore, based on the results, the attachment styles and defense mechanisms would predict marital adjustment.

Introduction

Marital adjustment has been proposed as one of the most important factors in determining the permanency of marital relation-

ship [1]. In addition, marital adjustment influences on different aspects of life quality, such as physical and mental health, life and job satisfaction, the educational success of children and longevity [2]. Due to the importance of marital adjustment in life, numerous

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studies have been conducted on this regard and shown that various factors, including social, psychological, personal and demographic characteristics, influence marital adjustment [3].

Attachment style is one of the effective factors in marital adjustment. Hazan and Shaver [4] reported that attachment styles predict marital quality and attitude toward intimate relationships. They proposed three adult attachment styles, including secure, avoidant and ambivalent. These attachment styles had been suggested by Ainsworth et al. [5].

Studies have shown that individuals with secure attachment style have better relations and problem-solving skills. Besides, they enjoy better mental and physical health. In addition, secure attachment style is more compatible with marital adjustment [6,7]. According to the available researches, one of the investigated subjects in the present study was the association between attachment styles and marital adjustment levels [6,7]. However, to identify whether this is a simple relationship or is modified by other variables, recent studies have investigated the moderating variables of attachment styles on marital adjustment levels.

In the present study, defense mechanisms are assumed to play a moderating role in the association between attachment styles and marital adjustment. Defense styles could have moderating and mediating role in early negative relations and psychopathology of adults. Defense mechanisms are automated psychological processes that protect individuals against anxiety and internal-external stressful events. These mechanisms regulate mental experiences related to individuals' thoughts, feelings and painful emotions and protect them against anxiety and the awareness of internal-external dangers or stresses [8]. Andrews et al. classified defense mechanisms into three categories including mature, immature and neurotic based on the defense mechanisms proposed by Vaillant [9,10].

Both attachment styles and defense mechanisms originate in childhood, act under conscious mind, and become active under stressful conditions [11]. There is a significant relationship between immature defense mechanisms and lower psychological and physical health such as depression and stress. However, mature defense mechanisms are associated with mental and physical health and more life adjustment in adults [12].

Studies have also shown that individuals who use mature defense mechanisms perform more efficiently when facing problems, have more adaptable behavior and enjoy a higher life quality as well as more mari-

tal adjustment [13]. On the other hand, Immature defense mechanisms are more commonly accompanied with depression and unadjusted behavior. According to recent studies, using mature defense mechanisms predicts psychological adjustment and physical health [14].

Lindblom et al. demonstrated that individuals with insecure attachment style use immature and neurotic defense mechanisms more often [15]. Attachment styles are considered as defense actions which occur when the attachment system is activated or inactivated [16]. If attempts made by an individual to achieve love and support are not successful, the attachment system gets inactivated and the individual uses defense strategies characterized by avoidance (avoidant attachment styles). Strategies that emerge due to an individual denial, weakness or failure in having others' attention and its following emotional involvement, as well as using defense mechanisms which result from inactivation of attachment and denial system are observed among individuals with avoidant attachment style [16]. In individuals with ambivalent attachment style, attachment system is more active. They make excessive effort to get others' attention which will result in defense styles such as identification and projective identification; thus, their boundaries with others are eliminated. In projective identification defense mechanism, they project their own characteristics to others and thus identify others with themselves more often. This way, activation and inactivation of the attachment system will result in people's adjustment to stressful conditions [17]. In addition, using of immature defense mechanisms in people with ambivalence attachment style, those who have more self-criticism, is more than others [18].

The attempts to recognize the moderating factors of the relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment will assist the researchers to achieve their goal in maximizing marital adjustment. Due to the lack of researches in this area in Iran, this study could approximately fulfil the research gap and practically results in future researches and psychotherapies. Therefore, the present study was carried out aiming at determining the moderating role of defense mechanisms in the association between attachment styles and marital adjustment among couples in Isfahan.

Methods

The present study used a descriptive-correlational method. The target population in the study included all couples of Isfahan in 2014. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall, a sample of 150 couples (150 men and 150

women) were determined [19]. With regard to the panel attrition, 150 couple were selected through convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria consisted of the following: having 18-60 years old, passing at least 2 years of marriage and no asking for divorce. The mean age of all the participants was 37 years old and the standard deviation was 10.70 (range = 20-60).

The participants got explained of the study goals and notified that the results are used with the purpose of scientific and research affairs. The confidentiality and privacy of participants' was emphasized also. Then, the packages of research questionnaires were given to the participants in different orders and they were asked to complete the questionnaires carefully after reading them. They were allowed to finish their cooperation in any step of the study. The Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS) [20], Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI) [21], and Defense Styles Questionnaire (DSQ) [9] questionnaires were used for data collection.

Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS): Grims's inventory was made by nferNelson in 1988 for the first time and it was revised and published by Golombok and Rust in 2007 [22]. This inventory has been designed to measure the quality of the relationship between married couples. It presents a final score for the quality of the relationship in the opinion of men and women separately. This scale has 28 multiple choice questions (disagree, strongly disagree, agree, and strongly agree) with scoring between 0-3. Therefore, the total score fluctuates between 0 and 84. High scores indicate very low quality of marital life. In other words, the higher the score of individuals in this scale, the lower quality of those individuals' marital life. In terms of its reliability, Golombok and Rust reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 for men and 0.89 for women in 1990. The Cronbach's alpha of its Persian version was calculated to be 0.91 and 0.89 for women and men respectively [23].

Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI): This scale has been made using Hazan and Shaver's attachment test [4] and normalized in the samples of student and Iranian general population [24]. It is a 15-question test and measures three attachment styles, secure, avoidant and ambivalent, in a 5-point Likert scale (very low=1, low=2, average=3, high=4, very high=5). The minimum and maximum scores of the subscales will be 5 and 25, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the secure, avoidant, and ambivalent subscales (n=1480, 860 women, 620 men) were calculated to be 0.91, 0.89, 0.88 for all participants, 0.91, 0.90, 0.87 for women, and 0.90, 0.89 and 0.87 for men, respectively. These

results indicate great internal consistency of this scale. The correlation coefficient between the scores of 300 participants was calculated on two occasions with an interval of four weeks to assess the test-retest reliability. The coefficients for the secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles varied from 0.87, 0.83, 0.74 for all subjects, 0.86, 0.82, 0.75 for women, 0.85, 0.81 and 0.73 for men, respectively. These results showed that the test-retest reliability of the scale was satisfied [24].

Defense Styles Questionnaire (DSQ): This questionnaire is a 40-item tool that measures twenty defensive mechanisms based on mature, immature and neurotic defensive styles in a 9-point Likert Scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) [8]. The mature defense style includes sublimation, humor, anticipation and suppression mechanisms. The mechanisms related to the neurotic defense style include falsification, false altruism, idealization, and opposite reaction. The immature defense style consists of twelve defense mechanism as follows: projection, inactive aggression, implementation, disaggregation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, denial, displacement, segregation, splitting, rationalization, and somatization.

The Cronbach's alpha for each question of defense styles was described as satisfactory [8]. The psychometric properties of the Persian version of the defensive style questionnaire have been reviewed and approved in several studies, during the years between 1999 and 2006 in patient (n=423) and normal (n=1397) samples. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale of this questionnaire were calculated to be between 0.83 and 0.94 for mature defensive style, 0.81 and 0.92 for immature style and 0.79 and 0.91 for neurotic style. These coefficients confirmed the internal consistency of the subscales of the defensive styles questionnaire [25].

The test-retest reliability of this questionnaire was calculated twice with 2 to 6 weeks intervals, which was from 0.73 to 0.87 for the mature style, from 0.71 to 0.84 for the immature style, and from 0.69 to 0.78 for the neurotic style among the patient (n=107) and normal (n=248) samples. These coefficients were all significant ($P < 0.01$) and confirmed the test-retest reliability of the questionnaire.

In this study, the Pearson correlation coefficient and hierarchical regression analysis in SPSS-21 and AMOS-24 were used for data analysis

Results

Table 1 shows mean scores, standard deviations, and zero order correlations for all study variables. As it has been shown in the Table 1, there is a significant positive correlation between marital adjustment with mature defensive mechanism ($p>0.01$; $r=0.287$) and secure at-

tachment style ($p>0.01$; $r=0.289$). There is a significant negative correlation between marital adjustment with immature defensive mechanism ($p>0.01$; $r=-0.371$), avoidant attachment style ($p>0.01$; $r=-0.302$), and ambivalent attachment style ($p>0.01$; $r=-0.251$). Marital adjustment had a negative correlation with neurotic defensive mechanism ($r=-0.080$), which is not statistically significant.

Table 1 Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Zero Order Correlations between Study Variables

Variable	Men(n=150)/ Women(n=150)						
	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Marital adjustment	24.60(11.59)	1					
2. Mature Defensive mechanism	5.64(1.48)	0.287**	1				
3. Immature defensive mechanism	4.49(0.97)	-0.371**	-0.141*	1			
4. Neurotic defensive mechanism	5.56(1.21)	-0.080	-0.366**	0.141*	1		
5. Secure Attachment style	4.21(1.25)	0.289**	0.260**	-0.099	-0.084	1	
6. Avoidant Attachment style	1.99(1.40)	-0.302**	-0.113	0.260**	0.111	-0.408**	1
7. Ambivalent Attachment style	2.15(1.55)	-0.251**	-0.141*	0.208**	0.015	-0.204**	0.553**

* $P<0.05$, ** $P<0.01$

The standardized scores of variables and hierarchical regression were used to determine the moderating effect of defense mechanisms. The dependent variable

was marital adjustment. The results are given separately in the following models.

Table 2 Moderating effect of the mature defensive mechanism on secure attachment style and marital adjustment

Model 1	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	t
1.	0.084	0.081				
Secure Attachment Style			-0.289	0.055	-0.289	0.001
2.	0.146	0.140				
Secure Attachment Style			-0.255	0.054	-0.255	-4.702
Mature Defensive mechanism			-0.252	0.054	-0.252	-4.654
3.	0.164	0.156				
Secure Attachment style			-0.247	0.054	-0.247	-4.599
Mature Defensive mechanism			-0.248	0.054	-0.248	-4.613
Z Secure Attachment style* Z Mature Defensive mechanism			0.125	0.049	0.136	2.551

Model 1 in Table 2 shows the moderated regression results regarding the moderating effect of mature defense mechanism in relationship between secure attachment style and marital adjustment. In the first step, we only used the standard score of secure attachment style in the equation. The secure attachment style was significant ($B=-0.289$; $p<0.001$). It means that secure attachment style could predict marital adjustment. In the second step, we entered the mature defensive mechanism and the β regression coefficient for secure attachment style changed from -0.289 to -0.255 , whereas secure attachment style remained significant ($t=-4.702$; $p<0.001$). Regression analysis coefficients in model 1 show that

secure attachment style ($B=-0.247$; $p<0.001$), mature defense mechanism ($B=-0.248$; $p<0.001$) and the moderating effect of mature defense mechanism ($B=0.125$; $p<0.001$) determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

Model 2 shows the moderated regression results regarding the moderating effect of immature defense mechanism in relationship between secure attachment style and marital adjustment. Regression analysis coefficients in model 2 show that secure attachment style ($B=-0.242$; $p<0.001$), immature defense mechanism ($B=-0.352$; $p<0.001$) and the moderator effect of im-

mature defense mechanism ($B=-0.298$; $p<0.001$) determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly. Regression analysis coefficients in Model 3, in the third step, showed that secure attachment style ($B=0.283$; $p<0.001$) determines the variance of marital

adjustment significantly but neurotic defense mechanism ($B=-0.044$) and the moderating effect of neurotic defense mechanism ($B=-0.090$) cannot determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

Table 3 Moderating effect of the mature defensive mechanism on avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment

Model 4	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	t
1.	0.091	0.088				
Avoidant Attachment style			0.302	0.055	0.302	5.463
2.	0.156	0.150				
Avoidant Attachment style			0.273	0.054	0.273	5.084
Mature Defensive mechanism			-0.256	0.054	-0.256	-4.777
3.	0.157	0.148				
Avoidant Attachment style			0.275	0.054	0.275	5.101
Mature Defensive mechanism			-0.250	0.055	-0.250	-4.513
Z Avoidant Attachment style* mature defensive mechanism			-0.025	0.049	-0.028	-0.505

Model 4 in Table 3 shows the moderated regression results regarding the moderating effect of mature defense mechanism in the relationship between avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment. As it can be seen in this model, when we entered the mature defensive mechanism, the β regression coefficient for avoidant attachment style was changed from 0.302 to 0.273. Besides, Regression analysis coefficients in model 4 in the third step, showed that avoidant attachment style ($B=0.275$; $p<0.001$), mature defense mechanism ($B=-0.250$; $p<0.001$) and the moderating effect of mature defense mechanism ($B=-0.025$; $p<0.001$) determined the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

Model 5, (in the third step), shows the moderated regression results of the study. Regression analysis coefficients showed that avoidant attachment style ($B=0.206$; $p<0.001$) and immature defense mechanism ($B=0.312$; $p<0.001$) determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly but the moderating effect of immature defense mechanism ($B=0.029$) cannot determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

Model 6 shows the results of moderated regression regarding the moderating effect of neurotic defense mechanism in the relationship between avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment. Furthermore, Regression analysis coefficients in Model 6 showed that avoidant attachment style ($B=0.294$; $p<0.001$) in the third step, determines the variance of marital adjustment significantly but neurotic defense mechanism ($B=-0.042$) and the moderating effect of neurotic defense mechanism ($B=-0.025$) cannot determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

In Model 7, when we entered the mature defensive mechanism, the β regression coefficient for ambivalent attachment style changed from 0.251 to 0.215. Regression analysis coefficients in model 7 (third step) showed that ambivalent attachment style ($B=0.215$; $p<0.001$) determines the variance of marital adjustment significantly but mature defense mechanism ($B=-0.257$) and the moderating effect of mature defense mechanism ($B=-0.002$) cannot determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

Model 8 shows the moderated regression results regarding the moderating effect of immature defense mechanism in the relationship between ambivalent attachment and marital adjustment. Regression analysis coefficients in Model 8 (the third step) showed that ambivalent attachment style ($B=0.176$; $p<0.001$), immature defense mechanism ($B=0.329$; $p<0.001$) and the moderating effect of immature defense mechanism ($B=0.294$; $p<0.001$) determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

Regression analysis coefficients in Model 9 (third step) showed that ambivalent attachment style ($B=0.252$; $p<0.001$) and neurotic defense mechanism ($B=-0.085$; $p<0.05$) determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly but the moderating effect of neurotic defense mechanism ($B=0.018$) cannot determine the variance of marital adjustment significantly.

The standard coefficients of the attachment styles for marital adjustment with regard to the moderating role of defense mechanisms are listed in table 5.

Table 4 Moderating effect of the mature and immature defensive mechanism on ambivalent attachment style and marital adjustment

Model 7	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	t
1.	0.063	0.060				
Ambivalent attachment style			0.251	0.056	0.251	4.472
2.	0.128	0.122				
Ambivalent attachment style			0.215	0.055	0.215	3.921
Mature Defensive Mechanism			-0.257	0.055	-0.257	-4.693
3.	0.128	0.119				
Ambivalent Attachment Style			0.215	0.055	0.215	3.888
Mature Defensive Mechanism			-0.257	0.055	-0.257	-4.681
Z Ambivalent Attachment Style* Z Mature Defensive Mechanism			0.002	0.054	0.002	0.033
Model 8	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	t
1.	0.063	0.060				
Ambivalent Attachment Style			0.251	0.056	0.251	4.472
2.	0.170	0.164				
Ambivalent Attachment Style			0.181	0.054	0.181	3.357
Immature Defensive Mechanism			0.334	0.054	0.334	6.174
3.	0.171	0.162				
Ambivalent Attachment Style			0.176	0.055	0.176	3.208
Immature Defensive Mechanism			0.329	0.055	0.329	6.035
Z ambivalent attachment style* Z immature defensive mechanism			0.030	0.044	0.037	0.683

Criterion variable: marital adjustment (standard)

Table 5 Standard coefficients of the attachment styles on marital adjustment with regard to the moderating role of defense mechanisms

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Standard coefficient	Sig
Attachment style	Marital Adjustment	-0.44	0.000
Marital adjustment*defense mechanisms	Marital Adjustment	-0.12	0.026

According to Table 5, the effect of interaction between independent variable (attachment style) and moderating variable (defense mechanisms) on marital adjustment was -0.12, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Regarding to this significant interaction, it can be concluded that defense mechanisms had a significant effect on the strength of the relationship between attachment style and marital adjustment. Therefore, it seems that defense mechanisms play a moderating role. In addition, the effect of attachment style on marital adjustment was -0.44, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

According to Table 4, this model was presented to explain the moderating role of defense mechanisms in the association between attachment styles and marital adjustment.

Based on the Model 1, all loading factors of attach-

ment style variable are from 0.45 to -0.87 which are statistically significant. Totally, 0.21 of the variance of marital adjustment can be explained by the above model.

Discussion

The findings of the study showed that there was a positive relationship between secure attachment style and marital adjustment. Besides, there was a negative relationship between insecure attachment style and marital adjustment. These results are in line with previous studies [26, 27]. Individuals with a secure attachment style talk more about their thoughts and feelings, assess events more positively, and experience more intimacy in their relationship. They also use more effective strategies for resolving conflicts and receive more support from their husbands.

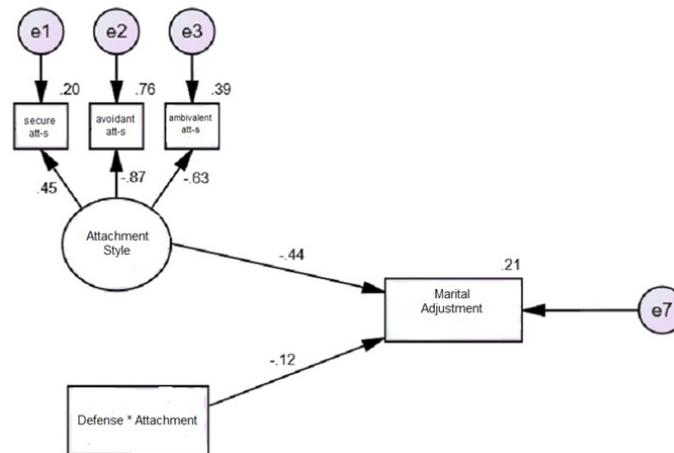


Figure 1. Moderating role of defense mechanisms in the association between attachment styles and marital adjustment

Individuals with an insecure attachment style have a negative attitude towards others; therefore, lower levels of trust, intimacy, and emotional support are built in their relationship. Individuals with an avoidant attachment style deny the importance of intimate relationships and need of having a close relationship. In addition, they are also characterized by avoiding conflicts and receiving less support from their wives/husbands for emotional regulation and stress relief in critical situations [28]. Individuals with an ambivalent attachment style doubt about their value and seek their wife/husband approval. These individuals experience more anger and jealousy in their relationship due to the fear of rejection. They use less effective strategies for resolving conflicts and feel more anger and frustration. Besides, they think negatively of their spouse's interference in their personal affairs due to the fear of losing them; therefore, they surrender more often to their spouse's demands.

There was a positive and significant relationship between mature defense mechanisms and marital adjustment and a negative relationship between immature defense mechanisms and marital adjustment. The relationship between neurotic defense mechanisms and marital adjustment was not significant. Defense mechanisms are usually classified according to maturity hierarchy. Mature defenses (e.g. sublimation, humor, anticipation, altruism) are seen among individuals with higher levels of success in their work and relationships and lower levels of psychological damage. The research findings show that defense mechanisms in adults are related to personality variables and the aspects of adjustment and conflict [29]. Individuals who use mature defense mechanisms such as suppression, humor and sublimation, distort reality less often when they face marital problems; therefore, they use better

problem-solving skills. These individuals easily find access to their distressing thoughts and feelings and speak about them with others, such as their spouse; thus, they enjoy their spouse's support.

The results of the current study showed that the moderating role of mature and immature defense mechanisms was significant in the relationship between secure attachment style and marital adjustment. Moreover, the moderating role of mature defense mechanisms was significant in the relationship between avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment. Furthermore, the moderating role of immature defense mechanisms was significant in the relationship between ambivalent attachment style and marital adjustment. Couples with less secure attachment styles experienced less marital adjustment in case of less mature defense mechanism and more immature defense mechanism. Couples experienced more marital adjustment in case of more mature defense mechanism and less immature defense mechanism. Besides, couples with more avoidant attachment style and less mature defense mechanism experienced less marital adjustment. In case with more mature defense mechanism, couples experienced more marital adjustment. Also, couples with ambivalent attachment style and more immature defense mechanism experienced less marital adjustment. If couples had more mature defense mechanism, they experienced more marital adjustment. There was no moderating role in other cases but decrease or increase in mature, immature and neurotic defense mechanisms could make the relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment weaker or stronger; however, this change was not significant.

When individuals are under stress, insecure attachment as a risk factor reduces efficient coping strategies

and causes negative emotions which has an important role in emotional problems, psychological vulnerability and conflicts. Early attachment experiences of individuals with insecure attachment styles (avoidant or ambivalent) are characterized by unstable and inadequate distress regulation, which can interfere with the growth of the necessary internal resources to successfully cope with stress, life problems and maintain mental health. Individuals with ambivalent attachment styles use active attachment strategies during stress, which exaggerates the risk and exacerbates the feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. On the other hand, individuals with avoidant attachment styles use inactive strategies which leads to emotions blockage and needs denial even when they are existence [30]. Responding both emotionally and behaviorally against stressful life events is related to individuals' attachment style. Individuals with avoidant attachment styles tend to emotionally distance from others and rely on themselves while individuals with ambivalent attachment styles are sensitive to any sign of losing their partner while they are too dependent on them. Insecure individuals mainly feel sad about emotional intimacy while they have fear of separation. These people often avoid expressing their feelings during conflicts and cannot resolve their problems well; therefore, they are less satisfied with their marital relationships. Studies show that immature defense mechanisms are related to higher levels of stress in life, adjustment disorders and emotional problems [14].

Over time, the use of defense mechanism increases conflict behaviors and instability in couple's relationships. Couples who use neurotic and immature defensive mechanisms try to avoid conflicts and this leads to interpersonal reactions such as irritability, failure to solve the problem, criticism and blame, which disrupt the couple's relationship. Individuals with avoidant attachment styles use denial as a defense mechanism to get rid of their negative memories and feelings. These individuals underestimate the importance of intimate relations and avoid them. Therefore, couples with avoidant attachment styles are unable to effectively resolve their marital problems and they thus have less marital adjustment. In addition, individuals with avoidant attachment styles consider themselves distinct from others and wrongly consider themselves as having unique and particular characteristics. These individuals attribute their negative characteristics to their spouse by using projection as a defense mechanism which makes them to wrongly assess the other person as having those negative characteristics; thus, they feel unhappy about the other person and their relationship [31]. Using a secure attachment style is accompanied

with more social adjustment. Furthermore, mature defensive mechanisms are related to social competencies. According to the findings of the current study, individuals with insecure attachment styles use immature and neurotic defensive mechanisms which consequently leads to anxiety and less psychological adjustment. Besharat and Khajavi [32] also demonstrated that defensive mechanisms is a mediator of the relationship between attachment styles and alexithymia. Individuals with secure attachment styles experience more positive emotions. They express their feelings more easily, receive appropriate responses and enjoy better emotional self-regulation which leads to the use of more mature defensive mechanisms. On the other hand, individuals with insecure attachment styles have been taught to hide their negative feelings and aggressiveness, which will be followed by immature and neurotic defensive mechanisms [33].

Coping skills and defense mechanisms are two concepts that researchers use to describe individuals' responses to stressful and distressing situations. Coping skills and defense mechanisms are used for reducing negative emotions as well as solving and managing distressful situations [34]. A similar study on the moderating role of coping skills in the relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment has shown that: individuals with secure attachment styles use problem-oriented coping skills, individuals with ambivalent attachment styles use emotion-oriented coping skills, and individuals with avoidant attachment styles use avoidance coping skills. Problem-oriented coping skills decrease the negative relationship between avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles on the one hand and marital satisfaction on the other. However, the use of avoidant coping skills increases the negative relationship between ambivalent attachment style and marital adjustment [35]. In addition, coping skills can have a moderating effect on the relationship between fear of intimacy and marital problems. In other words, problem-oriented coping skills can reduce the effect of fear of intimacy on marital problems [36].

Conclusion

The present study showed that defense mechanisms can have a moderating role in the association between attachment styles and marital adjustment. These results highlight the determining role of various psychoanalytic factors in decreasing or increasing marital adjustment. This study may provide valuable results for couples' problems by examining the important and influential factors such as marital attachment styles and defensive mechanisms. Identifying these factors and

pre-marriage counseling would reduce the rate of risky marriages. Besides, it increases satisfaction, happiness and the quality of marriage and thereby prevents the harsh consequences of family troubles.

One of the limitations of this study was using convenience sampling which was limited to couples in Isfahan. Convenience sampling method reduces the generalizability of the results. In addition, the research design was correlational which has the limitations in the field of variable etiology, an issue that needs to be taken into consideration. It is suggested that further studies be conducted in different populations to assess the impact of these variables on marital adjustment and their relationship with each other in order to eliminate cultural biases and generalize research results more easily.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

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Authors' contributions

Study design: Moloud Sivandian, Mohammad Ali Besharat; Data collection and analysis: Moloud Sivandian, Mohammad Ali Besharat; Manuscript preparation: Moloud Sivandian, Mohammad Ali Besharat.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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