

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALEXITHYMIA, INTERVENTION/ EXTRAVERSION AND NEUROTICISM WITH MARITAL SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

The present study was performed in the form of a scientific model with the aim of investigating the relationship between Neuroticism, Alexithymia and Intervention/ extraversion with marital satisfaction. The present study was a correlational study using structural equation modeling techniques. The population of this research consists of married undergraduate, master's and doctoral students of the Azad Universities of Rasht that with multistage cluster sampling method, 396 students (198 couple of students, 198 females and 198 male) from different courses of study in the areas of Humanities, Science and Technology were selected. After explaining the purpose of the study and the participation and cooperation of the subjects, Toronto Alexithymia scale, Enrich marital satisfaction scale and the Eysenk Personality scale was administered to the subjects. The results showed that neuroticism has negative and significant direct effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta=-0.52$) and Intervention/ extraversion has positive and significant direct effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta= 0.20$) but Alexithymia ($\beta=-0.01$) has no significant effect on marital satisfaction. The direct effect of neuroticism ($\beta=0.37$) on alexithymia is positive and meaningful. And also the effect of intervention-extraversion ($\beta=0.08$) on alexithymia is not significant. Also introversion - extraversion and alexithymia and neuroticism explain 33% of the change in marital satisfaction. Neuroticism and introversion - extraversion predict 14% of the alexithymia changes. So based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that the introversion / extraversion personality factors and neuroticism can affect marital satisfaction and increase mutual understanding of couples from each other.

Keywords: *Alexithymia, Neuroticism, Introversion-Extroversion, Marital Satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction is a person's overall mental assessment of the marital relationship and the degree of the fulfillment of personal and mutual needs, desires, and wishes in this relationship (Gellz, 1995). Marital satisfaction can be considered as a psychological state that does not occur spontaneously but requires the efforts of both spouses. Expressing emotions is a major factor in differentiating unhappy couples from happy couples, because it has an important role in the intimacy of the relationship (Kathryn and Timmerman, 2003). Marriage is one of the most important issues for the mental health. Both mental healths affect the success of the marriage and the marriage will have an impact on mental health. Provided that the marriage conditions and criteria reconsidered, (with the realization of a successful marriage) the occurrence of many mental health problems can be prevented (Ahmadvand, 2010).

Ellisin states that the marital satisfaction is objective feelings of happiness, satisfaction and enjoyment, experienced by the wife or the husband, when they consider all aspects of their marriage (Soleimani, 1994). Marital satisfaction is affected by a pack of different factors. A very important factor in marital satisfaction is effective mutual communication. Communication plays a central role in the marriage so that from the respect of marital properties it is specified that the effective and efficient communication between husband and wife is the most important aspect of the families with optimal performance (Greef, 2000). Marital satisfaction is influenced by many variables. Due to the effects of variable son marital satisfaction such as intimacy, emotional expression, emotional exchange and empathy, the problems and disorders that affect these variables and issues, can prevent obtaining marital satisfaction. Alexithymia is

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considered as one of the problems. Mutual expression of emotions in couples creates a sense of protection and follows more self-revelation (Sanderson and Evans, 2001). Alexithymia in its original meaning refers to the lack of words to name and describe feelings which is derived from Greek word (Alexy), lack of word (times) for emotion (Campos *et al.*, 2000). People with this trait who have difficulty in understanding the emotional states of others and in interpersonal relationships show little empathy (Krystal, 1979). Alexithymia is turmoil in the emotional and cognitive function, along with the inability to turn the emotional arousal experiences to the feelings and fantasies which are the symbol and sign of the excitements. Some of the Alexithymia features such as constant describing of physical symptoms rather than excitements, objective speech and thoughts related to external events, and the poverty and limitations of imaginative life can be noted (Sifneos, 2000). People who have alexithymia have some difficulties in recognition, detection, processing and regulations of emotions (Kreitler, 2002).

Important features which are needed to create and maintain close relationships are less than necessary in people who have high scores on alexithymia. And a moderate negative correlation between alexithymia and marital satisfaction has been confirmed (Spricher *et al.*, 1995). Lippert and Prager showed that self-revealing behavior of couples have positive relation with marital satisfaction (Lippert and Prager, 2001). Mutual expression of emotions creates sense of being protected and follows more self-revelation (Sanderson and Evans, 2001). Effective communication plays a prominent role in marital satisfaction and can have a significant role in creating a sense of security in the couples (Stanley *et al.*, 2002). Cordova (2013), examined the ability to identify and express emotions on intimacy and marital satisfaction. The results indicate that the ability to realize and express emotions moderated by marital intimacy. Although the similarity of culture, creed, religion is the criteria of mate selection but the existence of these factors for establishing and maintaining an enjoyable and successful life are not enough. One of the criteria that must pay more attention is the characteristics of the individual (simian personality). One of the personality characteristics that affect the success and continuity of life is the degree of couple's introversion and extraversion (Breshtain and Breshtain, 2002). Personality reflects those figures of the individuals that show the fixed pattern of their behavior (Parvin, 1989). Personality theory, the use of adjective views and opinions of bio-psychological suggest that personality has a critical role in predicting the compatibility. It means that some specific personality factors such as extraversion and neuroticism have durable and stable trends that end to consistent positive or negative quality and mental peace and also other personality traits such as adaptability and responsibility have indirect instrumental role in the adaptation and mental relaxation (Barzgari *et al.*, 2008).

Young named the two words of introversion and extroversion as the two dimension of human personality, and believed that these people psychologically fit into one of these two. Accordingly, we can predict individual reaction on different situations according to their personality. The personality directly and as an influential factor affects the process of couples communication and thus also affect couples' marital satisfaction. A person's personality calls certain types of reactions from the other side that as a whole affects the general satisfaction (Coughlin *et al.*, 2000). Farhad and Borjali (2012) found that couples who have similar personality traits have more stable and lasting marriage. Personality similarity leads to fairly balance and successful relationship. Results showed between similarity in agreeableness and extraversion with marital satisfaction, existed significant relationship and between the complement of the happiness with marital satisfaction existed negative relationship. According to this issue marital dissatisfaction and divorce, caused physical and mental disorders of couple (Sapuinton, 1999). Neuroticism in different studies showed its negative relationship with marital satisfaction and compatibility (Eysenck, 1980; Karny & Bradbury, 1995; Russell and Wells, 1994; Thomas & Gilber, 1997; Zaleski & Galkowska, 1978) Researches which carried out in the context of the relationship between alexithymia and personality factors mostly considered the two factors of extraversion and introversion (Begbi *et al.*, 1994; Shafru Eshnaider *et al.*, 2002; lamint *et al.*, 1999; Weiss *et al.*, 1992).

Since the choice of spouse and marriage treaty is considered as a milestone in the growth and personal development and since choosing a partner is undoubtedly one of the most important decisions in our life, (Bernstein and Bernstein, 1998), Therefore the importance of the issue necessitate that during mate

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selection, in addition to objective factors such as religion, social class, clothing, age, looks; educational level of the underlying factors such as personality characteristics should be considered to provide healthy and productive environment by right selection under the shade of happiness and marital satisfaction resulted from healthy marriage in order to possible the basis for future generations, the development of society, culture and values of the transmission (Danesh, 2005). And finally, by dysfunctional families, the community will be damaged. These entire make the researcher to explores and identify the factors and components which lead to marital satisfaction. These show the importance of the family role for a healthier and more productive society which is the fundamental group unit of society and finally in this study the role of personality traits, neuroticism, introversion /extraversion and emotional Alexithymia satisfaction was investigated. In the hope that in the future studies pay more attention to the factors influencing marital satisfaction and also develop useful and fruitful training programs in this area. The research model of this study is shown in the following figure.

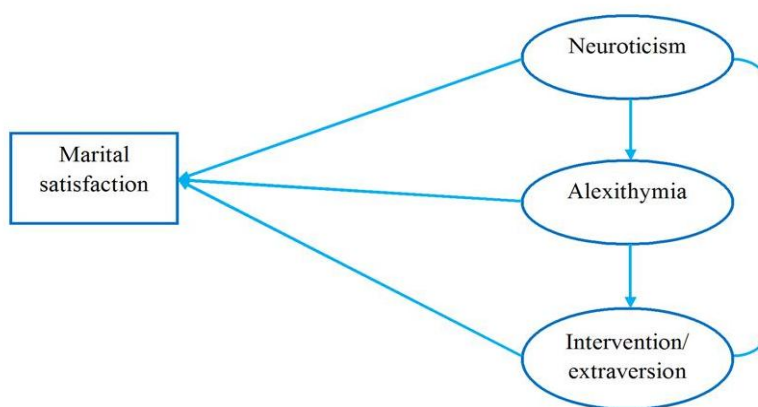


Figure 1: The hypothetical model study

Research Hypotheses

1. Neuroticism has a direct effect on marital satisfaction.
2. Alexithymia has a direct effect on marital satisfaction.
3. Introversion/ Extraversion have a direct effect on marital satisfaction.
4. Neuroticism has a direct effect on Alexithymia.
5. Introversion / extraversion have a direct effect on Alexithymia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was a kind of correlation study using structural equation modeling techniques. In this study neuroticism variables and introversion-extraversion are considered as exogenous structures and Alexithymia and marital satisfaction are considered as endogenous structures. The population of this study, who were selected by cluster sampling method, was married students in undergraduate, master and doctoral degrees in Azad Universities of Guilan province in the 2013-14 school years. At the beginning among 17 Azad university units of Guilan province, 3 units were randomly selected college. Then among 3 universities, 9 faculties were selected and the questions were distributed among the students of these faculties. Due to the volume number of the population that was 10,054 persons, the number of sampling proposed by Morgan was 365 persons. Researcher due to distorted or non- cooperated of a number of questionnaires added 55 persons to this number. Thus, the sample size increased to 420 patients (210 couples). Finally, from these numbers due to some distorted number of questionnaires and lack of on time delivery, a number of questionnaires were excluded from the process of study. And the information of 396 questionnaires in the form of 198 pairs for the final analysis was entered to spss21 software. For collecting data the Toronto Alexithymia scale, Eysenk Personality scale and Enrich marital satisfaction scale was used.

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Toronto Alexithymia Scale (FTAS-20)

Toronto alexithymia scale (Begbi *et al.*, 1994), is a test of 20 questions which measures three subscales which are difficulty in identifying feelings (including 7 females), difficulty in describing feelings (5 females), and objective thinking (including 8 females) in measures of 5 Likert degrees in score of 1 (strongly disagree) to a score of 5 (strongly agree). A perfect score also is calculated from the sum of 3 subscale scores for total alexithymia. Psychometric properties of the Toronto alexithymia scale -20 in several investigations have been reviewed and approved (Parker *et al.*, 2001; Palmer *et al.*, 2004; Reminder *et al.*, 1996; Begbi and Taylor, 2000). In the Persian version of Toronto alexithymia scale -20 (Besharat, 2007) the advantage of Cronbach's Alpha for the total alexithymia and three subscales of difficulty in identifying feelings, difficulty in describing feelings and objective thinking, are calculated respectively, 0.85, 0.82, 0.75 and 0.72 which is the indication of the good internal consistency of the scale. The retest reliability of the Toronto-20 alexithymia scale in a sample of 67 persons on two occasions with an interval of 4 weeks from $r = 0.80$ to $r = 0.87$ for total alexithymia and different subscales was confirmed (Besharat, 2007).

Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire

This questionnaire (Sanaei, 2000) has been made. This questionnaire contains 47 questions. This questionnaire made in Iran by Solemaniyan (1994) as a short form. Grading questions as completely agreed or strongly disagreed is set to 5 degrees that they are given a score of 1 to 5 which means in the set of complete agreed questions 5 is given and the rest of the questions are rated as contrary. In this questionnaire, the minimum and maximum scores were 47 and 235 respectively. Olson (1989) reported the validation form of 47-questions by using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.92. In our country Solemaniyan for the first time (1994) Calculated and reported the internal consistency 0.93 for long-form, and 0.95 for short Form.

Eysenk Personality Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two parallel forms of A and B that in this studies its current form in Iran (Form A) has been used. Iranian form (A) of this questionnaire studied by Mohammad Taghi Rayfy for the Iranian population which contains 57 questions (Fraternity and Scientist, 1980). Questions is provided in such a way that for the less educated people with IQ of 80 could be understandable. This questionnaire contains a lie detector scale (L). But more important is that this questionnaire evaluates extraversion (E) and neuroticism (N) independently, with near-zero correlation between extraversion and neuroticism (Feist and Feist, 2002; Translated by Seyyed Mohammad, 2008). The coefficient alpha of this questionnaire for the scale of, E, N and L obtained, respectively as 0.63, 0.78, 0.56 that is the indication of its favorable validation (Azakhsh, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Structural equation modeling techniques were used to evaluate the research hypotheses. Before presenting the results of the structural equation model in Table 1, descriptive statistical analysis and correlation matrix of variables of the study have been reported.

Table 1: Descriptive statistical analysis and correlation matrix of variables

Row	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Neuroticism	10.21	5.30	1			
2	Introversion-Extroversion	12.91	2.77	0.06	1		
3	Alexithymia	43.50	12.25	0.24**	0.07	1	
4	Marital satisfaction	87.69	20.51	-0.29**	0.21**	-0.03	1

** $p < 0.01$

According to Table 1, neuroticism relationship with alexithymia of (0.24) at 0.01 is positive and significant. The relationship of this variable with the marital satisfaction of (0.29) is negative and

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significant. Also the inter-relationship between extroversion/introversion with marital satisfaction of (0.21) is positive and significant.

To test the theoretical model of this study and processing of it by the collected data the maximum probability method was used.

In this study the neuroticism and extroversion/introversion variables as exogenous structures and alexithymia and marital satisfaction as endogenous structures are considered.

Exogenous Structures affected by factors outside the model and endogenous structures can be explained by the variables in the model. It should be noted that the AMOS software (version 16) was used for data analysis. To check the model process, the suggested indexes by Gefen *et al.*, (2000), were used.

These indexes which include following. X^2 / df are acceptable with the amounts of less than 3, the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI) higher amount of 0.9 indicates the goodness of fit for the model, modified goodness of fit index (AGFI) higher values of 0.8 are acceptable and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) that indicate the goodness of fit for the model are less than 0.08. These indexes are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Tested study of the goodness of fit indexes

RMSEA	AGFI	CFI	GFI	X^2/df
0.06	0.91	0.90	0.94	2.46

According to Table 2 indexes of GFI, AGFI, and CFI are greater than following amounts 0/9 and 0/80 which provided by Gefen and colleagues (2000). RMSEA quantities and X^2 / df are also less than the amounts listed above which are 0.08 and 3. According to these findings, it can be said that the tested model is a good fit. In the Table 3 Effects of direct, indirect, and the total explained variance variables is reported.

Table 3: Effects of direct, indirect, and total variance of the variables

Variable	Direct effect	Indirect effect	The total effect	Explained variance
To the marital satisfaction	-		-	0.33
neuroticism	-0.52***	-0.01	-0.53**	
Extroversion-introversion	0.20***	0.00	0.20*	
Alexithymia	-0.01	-	-0.01	
To alexithymia	-	-		0.14
neuroticism	0.37***	-	0.37***	
Extroversion-introversion	0.08	-	0.08	

According to Table 3, the direct effect of neuroticism of ($\beta = -0.52$) on marital satisfaction is negative and the effect of introversion-extroversion of ($\beta = 0.20$) on marital satisfaction is positive and at the 0.001 it is significant. But alexithymia has no significant effect on the marital satisfaction ($\beta = -0.01$). Direct effect of ($\beta = 0.037$) neuroticism on alexithymia is positive and at the 0.001 it is significant. The effect of introversion-extroversion ($\beta = 0.08$) on the alexithymia is not significant. Also neuroticism and introversion/extroversion and alexithymia explain 33% of the marital satisfaction changes. Also neuroticism and introversion/extroversion predict 14% of alexithymia changes. In the Figure 2 the tested model of the study has been indicated. The Table 4 also reports the results of the research hypotheses.

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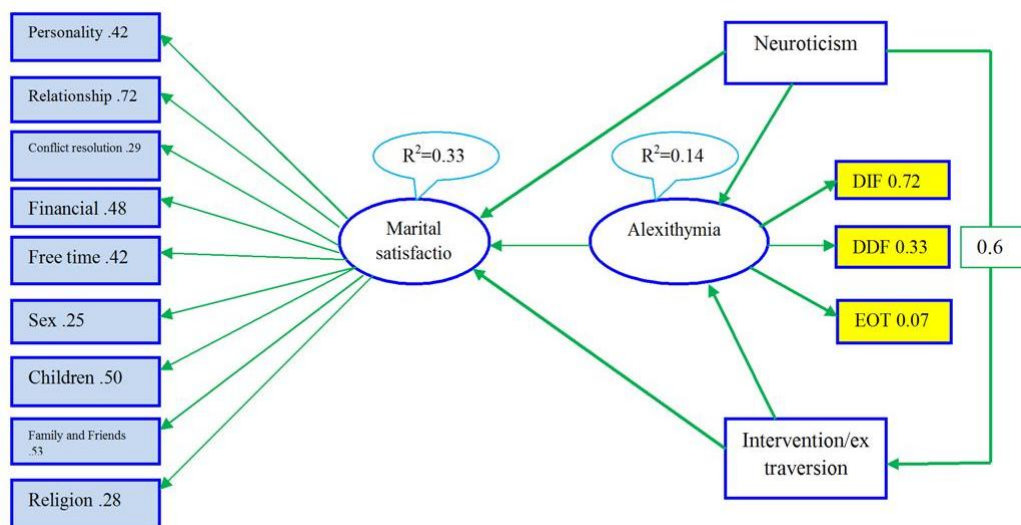


Figure 2: The tested model study

Table 4: Results of the research hypothesis

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	Statistics t	p	Result
Neuroticism affects marital satisfaction	-0.52	-7.22	0.001	Confirmed
Intro-extroversion affects marital satisfaction	0.20	3.70	0.001	Confirmed
Alexithymia affects marital satisfaction	-0.01	-.11	0.91	Confirmed
Neuroticism affects alexithymia	0.37	6.59	0.001	Confirmed
Intro-extroversion affects alexithymia	0.08	1.55	0.12	Confirmed

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between neuroticism, alexithymia and introversion/ extroversion with marital satisfaction by using structural equation modeling approach. The results showed that the proposed model with the collected data fit well. And neuroticism, introversion / extroversion and alexithymia can explain 33% of marital satisfaction changes and the neuroticism and introversion/ extroversion can explain 14% of alexithymia variance. Sufficient amount of the variance is one of the most important criteria for deciding on the suitability of the provided model. The results of first hypothesis showed that neuroticism has negative and significant direct effect on the marital satisfaction. In other words, as much as the person is more neurotic, marital satisfaction is lower. Neuroticism in different studies has shown its negative relationship with consistency and marital satisfaction (Carney and Bradbury, 1995; Russell and Wells, 1994; Tamson and Gilbert, 1997; Zaleski and Galkvska, 1987). Since the high scores on neuroticism comes with negative emotions and emotional instability such as fear, sadness, anger and guilt; those who earn a high score in this area tend more to impulsivity, aggression and vulnerable and also they are more prepared to show their anxiety in stressful situations. Generally neuroticism as a negative dimension of personality dimensions can particularly have negative effects on the compatibility of the marital relationship.

The results of second hypothesis consideration showed that introversion/extroversion have significant and positive effect on the marital satisfaction ($p < 0.000$, $r = 0.214$). In other words, those with higher introversion/extroversion have a higher level of marital satisfaction. The obtained result with the findings of Mohammad (2012), Atari *et al.*, (2006), Rajai (2013), Ghalili *et al.*, (2012), Shakerian *et al.*, (2012), Kaperman and Lax (2014), Amiri *et al.*, (2014), Cordova *et al.*, (2013), Gadyano and Herbert (2012); is conformed. On account of the above result, we can say that people, who have introverted personality, become discouraged in the face of everyday events and do not try to solve their problems and they are much weaker than the others in coping with stress and its related events. Couples with extroverted

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personalities are sociable and have good interpersonal relationships with others. On the other side the couple with extrovert personality is more skilful in communicating with others. And these people are optimistic and full of hope about the issues and events that happen to them and they have sense of humor and joking and they see and accept others and the external world as they are. This is the opposite in introverted couples because these individuals due to their marital satisfaction are almost pessimistic about the situations around them and attribute those situations to their self.

All these properties affect the relations between spouses. In general, the introversion/ extroversion trait as one of the personality dimensions has a great impact on the people's relationships and since the influential relationship is the foundation stone of a healthy family, so we can conclude that the introversion/ extraversion can play an important role in predicting marital satisfaction. The results of the third hypothesis showed that alexithymia have no direct significant effect on marital satisfaction ($p > 0.05$, $r = -0.027$). The obtained result with findings of Rajai (2013), Ghalili *et al.*, (2012), Asad and Sepah (2011), Shakerian *et al.*, (2012), Besharat and Ganji (2012), Bal (2008), Johuni (2010), Showarzer and Faches (2012), is in contradiction. In the explanation of this result it should be said that the relationship between human beings, generally marriage and married life, in particular, is a context that is full of emotion. The ability of understanding others lead to improvement of interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, Alexithymia impact on social functioning that determines entry into other relationships and this will cause to the emerging of irrational thoughts and behaviors. Not having a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and Alexithymia is not the reason for the lack of importance of these factors and also the effective role of expressing emotions and feelings and mutual expression on marital satisfaction cannot be deniable on any cases. But on the other hand we are faced with the complexities of human relationships which are sometimes surprising. Couple after a while, know each other behavior better and can realize and understand feelings and emotions, despite clear expression from the behavior of each other. Hence it must be said, what is important to establish a good relationship of marriage is not the couple's harmony and proportion to each other, but the key is how to deal with conflicts and inconsistencies. On the other hand, in the above example the size of Alexithymia has not reached to that extent of significance to be a factor that could impact on marital satisfaction. And also being unaware of the lack of proper understanding of emotions and feelings can worsen the situation. In general we can say that the empowerment of couples in identifying, diagnosing and reciting correctly of the emotions, can be an important factor in intimacy that understands which ultimately lead to more marital satisfaction feelings. This problem can be solved through training sessions to people. Based on the results of the fourth hypothesis, neuroticism has a direct positive and significant effect on alexithymia that with research findings of (Sarijaruy *et al.*, 2001; Martinez-Centir *et al.*, 2003; Martinez-Sanchez *et al.*, 1998) is conformed.

Neuroticism dimension which is the indicator of hostility, impulsiveness, shyness, irrational thinking, depression and self-esteem, is very low (John, 1989; Mac Rental and John, 1992; Mac Rental and Costa, 1987) that with inflicting psychological distress on a person can affect the process of identifying and describing emotions. Willingness to experience anxiety, tension, self-blaming-when the process of identifying and describing feelings for any reason (disturbance in cognitive processing of emotional information system, disturbances in emotion regulation) is disturbed- limit individual psychological distress to objective, pragmatic, and reality-based thinking (Begbi and Taylor, 2000; Sifnus, 2000). The preference of someone with alexithymia to be only the observer of the events and don't try to analyze and interpret them, and in relationships and activities limits his/herself to the objective activities and basically don not pay attention to the emotions of self and others (Bgby *et al.*, 1994), are examples of these cognitive styles. The relationship between neuroticism and alexithymia is justified on the basis of this mechanism.

Conclusion

According to the fifth hypothesis, introversion/ extraversion has no significant impact on alexithymia. In explaining the above result it should be said that excitement has role in the quality of interpersonal communication. One of the important aspects of having excitement abilities in interpersonal relationships

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is to use these abilities to solve the problem. Excitement and emotional issue is often the first sign of the problem. Understanding is used in the recognizing the problem and planning the possible solutions and their consequences and also planning to implement the best solution. Finally to complete this process of serialization, behavioral skills should be used.

Although this process is somewhat complicated, but can be successfully taught and influenced by some of the methods and skills. The ability to control and manage the emotions means to know what time excitement expression success and what time it is problematic and troublesome. Managing and organizing the excitements help the individual to use more efficient and adapted strategies in the time of stressful situations. In total the cultural differences in the present study with other research in this area explaining the lack of correlation between introversion/ extraversion and alexithymia. Given that the research conducted on a specific community (students), it is suggested to apply the ability to generalize the results to other populations. Also other factors to be considered on marital satisfaction, because increasing the scope of such research can prevent a lot of family problems and the breakdown of the family. Family counselors can use the findings of this research. Given that the personality characteristics are meaningful predictor of the marital satisfaction, people who want to get married, can go to premarital counseling centers to get necessary information and knowledge about each other's personality and emotional characteristics and finally choose consciously.

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