

## Original Article

## The relationship between social responsibility and marital conflicts in couples with the mediating role of optimistic and self-regulatory

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**Received:** 08 Jan 2022

**Accepted:** 25 Feb 2022

**Published:** 10 Apr 2022

### Abstract

**Background:** Marital conflicts are a precursor to the separation of couples and can range from obvious differences in the views of man and woman to serious differences in goals, values and aspirations. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social responsibility and marital conflicts in couples with the mediating role of optimism and self-regulatory.

**Methods:** The present study was a descriptive-survey and correlational study. The statistical population included couples who referred to Bahar Andisheh Clinic in Mashhad in 2020-2021 and 300 people were selected by convenience sampling. Responsibility, marital conflicts, self-regulation and optimism questionnaires were used to collect data. Data were analyzed using SPSS 23 software and Pearson correlation test (structural equation).

**Results:** The results revealed that 68% of the variance related to marital conflicts was explained by the social responsibility, optimism, and self-regulation. Responsibility showed a direct and significant relationship with optimism and self-regulation ( $r= 0.597$  and  $0.736$ , respectively and  $P < 0.001$ ), and had a negative and significant relationship with marital conflicts ( $P$ -value  $< 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Based on the results, the sense of social responsibility reduces marital conflicts and with increasing optimism and self-regulation, couple's conflicts decrease. It is suggested that educational interventions be held to strengthen and improve the level of responsibility, optimism and self-regulation in order to reduce marital conflicts.

**Keywords:** Couples Therapy; Family Conflicts; Optimism; Self-Control; Social Responsibility.

**Cite this article as:** Hashempour Mofasali R, Jajarmi M, Akbari H. The relationship between social responsibility and marital conflicts in couples with the mediating role of optimistic and self-regulatory. *Soc Determinants Health*. 2022;8(1):1-9. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22037/sdh.v8i1.37322>

### Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important and vital events in the daily life of society, which in addition to responding to the emotional and sexual needs of the individual, also regulates his economic needs, social and cultural relations (1); But some marriages become conflicted over time. Marital

conflicts are a precursor to the separation of couples (2).

Conflict can range from the obvious differences in the views of the couple to serious differences in goals, values and aspirations, and can lead to any power struggle that arises in order to eliminate other privileges and increase their privileges. (3). Studies showed that couples

who experience a lot of marital conflict in their relationships and lives have different issues such as insufficient understanding of each other, financial and moral expectations in their lives. Some of these issues and problems, such as infidelity, play an important role in the occurrence of conflicts, as well as feelings of anger, resentment, hatred, jealousy, and verbal and physical abuse dominate the relationship between husband and wife. As a source of stress, its psychological effects on family members are also important, including emotional disorders in couples due to marital conflicts, hesitation, depression and feelings of guilt in the couple (5). But what seems important in the meantime is the influence of factors in the absence of which there may be conflict or by their presence may help couples to have less conflict in their marital relationship. One of the effective factors to deal with conflict, life pressures and having a good performance in life is to have responsible behavior (6).

Social responsibility can be studied from a sociological perspective at the micro, intermediate and macro levels. At the micro level; Social responsibility is considered as a sense of commitment and action, which each person has in the form of their roles towards each other (7). Responsibility of individuals means the ability to accept, respond or undertake the work that is asked of the person and he has the power to accept or reject it (8). In fact, responsibility is the conscious and unconditional choice in determining one's own behavior and how to treat others in social situations. Responsible behavior in relationships leads to flexibility and social adjustment, and irresponsible behavior leads to selfish behavior and disorder in social relationships (9, 10) and leads to conflict between couples. Doing family chores for each spouse makes them feel safe and secure and gives them hope for their lives; this eliminates the root of any dispute. The problem with humans and their anomalies is that they do not take responsibility; because they cannot meet

their basic needs based on the right and humane situation (8).

Optimism is one of the inner characteristics of people to take responsibility and gain marital satisfaction. In fact, it is a cognitive structure of hope about future consequences (11). Some studies have mediated the role of optimism for responsible and committed behavior, and have shown that optimism as a personality factor can guarantee responsibility and commitment to achieve the goals (12). Optimistic people are more prepared to accept the reality of life in the present, are more determined in their goals and show less signs of incompatibility (13). Optimism for couples having a general expectation that in the future, good events will happen more than bad events can affect people's behavior and how they cope with life's stressful problems and events. This is because optimistic people will have positive consequences for them in the future, and this confidence in the future will lead to positive things in the person. As a result, it creates a high level of psychological adjustment in him. Such people, even if they face stressful problems and life events, because they are optimistic about the future and believe that they can solve problems by their own efforts, use positive strategies to deal with situations (14).

Emotions are known as both a product and a process of social relations. The beginning and core of these relationships is in the family. Children develop emotion regulation techniques to a large extent during parent-child relationships. These emotional self-regulation techniques affect interpersonal relationships to other tissues, including couples relationships (15). On the other hand, when positive emotions and love are expressed between spouses and emotional self-regulation occurs properly, conflicts are reduced and intimacy and relationship are strengthened, but when the relationship is defensive, cold and without feelings and devoid of intimacy,

Relationships weaken and conflicts increase and the likelihood of boredom increases (16).

The implementation of the present study is important from both theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, determining the role of sense of responsibility in couples through the mediation of optimistic and self-regulation on their marital conflicts provides the basis for experimental research and subsequent interventions in the field of factors affecting marital conflicts and practical results. This research can help counseling and couple therapy centers and related and welfare organizations to identify the areas of marital life and marital satisfaction and use it to resolve marital conflicts and prevent family breakdown. Therefore, the present study aimed to identify the relationship between the sense of social responsibility in couples on marital conflicts mediated by optimistic and self-regulated.

## Methods

This research is fundamental in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of research method and is of correlation type. The statistical population includes couples who referred to Bahar Andisheh Clinic in Mashhad from May 2020 to June 2021. Sample size included 300 people who were selected and examined by convenience sampling method. Inclusion criteria were: minimum diploma literacy, age range between 20 and 60 years and having couples living together. Exclusion criteria were included lack of literacy, unwillingness to continue working together and couples seeking divorce.

Prior to the research, written consent was obtained from the clinic officials by the researcher and while observing ethical considerations including informed consent to participate in the research, emphasis on information confidentiality and maintaining the confidentiality of information and identity of participants, questionnaires were distributed among

individuals. Out of 325 distributed questionnaires, 9 questionnaires were not returned and 16 questionnaires were filled out incomplete, which were removed from the analysis. Finally, statistical analysis was performed on 300 people, which were 150 women and 150 men.

The tools used in the present study were: Responsibility Questionnaire; this questionnaire was first designed by Gough (17). The 42-item Responsibility Scale is used to gauge a sense of responsibility. The scoring method of this questionnaire is based on two options right and wrong. The range of scores is between 0 and 42, and a higher score indicates greater responsibility. In Aghaei research, the content and face validity of this questionnaire was evaluated as appropriate and Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 was reported for it (18).

Marital conflicts Questionnaire (MCQ); This questionnaire has been compiled by Sanai which includes 42 questions and seven components of decreasing cooperation, reducing sex relation, increasing emotional reactions, increasing child support, increasing personal relationships with relatives, spouses and friends, and separating of finances. The MCQ has been developed in a range of 5-Likert options, which low score means light conflict and high score means great conflict in couples. Reliability by internal consistency method by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient on the components of decreasing cooperation (0.81), reducing sex relation (0.61), increasing emotional reactions (0.70), increasing child support (0.33), personal relationships with relatives and friends (0.86), personal relationships with relatives (0.89), separating of finances from each other (0.71), effective communication reduction (0.69) and total items (0.96) are obtained (19).

Self-regulatory Questionnaire; The standard self-regulatory questionnaire of Miller and Brown (20) was used to assess

self-regulation. This questionnaire has 63 items and self-regulation of individuals is measured with a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree). Its scores range is between 63 and 315, and a higher score indicates more self-regulation. In the study of Miller and Brown, its validity was confirmed, the retest coefficient and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was reported 0.74 and 0.77, respectively. In the research of Ahanchiyan et al. (20), the validity and reliability of self-regulatory questionnaire were also confirmed and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.74.

Optimism Questionnaire; this questionnaire was prepared by Scheier and Carver, which has 10 items and are used to assessing life optimism. It is rated on a 5-point Likert scale and a higher score indicates more optimism in the individual. Scheier and Carver reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.76 and a retest reliability coefficient of 0.79 for it (21). In the study conducted by Goodarzi and Bustanipour, the validity and reliability of this questionnaire were examined. Content validity was confirmed by qualitative method with a survey of 10 experts of university and its reliability was reported with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 (22).

In this study, the normality of data was analyzed using the Kalmogorov-Smirnov test. Also, for statistical analysis LISREL software and SPSS software version 23 were applied and confirmatory factor analysis was used to investigate the structural equations.

## Results

Out of 300 participants in the present study, 150 (50%) were male and 150 (50%) were female. 35 people (11.7%) had undergraduate education and less, 183(61%) had bachelor's degree and 82 (27.3%) had postgraduate education and higher. In this study, people were between

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the studied variables in participants

	Variable	Mean	SD
	Reducing cooperation	13.37	3.43
	Reducing relation sex	15.33	3.48
	Increasing emotional reactions	20.25	4.32
Marital conflicts	Increasing support child	14.42	2.90
	Increasing relationship with your relatives personal	17.40	3.95
	Reducing relationships with spouse relatives and friends personal	15.81	3.96
	Separating finances	18.44	5.13
	Responsibility	25.61	3.37
	Self-regulatory	195.40	7.21
	Optimism	24.82	6.08

22-49 years old, the highest age group was related to 33 to 38 years with 102 (34%) and the lowest frequency was related to the age range of 44 to 49 years 13 (4.4%). The mean of the studied variables in the subjects are shown in Table 1. Table 2 also shows the normality of the data using the symmetry distribution. According to the results, the skewness and kurtosis of the variables were between 2- to +2, which indicates the normal distribution of data.

The goodness of fit index (GFI) was measured by LISREL software (as shown in Table 3). The critical point (1.191) must be less than 3. The RMSES value should also be less than 80, which is lower here (RMSES= 0.026). The P-value must be greater than 0.05 for the model to be

Table 2. Normality of data using symmetry distribution

Index	Social responsibility	Self-regulatory	Optimism	Marital conflicts
Skewness	0.278	0.110	0.311	0.281
Kurtosis	-0.747	-0.620	-0.403	1.987

Table 3: Significance of factor analysis model fit

Model	X <sup>2</sup>	RMSEA	X <sup>2</sup> /DF	P-value
Path analysis	4.790	0.026	1.191	0.310

Table 4: Route coefficients related to the effect of social responsibility on optimism, self-regulation and marital conflict

Variable	Estimation	Standard deviation	Critical point (C.P)	P-value	Result
Social responsibility → Optimism	0.199	0.033	5.948	0.001	Confirm
Social responsibility → Self-regulatory	1.024	0.255	4.017	0.001	Confirm
Social responsibility → Marital conflict	-4.703	0.454	-10.370	0.001	Confirm

validated. In this study, all the indicators obtained in this model were desirable and had a good fit.

The appropriateness criteria of the overall model were investigated. Since the Bentler and Bonnet's Normed fit index (NFI= 0.988, P = 0.001), the relative fit index (RFI = 0.996, P = 0.001), the Incremental Fitness Index (IFI = 0.996, P = 0.001), the Tacker-Lewis index (TLI = 0.995, P = 0.001), and the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.998, P = 0.001) were obtained, accordingly the model had a good fit.

The direct route coefficients related to the effect of social responsibility on optimism, self-regulation and marital conflict are shown in Table 4. The results revealed that social responsibility has a positive and significant relationship with self-regulation and optimism, while social responsibility showed a negative and significant relationship with marital conflict, it meant that those who scored higher had more marital conflict.

Model evaluation was also evaluated using the Sobel test (Table 5). In the Sobel test, hypothesis H<sub>0</sub> indicates that the couple's social responsibility does not have an indirect effect on marital conflicts due to optimism and self-regulation; while, Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>, states that there is an indirect effect between marital social

responsibility on marital conflicts through optimism and self-regulation. According to the results in Table 5, therefore it can be said that social responsibility has an indirect effect on marital conflicts through optimism and self-regulation.

The Structural model factor coefficients of the effect of social responsibility on marital conflicts through optimism and self-regulation are displayed in Figure 1. The impact of social responsibility on optimism and self-regulation were 0.597 and 0.736, respectively, which indicates a significant direct and moderate effect. The effect of optimism and self-regulation on marital conflicts were -0.101 and -0.832, respectively, which indicates a significant and inverse effect. Also, social responsibility had an inverse and significant effect on marital conflicts mediated by optimism and self-regulation with values of -0.062 and -0.577, respectively. In fact, it can be said that assuming other variables are constant, if the social responsibility increases a unit, the marital conflicts through optimism and self-regulation will decrease by 0.062 and 0.577. As well, the value of the coefficient of determination for marital conflicts is 0.604, which indicates that the variable of social responsibility is able to express 60.4% of the changes in marital conflicts through optimism and self-regulation.

Table 5: Evaluation of the model using the Sobel test

Estimating the mediator path	Sobel test (Z)	P-value	Result
Social responsibility → Optimism → Marital conflict	2.943	0.04	Confirm
Social responsibility → Self-regulatory → Marital conflict	12.754	0.001	Confirm

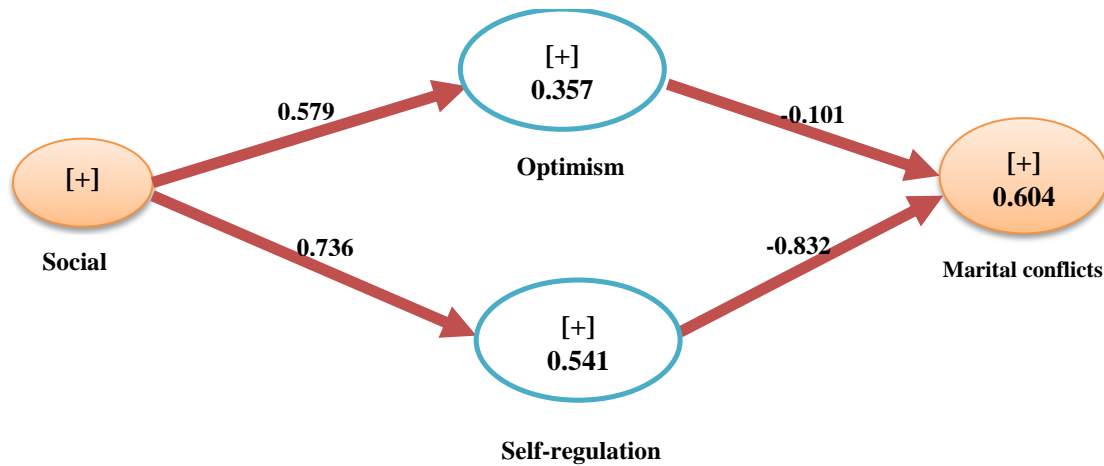


Figure 1: The Structural model factor coefficients of the effect of social responsibility on marital conflicts through optimism and self-regulation

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social responsibility and marital conflicts in couples with the mediating role of optimism and self-regulation. The results indicated that social responsibility has a negative and significant effect on marital conflicts and optimism and self-regulation are able to play a mediating variable in the correlation between social responsibility and marital conflicts. In fact, optimism and self-regulation had significant and inverse effects on marital conflicts, and considering the value of the coefficient of determination for marital conflicts ( $r^2=0.604$ ), it can be said that social responsibility can express 60.4% of marital conflict changes through optimism and self-regulation. These results were consistent with the findings of Laszlo (23), Brammer et al., (24), and Chen and Bouvain (25). A sense of social responsibility is one of the effective factors in improving interpersonal relationships and also the ability to respond effectively and make appropriate decisions in different situations and situations. Appropriate decision-making means that a person, within the framework of social norms and expectations, makes a choice that creates positive human relationships, increases his / her safety, success and peace of mind (26).

In explaining the result of the present study, it can be acknowledged that since

responsibility refers to a sense of conscientiousness, accountability and commitment, and since man as a social being in his collective life is responsible for others and must respect the rights of others. Therefore, people who have a high sense of responsibility, satisfy their needs to a reasonable extent, basically accept the consequences of their behaviors and are reliable and trustworthy. They feel committed to the larger social structure, and although they are not necessarily leaders, they are honest and keep their word (27). People with higher responsibilities have high levels of self-regulation and optimism, as well as low levels of pessimism, because of the sense of self-respect they have for themselves and members of society. High levels of pessimism in individuals can cause increased emotional problems such as stress, anxiety and depression, which lead to increased marital conflict (28). In other words, since the pessimists have low adaptive behaviors and psychological adjustment, and try to have negative meanings in positive events and outcomes. Consequently, they will have more conflict in interpersonal relations, including their marital relationships (2). In contrast, social responsibility causes people to have higher social flexibility in their job, organizational, and social relationships, which is an effective step in reducing their marital conflicts. In other words, high responsibility not only makes people more

motivated to achieve their goals, but also increases their tolerance, resilience, and social adjustment in interpersonal relations, including marital relationships, and reducing conflict (12).

In this study, the results showed that there is a direct and significant correlation between responsibility and self-regulation, so that the responsibility is able to express 59.9% of the changes in self-regulation. This result confirmed the findings of Kazempour et al. (29), Behdarvand Sheikhi and Shariatbagheri (30), and Koval et al. (31). In explaining the result obtained, it can be stated that people who have high responsibilities and can perform their responsibilities well, are better able to express appropriate emotions. Such people are looking to get the job done in the best way possible. Also, these people are self-reliant and have more inner motivation to perform tasks and manage their life process. Moreover, they have the ability to interpret social situations and their emotions; accordingly, this makes them have higher self-regulation.

In the present study, the results revealed that there is a moderate and significant correlation between responsibility and optimism. Considering the value of the coefficient of determination ( $r^2=0.357$ ), it can be said that the responsibility can estimate 35.7% of the changes in optimism. The result was in line with the findings of Chegini and Gholam Ali Lavasani (32), and Larman (33). In this regard, it can be said that the type of person looking at the world around them, whether it is a good or bad view, both will be effective as a result of the person's interaction with himself, the environment and family life. If a person has a bad view of the world around him, he may refuse to accept responsibilities or even give up performing his responsibilities and duties towards others. In contrast, if a person has a positive outlook, he will feel more responsible towards himself, the relationship between himself and life, and the world in general, and having a beautiful

outlook will reduce problems. Also, in the presence of conflict, it will provide an easier solution to the difficulties and conflicts of life.

The present study includes limitations such as the use of self-report tools that may be biased. The results of the study are limited to couples referring to the Mashhad Spring Counseling Clinic, so the findings cannot be generalized to all other couples with complete confidence. In addition, there was no lack of control over variables such as social, economic and family variables, education level or employment of the couple. One of the strengths of the present study is that the special conditions of the society economically as well as the double pressure of these problems on the people and the family will certainly cause the lack of attention to the basic needs of the individual, and the weak foundation of these needs effects on other people's needs such as love and respect. The presence of social responsibility component in the research is important in that it can itself lead to consistent and constructive growth, because the sense of social responsibility follows the sense of individual responsibility.

### **Conclusion**

The results revealed that the sense of social responsibility reduces marital conflict and with the increase of optimism and self-regulation, the couple's conflicts are decreased. In this regard, it is suggested that professionals who are somehow related to couple therapy issues as well as education and prevention of couple conflicts, pay more attention to responsibility and optimism components in interventional programs.

### **Acknowledgement**

The present article is extracted from the doctoral dissertation approved by the Islamic Azad University, Bojnourd Branch. We hereby sincerely thank all the participants of this research.

**Authors' contribution:** The conception and design of the study were developed by HMR & J.M; HMR acquired the data; HA and JM analyzed and interpreted the data, and HMR wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the manuscript editing and read and approved the final manuscript.

**Funding/financial support:** There is no funding.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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