



Relationship of Self-Differentiation and Social Intelligence with Happiness by Mediating Role of Difficulty in Cognitive Emotion Regulation Among Female-Headed Households

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Abstract

Background: Female-headed households are one of the vulnerable classes of society that are exposed to serious social problems. Happiness constitutes part of human emotions with different functional consequences in the personal, social, mental, cognitive, and emotional characteristics of female-headed households.

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of difficulty in cognitive emotion regulation in the relationships of self-differentiation and social intelligence with happiness among female-headed households in Ahvaz city in 2018.

Methods: This cross-sectional study included 261 female-headed households, which were selected by a purposive sampling method. The research instruments included the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI), the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), the Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI), and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS).

Results: The results showed that the relationship between difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation and happiness was significant, direct, and negative ($\beta = -0.50$, $P = 0.000$). Also, the relationship between social intelligence and happiness was significant, direct, and positive ($\beta = 0.21$, $P = 0.000$). There was no direct and significant relationship between self-differentiation and happiness ($\beta = 0.04$, $P = 0.545$). Path analysis results showed that difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation had a mediating role in the relationship of social intelligence ($\beta = -0.16$, $P = 0.000$) and self-differentiation ($\beta = -0.03$, $P = 0.019$) with happiness.

Conclusions: The research findings suggest the important mediating role of difficulty in cognitive emotion regulation in the relationships between social intelligence, happiness, and self-differentiation.

Keywords: Happiness, Emotional Intelligence, Cognitive, Emotion, Women

1. Background

There are many female-headed households in which a woman has to take the responsibility of the household livelihood in addition to her maternal role. Such women are faced with various problems due to their responsibilities. Inconsideration of this vulnerable group can damage the family and, finally, society (1). Although a female-headed household is not considered a problematic phenomenon by itself, the unfavorable economic situation, occupational discriminations, social and mental pressures imposed on such families can cause anxiety, depression, and other mental problems in them (2). If no measure is taken to resolve these problems and their origins, they can lead to social harms, which can sometimes be irreparable.

Happiness is one of the most important goals of human life (3). Happiness and the attitude towards life are determining factors in the face of events (4). Happy peo-

ple are more satisfied with their lives. They are healthier, more productive, and more willing to participate in social programs and public services. These attitudes become generalized to the family, workplace, and society, and they will be beneficial for society (5). Several studies suggest that this construct, as a mediating variable, is related to many factors such as physical health, psychological problems, adaptability, lifetime, self-esteem, situation management, and facing with events (6-8). Also, it has been found that there is a significant relationship between happiness and personality, education level, and socioeconomic situation (9).

One of the factors that seem to affect happiness is self-differentiation. Self-differentiation is an evolutionary process in which the person learns to create a balance between different stimulants and his/her unique identity. People with a favorable level of self-differentiation can

preserve their values and beliefs while cooperating with others to achieve their goals (10). A differentiated person can create a balance between rational-emotive action and intimacy-autonomy, and such people express higher levels of communication adaptability (11). Recent studies support the theoretical relationship of self-differentiation with psychological well-being, higher relationship satisfaction, lower anxiety, and interpersonal problems (12). Kim and Jung (13) found a positive relationship between self-differentiation and life satisfaction. Jankowski and Hooper (14) indicated a significant positive relationship between self-differentiation and mental health.

Another variable that can probably affect happiness is social intelligence. Social intelligence is a way of progress in life and social relationships. Social intelligence refers to the ability to accompany other people, be aware of social affairs, and be sensitive to stimuli received from other people (15). This characteristic is an important factor in achieving success and efficient performance (16). Boyatzis et al. (17) believe that people with a high level of social intelligence can express proper social behaviors to achieve the desired social goals. Emotional intelligence is a component of social intelligence and the first step to get into society. A person should acquire the ability to control his/her emotions and enter small and large communities. Thus, the promotion of emotional dimension leads to success in the social dimension (17).

Cognitive emotion regulation refers to the management of internal and external processes involved in starting, continuing, and regulating emotions under stressful conditions and expressing emotions in the events (18). Emotion regulation is an important factor determining health and successful performance in social interactions (19). According to studies, people's abilities to effectively regulate their emotions are effective in their happiness, physical health, interpersonal relationships, and social interactions. Emotion management plays an important role in creating and preserving interpersonal relationships by regulating the distance between individuals (20). Darali and Sohrabi (21) reported that cognitive emotion regulation is one of the most important tasks for achieving physical and psychological health. In general, it seems that cognitive emotion regulation plays an important role in female-headed households' adaptability to stressful life events, and it is one of the factors decreasing stress and concerns in this group of women.

2. Objectives

Female-headed households constitute part of a society facing various problems that disturb their health and happiness and cause some disorders in them. Therefore, a re-

search question raised as follows: Is there any relationship between self-differentiation, social intelligence, and happiness by the mediating role of difficulty in emotion regulation among female-headed households in Ahvaz city?

3. Methods

A causal-correlational study of the field type was designed. The statistical population of the study consisted of all female-headed households in Ahvaz city in 2018. A purposive sampling method was used to select the sample group. To this end, three questionnaires were first selected and clarified for the participants. The interviewer completed the questionnaires through interviews by presenting in different regions of the city. Besides, initial interviews were conducted with female vendors to make sure that they have husbands or are female heads of households. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz Branch (code: IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1396.112). The questionnaires were filled out with the participants' satisfaction, and written informed consent was obtained from the participants in this study. The participants were ensured that their information would remain strictly confidential. A total of 300 questionnaire forms were distributed, and 261 forms were analyzed following the elimination of incomplete ones. The sample size was estimated at 261 by SPSS and the test power index. An 80% power and a 0.05 alpha indicated that the sample size was adequate. Data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores, and Pearson correlation coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to determine reliability and validity. The skewness and kurtosis were utilized to specify the data normality, and the path analysis was used to assess the proposed model. Besides, SPSS and AMOS were further used for analyzing the data. The significance level was considered to be $\alpha = 0.05$.

3.1. Research Instruments

3.1.1. Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI)

The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) was first developed by Argyle and colleagues (22). The questionnaire contains 29 questions to measure life satisfaction, happiness or enjoyment, self-esteem, relaxation, control, and efficiency. The score range is from 29 to 116. Higher scores represent more happiness. Alipoor and Noorbala (23) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93 for this questionnaire.

3.1.2. Social Intelligence Scale

Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), comprising 21 questions, was designed by Silvera and colleagues (24). It measures individual social intelligence and its subscales (social information processing, social awareness, and social skills). A seven-point Likert scale is used for scoring, including strongly agree, somewhat agree, slightly agree, no idea, slightly disagree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree. Based on the Rezaei study (25), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.75 for the whole scale. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87 for the questionnaire.

3.1.3. Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI)

This inventory was designed by Skowron and Schmitt (26). The final scale includes 45 items and four components. These components include emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others (used for measuring the person's differentiation). This questionnaire is scored based on a six-point Likert scale. Skowron and Friedlander obtained the Cronbach's alpha coefficient as 0.88. Fakhari et al. (27) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.75 for this questionnaire. In the present study, the reliability of the questionnaire was obtained as 0.83 by Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient.

3.1.4. Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)

The difficulties in emotion regulation scale (DERS) was first developed by Gratz and Roemer (28). The initial scale was a self-report 36-item measure formulated to clinically assess difficulties in emotion regulation. This questionnaire has six components including rejection of emotional responses, difficulty in performing targeted behaviors, difficulty in control impulse, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity. The scale has an overall score and six sub-scores for each component. The internal consistency is 0.93 for questions, and over 80% for each of the components (29). In this study, the reliability of 0.88 was achieved for the whole scale using Cronbach's alpha.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics, including mean, Standard Deviation (SD), and the number of research variables are summarized in Figure 1. Table 1 shows the correlation matrix of the research variables. According to Table 1, the results of the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a significant relationship between all variables.

According to the data of Table 2, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.45) showed that the

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Variables

Variables	Happiness	Self-Differentiation	Social Intelligence
Happiness	1		
Self-differentiation	0.35 ^a	1	
Social intelligence	0.46 ^a	0.59 ^a	1
Cognitive emotion regulation	-0.61 ^a	-0.41 ^a	-0.49 ^a

^aP < 0.01

initial model required modification. To this end, the non-significant relationship between self-differentiation and happiness was removed. In the final model, the RMSEA= 0.001 indicated a good model fit.

Table 2. Initial and Final Model Fit Indicators

Fit Indicators	Initial Model	Final Model
χ^2	0.00	0.37
df	0	1
(χ^2 /df)	-	2.17
p	-	0.14
Goodness of fit index	1.00	0.99
Normalized fit index	1.00	1.00
Comparative fit index	1.00	0.99
RMS error of approximation	0.45	0.00

Abbreviation: RMS, root mean square

The results showed that the direct effect of social intelligence on happiness was significant ($\beta = 0.21$, $P = 0.000$). Self-differentiation did not have a significant direct effect on happiness ($\beta = 0.04$, $P = 0.545$). Moreover, self-differentiation had a significant direct impact on difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.18$, $P = 0.000$). The direct effect of social intelligence to difficulties was significant on cognitive emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.39$, $P = 0.000$). Difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation significantly affected happiness in a direct manner ($\beta = -0.50$, $P = 0.000$) (Table 3). The bootstrap method was used to determine the significance of intermediary relationships.

The indirect path of self-differentiation towards happiness through the mediating role of difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation was significant ($\beta = -0.03$, $P = 0.019$). Furthermore, the indirect path of social intelligence towards happiness was significant according to the mediating role of difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.16$, $P = 0.000$) (Table 4).

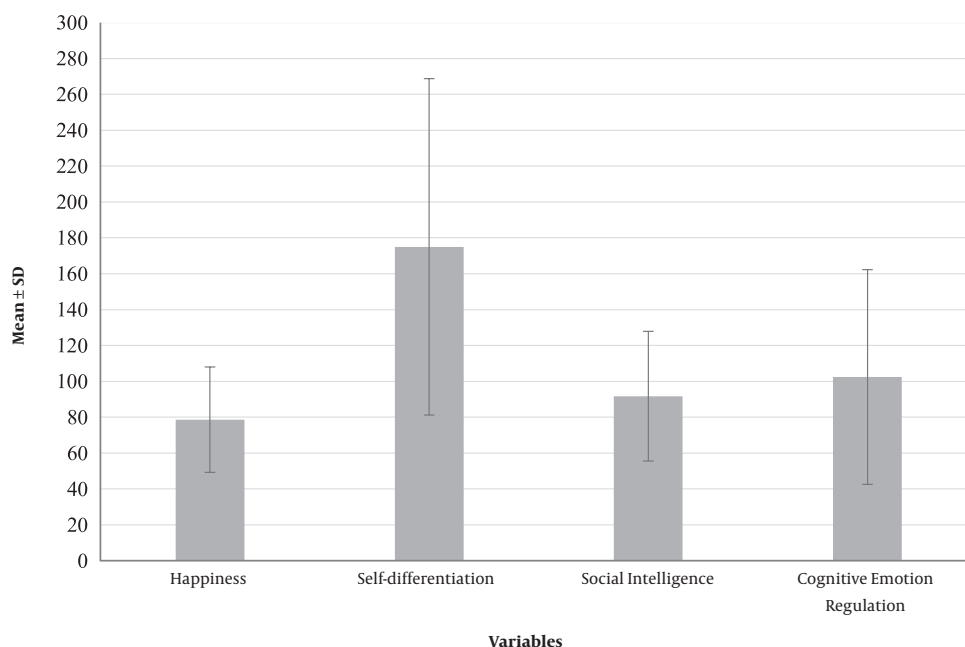


Figure 1. Mean scores of research variables (n = 261)

Table 3. Path Coefficients of Direct Effects Among Research Variables in the Initial and Final Model

Path	Initial Model			Final Model		
	Path Type	β	P	Path Type	β	P
Social intelligence to happiness	Direct	0.19	0.003	Direct	0.21	0.000
Self-differentiation to happiness	Direct	0.04	0.545	Direct	-	-
Self-differentiation to difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation	Direct	-0.18	0.005	Direct	-0.18	0.005
Social intelligence to difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation	Direct	-0.39	0.000	Direct	-0.39	0.000
Difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation to happiness	Direct	-0.50	0.000	Direct	-0.50	0.000

Table 4. Results of the Bootstrap Method for Investigating Indirect and Intermediary Paths

Predictor Variable	Mediator Variable	Criterion Variable	Initial Model		Final Model	
			Bootstrap	P	Bootstrap	P
Self-differentiation	Difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation	Happiness	-0.03	0.019	-0.03	0.019
Social intelligence	Difficulties in cognitive emotion regulation	Happiness	-0.16	0.000	-0.16	0.000

5. Discussion

The findings suggest the optimal fitness of the proposed model. According to the findings, there was a significant relationship between happiness and all the direct and indirect pathways, except for the direct path of self-differentiation. Bayrami et al. (30) found that among the four components of self-differentiation, only could emotional cutoff and I-position predict marital satisfaction. Biadisy-Ashkar and Peleg (31) found the strongest relation-

ship between emotional cutoff and life satisfaction. Differentiation is one of the indicators of emotional maturity, and a differentiated person usually experiences higher mental health, higher quality of interpersonal relationships, and higher life satisfaction. Regarding their various problems in their personal and social life, mistreated women usually experience lower levels of happiness. Due to their multiple roles, economic problems, the sense of insecurity, injustice, and inequality, most of these women

suffer from physical and mental fatigue, and they do not have a favorable condition in terms of happiness (32, 33).

According to the findings, there was a significant relationship between social intelligence and happiness. People with higher social intelligence can better interact with other people and apply their own and others' social capacity (34). Social intelligence creates social skills in group work and the ability to manage relationships. Social intelligence has a positive share of happiness, life satisfaction, and optimism. The lack of social intelligence can be a cause of anxiety, social phobia, depression, and loneliness (15). People with higher levels of social intelligence experience lower levels of anxiety and depression and higher quality of relationships.

According to the findings, there was a significant positive relationship between self-differentiation and difficulty in cognitive emotion regulation. This finding can be explained by the fact that people with emotion regulation difficulty do not have an adequate level of social skills. In contrast, self-differentiating people are more aware of themselves, their characteristics, their needs, and their strengths and weaknesses; also, they can better manage their emotions under stressful conditions (35). High levels of differentiation are related to emotion regulation and rational thinking. Differentiated people have a higher ability to develop adaptive and satisfactory relationships (36). Indeed, differentiated persons can regulate their emotions by preserving their balance, and stable performance, and they have a higher level of mental and physiological performance. Such people have chosen their goals and direction; they have a more rational performance in emotional situations and they do not lose their control.

The findings indicated a significant negative relationship between social intelligence and difficulty in cognitive emotion regulation. This finding is consistent with the research results by Sadri Damirchi et al. (37) and Micaela and Carolyn (38). Emotion regulation is one of the factors related to well-being, proper performance, and adaptability to environmental stressors. On the other hand, higher levels of emotional intelligence create positive relationships, the ability to manage stress under stressful conditions, and adaptability. Social intelligence and skills help individuals to cope with challenges and better regulate their emotions. On the other hand, people who cannot regulate and control their emotions do not experience favorable social relationships, and they cannot express good performance in the face of environmental stressors. In other words, difficulty in emotion regulation harms the quality of family, occupational, and social relationships.

A significant negative relationship was found between difficulty in cognitive emotion regulation and happiness. This finding is consistent with the research results by

Quoidbach et al. (39) and Young et al. (40). Difficulty in emotion regulation is one of the effective factors in social performance. It seems that it can affect happiness, too. People with lower levels of emotion regulation ability face problems in perceiving and accepting the adaptive behaviors and emotions, and they cannot control their behaviors. Emotion regulation enables the person to adopt cognitive and behavioral strategies to cope with stressful situations. People with a high level of cognitive emotion regulation have a lower tendency to rumination, and higher flexibility and acceptance ability. They face events with positive evaluation and planning. As a result, they experience higher physical and mental health and psychological well-being.

The results suggested a significant indirect path from self-differentiation to happiness with the mediating role of difficulty in cognitive emotion regulation. People with a high level of differentiation express higher emotional reactivity, and they can better control stressful situations. In contrast, people with emotion regulation difficulty cannot set their behaviors to achieve their goals due to their inability to manage their emotions. Such people experience higher levels of anxiety and lower ability to manage the quality of their relationships. As a result, they are less satisfied with their relationships and they experience lower levels of happiness and satisfaction. Moreover, a significant indirect path was found from social intelligence to happiness by the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation. By decreasing the ability to manage and control emotions, difficulty in emotion regulation harms the sense of self-acceptance, acceptance of others, and interpersonal relationships. Such people cannot choose and modify situations and properly respond to different situations. They do not use problem-solving methods and receive lower levels of social support.

There were some limitations to this study. For instance, sampling was done by a purposive method; the sample was selected only from Ahvaz, and the respondents answered the scales in a self-report manner. These limitations may harm the generalizability of the results. It is proposed to research with larger samples in other cities. The results would be a step towards decreasing the problems and increasing the abilities of female-headed households. Also, it is suggested for the relevant institutions to provide education in the area of emotional reactions and communication skills for such women who are responsible for the family livelihood.

5.1. Conclusion

Happiness is part of human emotions that indicates the quality and favorability of life. As a mediator, happiness is related to many factors, such as physical health,

psychological problems, adaptability, self-esteem, situation management, and coping with life events. Difficulty in emotion regulation is effective in happiness and the relationship between emotional intelligence, self-differentiation, and happiness. Emotion plays an important role in adaptability to changes in life and stressful events. Emotional states are determining factors in the somatization of anxiety and stress in the face of events. Emotion regulation is an important factor affecting happiness and successful performance in family and social interactions.

Footnotes

Authors' Contribution: Masoumeh Dehdashti Lesani: Study concept and design, acquisition of data, analysis, and interpretation of data, and statistical analysis. Behnam Makvandi: Administrative, technical, and material support, and study supervision. Farah Naderi and Fariba Hafezi: Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content.

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Informed Consent: Questionnaires were filled out with the participants' satisfaction, and written informed consent was obtained from the participants in this study.

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