



## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFECTIONISM, NARCISSISM, AND FLEXIBILITY WITH EMOTIONAL DIVORCE AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN TEHRAN

Zhaleh Bahraie<sup>1</sup>, Taher Tizdast<sup>2</sup>

1. *Department of psychology, college of human science, North Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.*
2. *Department of psychology, Tonekabon Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran Mazandaran.*

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between perfectionism, narcissism, and flexibility with emotional divorce among working women. The study population consisted of all women working in Education in Tehran in 2016. We selected 356 subjects as samples by cluster sampling from among the population. They filled out questionnaire of emotional divorce, narcissism, perfectionism, and flexibility. Method of the study was descriptive-correlational. We used correlation and stepwise regression for data analysis. The results of Pearson correlation showed a negative relationship between positive perfectionism and emotional divorce, and a positive relationship between negative perfectionism and emotional divorce. There is a positive relationship between narcissism and emotional divorce, and a negative relationship between flexibility and emotional divorce. The results of stepwise regression showed that negative perfectionism predicts 33.1%, narcissism 7.1%, flexibility 3.2%, and perfectionism 1.3% of the changes of emotional divorce. Overall, these variables are able to predict about 44.7% of the changes in emotional divorce.

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### Introduction

Perfectionism, as a personality trait, is a multi-dimensional construct [1, 2], which is identified with an effort to be perfect and set high standards for performance along with the tendency towards highly critical evaluations of the personal conduct and excessive sensitivity to errors [1; 2]. Research evidence distincts between two dimensions of perfectionism [3; 4]. The first dimension has been described as positive, healthy, or adapted perfectionism and includes those aspects of perfectionism related to perfectionism efforts such as high personal standards, setting precise criteria for individual performance, and effort to be perfect [5,6,7]. The second dimension as the negative perfectionism is correlated with non-adapted indices, such as depression, anxiety, stress and negative affect, inefficient coping styles and physical ailments [7, 8].

On the other hand, narcissism is associated with some positive and negative consequences. Among its positive outcomes, one can refer to reducing depression, extroversion, initial satisfaction, and better performance when with others [9]. On the other hand, due to thirst of attention, extreme self-confidence, lack of empathy, aggression, and social incompatibility are some of the negative consequences of narcissism [10]. On the other hand, cognitive flexibility refers to human ability to adapt strategies of the cognitive process used to face new and unexpected situations of the environment (Canas, Quesada et al., 2003). Cognitive flexibility is one of the main components of executive functions. Executive functions regulate behavior outputs that usually include inhibition and control of stimuli, working memory, cognitive flexibility, planning, and organizing (Denkela, 2003).

**Corresponding Author:** Zhaleh Bahraie, Department of psychology, college of human science, North Branch, Islamic Azad University,tehran, Email: zhaleh\_bm2295@yahoo.com

According to material presented in this study, the basic question of the study is whether there is a relationship between perfectionism, narcissism, and flexibility with emotional divorce of women working.

Review of literature

Perfectionism

Perfectionism, as a personality trait, is a multi-dimensional construct [1,2], which is identified with an effort to be perfect and setting high standards for performance along with the tendency towards highly critical evaluations of the personal conduct and excessive sensitivity to errors [1; 2].

Maladaptive perfectionism may have emotional (such as anxiety and depression), social (social isolation), physical (such as insomnia), cognitive (e.g. focus and disrupted focus), and behavioral (e.g. frequent control of tasks, repetitive doing of tasks, and a long time for doing tasks) consequences [11].

Hewitt and Felt [2] suggested that any of the dimensions of perfectionism might have an important role in the onset of psychopathological damage or play this role through their relationship with stress and by adding stressful and annoying experience, or a sense of failure as a mediating factor in the onset of these diseases.

Perfectionism dimensions from the perspective of Hewitt and Felt

Self-oriented perfectionism

Self-oriented perfectionism is an internal characteristic of the individual. This dimension of perfectionism directly refers to itself. Features of this aspect are described as follows: determining unrealistic criteria of stringent assessment in relation to one's performance, focus on one's own weaknesses and faults, generalization of these unrealistic expectations and stringent assessments to all behavior. On top of these factors, self-oriented perfectionism requires a strong motivational factor for efforts to achieve perfection and avoid failure, which lead to self-criticism and self-punishment (San Silic, 2003).

Other-oriented perfectionism (OOP)

Another important dimension of perfectionism includes beliefs and expectations about the capabilities of others [12]. OOP The circuit is a interpersonal aspect, which includes a perfectionist standards for people who are very important for the person. Thus, this perfectionism may lead to difficult interpersonal relationships [13].

**Community-oriented perfectionism (COP)**

In COP, others have exaggerated and unrealistic expectations from the person. Although meeting these expectations is difficult, the person must meet them to be approved and accepted by others [1, 2]. On the other hand, as others impose these extreme criteria, they are experienced as externally imposed criteria. Thus, the person feels that they are uncontrollable, which leads to feelings of failure, anxiety, anger, frustration, and despair related to thoughts of suicide and depression [14].

Positive and Negative Perfectionism (normal and abnormal)

In abnormal perfectionism, social influence, organizing, and regulation are preferable. Index of abnormal perfectionism is high doubt and fear of making mistakes, whereas index of normal perfectionism is high standards and self-oriented perfectionism for performance.

By distinction of normal and neurotic perfectionism, Hemachek (1978) raises the issue that the person with normal perfectionism enjoys effort and competition for excellence and perfection, recognizes his personal limitations, is happy with his performance, and has flexibility in changing his schedule [15].

**Narcissism**

Narcissism is defined as a mixed blessing (Paul Haas, 1998) composed of adaptive and non-adaptive aspects [16, 17]. Narcissism is often known as an important and complex personality trait containing a sense of grandiosity and brittle at the same time, entitlement, preoccupation with success, and desire to get respect from others (Ames, Ross et al. 2006).

According Krenberg [18], narcissism is a psychological immune response created as the result of a combination of feeling inferior and megalomania. In contrast, according to Kohut, psychological narcissism occurs due to failure of the aspirations of the parents because of rejection or indifference. Many researchers consider narcissism as a continuum, on one side of which is clinical narcissism, and on the other, healthy narcissism, but there are no absolute separate boundaries between the two, but they are relative and continuous (Jordan, 2001).

Narcissistic people prefer to focus on themselves. It is observed that those who get high scores in narcissism scale when writing narrative stories, they have widespread use of first-person pronouns. Narcissistic people see themselves apart from the social world around them. They consider themselves unique, compared to less narcissistic people, and have a tendency to consider themselves independent and self-sufficient [20]. Narcissistic people have great respect for themselves and often find themselves better than others. They are many self-concepts and feelings of superiority and megalomania [21].

Narcissism is associated with some positive and negative consequences. Among its positive outcomes, one can refer to reducing depression, extroversion, initial satisfaction, and better performance when with others. On the other hand, due to thirst of attention, extreme self-confidence, lack of empathy, aggression, and social incompatibility are some of the negative consequences of narcissism (Yang & Pinsky, 2006).

Wink [22] identified three types of narcissism using Q method and called them willful, over-sensitive, and autonomous narcissism. Willful narcissism has features such as sure of one, self-rogue (which clearly shows magnanimity), poor impulse control, and a strong orientation towards power. Over sensitive narcissism is described as a person excessively inhibited, introverted, with no self-confidence, and as a person who has a latent sense of his own importance.

According to Wink (1992), willful and over-sensitive narcissisms are strongly correlated, respectively, with overt and covert narcissism. Autonomous narcissism is described as creative, sympathetic, and the orientation towards the development of healthy narcissism. Both magnanimous and vulnerable narcissisms are correlated with key features such as narcissism, entitlement, fun loving, fragile self-esteem, and exploitative interpersonal relationships (Kine et al., 2008).

#### Flexibility

Cognitive flexibility refers to human ability to adapt cognitive process strategies to deal with new and unexpected situations in the working environment. Some researchers have defined cognitive flexibility as the assessment of the person of the controllability of situations, which varies in different situations [23].

Today, flexibility has a special place in developmental pathology and mental health, so that every day the number of studies relevant to flexibility goes up. The results show positive outcomes of flexibility, such as increased mental health and satisfaction with life (Samani et al., 2007).

Flexibility helps effective dealing with problems, so that high flexibility is positively correlated with problem-focused coping strategies, while low flexibility is associated with emotion-oriented coping strategies (Goudarzi, 2016).

Evolution studies have shown that flexibility occurs at different ages and tissues. At the age of about 3 to 5 years, an increase in flexibility function is created that significantly helps the child's performance on complex tasks such as the sensing the problem and control. Researchers prefer to study these changes in executive functions.

In general, executive functions occur within the framework of reflection and consciousness that has some steps [24]. Based on the pattern of consciousness level, reflection increases with age and children can have a better performance in respond to the demands of the environment. Accordingly, increased level of alertness, increased quality of experience, the potential for recall, control, thinking consciousness, complexity of child-science helps children from structures of excitement and action.

#### Emotional Divorce

In emotional divorce, the two parties are not physically separated from each other and live together and some circumstances reign their relationship that do not exist in normal divorce. The two sides gradually realize that charm, attraction, interest and positive affect they have had towards each other have faded (Dezhgam, 2012).

Emotional divorce is the symbol of problems in healthy and correct communication between husband and wife. This communication problem at family level can spread in society and disrupt human communication [27].

#### Consequences of emotional divorce

Emotional divorce has consequences for families, one of which is men and women facing different pressures and emotional problems. Lack of motivation, boredom, and depression are of the problems that vast majority of men and women have.

Humiliation and character ruin are of the other consequences that studied men and women, who have emotional divorce, have experienced. Moreover, these people experience various neurological diseases. Another very important consequence of emotional divorce is children facing psychological and behavioral problems, including severe anxiety, isolation and withdrawal, aggression, school failure, emotional separation from father, and running away from home. Children's education failure is of these problems [26].

#### Hypotheses

##### The main hypothesis

There is a relationship between perfectionism, narcissism, and flexibility with emotional divorce in women working.

##### Sub-hypotheses

First sub-hypothesis: There is a relationship between perfectionism (positive and negative) and emotional divorce in women working.

The second sub-hypothesis: There is a relationship between narcissism and emotional divorce in women working.

The third sub-hypothesis: There is a relationship between flexibility and emotional divorce in women working.

#### Methodology

Regarding the purpose and nature, the study is applied, and regarding the method of data collection, it is descriptive and correlational. The study population consists of all women working in Education teaching staff in Tehran in 2016, who are 4854 people.

Multi-stage cluster sampling was used and 356 people were selected from among the population. Perfectionism questionnaire of Besharat [27], narcissism questionnaire by Raskin and Terry (1988), flexibility questionnaire by Dennis and Vander Wal (2010), and emotional divorce questionnaire by Guttman (2008) have been used to collect data. We used correlation and stepwise regression analysis (multivariate) for the analysis of data.

#### Data analysis

**The main hypothesis: There is a relationship between perfectionism, narcissism, and flexibility with emotional divorce in women working.**

Results of Table 1 show that the correlation coefficient between positive perfectionism and emotional divorce ( $r=-0.55$ ) at 0.01 level is negative and significant. Correlation coefficient between negative perfectionism and emotional divorce ( $r=0.57$ ) at 0.01 level is positive and significant. Correlation coefficient between narcissism and emotional divorce ( $r=0.46$ ) at 0.01 level

is positive and significant. The correlation coefficient between flexibility and emotional divorce ( $r=-0.42$ ) at 0.01 level is negative and significant.

**Table 1: Correlation matrix of perfectionism, narcissism, and flexibility with emotional divorce in working women**

Variables	Positive perfectionism	Negative perfectionism	Narcissism	Flexibility
Emotional Divorce	**0.55-	**0.57	**0.46	** -0.42

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**First sub-hypothesis:**

**There is a relationship between perfectionism (positive and negative) and emotional divorce in women working.**

Results of Table 2 show that the correlation coefficient between positive perfectionism and emotional divorce is ( $r=-0.55$ ) negative and significant, and the correlation coefficient between negative perfectionism and emotional divorce ( $r=0.57$ ) at level of 0.01 is positive and significant. Thus, according to the study, this hypothesis was confirmed, meaning that there is a relationship between perfectionism (positive and negative) and emotional divorce of women working.

**Table 2: Correlation matrix of perfectionism and emotional divorce**

Variables	Positive perfectionism	Negative perfectionism
Emotional Divorce	** -0.55	**0.57

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

**The second sub-hypothesis: There is a relationship between narcissism and emotional divorce in women working.**

Results of Table 3 show that the correlation coefficient between narcissism and emotional divorce ( $r=0.46$ ) at level of 0.01 is positive and significant, so the second hypothesis was confirmed, meaning that there is a relationship between narcissism and emotional divorce of women working.

**Table 3: Correlation matrix of narcissism and emotional divorce**

Variables	Narcissism
Emotional Divorce	**0.46

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

**The third sub-hypothesis: There is a relationship between flexibility and emotional divorce in women working.**

Results of Table 4 show that the correlation coefficient between flexibility and emotional divorce ( $r=-0.42$ ) at level of 0.01 is negative and significant, so this hypothesis was confirmed, meaning that there is a relationship between flexibility and emotional divorce of women working.

**Table 4: Correlation matrix of flexibility and emotional divorce**

Variables	Flexibility
Emotional Divorce	** -0.42

We have used stepwise regression to predict the emotional divorce of women working through perfectionism (positive and negative), narcissism, and flexibility.

In the first step, negative perfectionism; in the second step, narcissism; in the third step, flexibility, and in the fourth step, positive perfectionism enter the equation to predict the emotional divorce of women working through perfectionism (positive and negative), narcissism, and flexibility. These four variables kept their significance through four steps. In Table 5, regression analysis results have been presented.

**Table 5: Summary of the results of stepwise regression analysis**

Entered variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R2	R <sup>2</sup> Δ	F	df
Negative perfectionism	0.575	0.331	0.329	0.331	**165.239	1.334
Narcissism	0.634	0.402	0.339	0.071	**111.971	2.333
Flexibility	0.659	0.434	0.429	0.032	**84.899	3.332
Positive perfectionism	0.669	0.447	0.440	0.013	**66.862	4.331

$P < 0.01$ , \*  $P < 0.05$  \*\*

In Table 5, R represents the correlation between independent variables and the dependent variable. R<sup>2</sup> represents the explained variance of the dependent variable by the combination of independent variables. Modified R<sup>2</sup> is a more conservative index of the explained variance. ΔR<sub>2</sub> shows the contribution of each variable in predicting the dependent variable indicated separately. According to Table 5, negative perfectionism predicts 33.1%, narcissism 7.1%, flexibility 3.2%, and perfectionism 1.3% of the changes of emotional divorce. Overall, these variables are able to predict about 44.7% of the changes in emotional divorce. As shown in Table 5, analysis of variance shows that perfectionism (positive and negative), narcissism, and flexibility have a significant effect on the emotional divorce.

F value in Table 5 indicates a significant relationship between linear combination of the independent variables specified by the model and the dependent variable. If this value of F is not significant, we will not continue the multiple regression analysis or interpretation of these results, because this implies that our prediction of the criterion variable model is not better than chance.

**Table 4.8: Coefficients of stepwise regression analysis**

Steps of entry of the variables	Predictor variables	β Standardized coefficients	The standard error	Non-standard factors of β	t	The significance level
The first step	Negative perfectionism	0.575	0.2	0.263	12.855	0.01
The second step	Negative perfectionism	0.468	0.021	0.214	10.236	0.01
	Narcissism	0.228	0.028	0.174	6.293	0.01
The third step	Negative perfectionism	0.437	0.021	0.199	9.683	0.01
	Narcissism	0.215	0.029	0.130	4.514	0.01
	flexibility	-0.20	0.016	-0.068	-4.335	0.01
The fourth Step	Negative perfectionism	0.331	0.027	0.151	5.635	0.01
	Narcissism	0.214	0.029	0.130	4.535	0.01
	Flexibility	-0.151	0.017	-0.051	-3.082	0.01
	Perfectionism positive	-0.171	0.032	-0.088	-2.766	0.01

As shown in Table 6, t coefficients indicate that negative perfectionism and narcissism have a positive and significant impact on emotional divorce. Flexibility and positive perfectionism have a significant and negative impact on emotional divorce. Table 6 enables us to examine the outcome of t test about the weight of each of the predictor variables. Based on t-tests and the significance level, the researcher can evaluate separate contribution of each variable in predicting the dependent variable. Non-standard coefficients reflect separate regression coefficients of each independent variable in the main unit with which it is measured. Thus, comparing them with each other is difficult because each independent variable can be measured on a unique scale. Therefore, standardized coefficients, based on z scores with zero mean and standard deviation of one, are used. In other words, these scores provide a unit for all variables to assess and compare.

**Discussion and conclusion**

**The main hypothesis:**

According to the results, positive perfectionism has a significant negative relationship with emotional divorce, and negative perfectionism has a significant positive relationship with emotional divorce. The relationship between narcissism and emotional divorce is significant and positive, while the relationship between cognitive flexibility and emotional divorce is significant and negative. We used stepwise regression to predict emotional divorce based on predictor variables. The results showed that negative perfectionism predicts 33.1%, narcissism 7.1%, flexibility 3.2%, and perfectionism 1.3% of the changes of emotional divorce. Overall, these variables are able to predict about 44.7% of the changes in emotional divorce. In explaining the results, it can be argued that family is one of the most important basic institutions of human life, where consolidation and ensuring of the individual's health and survival of the community are formed. Individuals of any society are influenced by the family not only in physical and in livelihood terms but also emotionally-psychologically and in personality sphere because family is the place where the individuals can complete their character and be ready to accept social roles. Marital conflicts and divorce are serious threats to the stability of family ties that challenge marriage quality and cause negative

mental, physical, social, and economic consequences. Emotional divorce is a phenomenon ahead of legal divorce and on the rise, and personality traits such as narcissism and perfectionism and cognitive functions such as cognitive flexibility play an important role in predicting it.

**The first hypothesis:**

Results showed a negative correlation between positive perfectionism and emotional divorce, and a significant positive relationship between negative perfectionism and emotional divorce. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Iman and Ayatollah [28], Diamogio et al. [28], and Zamani, Ahadi, and Asgari [29]. In explaining the results, it can be argued that family, as the most important institution in society, has historically faced various harms. Healthy society is realized with a healthy family structure and function. Divorce is one of the devastating harms that destroying family functioning. In a general classification, divorce and separation are divided into two types: formal and emotional. In emotional divorce, according to customary conditions prevailing in society, men and women prefer to live under the same roof, but with no emotional relationship. In this regard, as a personality variable, meaning a set of high-level goals and standards for life, perfectionism could affect relations between men and women. In positive perfectionism, despite individual standards for functioning being at a high level, these goals are logical and accessible.

**Second hypothesis:**

The results showed a significant positive relationship between narcissism and emotional divorce. The results are in line with the findings of Lavner et al. [30]; Yazdanbakhsh et al. [31], and Besharat et al. [27]. In explaining the results, it can be stated that family is a unit with different aspects that because of its importance and special position has long been of interest to social scientists. Interactions of family, the quality of its life, and its effect on other components and institutions of society have prompted the intellectuals to study this unit with different approaches. Here, emotional divorce is considered a kind of anomaly in the family system that despite not leading to the separation of the couples and for some reasons man and woman live together; their life has changed into a futile marriage with no love, communication, or friendship. In this regard, the results of previous research showed that narcissism is among the personality traits negatively associated with quality of interpersonal relations (Egroni Zak et al., 2009; 32).

**The third hypothesis:**

The results showed a significant negative correlation between emotional divorce and flexibility. The results are in line with the findings of Taghizadeh and Farmani (2013), Arjmand Siahpoush and Piramun (2014). Based on the results of research, it can be argued that couples form the life in hope of warm interaction, but what is experienced in reality is that after a while due to ignorance and negligence of either party or both, emotions subside. This situation is exacerbated gradually and the life becomes cold. In this regard, a cognitive phenomenon that is very important in conjugal relationships is cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility is described as the major feature of human cognition and refers to the ability of the person to consider conflicting representation of an object or an event simultaneously [24].

**Suggestions**

1. According to the findings, in the areas of family harm and emotional divorce, the psychologists and family counselors are recommended using the findings with respect to the variables studied in clinical interventions related to emotional divorce.
2. On a practical level, providing educational and intervention programs to modify personality characteristics can improve the quality of interpersonal relations and explain the emotional divorce to couples.
3. According to the findings of this study, we suggest clinical therapists use strategies to improve cognitive flexibility in order to prevent emotional divorce.
4. According to the findings, we recommend related officials take action in making couples aware of the needed points by holding workshops or various media programs in factors affecting couples' emotional divorce.
5. It is recommended create valid free consultation centers and counseling centers regarding familiarity with marriage issues and the ways of strengthening the family.

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