Investigating the mediation of emotion regulation in the relationship between loneliness and meaning of life with Tolerance of failure in married women in northern Tehran

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Feelings of loneliness and meaning in life are among the most important factors associated with tolerance of failure in married women. The aim of the present study was to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between loneliness and meaning in life with Tolerance of failure in married women in northern Tehran.

Method: The research method was applied and descriptive-correlational, using path analysis. The statistical population included 1,400 married women living in northern Tehran in 2023, from whom 300 were selected using cluster sampling. Research tools included Harrington's Tolerance of failure Questionnaire (2005), Steger et al.'s Meaning in Life Questionnaire (2006), DiTommaso et al.'s Loneliness Questionnaire (2004), and the Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 and Smart PLS version 3 software.

Findings: The direct effect of loneliness on difficulty in emotion regulation ($\beta = 0.190$, $P = 0.011$) and Tolerance of failure ($\beta = 0.262$, $P = 0.018$) was positive and significant. Additionally, the direct effect of meaning in life on difficulty in emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.262$, $P = 0.006$) and Tolerance of failure ($\beta = -0.204$, $P = 0.025$) was negative and significant. The indirect effect of loneliness on Tolerance of failure, mediated by difficulty in emotion regulation ($\beta = 0.19$, $P = 0.003$), and the indirect effect of meaning in life on Tolerance of failure, mediated by difficulty in emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.067$, $P = 0.014$), were both significant.

Conclusion: The results showed that emotion regulation acts as an important mediating mechanism in the relationship between loneliness and meaning in life with tolerance of failure. It is suggested that educational programs to strengthen emotion regulation and meaning therapy should be implemented in counseling settings to increase tolerance of failure in married women. Furthermore, developing social support networks can help reduce loneliness and improve the mental health of these women.

Introduction

Married women's lives are accompanied by a complex set of individual, family, and social responsibilities that can lead to significant psychological stress (Tadesse et al., 2022). These women often balance multiple roles, such as wife, mother, household manager, and, in many cases, employment outside the home. This multiplicity of roles, combined with cultural and social expectations, can lead to chronic stress, psychological burnout, and reduced life satisfaction (Zegeye et al., 2021). In such circumstances, a person's ability to tolerate failure—that is, the capacity to face obstacles and setbacks without experiencing distress (Jafari et al., 2021)—is affected. A decrease in this ability can create a vicious cycle in which the person copes with subsequent problems more difficulty due to reduced tolerance, further increasing the likelihood of failure (Çoban, 2022).

Tolerance of failure is a key psychological construct influenced by various individual and environmental factors. Theoretically, this construct includes components such as stress tolerance, cognitive flexibility in the face of difficulties, and the ability to manage negative emotions when encountering obstacles (Lv et al., 2021). Research shows a significant relationship between tolerance of failure and feelings of loneliness, as the experience of loneliness can deplete a person's psychological resources and reduce their ability to face challenges (Amirbeik et al., 2021). Feelings of loneliness, particularly in married women, can stem from poor-quality marital relationships, lack of adequate social support, or a sense of not being understood by those around them. This negative emotional state, in turn, can affect a person's perception of the meaning of life (Kattan et al., 2022).

Loneliness is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that includes emotional dimensions (such as lack of self-esteem and emotional intimacy) and social dimensions (such as perceived isolation and lack of support networks). This feeling intensifies when the individual, despite being in social relationships, perceives their quality as low or inadequate. From an existential psychology perspective, loneliness can lead to a crisis of meaning (Sedlackova et al., 2024), as humans derive much of their life's meaning through meaningful connections with others (Huang et al., 2021).

Meaning in life, as an existential construct, encompasses a person's perception of purpose, worth, and coherence in life. When loneliness becomes chronic, it can distort this perception and lead to nihilism (Varela et al., 2022). Meaning in life consists of three main components: purpose (having clear direction and goals), significance (feeling valued and impactful), and coherence (perceiving interconnectedness in life experiences). Numerous studies have shown that a strong sense of meaning in life is associated with higher psychological resilience, better mental health, and greater stress-coping ability (Lindseth et al., 2022).

In this context, emotion regulation serves as a key psychological mechanism that moderates the relationship between loneliness, meaning in life, and tolerance of failure (Karataş et al., 2021). Emotion regulation refers to the cognitive and behavioral processes individuals use to manage, modulate, and guide their emotional experiences. These processes, which can be automatic or voluntary, profoundly influence how people interpret and respond to stressful events (Zhang et al., 2021).

Emotion regulation strategies are broadly categorized into adaptive (e.g., cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving, and acceptance) and maladaptive (e.g., emotional suppression, rumination, and avoidance) (Silvers et al., 2022). Research indicates that adaptive emotion regulation strategies can mitigate the negative effects of loneliness and enhance tolerance of failure by preserving or reinforcing meaning in life (Lincoln et al., 2022). In other words, women with greater emotion regulation skills are better equipped to cope with loneliness, maintain a sense of meaning, and, consequently, demonstrate higher tolerance of failure (Isaacowitz, 2022). These findings underscore emotion regulation as a critical mediating mechanism in these relationships.

The complex interplay among these variables highlights the need for further research to clarify their dynamics, as recent studies have begun to explore (Paley et al., 2022). This study is significant in examining the relationship between loneliness, meaning in life, and tolerance of failure, with emotion regulation as a mediator, among married women in northern Tehran. Married women, as the central pillar of the family, face multiple psychological pressures that affect their mental health and, by

extension, the entire family system. Understanding these relationships—particularly in the unique cultural context of northern Tehran—can inform targeted interventions.

Theoretically, this study provides a framework for understanding how key psychological variables interact and elucidates the mediating role of emotion regulation. The findings can serve as a foundation for designing emotion regulation training programs, resilience workshops, and couples therapy interventions, applicable at both preventive and therapeutic levels. For mental health professionals, these results offer a diagnostic and intervention framework, while policymakers can use them to shape counseling services. Additionally, increasing women's self-awareness regarding psychological stressors can enhance their quality of life.

The innovation of this study lies in its simultaneous examination of four critical psychological constructs within a covariate model, employing advanced statistical methods to test their relationships. Thus, this research represents an important step toward improving the mental health of Iranian women and families, potentially reducing societal costs associated with psychological problems.

Method

This study is considered an applied study in terms of purpose and is designed as a cross-sectional study in terms of time. In terms of data type, this study is quantitative, and in terms of research method, it is a descriptive correlational study. The statistical population of the study consisted of all married women living in the northern region of Tehran (1,400 individuals), who were selected using the cluster sampling method. The sample size was estimated to be 300 people based on the Morgan and Krejci formula, and this number was considered representative of the statistical population.

Regarding the implementation method, after obtaining the necessary permits from the university to conduct the research, the desired tests were held within a specific time period. Initially, the overall purpose of the test was explained to the participants, and after gaining their trust and cooperation, the method of answering the questionnaires was explained in detail. The participants were asked to answer the questions anonymously without mentioning their names.

The participants were married women living in the northern areas of Tehran, aged between 20 and 50 years. These individuals were required to participate in the study voluntarily and with full awareness and were free from any serious mental disorder. They also had at least one year of residence in the northern area of Tehran. If any participants withdrew during the study, provided incomplete responses, or did not meet the initial conditions, they were excluded. All these criteria were established to maintain the scientific validity of the research and uphold ethical standards in research studies.

After completing and collecting the questionnaires, the obtained data were scored and analyzed according to standard guidelines. In the data analysis section, descriptive statistical indicators were used, such as frequency distribution tables. SPSS software was used to check data independence, distribution normality, and multicollinearity. Additionally, to test the research hypotheses, advanced statistical methods such as path analysis and structural equation modeling were employed using Smart PLS version 3 software.

In the ethical considerations section of the research, issues such as obtaining necessary permits, ensuring participant confidentiality, acquiring informed consent, maintaining honesty in data analysis, and providing complete freedom to participate or withdraw from the study were addressed. Furthermore, to protect participant privacy, no identifying information (such as names) was recorded, ensuring full compliance with ethical research principles.

Research tools:

Tolerance of failure Questionnaire : This scale, which was designed and validated by Harrington (2005) , consists of 35 closed - ended items based on a five - point Likert scale . This questionnaire measures four components of emotional tolerance , distress tolerance , achievement , and competence , and was validated by Rahimi and Afsharnia (2017) . The questionnaire components include the first factor: emotional tolerance (questions 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25), the second factor: distress tolerance (questions 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27), the third factor: progress (questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28), and the fourth factor: competence (questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 32, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35). Scoring

is based on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree = 5 , agree = 4, somewhat agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1) . Scores of 35-70 indicate a weak level , 70-140 indicate a moderate level, and above 140 indicate a very high level . The reliability of the scales in the study by Rahimi and Afsharnia (2017) was calculated for emotional intolerance (0.70) , emotional intolerance (0.65) , pride (0.62), entitlement (0.71) , and the entire questionnaire (0.84). The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by a survey of professors and experts , and the relevance, clarity, and understandability of the questions were confirmed .

of Life Questionnaire : This scale, designed by Steiger et al. (2006), measures the existence of meaning and the effort to achieve it. It is a questionnaire that consists of ten questions and two subscales that are scored on a seven-point scale : completely false = 1 , mostly false = 2 , somewhat false = 3 , I ca n't say whether it 's true or false = 4, somewhat true = 5 , mostly true = 6, and completely true = 7. The maximum score on this test is 70. Research shows that this questionnaire has high stability and reliability, and its convergent and discriminant validity has been confirmed (Steiger and Shin , 2010 ; Steiger and Kashdan , 2007 ; Steiger et al . , 2008) . The internal consistency of the questionnaire has also been reported to be very good, with Cronbach 's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.87 (Steiger et al . , 2006). Test- retest reliability after one month was 0.79 for the presence of meaning subscale and 0.73 for the search for meaning subscale . Also , the reliability of this scale was estimated to be 0.86 for the existence of meaning and 0.87 for the search for meaning. In Iran , the test - retest reliability was calculated with a two-week interval of 0.84 for the existence of meaning subscale and 0.74 for the search for meaning. Cronbach 's alpha has also been reported to be 0.75 for searching for meaning and 0.78 for having meaning (Estad, 2009). This The findings indicate the high reliability and validity of the Meaning of Life Questionnaire in measuring the desired concepts .

Loneliness Questionnaire : This instrument, designed and developed by DiTamso , Baraneh, and Best (2004) , consists of 16 questions in the form of three main dimensions : emotional loneliness (questions 1 to 5), which refers to the feeling of emotional emptiness and lack of intimate relationships, social loneliness (questions 6 to 11) , which measures the feeling of isolation and lack of belonging to social groups , and family loneliness (questions 12 to 16), which addresses the feeling of distance and lack of connection with family members . This questionnaire is scored on a five - point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) . The reliability and validity of this instrument have been comprehensively investigated in the research of the police and the senses by Nizadeh-Arani (2015) . The Cronbach 's alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire was calculated to be 0.86 , which indicates the high reliability of this instrument . Also , the alpha coefficients for different dimensions were 0.64 for emotional loneliness , 0.85 for social loneliness , and 0.86 for family loneliness , respectively . The content validity of the questionnaire has also been confirmed through a survey of professors and experts in psychology and social sciences and the implementation of their suggested amendments . This questionnaire , due to its appropriate psychometric properties , is considered A valid and reliable instrument used in domestic and international research related to the field of loneliness and social isolation and has the ability to be used in clinical and research situations .

Findings

Table 1 presents the demographic data of the research group. Most participants (51.3%) were aged 26–30, and the majority (42.7%) held a post-diploma degree. The highest frequency for marriage duration (35%) was in the 6–10 year group..

Table 1: Demographic information of the research group			
Index	Grouping	Abundance	A high percentage of
Age	20-25 years	45	15
	26-30 years	154	51.3
	31-40 years	86	28.7
	41-51 years	15	5
Latin education	Undergraduate	57	15.7

	Diploma		
	Diploma	65	21.7
	Postgraduate Diploma	128	42.7
	Bachelor 's degree	54	18
	Master 's degree	6	2
Duration of marriage	Under 5 years	47	24.7
	6-10 years	105	35
	11-15 years	88	29.3
	Over 16 years old	33	11

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the research variables.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of research variables

Original variable	Variable dimensions	Number	At least	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Emotional adjustment	Unacceptable	300	9.00	30.00	19.6533	4.49301
	Goals	300	6.00	25.00	15.2200	4.35294
	Impulse	300	9.00	30.00	19.5700	4.37136
	Awareness	300	7.00	30.00	19.6000	4.55879
	Limited access	300	8.00	36.00	20.0067	5.10295
	Transparency	300	6.00	26.00	15.2000	4.28578
Tolerating failure	Emotional tolerance	300	8.00	34.00	22.0333	6.97143
	Tolerating discomfort	300	8.00	34.00	21.3500	7.16136
	Progress	300	8.00	34.00	20.8400	7.08343
	Competence	300	15.00	67.00	27.5200	13.37007
The meaning of life	The meaning of life	300	11.00	66.00	27.4800	12.82672
Feeling lonely	Feeling lonely	300	13.00	74.00	31.2700	16.30265

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the research variables, where in the emotional regulation section, the components "unacceptability" (mean = 19.65) and "limited access" (mean = 20.01) exhibited the highest means, while "transparency" (mean = 15.20) scored the lowest; within the tolerance of failure variable, "emotional tolerance" recorded the highest mean (22.03), and "feeling lonely" (mean = 31.27, SD = 16.30) demonstrated significant dispersion among participants. The assumptions were tested, revealing that life adjustment, with values of resilience (-0.30) and resilience (-0.743), falls within the normal range and displays a significant negative correlation with tolerance of failure (-0.509), general health (-0.432), meaning in life (-0.424), and hope for the future (-0.485); tolerance of failure itself follows a normal distribution with resilience (-0.748) and resilience (-0.325) and correlates negatively with general health (-0.464) and meaning in life (-0.495). Meanwhile, meaning in life, associated with tension (1.378) and anxiety (0.852), is normally distributed and positively correlated with general health (0.542) and hope for the future (0.557); loneliness, linked to tension (1.194) and anxiety (-0.080), also adheres to a normal distribution but exhibits negative correlations with general health (-0.660), meaning in life (-0.481), and hope for the future (-0.599). Collectively, these findings underscore significant relationships among the variables in the structural equation model.
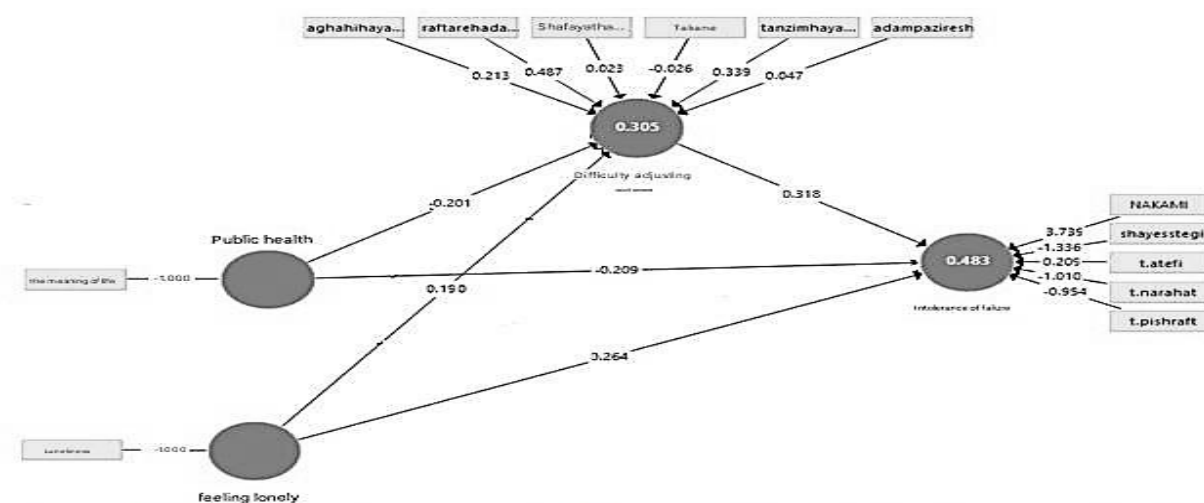
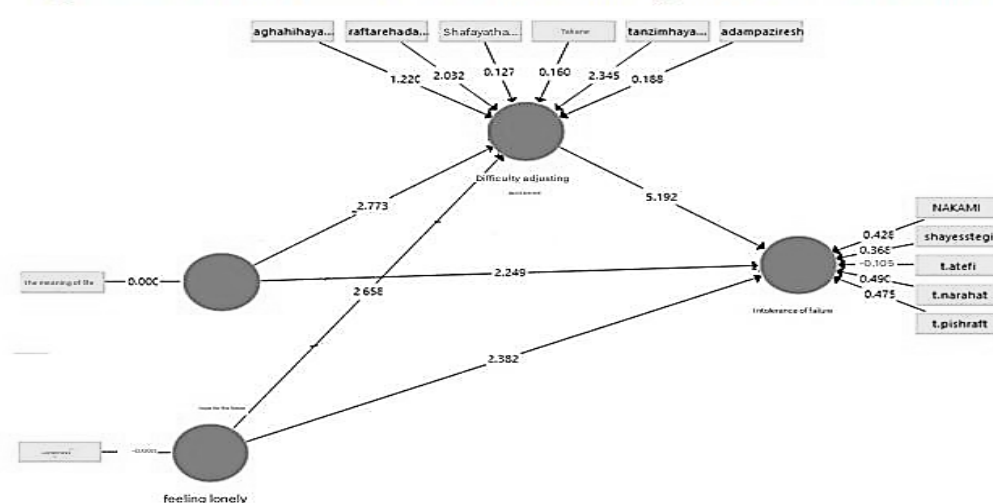Figure 1 Standardized coefficients estimated using the OLS method for the assumed model

Figure 2 Estimated T coefficients using the OLS method for the assumed model

The structural model fit shows that the absolute indices are adaptive and parsimonious. According to the results, the chi-square value (132.657 with 67 degrees of freedom) and p-value (0.0058) indicate statistical significance, but due to the strong dependence of chi-square on sample size, this index alone is not the best for evaluating the adequacy of the model fit. Other indices such as relative chi-square (1.97), GFI (0.916), TLI (0.99), CFI (0.98), RMSEA (0.061), and NFI (0.95) are all within acceptable limits and indicate a good fit of the model to the data. Therefore, considering the required values of various indicators, it can be concluded that the designed model has a good fit and it is possible to examine the research hypotheses. This result is proof of the model's consistency with the empirical data and its qualitative confirmation.

Table 3 Direct standard coefficients estimated by the OLSmethod					
Forecast variable	Dependent variable	Direct coefficient (β)	Standard deviation (SE)	t value-	Significance - level (p value)
Feeling lonely	Difficulty in adjusting the mood	0.190	0.067	2.658	0.011
Feeling lonely	Intolerance of failure	0.262	0.111	2.382	0.018
Difficulty in adjusting the mood	Intolerance of failure	0.326	0.061	5.192	<0.001

| The meaning of life | Difficulty in adjusting the mood | -0.262 | 0.073 | -2.773 | 0.006 |
| The meaning of life | Intolerance of failure | -0.204 | 0.093 | -2.249 | 0.025 |

Table 3 shows that feeling lonely is significantly related to difficulty in regulating emotions ($\beta = 0.190$, $p = 0.011$) and intolerance of failure ($\beta = 0.262$, $p = 0.018$). Also, difficulty in regulating emotions shows a significant effect on intolerance of failure ($\beta = 0.326$, $p < 0.001$). On the other hand, meaning in life has a negative and significant relationship with difficulty in regulating emotions ($\beta = -0.262$, $p = 0.006$) and intolerance of failure ($\beta = -0.204$, $p = 0.025$).

Table 4 : Indirect standardized coefficients estimated by the bootstrapping method				
Variable	Standard coefficient	Standard deviation	t value-	Level of significance
Feeling lonely By mediating the difficulty in setting up a life of intolerance for failure	0.019	0.025	3.648	0.003
The meaning of life is mediated by the difficulty of adjusting one 's life to an . intolerance of failure	-0.067	0.026	2.466	0.014

Table 4 shows the indirect standardized coefficients estimated using the bootstrapping method. Feeling lonely mediates the effect of difficulty regulating emotions on intolerance of failure, with a standardized coefficient of 0.019 (SE = 0.025, t = 3.648) at the 0.003 level. It was significant. Also, meaning in life had a negative and significant effect on the intolerance of failure, mediating difficulty in life adjustment ($\beta = -0.067$, SE = 0.026, t = 2.466, p = 0.014). The findings indicate the mediating role of difficulty in emotion regulation in the relationships under study.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between loneliness and the meaning of life with Tolerance of failure among married women in northern Tehran. The first key finding revealed that feelings of loneliness, when coupled with difficulties in emotion regulation, could predict Failure intolerance, a result that aligns with prior research in this domain (Huang et al., 2021). This outcome can be interpreted through the lens of cognitive-emotional deficits, where an inability to manage negative emotions heightens sensitivity to stressors. Loneliness, as a distressing emotional state, triggers heightened reactivity in the neuro-emotional system, particularly in neural circuits associated with social threat processing. When individuals lack the necessary skills to regulate these emotions, their capacity to endure daily Failures diminishes (Lindseth et al., 2022). Neurocognitive explanations further suggest that this phenomenon stems from suboptimal functioning of the prefrontal cortex, a region critical for emotional integration and impulse control. In lonely individuals, reduced activity in this area impairs the inhibition of maladaptive emotional responses (Silvers et al., 2022). Additionally, attachment theory posits that loneliness reflects deficits in early secure relationships, leaving individuals without effective internal models for emotional management in interpersonal contexts. This deficiency ultimately undermines psychological resilience in the face of adversity (Çoban, 2022). Neuroimaging studies support this by linking loneliness to structural changes in the amygdala, which heightens vulnerability to social rejection (Lincoln et al., 2022). Moreover, impaired emotion regulation prevents the use of adaptive strategies like cognitive reappraisal, leading instead to maladaptive coping mechanisms such as rumination, which exacerbate emotional distress and lower Tolerance of failure (Isaacowitz, 2022). This finding underscores that loneliness alone is not the sole determinant; rather, cognitive-emotional mechanisms mediate its impact. Clinically, this highlights the need for interventions targeting both loneliness reduction and emotion regulation enhancement, with mindfulness training and social problem-solving programs offering potential benefits (Paley et al., 2022).

The second major finding demonstrated that the meaning of life influences Failure intolerance through the mediation of emotion regulation difficulties. Individuals who lack a clear sense of life's meaning struggle to manage negative emotions effectively, resulting in reduced tolerance for Failure. Theoretically, this relationship can be understood within cognitive-emotional frameworks that emphasize the role of meaning-making in modulating emotional responses. Without meaningful goals or value orientations (Zegeye et al., 2021), negative emotions from stressors are processed more intensely, triggering ineffective coping strategies like avoidance or aggression. Emotion regulation deficits further amplify this dynamic, as impairments in recognizing, accepting, and modifying negative emotions diminish distress tolerance, making individuals more prone to failure experiences (Çoban, 2022). This aligns with affective regulation theory, which underscores the role of emotion regulation mediators in linking cognitive variables to behavioral outcomes (Varela et al., 2022). Prior research corroborates these results, showing that a lack of meaning in life correlates with decreased psychological resilience and heightened emotional reactivity. Consequently, interventions aimed at enhancing life meaning and teaching adaptive coping strategies could improve Tolerance of failure and psychological adjustment. Notably, the study reaffirmed that life meaning affects Failure intolerance through emotion regulation mediation (Huang et al., 2021), reinforcing the centrality of meaning-making processes in emotional modulation (Silvers et al., 2022). When individuals lack purposeful goals, stress-induced negative emotions trigger maladaptive responses, while emotion regulation difficulties exacerbate this cycle (Karataş et al., 2021). This is further explicable within Wiscont's theoretical framework, which emphasizes emotion regulation mediators in cognitive-behavioral pathways (Lincoln et al., 2022). The consistency of these findings with existing literature suggests that interventions fostering life meaning and emotion regulation skills could enhance psychological resilience and Tolerance of failure.

Research Limitations and Suggestions
The study's limitations include reliance on self-report measures, which may be influenced by participants' self-presentation biases and perception management strategies. Additionally, the sample was restricted to married women in Tehran, necessitating caution when generalizing findings to other regions, cultures, or demographic groups due to cultural and ethnic diversity. Respondent bias, such as conservative answering or withholding true opinions, further constrained the results. To address these limitations, future research should explore the efficacy of life adjustment training on married women's mental health and life meaning. Replicating this study across diverse cities and cultural contexts within the country is also recommended to validate and broaden the findings.

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