

Modeling the Relationship Between Psychological Capital and Alexithymia With Emotional Divorce Through the Mediating Roles of Marital Adjustment and Spiritual Intelligence in Couples Applying for Divorce

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the goodness of fit of a model explaining the relationship between psychological capital and alexithymia with emotional divorce, mediated by marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence, among couples applying for divorce. The research method was descriptive–correlational. The statistical population consisted of all couples applying for divorce who referred to counseling centers in the city of Babol in 2023 ($N = 780$). Using simple random sampling, 271 women were selected ($n = 271$) and completed the Psychological Capital Questionnaire by Luthans et al. (2007), the Toronto Alexithymia Scale by Bagby et al. (1994), the Emotional Divorce Scale by Gottman et al. (1995), the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale by Busby et al. (1995), and the Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire by Abdollahzadeh et al. (2008). Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling and path analysis with SPSS and LISREL software. The findings indicated a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and emotional divorce ($r = -0.424, p < .01$). Resilience was also significantly and negatively related to emotional divorce ($r = -0.141, p < .05$). A significant negative relationship was found between hope and emotional divorce ($r = -0.243, p < .01$). Optimism showed a significant negative relationship with emotional divorce ($r = -0.191, p < .01$). In contrast, difficulty identifying feelings was significantly and positively related to emotional divorce ($r = 0.353, p < .01$). Difficulty describing feelings had a significant positive relationship with emotional divorce ($r = 0.315, p < .01$). Externally oriented thinking was also significantly and positively associated with emotional divorce ($r = 0.332, p < .01$). Overall alexithymia demonstrated a significant positive relationship with emotional divorce ($r = 0.380, p < .01$). The results further showed that psychological capital and alexithymia were related to emotional divorce through the mediating roles of marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence among couples applying for divorce, and that the proposed model exhibited adequate goodness of fit. These findings can assist family counselors and couple therapists in planning preventive and intervention strategies for emotional divorce by considering the role of predictive factors among divorce applicants and designing more effective interventions.

Key words: psychological capital, alexithymia, emotional divorce, marital adjustment, spiritual intelligence

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Introduction

Emotional divorce has increasingly been recognized as a consequential relational phenomenon that may precede legal dissolution while imposing comparable—or in some cases greater—psychological, familial, and social costs. Conceptually, emotional divorce refers to a progressive erosion of intimacy, affection, responsiveness, and mutual commitment, in which partners remain legally married but experience a marked decline in emotional connection and marital vitality. This form of relational disengagement is associated with chronic loneliness within the marriage, reduced dyadic support, and a shift from “we-ness” to parallel lives. In societies undergoing rapid cultural, economic, and demographic transitions, emotional divorce may become more visible because marital expectations evolve faster than couples’ adaptive resources and relational skills. Iranian research has similarly highlighted the salience of emotional divorce and related constructs such as cognitive divorce among couples seeking separation, emphasizing its prevalence and the need for explanatory models that integrate personal and relational determinants (1). At a broader level, divorce-related dynamics in Iran over extended periods also suggest that relational instability is embedded in multi-layered structural changes, motivating more refined psychological and family-centered inquiries into precursors and protective factors (2). Family structure shifts documented through registration and demographic statistics further reinforce that marital functioning is shaped by macro-level transformations that can amplify stressors and alter norms regarding couplehood and family roles (3).

The clinical and preventive relevance of emotional divorce is underscored by evidence that relational disconnection can spill over into parenting and family climate. For instance, the risk of physical and psychological abuse of children may increase in families involved in emotional divorce or formal divorce, highlighting emotional divorce as not only a couple-level problem but also a broader family health issue (4). Moreover, understanding emotional divorce is essential because it does not merely reflect dissatisfaction; it can be embedded in patterns of conflict escalation, emotional withdrawal, and impaired problem solving. Research on conflict resolution styles and marital adjustment—particularly in contexts of psychological vulnerability such as major depression—suggests that relational functioning is tightly coupled with emotional processes and coping strategies, and that marital adjustment can be compromised when emotional regulation and communication deteriorate (5). Such evidence supports the need to examine emotional divorce within frameworks that explicitly include emotional processing capacities and dyadic adjustment processes.

Within this literature, marital adjustment represents a central relational construct that can serve both as an outcome of individual resources and as a proximal predictor of emotional divorce. Marital adjustment includes consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion, capturing the couple’s ability to manage differences, maintain mutual satisfaction, and sustain a sense of togetherness. Empirical findings indicate that marital adjustment is meaningfully related to emotional functioning and interpersonal competencies. For example, predictors of marital adjustment have been documented in sensitive sociocultural contexts such as child marriage, demonstrating how age-related, contextual, and psychosocial variables can shape the quality of marital adaptation (6). Similarly, research on depression, conflict resolution, and marital adjustment suggests that emotional vulnerabilities can undermine adjustment and thereby heighten relational distress (5). In the Iranian context, interventions aimed at reducing emotional divorce and loneliness among betrayed women have demonstrated that skill-based training (e.g., emotional literacy) can reduce emotional

divorce-related outcomes, indirectly signaling the importance of dyadic competencies and emotional skills in maintaining marital bonds (7). Additionally, comparative work on post-divorce adjustment shows that the consequences of relationship breakdown are complex and may differ by gender, which further strengthens the argument for earlier preventive efforts targeting emotional divorce before legal dissolution occurs (8).

A growing body of work suggests that psychological capital is one of the most promising positive psychological resources for understanding relationship maintenance and resilience under stress. Psychological capital, commonly conceptualized as a higher-order construct comprised of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, reflects an individual's positive appraisal and agentic capacity to pursue goals, recover from adversity, and persist in the face of challenges. In organizational and applied psychology, psychological capital has been linked to well-being, adaptive functioning, and quality of life, indicating that it functions as a robust protective resource across diverse life domains (9, 10). The motivational foundations of sustained goal pursuit and adaptive behavior are also consistent with broader motivational theory, which emphasizes the joint contribution of biological, psychological, and environmental determinants in shaping persistence and coping under adversity (11). When psychological capital is high, individuals may be more likely to engage in constructive problem solving, maintain hopeful pathways thinking, and interpret marital challenges as manageable rather than catastrophic—processes that can plausibly buffer against emotional divorce.

Evidence from Iranian studies directly supports the association between psychological capital and emotional divorce. For example, research examining couples in Kerman reported that psychological capital has a meaningful impact on emotional divorce rates, reinforcing its relevance as a protective factor in marital contexts (12). Similarly, psychological capital and self-differentiation have been shown to predict emotional divorce among female teachers, suggesting that intrapersonal resources and relational boundaries jointly contribute to protecting marital attachment and reducing emotional disengagement (13). In addition, the role of psychological capital has been examined in the context of marital adjustment, where psychological capital may mediate the influence of personality traits on marital adjustment, implying that positive psychological resources can translate trait dispositions into more adaptive dyadic functioning (14). While much of the foundational psychological capital literature emerged in occupational settings, research with church ministers also indicates that psychological capital predicts behavioral and well-being-related outcomes, supporting its generalizable function as a resource that can be mobilized in relational settings as well (15). Moreover, interventions can strengthen psychological capital, as indicated by evidence that mindfulness training can enhance psychological capital and emotional regulation, suggesting modifiability and applied potential for relational prevention programs (16). Similarly, psychological capital training has been associated with improvements in happiness and psychological well-being among divorced women, reinforcing psychological capital as a target for psychosocial interventions relevant to relationship transitions (17). Psychological capital has also been linked to psychological empowerment and wisdom-related outcomes, indicating pathways through which it may enhance agency and adaptive decision-making in interpersonal contexts (18).

Parallel to the protective role of psychological capital, alexithymia has been consistently identified as a risk factor for marital distress. Alexithymia involves difficulty identifying feelings, difficulty describing feelings, and a tendency toward externally oriented thinking that prioritizes concrete details over emotional

experience. In intimate relationships, alexithymia may impair emotional disclosure, reduce empathic attunement, and increase misunderstanding, which can erode marital satisfaction and intensify relational distance. The broader psychological literature has also considered normative patterns of emotional restriction—particularly in men—showing that alexithymia-related processes can be embedded in gender role conflict and friendship difficulties and are associated with psychological well-being outcomes (19). Within marital contexts, alexithymia has been empirically linked to emotional divorce. Research has shown that alexithymia, interpersonal forgiveness, and marital satisfaction predict emotional divorce, highlighting alexithymia as a salient vulnerability that may operate through relational affective processes and unresolved grievances (20). Extending this line, structural modeling has indicated that alexithymia relates to emotional divorce through mediating processes such as marital dissatisfaction, suggesting that emotional processing deficits may foster dissatisfaction that gradually culminates in emotional disengagement (21). Additional Iranian evidence also supports the association of alexithymia with marital quality of life, and suggests that spiritual intelligence may be a key protective factor that interacts with emotional processing capacities in shaping marital outcomes (22). Collectively, these studies indicate that alexithymia should be integrated into explanatory models of emotional divorce, not only as a direct risk factor but also through its indirect effects via marital adjustment and related relational evaluations.

Spiritual intelligence represents another construct of interest, particularly in culturally embedded contexts where meaning-making, transcendence, and values-based living are salient in family life. Spiritual intelligence is commonly described as the capacity to apply spiritual resources, values, and meanings to enhance functioning and well-being, enabling individuals to approach challenges with purpose, compassion, and a broader perspective. In marital relationships, spiritual intelligence may foster forgiveness, patience, empathic understanding, and commitment—factors that can support marital adjustment and reduce emotional withdrawal. Iranian research has demonstrated a relationship between identity styles, spiritual intelligence, and emotional divorce among married students, suggesting that spiritual intelligence may be inversely associated with emotional divorce tendencies (23). Furthermore, modeling studies have examined spiritual intelligence in relation to emotional divorce through mediating mechanisms such as attitudes toward extramarital relationships and maladaptive schemas, reinforcing the view that spiritual intelligence can function as a protective resource within complex relational pathways (24). Internationally, evidence from older couples suggests that resilience and spirituality are associated with marital peace, implying that spiritual resources continue to matter for relational harmony across the lifespan (25). Given these findings, spiritual intelligence is a plausible mediator or buffer that may help translate psychological capital into healthier relationship dynamics, or mitigate the adverse relational effects of alexithymia.

In addition to spiritual intelligence, emotional and motivational factors intersect with marital satisfaction and adjustment. Research on emotional intelligence, happiness, hope, and marital satisfaction supports the idea that positive affective capacities and hopeful cognition are associated with better marital outcomes (26). Such findings conceptually align with psychological capital's components—especially hope and optimism—indicating convergent pathways through which positivity and agency can support marital functioning. Moreover, marital compatibility research emphasizes that personality and marriage type (e.g., arranged vs. love marriage) relate to marital compatibility, reminding researchers that marital outcomes are embedded in broader interpersonal and cultural dynamics (27). In the Iranian context, attributional styles and

emotional expressiveness have been used to predict emotional divorce in married women, suggesting that cognitive interpretations and emotional communication styles are relevant levers in emotional divorce processes (28). Sexual satisfaction has also been compared between divorcing and non-divorcing couples, with findings indicating meaningful differences in sexual satisfaction and emotional divorce, which further supports multi-domain models that recognize intimacy and emotional connection as intertwined relational domains (29). Religious-spiritual psychotherapy has additionally been shown to influence emotional schemas and marital adjustment among women on the verge of divorce, strengthening the case for spirituality-related factors as clinically actionable contributors to relational stability (30). Similarly, psychological capital and emotional self-regulation have been emphasized as contributors to emotional divorce, providing further support for integrating self-regulatory capacities into explanatory models (31).

While the present study focuses on couples applying for divorce, it is important to recognize that this population is heterogeneous, and pathways to emotional divorce may reflect broader family-systemic and sociocultural dynamics. Recent evidence underscores the role of family structure and intimacy in emotional divorce, indicating that relational closeness and family structural characteristics are meaningful predictors of emotional divorce in cross-sectional analyses (32). Another contemporary model has emphasized marital commitment and family power structure, with intimacy operating as a mediator in predicting emotional divorce, highlighting the salience of relational governance and commitment processes in maintaining emotional bonds (33). Such findings are consistent with the argument that emotional divorce is rarely caused by a single factor; rather, it emerges through cumulative interactions among individual psychological resources (e.g., psychological capital), emotional processing deficits (e.g., alexithymia), relational functioning (e.g., marital adjustment, intimacy), and meaning-based resources (e.g., spiritual intelligence).

From an applied perspective, the increasing emphasis on therapeutic and preventive interventions for couples at risk of separation also informs the significance of the present model. Integrated approaches combining schema therapy with acceptance and commitment principles have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing marital conflicts and the desire for divorce among couples applying for divorce, suggesting that targeting deeper schemas and increasing psychological flexibility can influence divorce-related outcomes (34). Likewise, spiritual and religiously oriented interventions have shown potential in shifting emotional schemas and improving marital adjustment for women near divorce (30). These intervention findings highlight the need for explanatory models that specify modifiable pathways, including psychological capital development, enhancement of spiritual intelligence, and addressing alexithymia-related deficits in emotional awareness and expression. Moreover, qualitative work on adjustment experiences following emotional failure among young girls illustrates how emotional disruption can shape psychological and social adjustment, reminding researchers that emotional processing and coping are critical in relational crises and transitions (35). Collectively, this evidence supports a model-building approach that is both theoretically grounded and clinically useful.

Despite the expanding literature, several gaps remain. First, while psychological capital has been associated with well-being and adaptive functioning, fewer studies have tested comprehensive causal models that connect psychological capital to emotional divorce through both relational and meaning-based mediators in a single framework. Second, although alexithymia has been established as a marital risk factor, its joint modeling with psychological capital—particularly in divorce-applicant samples—remains limited.

Third, spiritual intelligence has frequently been examined as a correlate of marital outcomes, yet its positioning as a mediator that can translate personal resources and emotional capacities into relational outcomes warrants more systematic testing. Addressing these gaps is especially important for couples applying for divorce, because interventions in this stage may prevent the progression from emotional to legal divorce and reduce associated harms to partners and children.

Accordingly, the present study integrates these strands by proposing that psychological capital and alexithymia are associated with emotional divorce both directly and indirectly through the mediating roles of marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanatory account consistent with contemporary evidence in Iranian and international scholarship (12, 13, 21-23, 25, 32, 33).

The aim of this study was to test a structural model of the relationships between psychological capital and alexithymia with emotional divorce through the mediating roles of marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence among couples applying for divorce.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

The research method was descriptive–correlational, aimed at examining the relationships among variables within a causal model. The statistical population of the study included all couples applying for divorce who referred to counseling centers in the city of Babol in 2023. Based on available statistics, the approximate number of couples referring to the judiciary system was estimated at 780 couples. The inclusion criteria were a minimum marriage duration of 5 years, female gender, an age range of 35 to 55 years, having at least one child, and a minimum educational level of a high school diploma. The exclusion criteria included the presence of severe or chronic physical illness, psychological disorders (based on self-report), substance use, and having received counseling or psychological services during the past three months. Using simple random sampling, 271 participants were selected and completed the research questionnaires.

Measures

Emotional Divorce Questionnaire. The Emotional Divorce Questionnaire developed by Gottman et al. (1995) consists of items that assess emotional divorce as well as the emotional state of loneliness. It includes 24 dichotomous (yes/no) items. “Yes” responses are scored 1 and “no” responses are scored 0. Following back-translation, the face validity of this scale was confirmed by four experts in the field. The reliability of the scale, assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, was reported as .91 for men and .91 for women (Hashemi & Asghari Ebrahimabad, 2016). In the study by Mousavi and Rahiminajad (2015), the overall reliability of the test was reported as .93 using Cronbach’s alpha, and its face validity was confirmed by experts. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the total questionnaire was .891, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. In addition, the results of confirmatory factor analysis in the present study indicated an acceptable factor structure for this questionnaire.

Psychological Capital Questionnaire. The Psychological Capital Questionnaire was developed by Luthans et al. (2007) and consists of 24 items derived from standardized measures widely used to assess self-efficacy, resilience, hope, and optimism. Each subscale includes six items. Respondents rate each item on a six-point Likert scale ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. Confirmatory factor

analysis results indicated that the test measures the intended factors and constructs proposed by its developers. In a study conducted by Dianatnasab et al. (2014), Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was .71 and validity was reported as .66. Bahadari Khosroshahi (2011) reported a reliability coefficient of .97 for this questionnaire. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the total questionnaire was .881, indicating adequate internal consistency. Moreover, confirmatory factor analysis results demonstrated an acceptable factor structure for this questionnaire.

Alexithymia Questionnaire. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale was developed by Bagby et al. (1994) and consists of 20 items measuring three subscales: difficulty identifying feelings, difficulty describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The psychometric properties of this scale have been confirmed in numerous international studies (Parker et al., 2001, 2003; Taylor & Bagby, 2000) as well as in the Persian version (Besharat, 2007, 2008). In the original study by Bagby et al. (1994), the scale demonstrated adequate internal consistency and test-retest reliability, supporting a three-factor structure consistent with the theoretical model of alexithymia. Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported by Bagby et al. (1994) were .81 for the total scale, .78 for difficulty identifying feelings, .75 for difficulty describing feelings, and .66 for externally oriented thinking. In Besharat's (2007) study, internal consistency reliability coefficients for the total scale and the subscales of difficulty identifying feelings, difficulty describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking, using the test-retest method, were reported as .77, .73, .69, and .65, respectively (Besharat et al., 2006). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the total questionnaire was .901, indicating high internal consistency. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis results demonstrated an acceptable factor structure for this questionnaire.

Marital Adjustment Questionnaire. In the present study, marital adjustment was assessed using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale developed by Busby et al. (1995), which includes 14 items. The original version of this scale contains 32 items and was developed by Spanier (1976) based on the theory of Lewis and Spanier (1979) regarding marital relationship quality. Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000), after proposing their theory of quality of life, endorsed and recommended this questionnaire as an appropriate instrument for assessing marital quality (as cited in Yousefi, 2011). This questionnaire is scored on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 5. It consists of three subscales: consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion, with higher scores indicating higher marital quality and adjustment. Confirmatory factor analysis in the study by Busby et al. (1995) supported the three-factor structure of the questionnaire in the United States and demonstrated its validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported by Hollist and Miller (2005) for the subscales of consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion were .79, .80, and .90, respectively. In Yousefi's (2011) study, internal consistency reliability coefficients, including Cronbach's alpha and split-half reliability for the 14 items and the three factors of the total questionnaire, were satisfactory (.92 and .89, respectively). Additionally, convergent validity coefficients between marital quality and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Couple Cohesion Evaluation Questionnaire, and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale were reported as .39, .36, and .33, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the total questionnaire was .845, indicating adequate internal consistency. Confirmatory factor analysis results also demonstrated an acceptable factor structure for this questionnaire.

Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire. The Spiritual Intelligence Scale was developed by Abdollahzadeh et al. (2008) based on the cultural characteristics of Iranian society. This questionnaire consists of 29 items and two subscales: understanding and connection with the source of existence, and spiritual life. Items are scored on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Abdollahzadeh et al. (2008) administered this questionnaire to a sample of 280 participants and reported a reliability coefficient of .89. Using varimax rotation, two main factors were extracted: understanding and connection with the source of existence with 12 items, and spiritual life or reliance on the inner core with 17 items. The correlation coefficients between the first and second factors of this questionnaire and the Comprehensive Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire developed by Amram and Dryer (2008), consisting of 83 items, were .76 and .71, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the total questionnaire was .898, indicating high internal consistency. Confirmatory factor analysis results also supported an acceptable factor structure for this questionnaire.

Data Analysis

In the present study, structural equation modeling and path analysis were used for statistical data analysis.

Findings and Results

Among the 271 female participants, the mean age was 41.7 years ($SD = 6.2$), and the mean duration of marriage was 16.4 years ($SD = 7.1$). Regarding educational level, the highest frequencies were associated with a bachelor's degree (38.4%) and a high school diploma (32.1%).

The mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores of the study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Exogenous, Endogenous, and Mediating Variables: Psychological Capital, Alexithymia, Emotional Divorce, Marital Adjustment, and Spiritual Intelligence

Variable	Mean	SD	Maximum	Minimum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-efficacy	13.24	5.03	24	6	0.671	-0.794
Resilience	25.48	3.62	31	17	-0.454	-0.719
Hope	20.05	4.34	30	10	-0.394	-0.216
Optimism	6.90	1.39	14	6	1.998	0.564
Psychological capital	94.82	3.04	139	59	0.368	-1.334
Difficulty identifying feelings	26.76	5.33	34	15	-0.831	-0.541
Difficulty describing feelings	21.51	3.30	25	14	-0.832	-0.519
Externally oriented thinking	27.08	5.36	35	15	-0.831	-0.445
Alexithymia	75.27	2.78	99	45	-1.007	-0.271
Emotional divorce	16.67	4.173	24	10	-0.270	-1.327
Consensus	23.20	5.134	30	15	0.144	-1.538
Satisfaction	17.01	3.88	20	10	-1.007	-0.692
Cohesion	17.04	3.89	20	10	-0.894	-0.423
Marital adjustment	57.29	5.81	70	36	-0.483	-0.988
Source of existence	24.13	6.18	38	15	0.398	-1.227
Spiritual life	25.39	6.15	45	17	0.483	-0.624
Spiritual intelligence	49.51	4.02	83	32	0.423	-1.059

As shown in Table 1, within psychological capital, the highest mean pertains to resilience (25.48) and the lowest mean pertains to optimism (6.90). Within alexithymia, the highest mean pertains to difficulty identifying feelings (26.76) and the lowest mean pertains to difficulty describing feelings (21.51). Within marital adjustment, the highest mean pertains to consensus (23.20) and the lowest mean pertains to satisfaction (17.01). Within spiritual intelligence, the highest mean pertains to spiritual life (25.39) and the lowest mean pertains to source of existence (24.13). The mean score of emotional divorce was 16.67.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Study Variables

Variables	Emotional Divorce
1. Psychological capital	-0.476
2. Alexithymia	0.380
3. Marital adjustment	-0.760
4. Spiritual intelligence	-0.623

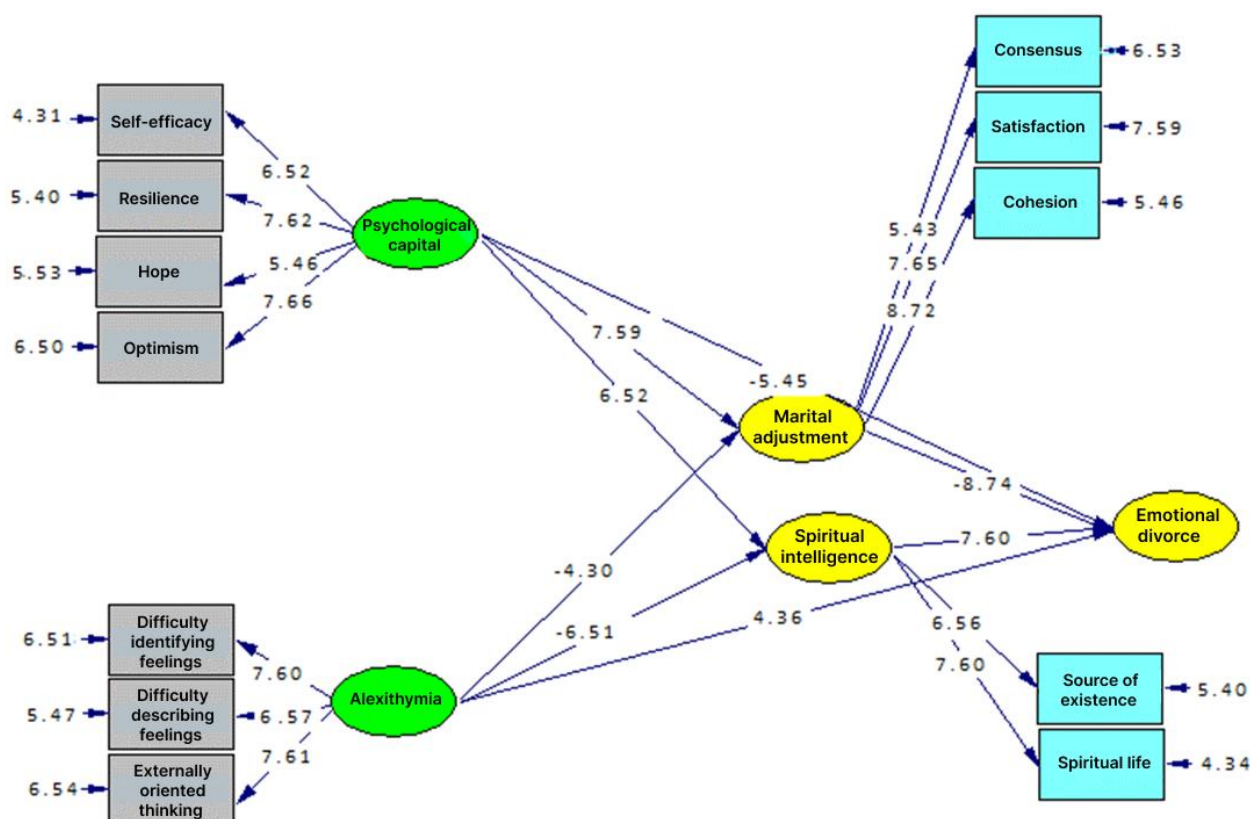
The results of Pearson correlation coefficients indicated a significant negative relationship between psychological capital and emotional divorce ($r = -0.476, p < .01$), a significant positive relationship between alexithymia and emotional divorce ($r = 0.380, p < .01$), a significant negative relationship between marital adjustment and emotional divorce ($r = -0.760, p < .01$), and a significant negative relationship between spiritual intelligence and emotional divorce ($r = -0.623, p < .01$).

Prior to data analysis using path analysis, the assumptions of multivariate normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and independence of errors were examined and confirmed. To assess normality, skewness and kurtosis indices were used. Because all skewness and kurtosis values for the study variables fell between -2 and $+2$, the assumption of normality was supported. To assess multicollinearity, tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics were examined; for all variables, VIF values were below 10 and tolerance values exceeded 0.10, indicating that the assumption of no multicollinearity was met. The Durbin–Watson test was used to assess the independence of errors. The obtained value in this study was 2.14, which falls within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5, indicating that the assumption of error independence was satisfied. Given that the assumptions were met, the fit of the proposed model was evaluated using goodness-of-fit indices. Path analysis was employed to evaluate the proposed model examining the relationship between psychological capital and alexithymia with emotional divorce through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence among couples applying for divorce, as depicted in Figure 1.

Table 3 presents the model fit indices along with their acceptable criteria.

Table 3. Fit Indices of the Modified Model

Fit Category	Index	Value	Criterion	Interpretation
Absolute	Chi-square (χ^2)	192.46	—	—
	Degrees of freedom (df)	68	—	—
	Significance level	.001	< .05	—
	χ^2/df	2.67	< 3	Good fit
	Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	0.912	> 0.90	Good fit
	Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	0.861	> 0.85	Good fit
Incremental	Relative Fit Index (RFI)	0.934	> 0.90	Good fit
	Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.922	> 0.90	Good fit
	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.920	> 0.90	Good fit
	Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI)	0.927	> 0.90	Good fit
	Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.918	> 0.90	Good fit
Parsimonious	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.032	< 0.10	Good fit
	Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	0.669	> 0.50	Good fit
	Parsimonious Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI)	0.677	> 0.50	Good fit



Chi-Square= 192.46, df=68, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.032

Figure 1. Significance statistics (t-values) of the components of the study variables.

The results in Table 3 indicate that the chi-square value was 192.46 with 68 degrees of freedom. The chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio was 2.67, which is below the threshold of 3 and indicates excellent model fit. The GFI value of 0.912 reflects good model fit, and the AGFI value of 0.861 exceeds the acceptable criterion of 0.85, further supporting adequate fit. The RMSEA value was 0.032, which is below 0.10 and indicates a desirable fit, thereby confirming the research model. Additionally, the NFI (0.918), TLI (0.927), CFI (0.920), and RFI (0.934) values all exceeded the recommended thresholds, collectively indicating good model fit and confirming the proposed research model.

Based on the quantitative goodness-of-fit indices, it can be concluded that the theoretical model of the study is acceptable. Accordingly, the relationships within the model and the values of the regression coefficients between the latent variables can be examined. To test the hypotheses, the partial *p*-value index was used. A relationship is considered statistically significant when the value of this index for the specified path is less than .05. Therefore, the model examining the relationship between psychological capital and alexithymia with emotional divorce through the mediating roles of marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence among couples applying for divorce demonstrates an acceptable level of fit.

Table 4 presents the direct effect coefficients and significance levels among the study variables.

Table 4. Estimates of Direct Effects of Independent Variables on Dependent Variables (Psychological Capital, Alexithymia, Emotional Divorce, Marital Adjustment, and Spiritual Intelligence)

Path	Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-value
Psychological capital → Marital adjustment	0.619	0.235	7.59	.0005
Psychological capital → Spiritual intelligence	0.543	0.317	6.52	.0005
Alexithymia → Marital adjustment	-0.329	0.324	-4.30	.0005
Alexithymia → Spiritual intelligence	-0.531	0.380	-6.51	.0005
Psychological capital → Emotional divorce	-0.476	0.235	-5.45	.0005
Alexithymia → Emotional divorce	0.380	0.307	4.36	.0005
Marital adjustment → Emotional divorce	-0.760	0.314	-8.74	.0005
Spiritual intelligence → Emotional divorce	-0.623	0.350	-7.60	.0005

Table 5 presents the results obtained from the bootstrap method, conducted using a macro program, for the mediating relationships.

Table 5. Estimates of Indirect Paths in the Model

Exogenous Variable	Mediator	Endogenous Variable	Estimate	Upper Limit	Lower Limit	p-value	Confidence Interval
Psychological capital	Marital adjustment	Emotional divorce	-0.436	0.247	0.130	.006	95%
Psychological capital	Spiritual intelligence	Emotional divorce	-0.460	0.126	0.102	.001	95%
Alexithymia	Marital adjustment	Emotional divorce	-0.629	0.151	0.119	.005	95%
Alexithymia	Spiritual intelligence	Emotional divorce	-0.461	0.240	0.131	.006	95%

The results in Table 5 indicate that the indirect effect coefficient of psychological capital on emotional divorce through the mediating role of marital adjustment was estimated at -0.436, and this path coefficient was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between psychological capital and emotional divorce through the mediating role of marital adjustment among couples applying for divorce. The indirect effect coefficient of psychological capital on emotional divorce through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence was estimated at -0.460, and this path coefficient was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Accordingly, psychological capital is related to emotional divorce through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence among couples applying for divorce.

Furthermore, the indirect effect coefficient of alexithymia on emotional divorce through the mediating role of marital adjustment was estimated at -0.629, which was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Thus, alexithymia is related to emotional divorce through the mediating role of marital adjustment among couples applying for divorce. Finally, the indirect effect coefficient of alexithymia on emotional divorce through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence was estimated at -0.461, and this path coefficient was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, alexithymia is related to emotional divorce through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence among couples applying for divorce.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study demonstrated that the proposed structural model explaining emotional divorce among couples applying for divorce achieved an acceptable level of fit and that the hypothesized

relationships among psychological capital, alexithymia, marital adjustment, spiritual intelligence, and emotional divorce were empirically supported. The results indicated that psychological capital was directly and negatively associated with emotional divorce, whereas alexithymia showed a direct and positive relationship with emotional divorce. In addition, marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence emerged as significant mediating variables through which psychological capital and alexithymia influenced emotional divorce. Taken together, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of emotional divorce and confirm that both personal psychological resources and emotional-processing vulnerabilities operate through relational and meaning-based pathways to shape marital disengagement.

The negative direct association between psychological capital and emotional divorce aligns with the theoretical assumption that positive psychological resources enhance individuals' capacity to cope with marital stressors, regulate emotions constructively, and maintain commitment during relational adversity. Psychological capital, encompassing self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, equips individuals with agentic beliefs and adaptive coping strategies that may prevent the gradual emotional withdrawal characteristic of emotional divorce. This finding is consistent with previous Iranian research showing that higher psychological capital is associated with lower levels of emotional divorce among couples (12) and among female teachers (13). It also accords with broader evidence linking psychological capital to well-being and adaptive functioning across life domains (9, 10). From a motivational perspective, individuals high in psychological capital are more likely to perceive marital challenges as manageable and temporary, rather than as insurmountable threats, which is consistent with motivational frameworks emphasizing resilience and goal-directed persistence under stress (11). Therefore, psychological capital may function as a protective buffer that reduces vulnerability to emotional disengagement by sustaining constructive engagement and relational hope.

In contrast, the positive direct association between alexithymia and emotional divorce highlights the detrimental role of emotional-processing deficits in marital relationships. Individuals with high levels of alexithymia experience difficulty identifying and describing emotions and tend to adopt an externally oriented thinking style, which can impair emotional communication, empathy, and intimacy. These deficits may foster misunderstanding, unresolved conflict, and emotional distance, thereby accelerating the process of emotional divorce. The present findings corroborate prior studies demonstrating that alexithymia predicts emotional divorce and marital dissatisfaction (20, 21). They are also consistent with research showing that alexithymia is associated with poorer marital quality of life and reduced relational functioning (22). Moreover, evidence from international research on normative male alexithymia and gender role conflict suggests that alexithymia-related processes are linked to psychological distress and relational discord, further supporting the present results (19). Collectively, these findings emphasize that emotional unawareness and expressive limitations constitute significant risk factors for emotional divorce.

Beyond these direct effects, a central contribution of the present study lies in elucidating the mediating roles of marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence. The results showed that marital adjustment was a strong negative predictor of emotional divorce and mediated the effects of both psychological capital and alexithymia on emotional divorce. This finding underscores marital adjustment as a proximal relational mechanism through which individual psychological characteristics translate into emotional outcomes within marriage. Couples with higher marital adjustment—characterized by greater consensus, satisfaction, and

cohesion—are less likely to experience emotional withdrawal, even in the presence of stress. This result is in line with evidence demonstrating that marital adjustment is closely related to emotional functioning and conflict resolution styles (5) and that reduced adjustment is associated with higher emotional divorce and loneliness (7). The mediating role of marital adjustment is also consistent with structural models showing that relational dissatisfaction mediates the impact of alexithymia on emotional divorce (21). Thus, marital adjustment appears to represent a critical relational pathway through which both strengths and vulnerabilities exert their influence on emotional disengagement.

Spiritual intelligence also emerged as a significant mediator in the present model, indicating that meaning-oriented and value-based capacities play an important role in shaping marital outcomes. The indirect negative effects of psychological capital on emotional divorce through spiritual intelligence suggest that individuals with higher psychological capital may be more capable of engaging spiritual resources—such as meaning-making, transcendence, and ethical commitment—to cope with marital challenges. This finding aligns with prior Iranian research showing that spiritual intelligence is inversely related to emotional divorce and interacts with identity styles and relational functioning (23). Similarly, modeling studies have demonstrated that spiritual intelligence can mediate relationships between maladaptive schemas and emotional divorce, reinforcing its protective role within complex relational pathways (24). International evidence further supports the association between spirituality, resilience, and marital peace, particularly among older couples, highlighting the enduring relevance of spiritual resources for relational harmony (25). In this context, spiritual intelligence may foster forgiveness, patience, and a broader perspective on marital difficulties, thereby mitigating emotional withdrawal.

The indirect positive effects of alexithymia on emotional divorce through reduced spiritual intelligence further clarify the mechanisms by which emotional-processing deficits undermine marital stability. Individuals with high alexithymia may struggle not only with emotional awareness but also with reflective meaning-making and value-based coping, which are central components of spiritual intelligence. Consequently, limited access to spiritual resources may exacerbate the relational impact of emotional unawareness, increasing vulnerability to emotional divorce. This interpretation is supported by findings indicating that spiritual intelligence moderates or mediates the association between emotional characteristics and marital quality (22). It also resonates with research showing that spiritual and religiously oriented psychotherapies can improve marital adjustment and emotional schemas among women on the verge of divorce, suggesting that spiritual capacities are modifiable and clinically relevant (30). Together, these results position spiritual intelligence as a meaningful pathway through which both psychological strengths and emotional deficits shape emotional divorce outcomes.

The strong negative association between marital adjustment and emotional divorce observed in this study is consistent with a broad literature emphasizing relational quality as a key determinant of marital stability. Reduced adjustment has been linked to higher levels of conflict, dissatisfaction, and emotional disengagement across diverse populations (5, 6). In the Iranian context, studies have documented the prevalence of cognitive and emotional divorce among couples applying for divorce, underscoring the urgency of identifying relational mechanisms that can be targeted in preventive interventions (1). Furthermore, recent work has highlighted the roles of intimacy, family power structure, and marital commitment in predicting emotional divorce, suggesting that relational governance processes interact with individual

resources to shape marital trajectories (32, 33). The present findings complement this literature by demonstrating that marital adjustment is not merely an outcome but a central mediator linking individual psychological characteristics to emotional divorce.

Taken together, the results support an integrative model in which emotional divorce among couples applying for divorce emerges from the interplay of positive psychological resources, emotional-processing vulnerabilities, relational functioning, and meaning-based capacities. Psychological capital appears to protect against emotional divorce both directly and indirectly by enhancing marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence, whereas alexithymia increases risk through direct effects and through undermining these mediating resources. These findings extend previous research by testing a comprehensive structural model within a high-risk population and by simultaneously incorporating marital adjustment and spiritual intelligence as mediators. In doing so, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of the pathways leading to emotional divorce and highlights multiple leverage points for prevention and intervention.

Regarding limitations, the present study employed a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference despite the use of structural equation modeling. Longitudinal designs would be necessary to establish temporal ordering among psychological capital, alexithymia, mediating variables, and emotional divorce. In addition, the sample consisted exclusively of women applying for divorce in a specific cultural and geographic context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to men, intact couples, or other sociocultural settings. Reliance on self-report measures may also introduce response biases related to social desirability or emotional distress at the time of assessment.

In terms of future research directions, subsequent studies should employ longitudinal or prospective designs to examine how psychological capital and alexithymia influence the progression from marital dissatisfaction to emotional and legal divorce over time. Including both partners in dyadic designs would allow for the examination of actor–partner effects and reciprocal influences between spouses. Future research could also explore additional mediators or moderators, such as intimacy, forgiveness, emotional regulation strategies, or family-of-origin variables, to further refine explanatory models of emotional divorce.

With respect to practical implications, the findings suggest that preventive and therapeutic interventions for couples at risk of emotional divorce may benefit from simultaneously strengthening psychological capital, enhancing emotional awareness and expression, improving marital adjustment skills, and cultivating spiritual intelligence. Counseling and couple therapy programs that integrate positive psychology, emotional skills training, and meaning-based or spiritually informed approaches may be particularly effective in reducing emotional disengagement and supporting marital resilience among couples applying for divorce.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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.

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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