



Research Paper: Predicting Social Adjustment based on Early Maladaptive Schemas and Social Skills



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Abstract

This research aimed to predict social adjustment based on early maladaptive schemas and social skills. Through convenience sampling, 133 individuals from Tehran's population completed the online questionnaires, including Bell's Adjustment Inventory (BAI), Young's Early Maladaptive Schemas (YEMSQ), and Matson Evaluation of Social Skill with Youngsters (MESSY). To analyze the data, correlation as well as structural equations modeling were used running SPSS-22 and LISREL software. The results indicated that early maladaptive schemas in five domains of disconnection/rejection, impaired autonomy/performance, impaired limits, other-directedness, and over-vigilance/inhibition had a negative relationship with social adjustment, and also social adjustment had a positive relationship with social skills. The findings suggested that social adjustment can be predicted based on early maladaptive schemas and social skills. Among the schemas, the two domains of impaired limits (-0.69) and impaired performance (-0.53) had the strongest negative impact on social adjustment and social skills; however, the second effective factor designated the most positive effect (0.58) on social adjustment, following the domain of impaired limits. The results were explained in the context of the theory of schemas and suggestions were made to promote social adjustment.

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1. Introduction

Social adjustment as the crucial symptom of mental health is one of the topics that has attracted the attention of many sociologists and psychologists in recent decades. The adjustment has been defined as a continuous process in which an individual's social learning experiences provide abilities and skills through which needs can be satisfied (Goleman, et al., 1995). Adjustment is considered to be a general concept that includes all strategies for managing stressful life situations, including realistic and symbolic threats. When a person's physical and mental balance is disturbed in such a way that it causes his/her unpleasantness, s/he needs to use internal forces and external support to create balance. If it succeeds in using new mechanisms and solves the problem in its favor, the adjustment process has been established (Rahimnia & Rasulian, 2006). The dimensions of adjustment include social, emotional, physical, and moral adjustments, in which social adjustment is at the top of all; this adjustment is considered to be a precursor to reaching emotional and moral adjustment (Mazaheri et al., 2007). Usually, personality traits are considered to be normal, which help a person adjust to the world around him/her, that is, to live at peace with others and attain a place for himself/herself (Atkinson et al., 2000/2012). In the formation of social adjustments, factors such as training methods, values, and beliefs governing the individual, society, and family are effective. Social adjustment is influential in the level of occupational success and social development of individuals. Coping with the social milieu can promote health and protect an individual against the negative effects of diseases (Cohen et al., 2004).

Several factors influence social adjustment. For instance, Amani et al. (2012) indicate that there is a relationship between attachment style and social adjustment, and secure attachment style can

predict social adjustment. Kagnici (2012) also reveals that emotional stability and social creativity are strong predictors of social adjustment. The positive relationship between social adjustment and social skills has also been indicated by Ceyhan (2006); moreover, Saeediyān and Nili (2011) show that self-assertiveness training has a significant effect on the social adjustment of female heads of households. Therefore, according to the wide range of variables that are related to social adjustment, it seems that social adjustment is a construct that is related to basic psychological factors; in fact, the relationship between social adjustment and a wide range of variables is related to the relationship between social adjustment and that basic factor.

Most of the interpersonal difficulties people experience are influenced by their way of thinking about themselves and others. This way of thinking is called schema. In the context of psychology and psychotherapy, a schema is considered generally to be any organizing principle that is essential to understanding one's life experiences. Many schemas are formed early in life, continue to form, and impose themselves on later life experiences (Beck, 1967). This is sometimes referred to as the need for cognitive consonance, that is, maintaining a stable view of oneself or others, even if that view is inaccurate or distorted. Early maladaptive schemas are deep and pervasive patterns or themes that are made up of memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily sensations which are formed during childhood or adolescence. These self-destructive, emotional and cognitive patterns are repeated throughout the life course. The early maladaptive schemas are divided into 5 domains; each domain contains several schemas: 1- The domain of disconnection and rejection, including the schemas of abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, emotional deprivation,

defectiveness/shame, and social isolation/alienation 2- The domain of impaired autonomy and performance including schemas of dependence/incompetence, vulnerability to harm or illness, undeveloped self/enmeshment, failure 3- The domain of impaired limits, including schemas of entitlement/grandiosity, insufficient self-control/self-discipline 4- The domain of other-directedness including schemas of subjugation, self-sacrifice, approval seeking/recognition seeking 5- The domain of over-vigilance and inhibition which includes schemas of negativity/pessimism, emotional inhibition, unrelenting standards/hyper-criticalness and punitiveness (Young et al., 2006/2022).

In Yoosofnejad Shirvani and Peyvastegar's (2017) research, there is a relationship between life satisfaction and early maladaptive schemas; schemas of emotional deprivation, social isolation, defectiveness/shame, failure, dependence/incompetence, vulnerability to harm or illness, subjugation, self-sacrifice, emotional inhibition, unrelenting standards/hyper-criticalness, and insufficient self-control/self-discipline have a negative relationship with life satisfaction. This finding can be related to the subject of the present research in terms of the positive relationship between social adjustment and life satisfaction. Other studies have demonstrated the relationship between specific types of adjustment and early maladaptive schemas. For instance, Seyfizadeh et al. (2019) highlight that there is a negative and significant relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital adjustment in men ($r=0.31$) and women ($r=0.53$). In the field of adjustment to an institution, Nasirian et al. (2022) suggest that early maladaptive schemas in all domains have a negative and significant relationship with adjustment to an institution.

Social skills are a set of learned behaviors that enable an individual to have an effective relationship with others and avoid unreasonable social reactions (Biabangard, 2006). Social skill is a continuous process during which a person changes his/her behavior to create a sufficient and effective relationship with the environment, other people, and himself/herself. The basis of social skills is to create a balance between one's desires and society's expectations, which can affect all aspects of an individual's life (Dhingra et al., 2005). An individual who has high social skills changes his/her behavior to create an efficient and effective relationship with the environment and other people. Many psychologists believe that the insufficient development of social skills plays a significant role in the frustration and failure of people. Children who have not learned the necessary skills for effective interpersonal functions are aggressive, quick-tempered, and aloof, hated by others, unable to cooperate effectively with others, and severely exposed to physical and mental dangers and expulsion from school. Social skill means that an individual can mutually communicate with others and give positive responses (Rostami & Ahmadnia, 2012). Studies have revealed that individuals who lack social skills and live alone are more prone to the morbidity of infectious diseases under stressful situations; however, individuals who have social skills are less likely to suffer from physical symptoms and health problems (Khodayarifard et al., 2008). Research findings indicate the relationship between social skills and social adjustment, as well as the effect of social skills training on social adjustment. For instance, Hassani et al. (2021) suggests that social skills training is effective in social adjustment and social acceptance of hyperactive children. The researchers specified the obtained finding that social skills training is effective in the evolution of social cognition for hyperactive children, and therefore social

skills training can be used in the clinical interventions of hyperactive children. Another research also indicate that self-compassion training (as a social skill) is effective in increasing social adjustment (Babzadeh et al., 2022). Hemaci et al. (2016) also highlight that through the regression coefficient life skills, self-awareness skills, problem-solving, and interpersonal relationships can positively predict social adjustment.

Based on the mentioned studies, this research was looking for the variables that can explain social adjustment. Previous research has separately stressed the relationship between social adjustment and early maladaptive schemas and the relationship between social adjustment and social skills. Considering all the reviewed literature, this research aims at answering the following question: Is it possible to predict social adjustment based on early maladaptive schemas and social skills?

2. Method

1.2. Population, sample, and sampling method

Considering the population of Tehran in 2020 as the population of the study, 133 people (107 women and 26 men) were chosen through convenience sampling, who responded to the questionnaires.

2.2. Data collection tools

The variables of the study were: social adjustment (criterion variable), social skills, and early maladaptive schemas (predictor variables) measured by Bell's Adjustment Inventory (BAI). Bell's adjustment inventory (1961) measures five separate levels of personal and social adjustment such as home adjustment, health adjustment, social adjustment, emotional adjustment, and occupational adjustment. A high score in this inventory shows an inappropriate adjustment in that field. The

reliability of the total and subscales of adjustment at home, health, social, emotional, and occupational was obtained as 0.94, 0.91, 0.81, 0.88, 0.91, and 0.85 respectively (Bell, 1961). In this research, the social adjustment subscale (with 32 items) was used. Scores of 3-6 for men and 5-8 for women high level of social adjustment; scores of 7-15 for men and 9-19 for women indicate an average level of social adjustment, and scores of 16-20 for men and 20-24 for women show a high level of social maladjustment, such individuals tend toward isolation and stay aloof from people. In Mikaeili Mani and Madadi Emamzadeh's (2008) research, the total reliability of this test was 0.84 and its validity was 0.80.

Young Early Maladaptive Schemas Questionnaire (short form) (YEMSQ):

This questionnaire was created by Young (2005) with 75 items; it measures 15 early maladaptive schemas in five domains: 1- Emotional deprivation 2- Abandonment/Instability 3- Mistrust/Abuse 4- Social isolation/Alienation 5- Defectiveness/Shame 6- Failure 7- Dependence/Incompetence 8- Vulnerability to harm/illness 9- Undeveloped self/Enmeshment 10- Self-sacrifice 11- Emotional inhibition 12- Unrelenting standards/Hyper-criticalness 13- Entitlement/Grandiosity 14- Insufficient Self-control and Self-discipline 15- Subjugation (Young, 2005). Each item is answered based likert scale (from 1 (completely true) to 6 (completely false)), and a high score in each subscale indicates a maladaptive schema (Rafiee et al., 2011). The first comprehensive research on the psychometric properties of this questionnaire was done by Schmidt et al. (1995) and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was obtained in the non-clinical population from 0.50 to 0.82. Correspondingly, in another research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for subscales was obtained in

the range of 0.62 to 0.90 and internal consistency was 0.94 (Young, 2005). The standardization of this questionnaire in Iran was done by Ahi et al. (2008) at the University of Tehran, and the internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha was 0.97 in women and 0.98 in men.

Matson Evaluation of Social Skill with Youngsters (MESSY): This questionnaire was created by Matson (1983) and has 56 items and is scored based on the Likert scale. The reliability of this questionnaire was obtained by Shamsi and Amirianzadeh (2017) using Cronbach's alpha coefficient equaled to 0.86. The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure social skills from different dimensions (appropriate social skills, anti-social behaviors, aggression and non-aggressive behaviors, supremacy, high self-confidence, and relationship with peers).

2.3. Method of data collection regard

Since the research was conducted during the Coronavirus pandemic, the questionnaires were distributed electronically through a link send out to WhatsApp messenger in different groups (students of Payame Noor, Applied Science and Technology and Azad Universities' student groups, and several groups related to communication between schools and parents). By providing a brief explanation about the research, an effort was made to encourage the members present in the groups to complete the questionnaire. Questionnaires were prepared without the first and last name; since they provided their responses electronically, the participants granted their consent to participate in the research. The inclusion criteria were consenting to participate in the research, having minimum education of a diploma, and including in the age range of 18 to 45 years. With regard to the electronic nature of the questionnaires, only completed questionnaires were recorded;

therefore, no questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to incompleteness.

2.4. Method of data analysis

This correlational research was done by prediction type, Pearson correlation method and structural equation modeling. Data were analyzed using SPSS-22 and LISREL-8.8 software.

3. Results

34 individuals (25.6%) were single and 99 individuals (74.4%) were married. In terms of age range, 16 (12%), 10 (7.5%), 22 (16.5%), and 85 (64%) participants were placed in the age groups of 18 to 23 years, 24 to 29 years, 30 to 35 years, and 35 years and above respectively. Education levels: 36 (27.1%), 6 (4.5%), 32 (23.3%), 56 (42.1%), and 3 (3%) individuals held diploma, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral degree respectively.

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Table 1
Descriptive characteristics of research variables

| Variable | Subscale | Mean | Standard deviation | Skewness | Kurtosis | Kolmogorov-Smirnov |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|------|--------------------|----------|----------|--------------------|
| Early maladaptive schemas | Domain of disconnection and rejection | 5.17 | 0.62 | -0.93 | 0.59 | 0.765 |
| | Domain of impaired performance | 5.40 | 0.66 | -1.39 | 1.54 | 0.374 |
| | Domain of impaired limits | 4.74 | 0.80 | -0.48 | 0.11 | 0.178 |
| | Domain of other-directedness | 4.36 | 0.85 | 0.04 | -0.24 | 0.532 |
| | Domain of vigilance | 3.86 | 1.07 | 0.16 | -0.61 | 0.528 |
| Social skills | | 2.97 | 0.24 | 0.32 | -0.11 | 0.298 |
| Social adjustment | | 1.70 | 0.20 | 0.47 | 0.04 | 0.539 |

The descriptive characteristics of the examined variables were listed in Table 1. According to which, the data distribution is symmetrical (the data range is between -2

and +2) and normal (the values for the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were not significant).

Table 2
Correlation matrix between research variables*

| Variable | Early maladaptive schemas | | | | | Social skills | Social adjustment |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------|
| | Disconnection | Impaired performance | Impaired limits | Other-directedness | Vigilance | | |
| Disconnection | 1 | | | | | | |
| Impaired performance | 0.664 | 1 | | | | | |
| Impaired limits | 0.622 | 0.493 | 1 | | | | |
| Other-directedness | 0.478 | 0.387 | 0.473 | 1 | | | |
| Vigilance | 0.372 | 0.262 | 0.479 | 0.576 | 1 | | |
| Social skills | -0.428 | -0.504 | -0.293 | -0.441 | -0.334 | 1 | |
| Social adjustment | -0.415 | -0.524 | -0.684 | -0.424 | -0.504 | 0.568 | 1 |

*All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

Pearson's correlation test was run to examine the relationship between social

adjustment and social skills and early maladaptive schemas. The findings (Table

2) demonstrated an inverse relationship between early maladaptive schemas with social skills and social adjustment and a

positive relationship between social adjustment and social skills.

Table 3

Path coefficients of the effect of early maladaptive schemas and social skills on social adjustment

| Path | Path coefficient | t-value | Situation |
|---|------------------|---------|-----------|
| Domain of disconnection and rejection → Social adjustment | -0.43 | -4.10 | Accepted |
| Domain of impaired performance → Social adjustment | -0.53 | -6.07 | Accepted |
| Domain of impaired limits → Social adjustment | -0.69 | -7.76 | Accepted |
| Domain of other-directedness → Social adjustment | -0.45 | -4.11 | Accepted |
| Domain of vigilance → Social adjustment | -0.48 | -5.98 | Accepted |
| Social skills → Social adjustment | 0.58 | 8.25 | Accepted |

Structural equation modeling and LISREL software were used to investigate the effect of social skills and early maladaptive schemas on social adjustment. After adding the constraints of the model and selecting the maximum likelihood method, the model was executed. The path coefficients (Table 3) were significant. The

path coefficient of the effect of social skills on social adjustment was positive and the path coefficients of the effect of early maladaptive schemas on social adjustment were negative.

Table 4

A selection of Model Fit Indices

| Index | Index name | Abbreviation | Value | Acceptable fit |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|----------|----------------|
| Absolute Fit Indexes | Coverage area | $\chi^2_{df=14006}$ | 33340.31 | |
| | Goodness-of-fit index | GFI | 0.93 | >0.8 |
| Comparative Fit Indexes | Adjusted goodness-of-fit index | AGFI | 0.90 | >0.8 |
| | Comparative Fit Index | CFI | 0.98 | >0.9 |
| Parsimonious Fit Indexes | Root mean square error of approximation | RMSEA | 0..60 | <0.1 |

The Model Fit Indices (Table 4) demonstrated the statistical adequacy of the model. Based on this, it can be said that early maladaptive schemas (negatively) and

social skills (positively) affect social adjustment.

4. Discussion

The findings highlighted that early maladaptive schemas had a negative effect and social skills had a positive effect on social adjustment. Previous research also stressed that social skills had a positive effect on social adjustment (Ceyhan, 2006; Hassani et al., 2021; Babzadeh et al., 2022; Vatankhah, 2016 to name some). It can be said that the higher the social skills a person has acquired, the higher the power of the social adjustment they show. Higher social skills lead to a greater ability to communicate with others and they can ultimately meet their needs; hence higher social skills are associated with better social adjustment.

The findings of this research showed that all five domains of schemas had an inverse effect on social adjustment. In this context, Seyfizadeh et al. (2019) as well as Nasirian et al. (2022) also revealed that early maladaptive schemas hurt social adjustment. Among the schemas, the two domains of impaired limits and the impaired performance had the strongest effect on social adjustment (inversely). Examining the characteristics of people with early maladaptive schemas can be helpful in understanding the inverse relationship between early maladaptive schemas and social adjustment. By enumerating the main characteristics of these domains in an order according to which they illustrated the effects on social adjustment in the current research, we tried to explain why that domain affects social adjustment.

- The domain of impaired limits includes defects in internal limitations, a sense of responsibility towards others, or orientation towards long-term life goals. These schemas lead to problems related to respecting the rights of others, cooperation with others, commitment or goal setting, and achieving realistic goals. The schemas of this domain usually arise in families that their characteristic feature is extreme

carelessness, confusion, or a sense of superiority instead of discipline, appropriate exposure, reasonable limits, responsibility, cooperation, and goal-setting. In some cases, the child may not be able to tolerate natural discomfort or may not receive adequate guidance, direction, and leading (Young et al., 2006/2022). Based on the description of this schema, it is expected that a person with this schema, not feeling responsible toward others, does not have cooperation, has a low tolerance threshold for discomfort as well as frustration, has problems respecting the rights of others, has low social adjustment in social situations and relationships with others. For instance, among the schemas of this domain, entitlement and grandiosity express that a person stands himself/herself head and shoulders above the rest and gives prerogative to himself/herself, which distances him/her from observing the principles of mutual relations in social interactions, and these matters affect social adjustment.

- The domain of impaired autonomy and performance; an individual's expectations of himself/herself and his/her environment interfere with him/her perceived abilities to separate, survive, function independently or accomplish tasks. Schemas of this domain usually arise in families that reduce the child's self-confidence, trap the child, overprotect the child, or fail to encourage the child to do activities outside the family (Young et al., 2006/2022). According to this description, a person with the schemas of this domain cannot adjust properly in social situations due to low self-confidence and inability to perform his/her social duties. One of the schemas of this domain is dependence and incompetence which can well explain the relationship between this domain and social maladjustment; a person who feels incompetency and dependency cannot have mature social adjustment.

- The domain of over-vigilance and inhibition; this includes a hyper-emphasis

on suppressing emotions, impulses, and spontaneous choices or fulfilling inflexible and internalized rules and expectations about moral performance and behavior that often leads to the loss of happiness, expression of opinion, peace of mind, close relationships and health. The schemas of this domain usually arise in families where anger, expectation, and sometimes punishment are observed. In these families, excellent performance, perfectionism, conscientiousness, rule-following, hiding emotions, and avoiding mistakes are emphasized. At the same time, pleasure, happiness, and peace are not given much importance. There is usually an underlying tendency towards pessimism and anxiety in such people, so if people can't be vigilant all the time, everything falls apart (Young et al., 2006/2022). Since the efficiency of the emotional and affective dimensions is important in social relationships and social adjustment, a person who has too much inhibition in expressing and accepting emotions cannot demonstrate appropriate adjustment in social situations. Negativity and pessimism, punitiveness, unrelenting standards and hyper-criticalness, and emotional inhibition are schemas related to this domain, all of which can lead to low social adjustment, especially maladjustment in interpersonal relationships.

- The domain of other-directedness; in this domain hyper-focus on the desires, feelings, and responses of others, such that one's own needs are neglected. This is done to receive love and acceptance, to maintain relationships with others, or to avoid revenge and retaliation. In these schemas, a person usually suppresses his/her emotions and natural tendencies and is unaware of them. The Schemas of this domain usually arise in families that accept the child conditionally; the child must ignore important aspects of his/her personality to gain the attention, love, and acceptance of others. In many of these families, parents' emotional needs and desires and social

status are valued more than the child's needs and feelings (Young et al., 2006/2022). From the schemas of this domain, we can point out the schema of subjugation, self-sacrifice, approval seeking, and recognition seeking, in all of which a person cannot have a proper adjustment due to neglecting himself/herself and preferring the needs and satisfaction of others. For instance, the subjugation schema can cause anger that affects an individual's social adjustment in the form of passive-aggressive behaviors and uncontrolled emotional outbursts.

- The domain of disconnection and rejection; there is no expectation that one's needs for security, empathy, respect, etc. will be satisfied predictably. Schemas in this domain usually arise in families that are heartless, standoffish, bad-mannered, aloof, quick-tempered, unpredictable, or abusive (Young et al., 2006/2022). Social isolation/alienation as well as defectiveness and shame, which are the two schemas of this domain reduce social adjustment by reducing the quality and quantity of an individual's communications. Other schemas in this domain, such as mistrust/abuse, can lead to maladjustment in social relationships based on the belief that others are deceitful and profiteers.

5. Conclusion

Due to conducting the research during the Coronavirus pandemic, it was not possible to take more samples from a specific population (for instance, students) or use a random sampling method. Considering the importance of social adjustment in today's Iranian society, it is suggested that the relationship between other psychological variables and social adjustment should be investigated in future research from the set of findings in this field, planned to improve social adjustment. Similarly, researching more homogeneous groups, such as university and school students, can provide more specific results for setting up

intervention programs. Conducting research in different ethnic-cultural groups can also determine the effect of cultural factors.

In conclusion, it can be said that the early maladaptive schemas affect social adjustment considering that they are relatively stable patterns of cognitive and intellectual ones. Therefore, their effect on social adjustment is long-term. On the other hand, another finding of the research indicated the effect of social skills on social adjustment. Considering that social skills training is a simpler process than changing schemas, this path is probably more optimal for increasing social adjustment. The path coefficient of the effect of social skills on social adjustment, after the path coefficient of the domain of impaired limits on social adjustment, was also higher than the other path coefficients. Therefore, this finding can be taken into consideration in planning to improve the social adjustment of youth and teenagers.

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Conflict of interest

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