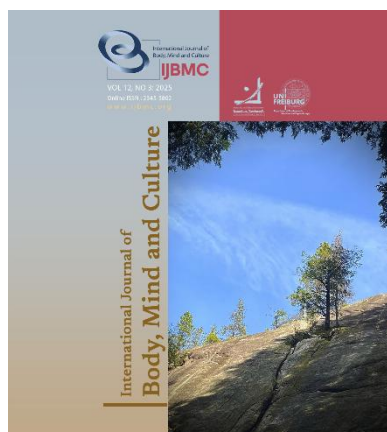


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## Introduction

Marriage has been described as one of the most fundamental human relationships, providing a structure for family life and contributing to overall life satisfaction (Navabinejad et al., 2024; Pirzadeh & Parsakia, 2023). Marital commitment, defined as the motivation to preserve and prioritize a marital relationship, plays a

# Predicting Marital Commitment: The Role of Attachment, Sexual Orientation, and Emotion Regulation

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to predict marital commitment based on attachment styles, emotional orientation in sexual relationships, and emotion regulation in married women.

**Methods and Materials:** This descriptive-correlational research was conducted among married students of Islamic Azad University, Tehran, during the academic year 2022. A total of 300 participants, aged 18 and above, with at least two years of marriage, were selected using convenience sampling. Data collection tools included the Marital Commitment Questionnaire (Adams & Jones, 1997), the Attachment Style Questionnaire (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), the Emotional Orientation Toward Sexuality Questionnaire (Aliabadian & Hassanzadeh, 2016), and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003). Data were analyzed using multivariate regression in SPSS version 26.

**Findings:** The findings indicated significant correlations between attachment styles and marital commitment: avoidant ( $\beta = -0.114$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and ambivalent ( $\beta = -0.195$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) attachment styles were negatively associated, while secure attachment style ( $\beta = 0.142$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was positively associated with marital commitment. Among emotional orientation subscales, only "desire for sex" showed a positive and significant correlation ( $\beta = 0.374$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) with marital commitment. Emotion regulation was also positively correlated ( $\beta = 0.691$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and accounted for 19% of the variance in marital commitment ( $R^2 = 0.19$ ).

**Conclusion:** Secure attachment style and emotion regulation were the strongest predictors of marital commitment. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating training on attachment styles and emotion regulation strategies in workshops for married individuals. Additionally, fostering healthy emotional orientation in sexual relationships, particularly enhancing desire, can further strengthen marital commitment.

**Keywords:** marital commitment, attachment styles, sexual relationships, emotion regulation.

pivotal role in maintaining long-term relationship stability and satisfaction. It influences not only mental health and life satisfaction but also external factors such as income and job performance (Moghadamnia & Soleimani Farsani, 2023; Pidad et al., 2024). Despite its significance, challenges in maintaining marital commitment can lead to relationship dissatisfaction,

social deviance, and even divorce (Moghadamnia & Soleimani Farsani, 2023).

Attachment theory provides a useful framework for understanding marital dynamics. Developed by Bowlby, attachment theory suggests that early life experiences shape attachment patterns, which continue into adulthood and influence romantic relationships (Afshin et al., 2024). Secure attachment is linked to psychological well-being and higher relationship satisfaction, while insecure attachment styles, such as avoidant and anxious attachment, are associated with relationship instability (Khorrami Nobandi & Yaghoubi Pour, 2024). Existing research demonstrates a strong association between attachment styles and marital commitment, but there remains a need to examine how these dynamics interact with other predictors (Ghezelseflo, 2020; Sadeghi et al., 2019).

Sexual satisfaction is another critical aspect of marital relationships. Emotional and physical intimacy in sexual relations fosters closeness and improves the quality of marital life (Bijan & Behzadipour, 2022). Emotional orientation in sexual relations encompasses feelings such as desire and passion, which significantly impact marital satisfaction and commitment. For example, higher sexual desire has been positively correlated with marital commitment, whereas low satisfaction often predicts marital instability (McNulty et al., 2019).

Emotion regulation, the process by which individuals manage their emotional experiences, also plays a crucial role in marital dynamics (Chukwuemeli, 2025; Cinek, 2025). Effective emotion regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, enhance interpersonal relationships by reducing conflict and fostering intimacy (Farmer & Chapman, 2025; Koçyigit & Uzun, 2025). Conversely, poor emotion regulation is linked to reduced marital satisfaction and an increased likelihood of relationship problems (Mirgain & Cordova, 2007).

Although previous studies have explored the individual effects of attachment styles, sexual relations, and emotion regulation on marital commitment, few have examined their combined predictive power. Understanding these interactions is essential to developing interventions aimed at strengthening marital relationships. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of attachment styles, emotional orientation in sexual relations, and emotion regulation in predicting marital commitment among married women.

## Methods and Materials

### *Study Design and Participants*

This descriptive-correlational study aimed to examine the predictive role of attachment styles, emotional orientation in sexual relations, and emotion regulation on marital commitment. The study was conducted among married students from Islamic Azad University branches in Tehran during the 2022–2023 academic year.

A total of 300 participants were selected using convenience sampling. Participants were eligible for inclusion if they were married, aged 18 years or older, and had been married for at least two years. Exclusion criteria included unwillingness to participate and failure to complete the questionnaires. While convenience sampling was used due to logistical constraints, this approach may introduce selection bias, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings.

Participants ranged in age from 20 to 45, with an average marital duration of 7.5 years ( $\pm 3.2$  years). Key demographic variables such as employment status, education level, and number of children were also recorded.

### *Instruments*

**Marital Commitment Questionnaire (Adams & Jones, 1997):** This questionnaire measures marital commitment using three subscales: personal, moral, and structural commitment. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater commitment. Reliability and validity have been confirmed in previous studies (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

**Attachment Style Questionnaire (Hazan & Shaver, 1987):** This instrument assesses secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles. Each subscale contains five items rated on a Likert scale. Previous studies report good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.78$ ).

**Emotional Orientation Toward Sexuality Questionnaire (Aliabadian & Hassanzadeh, 2016):** This tool evaluates the emotional dimensions of sexual relations, including desire, fear, and indifference. It contains 50 items rated on a 5-point scale, with subscale reliabilities ranging from 0.75 to 0.88.

**Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003):** This tool assesses cognitive reappraisal and

emotional suppression strategies using 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Internal consistency in prior studies has been high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83).

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Multivariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive role of attachment styles, emotional orientation, and emotion regulation on marital commitment. Assumptions for regression analysis, including multicollinearity (Variance Inflation Factor < 3), normality of residuals (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test,  $p > 0.05$ ), and independence of errors (Durbin-Watson statistic = 1.97), were tested and met. Missing

data were handled using listwise deletion. Potential confounding variables, such as education level and employment status, were controlled for during the analysis. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$  for all statistical tests.

### Findings and Results

The sample consisted of 300 married female students with an average age of 30.77 years ( $SD = 6.91$ ) and an average marital duration of 7.5 years ( $SD = 3.2$ ). A majority held a bachelor's degree (54.3%) and were first-born children (40%). Detailed demographic data are summarized in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

*Frequency Distribution Based on Demographic Variables*

| Variable          | Categories        | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Educational Level | Bachelor's Degree | 163       | 54.3%      |
|                   | Master's Degree   | 116       | 38.7%      |
|                   | Doctorate         | 21        | 7%         |
| Birth Order       | First-born        | 120       | 40%        |
|                   | Middle child      | 66        | 22%        |
|                   | Last-born         | 68        | 22.7%      |
|                   | Only child        | 46        | 15.3%      |

According to [Table 1](#), most of the participants were undergraduate students (54.3%) and first-born children (40%).

The mean and standard deviations for the main study variables are presented in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2**

*Mean and Standard deviation of the research Variables*

| Variable                               |                                  | Mean   | SD    |
|--|----------------------------------|--------|-------|
| Marital Commitment                     |                                  | 143.19 | 16.46 |
| Attachment Style                       | Secure                           | 16.49  | 3.44  |
|  | Avoidant                         | 16.25  | 3.81  |
|  | Anxious                          | 16.01  | 3.83  |
|  |                                  |        |       |
| Emotional Orientation Toward Sexuality | Fear of Sexual Relations         | 63.28  | 12.55 |
|  | Desire for Sexual Relations      | 70.55  | 7.25  |
|  | Indifference to Sexual Relations | 32.09  | 6.98  |
| Emotion Regulation                     |                                  | 44.26  | 7.23  |

Regarding the multiple regression assumptions, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to test and confirm the normality of the distribution. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson test was used to test the independence of errors. Since the Durbin-Watson statistic was between 1.5 and 2.5, it indicates that there was no autocorrelation among the errors. As for the multicollinearity assumption, since the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

values were between 1 and 3, multicollinearity was not a concern in the current analysis. Secure attachment style showed a positive and significant correlation with marital commitment ( $r=0.45$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), while avoidant ( $r=-0.34$ ,  $p=0.02$ ) and anxious attachment styles ( $r=-0.41$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) were negatively correlated. Among the subscales of emotional orientation in sexual relations, only "desire for sex" was positively correlated with

marital commitment ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Emotion regulation also showed a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 3**

*Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Marital Commitment Based on Attachment Styles, Emotional Orientation Toward Sexuality, and Emotion Regulation*

| Model      | SS       | Df  | MS      | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | F      | P     |
|------------|----------|-----|---------|-------|----------------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
| Regression | 17156.76 | 7   | 2450.96 | 0.460 | 0.212          | 0.193                   | 11.200 | 0.001 |
| Residual   | 63902.02 | 292 | 218.84  |       |                |                         |        |       |
| Total      | 81058.78 | 299 |         |       |                |                         |        |       |

A multivariate regression analysis was conducted to predict marital commitment based on attachment styles, emotional orientation in sexual relations, and emotion regulation in Table 3. The regression model was

statistically significant ( $F(7, 292) = 11.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and explained 21.2% of the variance in marital commitment ( $R^2 = 0.212$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.193$ ).

**Table 4**

*Standardized, Unstandardized Coefficients and t-Statistics of the Variables Entered in the Regression Equation*

| Variable                               |                                  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | P     |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
|  |                                  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |       |
| Constant                               |                                  | 99.25                       | 10.78      | 9.18                      |       | 0.001 |
| Attachment Style                       | Secure                           | 0.36                        | 0.18       | 0.14                      | 2.03  | 0.043 |
|  | Avoidant                         | -0.49                       | 0.24       | -0.11                     | -1.98 | 0.048 |
|  | Anxious                          | -0.83                       | 0.24       | -0.19                     | -3.42 | 0.001 |
| Emotional Orientation Toward Sexuality | Fear of Sexual Relations         | -0.15                       | 0.11       | -0.12                     | -1.43 | 0.150 |
|  | Desire for Sexual Relations      | 0.85                        | 0.12       | 0.37                      | 7.08  | 0.001 |
|  | Indifference to Sexual Relations | -0.19                       | 0.19       | -0.08                     | -1.00 | 0.310 |
| Emotion Regulation                     | 0.694                            |                             | 0.08       | 0.69                      | 7.92  | 0.001 |

Table 4 presents the regression coefficients for all predictors. Secure attachment style was positively associated with marital commitment ( $\beta = 0.142$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.26],  $p = 0.043$ ), while avoidant ( $\beta = -0.114$ , 95% CI [-0.21, -0.02],  $p = 0.048$ ) and anxious attachment styles ( $\beta = -0.195$ , 95% CI [-0.28, -0.10],  $p = 0.001$ ) were negatively associated. Among the subscales of emotional orientation, only "desire for sex" was a significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.374$ , 95% CI [0.23, 0.52],  $p < 0.001$ ). Emotion regulation emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.691$ , 95% CI [0.53, 0.85],  $p < 0.001$ ).

Fear of sexual relations ( $\beta = -0.120$ ,  $p = 0.150$ ) and indifference to sexual relations ( $\beta = -0.084$ ,  $p = 0.310$ ) were not significant predictors of marital commitment. These findings suggest that while desire plays a significant role, other emotional orientations in sexual relations may have limited direct effects.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the predictive role of attachment styles, emotional orientation in sexual relations, and emotion regulation on marital commitment among married women. The findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of marital relationships, with theoretical and practical implications. The results revealed that secure attachment style positively predicted marital commitment, aligning with Bowlby's attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of emotional security in fostering stable relationships. Conversely, avoidant and anxious attachment styles negatively predicted marital commitment, consistent with findings from Ghezelseflo (2020), which suggest that insecure attachment undermines relationship satisfaction (Ghezelseflo, 2020).

Emotion regulation emerged as the strongest predictor of marital commitment, highlighting its critical role in managing interpersonal conflicts and fostering intimacy. This finding supports Gross's model of emotion

regulation, which posits that adaptive strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, enhance emotional well-being and relationship stability. Among the subscales of emotional orientation in sexual relations, "desire for sex" showed a significant positive association with marital commitment. This finding underscores the role of sexual intimacy as a key component of marital satisfaction and stability, as suggested by McNulty et al. (2019). However, "fear of sexual relations" and "indifference to sexual relations" did not predict marital commitment significantly, which may indicate that these dimensions have indirect effects not captured in the current model (McNulty et al., 2019).

In explaining this finding, it can be stated that sexual relations are one of the most important aspects of marital communication. Meeting primary needs, especially sexual needs, and having satisfying sexual relations—considered as an essential component of intimacy between couples—can create both physical and emotional closeness. This contributes to improving the quality of the marital relationship and, consequently, enhances commitment to the marital life. Therefore, the greater the desire and willingness of spouses to engage in sexual relations, the higher the likelihood of increased intimacy and, in turn, increased marital commitment. Explaining this finding, it can be stated that individuals may face many negative memories and experiences throughout the day that emotionally trigger them, leading to rumination, which in turn affects their mental health. Creating an environment that allows individuals to express and disclose their emotions helps process these negative and harmful experiences. Additionally, using emotion regulation strategies allows individuals to cope with and manage their negative experiences, helping them manage stressful events and maintain emotional balance in their lives. Recognizing others' emotions also helps in establishing effective interpersonal relationships, including with a spouse, which can positively influence the stability of marriage and marital commitment.

Several limitations should be acknowledged: The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants might overestimate socially desirable traits. The study's design limits the ability to infer causation between predictors and marital commitment. The use of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of findings to broader populations.

The study was conducted among married students in Iran, which may limit the applicability of findings to other cultural contexts. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, more diverse samples, and mixed-method approaches to explore underlying mechanisms.

The findings have several practical implications for marital counseling and educational programs: Workshops could focus on enhancing secure attachment behaviors, such as effective communication and trust-building while addressing maladaptive patterns associated with avoidant and anxious attachment styles. Programs should teach adaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, to help couples manage conflicts and strengthen their emotional bond. Counseling sessions could emphasize the importance of maintaining desire and passion in sexual relationships as a means of enhancing marital commitment.

Future studies should: Explore the longitudinal effects of emotion regulation on marital commitment across diverse cultural contexts. Investigate mediating factors, such as marital satisfaction, to better understand the pathways linking attachment styles and sexual orientation to marital commitment. Examine the role of gender and other demographic variables in moderating these relationships.

This study highlights the importance of attachment styles, emotion regulation, and sexual desire in predicting marital commitment. Secure attachment and adaptive emotion regulation strategies are particularly critical for fostering stable and satisfying relationships. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance marital commitment, mainly through counseling and educational programs. By addressing the identified gaps, future research can further clarify the dynamics of marital relationships and contribute to more effective support strategies for couples.

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#### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.



## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch (Approval Code: IR.IAU.SARI.REC.1402.099). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing data and securely storing the responses.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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