

## Predicting marital commitment on the basis of relationship maintenance behaviors and attachment styles

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### Abstract

Common life and intimate family foundation, key elements of which are wife and husband, must be built with commitment. Commitment is one of the pillars of a successful marriage without which, marital relationship is shallow and instable. Current research aims at determining relationship maintenance behaviors' and attachment styles' predictive role on marital commitment among welfare organization' employees. Statistical sample in this research contained 155 persons (67 males and 88 females) among welfare organization' employees that were selected by cluster sampling. To collect data, Adams and Jones' Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), Collins and Rid' Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), and Stafford' Relationship Maintenance Behaviors Scale (SRMBS) were used. Results showed that there is a positive and significant correlation between relationship maintenance behaviors and attachment styles and marital commitment. The relationship between maintenance behaviors and attachment styles are important predictions for marital commitment, and loyalty and commitment to marital relationship among couples can be increased by training relationship maintenance behaviors and providing necessary trainings related to attachment styles for parents.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Education, Marriage

### Introduction

Once a marriage occurs, wife and husband promise to be with each other in bitter and sweet days. Without commitment, every relationship is shallow and unstable. Commitment is a cognitive variable that its final influence is connecting person to the relationship [1]. Arriaga and Agnew have defined marital commitment as person tendency to permanent maintaining marriage and being loyal to spouse, family and values, and recognized it

as having behavioral, affective and cognitive components [2].

Marital commitment has three single factors: personal commitment, moral commitment and structural commitment. Personal commitment means life partner' tendency degree to maintaining relationship. This commitment reflects person's attitudes toward life partner and their relationship, and also relationship is an importance degree for the

person [3]. Moral commitment means person's commitment feeling degree about continuing the relationship. Person's fundamental values and beliefs about correct behavior direction in relationship is moral commitment center [4]. Structural commitment means life partner's feeling degree about commitment to continuing loving relationship. Structural commitment means that the person feels that he/she has to be in the relationship due to external factors [5].

Wife and husband with higher commitment in solving their marital problems have fewer problems and are active to maintain the relationship [5,6]. Research findings show that predictive factors on relationship quality have a deep association with relationship maintenance behaviors [3]. Relationship maintenance behaviors contain behaviors with a degree from intimacy in relationship that is satisfactory for both in relationship [7].

Stafford and Canary [8] have studied relationship maintenance behaviors and determined seven factors for it: positive behaviors, openness, trust (commitment), social networks, collaborative responsibilities, conflict management and consultation. Positive behaviors include behaviors like standing on ceremony, not criticizing and expressing love to life partner. Openness contains using self-disclosure and free discussion about the relationship. Trust contains some reinforcing and supportive behaviors toward the relationship like spouse, having a dialogue about future and expressing love and mutual support. To use social networks means leaning upon friends and family leading into protecting relationship. Shared duties contain helping each other such as buying foodstuff or washing dishes. Conflict management means how to resolve problems and disagreement in relationship. And at last, counseling sub-scale refers to couple's consultation degree about things related to relationship. [8].

Authors argue that different relationship maintenance behaviors are used depending on type of relationship, because result from relationship quality is related to the relationship satisfactory [9]. Stafford and Canary's research results show that there is a positive and

significant relationship between maintenance behaviors and factors like commitment, love, trust, interest and satisfaction [8]. Ramirez' research results show there is a relationship between maintenance behaviors and marital commitment [3].

Study by Edenfield *et al* [10] shows that there is a significant difference between adult attachment styles and using suitable affective relationship and relationship maintenance-based behaviors. Attachment is defined as internal general model that is formed by infants' early experiences with their early caregivers, and means that how humans associate with other important people in their lives [11]. Early forming attachment theory focuses on three attachment style: secure style (convenience with intimacy, non-anxiety), avoidance style (inconvenience with intimacy, assigning problems to others), ambivalent style (tendency to extreme intimacy with high anxiety) [12]. In spite of affirming the situation, secure people call for help from others. People avoiding have problems by approving situation and calling for help and support. And ambivalent people are characterized by extreme sensitivity toward negative affection and attachment figures so that it is a barrier for self-direction [13]. Attachment index means mutual dependence, commitment, trust and satisfaction among couples [14]. In a general, relationship satisfaction is regarded as attachment result. Scientists have shown that secure attachment has a positive correlation with extend range of factors like believes about relationship with life partner, high intimacy, positive interaction, high commitment and relationship satisfaction [15], while insecure attachment has a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction and commitment [16].

In Pistol and Loranse [17] research done for examining organizational attachment and commitment, 101 female and 30 male from various races filled attachment questionnaire and commitment inventory. Results showed that people approving concerned or secure attachment relationship had more strong

personal loyalty than people approving worried avoidance attachment or avoidance attachment. In his research, Judi [18] examined jealousy, commitment and romantic attachment style constructs in a sample composed of 372 students. Results from data analysis revealed positive and significant relationship between secure attachment and personal commitment, and a negative significant relationship between avoidance attachment style and personal commitment.

As commitment is an important construct in marital life and it has an important function in marriage maintenance, stability and health, lack of them causes marriage contract break and family foundation weaken and at least leading to the divorce, therefore obtaining proper cognition from this important construct and effective factors for marital relationship maintenance and stability is necessary to increase couples' commitment degree. Aforementioned information and literature review show that two factors "relationship maintenance behaviors" and "attachment styles" can influence on marriage commitment and predict uncertainty in marital commitment. In some researches done abroad, the relationship between these two factors and marital commitment has been addressed separately [3,8,17,18], so, it is not found a research which has addressed to examining these two variables influence on marital commitment simultaneously. On the other hand, studies done in Iran showed that researches done in the field of marital commitment are rare, and until now, no research has addressed to examining relationship maintenance behaviors variable, and its effect on commitment factor and other marital variables. With regard to above issues, this is felt that research done about marital commitment couldn't examine factors related to marital commitment completely and comprehensively, and each research has examined one factor without regarding other factors. Hence, current research was done with aim at predicting marital commitment on the basis of relationship maintenance behaviors factors and attachment styles.

## Method

This research is a descriptive- correlational study. Statistical population contains all married employees in departments belonging to welfare institute in north Khorasan province, Iran (Bojnord, Shirvan, Farooj, Esfraeen, Garne and Jajarm, and Mane and Samalghan) in 2014. Population size is 265, composed of 151 male and 114 female. According to Korgesi and Murgan table, sample size should be selected as 155. Sampling method was has been random multi- steps as follow: first, among all departments belonging to welfare institute in north Khorasan (7 departments) 3 departments were selected randomly, and in each department 50 questionnaires were randomly distributed among married employees (in Bojnourd welfare department, 50 questionnaires were distributed). It is necessary to say that questionnaires were distributed with regard to ratio of male and female from research population viz 67 male (43%) and 88 female (57%). In this research, below instruments were used to collect data.

Dimensions of Commitment Inventory: This questionnaire measures people' degree of loyalty to their partner and marriage and its dimensions. This test is developed by Adams and Jones and measures 3 dimensions of marital commitment. These dimensions consist of: personal commitment: commitment toward partner that is based on partner attractiveness. Moral commitment: commitment toward marriage which is based on sanctity and respect in marital relationship. Structural commitment: commitment toward partner and marriage which is based on compulsion feeling and marriage stability and fear from divorce consequences [19]. Each question in this test has a 5-graded scale containing completely disagree, disagree, no idea, agree and completely agree that each option takes 1-5 score. Completely agree option and completely disagree option are given 5 and 1, respectively. Many of questionnaire questions are scored directly and only questions 11, 12, 16, 23, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 38 are scored adversely. Total score

range in people is from 1 to 72, and high score in this test suggests high couple' commitment [19]. To obtain questionnaire' reliability and validity in 6 various researches, Adams and Jones implemented it on 417 married persons and 347 single persons and 46 divorced persons. In these researches, each question' correlation with total test score was high and significant and, in a general, dimensions of this questionnaire received the most experimental and theoretical support. Adams and Jones obtained reliability degree of all test scales on cited sample as follow: personal commitment: 0.91, moral commitment: 0.89, structural commitment: 0.86 [20]. In research by Abbasi Molid, Cronbach's alpha degree for whole questionnaire was 0.85 [19]. In this research, Cronbach's alpha for personal commitment, moral commitment and structural commitment sub-scales and for whole questionnaire were 0.66, 0.76 and 0.78 and 0.87, respectively.

*Revised Adult Attachment Scale:* This scale was developed by Collins and Rid in 1990. This questionnaire which contains self-evaluation consisting skill in creating relationship and self-description consisting the way of creating close attachments comprises 18 items assessed by marking on Likert 5-graded scale for each item (from 1- it is not at all my characteristics, to 5- it is completely my characteristics). Factors analysis constitutes 3 sub-scales consisting of 6 items. Anxiety sub-scale (A) has congruence with mutual insecure attachment, close sub-scale (C) with secure attachment, and dependence sub-scale (D) with avoidance attachment. Collins and Rid showed that close (C), dependence (D) and anxiety (A) sub-scales were stable in a 2-month and even 8-month after intervention. With regard to the fact that Cronbach's alpha values were equal to and/ or more than 0.80 in all cases, so obtained confidence degree is high. In Iran, confidence was obtained by test-retest method as correlation between 2 implementations on sample size as 100 participants. Results from 2 implementations of this immediately after intervention and one month after intervention suggested that difference between

2 implementations of A, D, C scales in RAAS was not significant and this test is confident in 0.95 level. In a student population, Cronbach's alpha values for anxiety (A), dependence (D) and close (C) sub-scales were obtained as 0.74, 0.28 and 0.52, respectively [21]. Also, in this research, Cronbach's alpha value for anxiety (A), dependence (D) and close (C) sub-scales were 0.25, 0.73 and 0.34, respectively.

*Stafford Relationship Maintenance Behaviors Scale:* This scale developed by Stafford in 2000 [22], assesses strategic and current behaviors in a relationship and it is an instrument having 31 items with Likert-type that is composed of 7 sub-scales containing openness, positivity, trust (commitment), social networks, conflict management, consultation and collaborative responsibility. Scoring is done on 7-graded range (from completely agree=7 to completely disagree=1), that high score means person's using more from relationship maintenance behaviors. Positivity sub-scale assesses happiness level. Openness focuses on person' self-disclosure in the relationship. Trust (commitment) evaluates behaviors and interactions that assure people to be stable in their relationship. Social networks assesses person' participation level in social relationship with others. Collaborative duties evaluate tasks which people engaged in the relationship are required to comply. Conflict management is used to assess how to resolve disagreement in relationships. At last, consultation sub-scale is designed to evaluate behaviors based on giving and getting advice in relationship. In their researches, Stafford et al have proved questionnaire' reliability and validity [22]. In Punyanunt Carter' [23] research, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability that its values are as follow: consultation= 0.70, conflict management= 0.81, collaborative behaviors= 0.83, social network= 0.81, trustworthiness= 0.92, openness= 0.85, positivity= 0.76. To examine questionnaire reliability in this research, this questionnaire was implemented on 30 people with retest method in a 15-day interval and during

this time correlation result between pretest and posttest was calculated as 0.715 that was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). To examine internal consistency among questionnaire questions, Cronbach's alpha method was used that its values for sub-scales were reported as follow: consultation= 0.82, conflict management= 0.87, collaborative responsibilities=0.81, social network=0.68, trustworthiness=0.92, openness= 0.88, positivity= 0.82.

To analyze data, index like mean, standard deviation, Pearson's correlation test in descriptive statistics level and simultaneous multiple regression analysis in referential

statistics level were used. Data analysis was used by SPSS-18.

**Results**

According to Table 1, mean and standard deviation of participants' scores in marital commitment questionnaire are obtained as equal to  $150.26 \pm 19.88$ . Aged-based mean of participants is  $36.1 \pm 8.22$  years and its dispersion is between 23 and 59. Marriage interval mean is  $11.1 \pm 8.4$  years and aged-based difference in participants with mean equal to  $4.39 \pm 3.2$  has been dispersed between 0 and 15. Mean and standard deviation in other variables is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Descriptive data for research variables (n=155)

	M	SD	Min	Max
Marital Commitment	150.26	19.88	102	200
Relationship maintenance behaviors	157.03	34.87	45	217
Attachment Anxiety (ambivalent)	12.43	3.4	3	20
Attachment Closeness (secure)	16.54	3.47	6	24
Attachment Dependence (avoidance)	11.54	5.14	0	23
Age	36.1	8.22	23	59
Marriage interval	11.1	8.4	1	40
Children numbers	1.63	1.38	0	6
Aged-based difference	4.39	3.2	0	15

Table 2 shows correlation intensity and direction among predictive variables and marital commitment variable and its sub-scales. Age, marriage interval, children numbers, relationship maintenance behaviors and (secure) closeness attachment style variables have positive and significant correlation with commitment meaning that more variables value, more commitment level. Negative and

significant correlation ( $p < 0.01$  and  $r = -0.244$ ) between (avoidance) dependence-based attachment style and marital commitment means who person obtains higher score in this attachment style, it is more likely to have less commitment toward commitment. Also, results show that age-based difference among couples doesn't have significant relationship with marital commitment.

**Table 2** Pearson's correlation coefficient between predictor variables and dependent variable

	Marital commitment	Personal commitment	Moral commitment	Structural commitment
Relationship maintenance behaviors	0.588 **	0.673 **	0.531 **	0.290 **
Attachment Anxiety	0.092	0.109	0.073	0.052
Attachment Closeness	0.516 **	0.552 **	0.494 **	0.265 **
Attachment Dependence	-0.244 **	-0.369 **	-0.257 **	0.006
Age	0.290 **	0.160 *	0.210 **	0.340 **
Marriage interval	0.299 **	0.190 *	0.260 **	0.290 **
Children numbers	0.330 **	0.160 *	0.300 **	0.400 **
Aged-based difference	0.111	0.030	0.090	0.159 *

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 3 shows marital commitment predictive value based on relationship maintenance behaviors and attachment styles. Multiple correlation intensity between predictive variables and criteria variable is 0.622. Adjusted determination coefficient intensity (0.387) or value predicting criteria variable changes by independent variables show that relationship maintenance behaviors and attachment styles altogether explain 38.7% marital commitment changes that with regard to F value (23.67), this value is significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). B and  $\beta$  are indicative of regression non-standard

and standard coefficients, respectively, determining that with each unit change in one of the variables, how much criteria variable or marital commitment value will change. With regard to T-test values and its significant level, it is recognized that effectiveness of relationship maintenance behaviors variables and attachment styles in regression equations is significant. Tolerance factor which shows amount of linearity among independent variables suggests that amount of linearity among independent variables is too low to influence on regression analysis result.

**Table 3** Results of enter regression analysis for effectiveness factors on marital commitment

	B	Std.error	B	T	Sig	Tolerance
Constant	79.27	11.73	-	6.75	0.001	-
Relationship maintenance behaviors	0.257	0.048	0.451	5.4	0.001	0.815
Attachment anxiety	0.324	0.414	0.055	2.78	0.001	0.853
Attachment closeness	1.45	0.481	0.253	3.01	0.001	0.799
Attachment dependence	0.224	0.302	0.058	2.74	0.001	0.784

## Discussion

The study was done with aim at predicting marital commitment on the basis of relationship maintenance behaviors factors and attachment styles. Research findings were indicative of 38.7% marital commitment changes by relationship maintenance behaviors variables and attachment styles were explained and these factors have positive and significant correlation with marital commitment. Therefore, research hypotheses based on the relationship maintenance behaviors and attachment styles predict marital commitment is approved. Research findings are consistent with and confirm results of researches done by Ramirez, Stafford and Canary, Stackert and Bursik, Kandy et al, Feeney et al, Pistol and Lorance, Judi and Stafford et al [3,8,14-18,22]. To explain the relationship between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital commitment, we can explain that, in fact, the relationship<sup>246</sup> maintenance behaviors and commitment have mutual relationship because, in one hand, being engaged in relationship maintenance behaviors

leads to commitment and, on the other hand, couples plan their relationship-based behaviors structure according to the level of their commitment in the relationship and relationship goals [3]. The role commitment plays is regarded as a superior factor, and it seems that it has become the key to maintain successful relationship in many cases. When amount of commitment is high, others involving in the relationship show high degree on relationship maintenance behaviors [24]. Feeney et al explain that relationship maintenance behaviors can serve as a central mechanism in marital life satisfaction [16]. Evaluating a close relationship requires understanding a special positive and negative relationship in total representing relationship between couples and, in fact, requires that how couples interpret relationship. Research has shown that people evaluating problems as positive, have better marital satisfaction and higher marital commitment thereby [25].

Ramirez explains that central characteristics like relationship satisfaction, love, mutual control in life and commitment are regarded as outcomes of relationship maintenance behaviors and, at the same time, these factors themselves lead to continuing relationship maintenance behaviors [3].

To explain the relationship between attachment styles and marital commitment, we can say that, with regard to attachment theory, the kind of attachment that people have toward their early caregiver influences on interpersonal relationships in adulthood and on experiences and romantic relationships as positive or negative [26]. Attachment styles are relatively consistent and stable patterns from feelings and behaviors which people feel in close relationship. People with various attachment styles express various emotion and behavior's patterns in their relationship [12]. People with secure attachment regard their partner as more trustworthy and have more satisfaction from their relationship, and since they tend to have close relationship with others, so they feel protection in their relationship and can easily near their partner and have romantic and commitment-based relationship. Avoidance attachment (dependence) is accompanied by commitment aversion. People with avoidance attachment have much tendency to avert intimacy. While nearing their partner, these people feel uncomfortable, rarely trust their partner, feel dependence, and relationship with their partner is association with severe fear from nearness and distance, and low love. Therefore, they fail to establish a commitment-based relationship with their partner [10,27,28]. At last, anxious- mutual people have strong inclination to have nearness to partner, but this inclination is associated with fear from rejection from partner [26]. They try to improve their near relationship, but are unsuccessful in many cases. This unsuccessfulness causes they get desperate, have less satisfaction from relationship, try to establish alternative relationship, and hence, they feel less commitment toward their partner.

### **Conclusion**

In a general conclusion, we can say that commitment is one of the most important components in a successful marriage without commitment marital relationship would be superficial, shallow and aimless and in this case couples can't experience love and intimacy which will be created in the light of loyalty and commitment to partner and marriage. Commitment in marital life makes trust and intimacy possible. When people have commitment to partner and life in their own marital life, this provides more intimacy and trust among partners with a bed and much more marital intimacy leads to marital satisfaction. This research have the same limits as other researches that necessitate to be paid attention to them. Research method is from the type of correlation-based researches that make causal conclusion difficult. In this research, questionnaire was used to collect data. Hence, with regard to the fact that questionnaires are self-assessment, so it is likely that in responding to questions there would be bias. Relatively limited statistical population and control lack of other variables influencing on marital commitment are also other important limits of current research that challenge results generalization. It is recommended that other effective factors (marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, personality characteristics) are examined and more extended population is selected so that results generalization to more extended range will be feasible. It is also recommended that psychotherapists and family and marriage counselors improve loyalty and commitment to marital relationship in couples by training relationship maintenance behaviors and providing necessary training for suitable attachment styles.

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### Contribution

Study design: RD, MSH, KZ

Data collection and analysis: MSH, RD, BM

Manuscript preparation: RD, MSH, KZ, BM

### Conflict of Interest

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

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