



Relationship Between Communication Patterns and Distress Tolerance: The Mediating Role of Family Emotional Atmosphere in a Sample of Married Women

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 03 June 2023
Accepted: 20 November 2023

Article Type
Research paper

Keywords:
Communication
Patterns, Distress
Tolerance, Family
Emotional
Atmosphere.

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to examine the potential mediating effect of family emotional atmosphere on the association between married women's distress tolerance and communication patterns. A correlational design utilizing structural equation modelling was employed in the study. The sample comprised 217 married women residing in Tehran city in 2021, which was selected using the convenience sampling technique. The research instruments included the Communication Patterns Questionnaire, Family Emotional Atmosphere scale and Distress Tolerance Scale. The collected data were analyzed using the path analysis method using AMOS software. The results showed significant relationships between married women's communication patterns and distress tolerance with the mediating role of family emotional atmosphere. Emotional atmosphere significantly mediated the relationship between mutual constructive communication ($P\text{-value}=.001, \beta=.22$) and mutual avoidance communication ($P\text{-value}=.001, \beta=-.19$) on distress tolerance. According to the research findings, it is crucial to intervene in the communication patterns and emotional atmosphere within families that influence the distress tolerance of married women. This intervention aims to enhance the distress tolerance of married women by addressing underlying and causing variables.

Citation: Abbasi, N., Keshavarz, S. & Kakavand, A. (2024). Relationship Between Communication Patterns and Distress Tolerance: The Mediating Role of Family Emotional Atmosphere in a Sample of Married Women. *Journal of Woman and Family Studies*, 11(4), 84-101. DOI. 1.22051/jwfs.2024.42244.2920

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Introduction

Couples' satisfaction is a crucial factor for maintaining stability in married life. The emotional atmosphere, communication patterns, and ability to tolerate distress are key elements that contribute to couples' satisfaction and the overall stability of their marriage (Mehrpouya et al., 2021; Riahi et al., 2020). Distress tolerance refers to the capacity to both experience and withstand negative psychological states (Dorley et al., 2019). Distress tolerance plays a crucial role in married life as it determines a couple's ability to handle and endure stressful situations that arise in their lives, ultimately impacting their marital relationship (Riahi et al., 2020). Distress tolerance plays a significant part in married life, functioning as a skill or ability that enables couples to enhance their adaptability and effectively resolve conflicts (Shahabi et al., 2021). The family's emotional climate is one of the factors associated with distress tolerance. The family emotional atmosphere is one of the factors associated with distress tolerance (Ensafdaran et al., 2022). When the emotional atmosphere within a family is positive and healthy, and authoritative and genuine educational methods are employed, family members are better equipped to manage their negative emotions and respond to conflicts in an adaptive and rational manner. Consequently, these individuals demonstrate a high level of tolerance towards distress and negative emotions (Bonanno, 2004).

The emotional atmosphere of a family relates to the dynamics and interactions among its members in meeting their emotional needs. Consequently, it is essential for the family to provide a secure and soothing environment, enabling its members to acquire the necessary skills to address and resolve social challenges. Interpersonal interactions significantly influence the development of the emotional atmosphere inside a family and can have a notable impact on emotional and behavioral responses on specific occasions (Johnson, 2019). Family communication patterns play a significant role in shaping how people communicate, as they are closely linked to the emotional atmosphere inside the family (Rashidi et al., 2017). Individuals displaying significant emotional resilience have a deep awareness of their

emotions, comprehend the potential outcomes of their emotional experiences, and adeptly convey their emotional states to others. Individuals who exhibit the ability to comprehend and communicate emotional states demonstrate greater adjustment to their surroundings and interpersonal relationships and a higher competence in managing negative experiences (Taylor et al., 2014). A key factor in predicting individuals' conduct in adulthood is the family unit and the emotional atmosphere generated inside it. Several studies have indicated that the emotional atmosphere within a family plays a significant role in influencing the emotions experienced by its members (Costa et al., 2019). Communication patterns between partners might contribute to the emotional atmosphere of the family (Rezaei et al., 2021).

Effective communication is the fundamental pillar of every successful relationship. Effective communication between couples fosters intimacy and minimizes misunderstandings. It allows them to gain insight into each other's perspectives and worldviews, thus enhancing their connection. (Saberi Fard & Haji Arbabi, 2017). Individuals who experience failure in their marriage relationships and face conflict within their romantic relationships tend to have diminished levels of life satisfaction. Consequently, these individuals are more prone to experiencing an escalation in both physical and mental diseases (Zhu et al., 2018). Hence, communication patterns have the potential to influence the emotional atmosphere within the family. The emotional atmosphere inside a family significantly influences the development of individuals' emotions (Sabri Fard & Haji Arbabi, 2018). The communication patterns, emotional atmosphere, and distress tolerance of couples significantly influence the stability of married life. It is crucial for societies to prioritize and enhance relationships in order to improve the stability of married life since the stability of marital relationships enhances societal well-being, and given the high prevalence of divorce and separation in Iranian society, it mitigates the societal expenses (Rezaei et al., 2021). Alternatively, the emotional atmosphere within the family and the relationships within the family may serve as the foundation for individuals to develop coping mechanisms and adaptability in the face of challenges and sources of stress, hence enhancing their ability to tolerate distress (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020).

One important aspect to consider in the relationship between psychological variables is that they do not always directly cause psychological disorders in



a straightforward manner. Instead, it is crucial to recognize the role of interaction and mediation in this context. As previously stated, there is a significant correlation between communication patterns and distress tolerance among family members. It is worth noting that the emotional atmosphere within a family is a factor that is connected to both communication patterns (Sabri Fard & Haji Arbabi, 2018) and the distress tolerance of family members (Ensafdarani et al., 2022). Consequently, the emotional atmosphere can be seen as a mediating variable that potentially influences the relationship between communication patterns and distress tolerance, particularly among married women. The emotional atmosphere within a family is a dynamic factor that can be directly influenced by the communication patterns of its members. In turn, it can also directly impact the overall functioning and performance of family members. Consequently, the emotional atmosphere of a family can serve as a mediator for the reciprocal influences of various variables associated with the family.

Several investigations have indicated an association between the emotional atmosphere inside a family and both family communication and emotional well-being. For example, Shahmoradi et al. (2021) found a significant correlation between the emotional atmosphere inside a family and its members' communication patterns and emotions. Abdolmaleki et al. (2015) found a significant correlation between the emotional atmosphere within families and the regulation of emotions in individuals with addiction. In their study, Saberifard & Haji Arbabi (2017) found a significant correlation between the emotional atmosphere within a family and both emotional self-regulation and resilience.

Overall, given the significance of women's contribution to strengthening the family unit and fostering a positive emotional environment (Ensafdarani et al., 2022) and the importance of women's communication patterns and distress tolerance to the emotional atmosphere and family harmony (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020), it appears imperative to undertake further investigation in this domain. In light of the points above and the dearth of research investigating the role of mediating variables and the desired variables within a structural model in this domain, the current study investigates the correlation between

the communication patterns of married women and distress tolerance with the mediating effect of a family's emotional atmosphere.

Methods

The current research is fundamental in its objective, employs a quantitative theoretical approach, and utilizes correlational research methodology through path analysis modeling. The population under consideration for this study consists of married women between the ages of 20 and 50 residing in Tehran who possess a diploma or higher level of education. There is a diversity of viewpoints regarding the sample size in research studies that employ the path analysis correlation research method. However, it is widely agreed that the path analysis pattern is similar to the statistical technique of factor analysis, which is typically carried out with a large sample (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). According to Boomsma (1983), a minimum sample size of 200 people is considered sufficient to fit the model. The present study included a sample group of 217 subjects who were selected through an Internet survey over a period of 2 months. The data of 33 individuals who answered the questionnaires incompletely were removed from the sample. The participants were chosen using a convenience sampling method. The research included individuals who met the following inclusion criteria: being married, aged between 20 and 50 years, and providing informed consent. The exclusion criteria for the research was the presence of incomplete information.

Measurements

Distress Tolerance Scale (DTS). The scale is a self-report measure designed by Simons & Gaher (2005) to assess an individual's ability to tolerate emotional distress. This scale assesses distress tolerance by measuring an individual's capacity to endure emotional suffering, subjective evaluation of distress, attentiveness to negative feelings as they arise, and strategies for managing and enduring distress. The scale consists of 15 questions and is divided into four subscales: Tolerance (items 5, 3, and 1), Absorption (items 15, 4, and 2), Appraisal (items 12, 11, 10, 9, 7, and 6), and Regulation (items 14, 13, and 8). The elements of this scale are assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Scoring high on this measure indicates high distress tolerance (Simmons & Gaher, 2005). The alpha coefficients for these subscales are calculated to be .72, .78, .70,



and .82 for all scales. Azizi et al. (2009) found that the intraclass correlation of this scale was .61 after 6 months. They also observed a correlation of .21 between this scale and problem-oriented coping strategies and a correlation of -.28 between this scale and emotion-oriented coping methods. In the present study, the internal consistency of the total score of this scale was determined using Cronbach's alpha method, resulting in a value of .83.

Family's Emotional Atmosphere. The questionnaire, developed by NodargahFard (1994), aims to assess the emotional atmosphere within families. It consists of 35 questions, each rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very much). According to Abdolmaleki et al. (2015), the total score of the subject in this test is determined by adding up the scores obtained in all the questions. The minimum score is 35, while the maximum score is 175. A higher score on this scale indicates that the emotional atmosphere within the subject's family is more likely to be destructive and negative. Conversely, a lower score suggests that the emotional atmosphere within the family is more likely to be positive. The researchers Heydarihzadeh et al. (2022) confirmed this scale's validity by using the second-order factor analysis method. In Abdul Makli et al.'s (2015) study, the scale's reliability was found to be .91 using the split-half method and .95 using Cronbach's alpha. In this study, the internal consistency of the overall scale score was determined to be .93 using Cronbach's alpha method.

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ). The questionnaire was developed by Christensen and Sullaway (1984) at the University of California and consists of 35 items. Responses are scored using a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (indicating no possibility) to 9 (indicating a high likelihood). This study examines the behavior of spouses at three distinct stages of their conflict. This questionnaire consists of three components: Mutual Constructive communication, Mutual Avoidant communication, and Demand-Withdraw communication. In Betman and colleagues' (1996) study involving Swiss and German participants, Cronbach's alpha values for the components of this scale ranged from .74 to .78. In Iran, Ebadatpour (2000) conducted a validation study on this scale and established its validity by examining its subscales and their correlation with marital satisfaction. The

correlation coefficients obtained for the three subscales of mutual constructive communication, mutual avoidant communication, and demand-withdraw communication are .58, .58, and .35, respectively. All of these values were statistically significant at the .01 level. The questionnaire's reliability was assessed by calculating the internal consistency of its subscales. The resultant values for Mutual Constructive, Mutual Avoidance, Demand (male)-Withdraw (female), and Demand (female)-Withdraw (male) were .50, .51, .53, and .55, respectively. In this study, the internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha method. The estimated values for mutual Constructive Communication, Mutual avoidance, and Demand/withdrawal were .79, .81, and .84, respectively.

Procedure

The Press Line site was utilized to transform questionnaires into links, which were then distributed to married women on social media platforms for the purpose of gathering study data. The link sent to the sample group had certain criteria for participation. Only those who were married and between the ages of 20 and 50 were asked to complete the questionnaires. The participants were given essential details on the confidentiality of information, which helped establish their trust and willingness to engage in the research. The current research employed Amos24 software and path analysis structural equation modeling to test the hypothesis.

Results

The mean age and standard deviation of the research participants was 7.78 ± 34.71 . In terms of the length of marriage, 6.4% of the participants had been married for a period ranging from 1 to 10 years, while 39.6% had been married for a period ranging from 11 to 20 years. Regarding education, 27.2% of the individuals possessed a diploma or an Associate Degree, 33.3% held a bachelor's Degree, 27.2% had a master's Degree, and 2.3% had a doctoral Degree. Regarding employment status, 47.9% of the surveyed individuals were identified as housewives, while 52.1% had been identified as employed. In order to assess the normality of the data, skewness and kurtosis values were calculated, which indicated that the research variables exhibit a normal distribution.

**Table 1. Descriptive findings**

Variable Statistics	N	M	Std	Mutual constructive	Mutual avoidance	Demand-withdraw	Family's emotional atmosphere	Distress tolerance
Mutual constructive	217	6.53	3.91	1				
Mutual avoidance	217	12.47	5.80	-.48**	1			
Demand-withdraw	217	16.24	5.43	-.56**	.17*	1		
Family's emotional atmosphere	217	67.01	23.02	.42**	-.21**	-.40**	1	
Distress tolerance	217	4.73	1.39	.35**	-.28**	-.22**	.56**	1

Table 1 displays the mean and standard deviation of the research variables. An assumption in path analysis modeling is that the multivariate distribution is normal. Mardia's multivariate Kurtosis coefficient is employed to validate this assumption. Bentler (2005) proposes that Mardia coefficients exceeding 5 indicate a deviation from normality in the data distribution (Byrne, 2010). The data of the present study yields a Mardia coefficient value of 3.67, indicating the validity of the assumption of multivariate normality.

Table 2. The fit indices of the research model

Model fit criterion	Acceptable level	Model fit indices
Chi-Square Divided By The Degrees of Freedom	<3	2.54
Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA)	<.1	.06
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	>.9	.92
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	>.9	.91
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	>.9	.94
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	>.9	.93



distress tolerance are also evident. These findings support the hypothesis regarding the relationship between women's communication patterns. The marital status and the emotional atmosphere inside the family have been verified with a confidence level of 95%.

Table 3. Coefficients and significance of direct effects of research variables

Criterion variable	Predictor variable	Effect type	Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized β	t
Distress tolerance	Mutual constructive communication	Direct	.65	.33	4.49
Distress tolerance	Demand-withdrawal communication	Direct	-.57	-.26	-3.67
Distress tolerance	Mutual avoidance communication	Direct	-.51	-.20	-3.09
Distress tolerance	The family's emotional atmosphere	Direct	1.05	.51	5.13
The family's emotional atmosphere	Mutual constructive communication	Direct	.89	.42	4.87
The family's emotional atmosphere	Demand-withdrawal communication	Direct	-.42	-.17	-2.75
The family's emotional atmosphere	Mutual avoidance communication	Direct	-.81	-.37	-4.56

The Sobel test was used to analyze the impact of the mediating variable of family emotional atmosphere on the association between communication patterns and distress tolerance of married women. The results of this analysis can be seen in Table 4.

The findings presented in the table above indicate that within the communication patterns of married women, distress tolerance is influenced indirectly by mutual avoidance and constructive communication through the family's emotional atmosphere as a mediator (p -value<.05). Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that withdrawal/demand communication had no indirect effect on married women's distress tolerance through family emotional atmosphere mediation.

Table 4. Coefficients and significance of indirect effects of communication patterns on distress tolerance of married women

Criterion variable	Predictor variable	Effect type	Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized β	Sobel statistics	Sig
Distress tolerance	Mutual constructive communication (mediated by the family's emotional atmosphere)	Indirect	.93	.22	3.84	.001
	Demand-withdrawal communication (mediated by the family's emotional atmosphere)	Indirect	-.44	-.09	1.06	.12
Distress tolerance	Mutual avoidance communication (mediated by the family's emotional atmosphere)	Indirect	-.85	-.19	3.57	.001

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study set out to examine how married women's communication styles and distress tolerance are influenced by their family's emotional atmosphere and its mediating role in these relationships. The statistical findings demonstrated a strong correlation between mutually constructive communication, married women's mutual avoidance communication, and distress tolerance, with the emotional atmosphere of the family playing a mediating function. These outcomes are consistent with the research findings of Saberi Fard and Haji Arbabi (2018), Shahdoost et al., (2018), and Rashidi et al. (2018).

When considering the connection between mutual constructive communication and the distress tolerance of married women, with the mediator role of the family's emotional atmosphere, it can be observed that individuals who engage in constructive communication patterns, rather than avoidance and withdrawal patterns, are more likely to have opportunities to openly express their emotions and feelings. Engaging in effective discussions and communication with family members can enhance resilience and increase tolerance for distress in individuals. Family communication plays a crucial role in promoting mental health and overall well-being (Marra et al., 2020).



Additionally, coping strategies are another significant factor that can protect and improve individuals' mental health when faced with life's challenges. According to a recent study by Yildirim et al. (2022), individuals who engage in positive family communication tend to adopt more positive coping strategies. As a result, they are better equipped to handle challenging situations and experience lower levels of psychological distress. The constructive communication pattern promotes effective communication skills and encourages active participation from all parties involved in conflict resolution. As a result, there is an increase in mutual understanding and satisfaction within the relationship. This pattern also benefits women by fostering a healthy sense of identity and greater overall satisfaction. Additionally, the creation of a sincere and supportive emotional atmosphere within the family enhances the ability to manage negative emotions. These improved emotional skills have a positive impact on the overall functioning of the family. When Women are in a positive emotional atmosphere, it can lead to the development of effective communication patterns. This, in turn, can influence their ability to tolerate distress and respond to negative emotions in a constructive and rational manner, especially in stressful situations (Amin al-Raaya et al., 2015). Furthermore, families that have received training or have been exposed to effective communication skills, such as problem-solving, stress management, and anger control, are more adept at resolving their issues and conflicts. As a result, they tend to experience higher levels of satisfaction within their relationships.

The communication pattern adopted by married women is influenced by the emotional atmosphere and parenting approach of their family of origin (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020). Furthermore, couples replicate their parents' communication patterns, parenting styles, and the positive or negative atmosphere within their family and incorporate these experiences into their own marital and parental interactions (Shahdost et al., 2018). When the emotional atmosphere within a family is positive and healthy, and authoritative and sincere educational methods are employed, all family members feel comfortable expressing their opinions and feelings without fear. They consult one another during conflicts and problems and respect each other's independence. This type of environment has a positive impact on

family members, particularly mothers who play a crucial role in raising children. They are better able to manage their negative emotions and respond to conflicts in a consistent and rational manner. As a result, they experience less ambiguity, uncertainty, and even physical pain. Consequently, these individuals exhibit a high level of tolerance for distress and negative emotions. According to Bonanno (2004), positive family communication patterns have been found to enhance resilience in individuals. This increased resilience, in turn, can improve the distress tolerance of married women.

In the communication pattern known as mutual avoidance, conflicts are left unresolved and problems are denied, resulting in the persistence of these conflicts. This can have a range of negative consequences for women, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, distress, and physical discomfort. Consequently, these avoidance behaviors contribute to a detrimental and negative emotional atmosphere within the family, ultimately resulting in marital dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction with the marital relationship and the negative emotional atmosphere within the family have a detrimental impact on the distress tolerance of married women. Families that have poor communication patterns and strained relationships tend to seek external help to resolve their problems. Additionally, these individuals experience a decrease in their ability to tolerate distressing situations (Amin al-Raaya et al., 2015).

This can lead to conflicts and result in ineffective and inconsistent responses to stressful life situations. On the other hand, individuals who experience stress in confusing situations may exhibit unstable reactions, leading to a higher likelihood of impulsive and extreme behaviors. Individuals with these characteristics tend to have low distress tolerance (Shahdost et al., 2018). Consequently, a healthy family communication pattern has the effect of enhancing the positive emotional atmosphere among family members. This, in turn, increases the family's tolerance for distress. When the emotional atmosphere is positive, and the family has a high tolerance for distress, individuals are better equipped to cope with traumatic and stressful events.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that the withdrawal/demand component did not exert an indirect influence on the distress tolerance of married women through the emotional milieu of the family. It is worth noting



that no previous research aligning with these results has been found in this specific field. Glaser contends that the primary and foremost need for women is the desire for affection and a feeling of belonging, which may be attained within the suitable emotional atmosphere of the family. Glaser asserts that the absence of a genuine emotional bond within the family serves as the fundamental cause of enduring psychological issues in individuals (Tahuri & Karimi, 2022). Repeated and intense engagement in the withdrawal/demand communication pattern within a couple might result in a decline in marital happiness. Thus, it can be inferred that while the withdrawal/demand pattern may directly impact the distress tolerance of married women, it does not appear to have the ability to influence distress tolerance by mediating the emotional atmosphere of the family, which is a more influential factor. This pattern may exacerbate the tension in the couple's relationship, as women whose husbands exhibit withdrawal and avoidance in this manner receive a disapproving message that implies their spouses do not prioritize fostering meaningful contact with them. Conversely, men may resort to verbal or physical violence when they witness their female partners displaying avoidant behavior. Given the negative emotional atmosphere that prevails in such situations, it is likely that women's ability to tolerate distress will be diminished in this particular pattern.

This study found that the emotional atmosphere within a family mediated the association between communication patterns and distress tolerance in married women. Specifically, both mutual constructive and avoidance communication styles were found to directly and indirectly, predict the distress tolerance of married women. One of the limitations of the current research was the use of a convenience sample approach, which was prompted by the widespread Corona pandemic, hence preventing researchers from doing random sampling. Given that the current study sample consisted of married women in Tehran, it is important to use caution when generalizing the findings to the wider society. This study acknowledges that intervening factors, such as mental and internal processes, have influenced the participants' responses to the questionnaire. However, it is important to note that the study did not consider the participants' personality characteristics, IQ, and financial situation. One of the limitations of the current study was the utilization of a

correlational design, which relied on data obtained at a single point in time and hindered precise causal inferences. It is recommended to employ alternative sampling methods and conduct studies on samples with diverse demographic characteristics to enhance the generalizability of the results. Based on the research findings, it is crucial to address underlying factors that impact the distress tolerance of married women, such as communication patterns and the emotional atmosphere within their families. By intervening in these areas, we can effectively enhance the distress tolerance of married women.

Ethical considerations

Compliance with research ethics: This research is based on the master's thesis conducted at Imam Khomeini International University (RA) in Qazvin. The research was carried out in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Funding: The current study was not funded by any organization or person.

Authors' Contribution: This article is derived from the master's thesis authored by the first author, with the second author as the supervisor and the third author as the consultant.

Conflict of interest: The authors declared no conflict of interest with any person or organization.

Acknowledgements: We are grateful to all those who participated in this research.



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