

Presenting a predictive model of conflict management based on basic beliefs and empathy in counselors: the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and social acceptanceRaziye Esmaili,¹ Nahid Rezaei,^{*2} Mahsa sadat Karimi³**Abstract**

Introduction: Conflict management is one of the most important issues in the field of communication in the management of counseling sessions, among counselors in the field of psychology, from this point of view, the investigation of the prediction model of conflict management based on basic beliefs and empathy with the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and Social acceptance in counselors is of particular importance.

Research method: In terms of the purpose, the current research is a part of applied research, and in terms of method, it is a type of correlational study. The research community was made up of all counselors and psychologists working in the field of counseling and psychology in Tehran who were studying at Payam Noor University and Azad University in the spring of 1402, and 224 of them were selected as a sample. The tools of this research include Robbins' Conflict Management Questionnaire (1994), Catlin and Epstein's Basic Beliefs Scale (1992), Jordan et al.'s Empathy Scale Questionnaire (2016), Dennis and Vanderwaal's Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire (2010), Crown and Marlowe's Social Acceptance Questionnaire. (1960) was. The analysis method of this research was path analysis, which was used to examine the causal relationships of research variables.

Findings: The results of data analysis showed that both variables of basic beliefs and empathy have a negative and significant relationship ($P < 0.01$) with conflict management. Also, CFI, GFI and NFI indices are more than 0.9, which show that the model for measuring the research variables is a suitable model and the variables of cognitive flexibility and social acceptance could play a mediating role in this.

Conclusion: Therefore, based on the proposed model, by emphasizing the indicators of cognitive flexibility and social acceptance as much as possible, it is possible to reduce the intensity of conflicts between counselors and clients.

Keywords: basic beliefs, cognitive flexibility, conflict management, empathy, social acceptance model

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Introduction:

One of the most important issues in psychological sessions is the relationship that must be established between the client and the consultant. In fact, it is within the framework of this relationship that the client's trust in the consultant is formed (1) and if this relationship is not established properly, the counseling session will not be successful. It can be very successful (2). Since clients experience their deepest and most unattainable feelings at the psychological level in the counseling room, sometimes experiencing these feelings brings various challenges in the way of solving psychological problems and establishing an efficient relationship with the therapist (3). Therefore, it is better to identify these challenges and use them to advance the counseling process. One of the most important challenges is the conflict between the client and the consultant. Conflict is a natural and inevitable result of human communication that arises due to different goals, values and opinions, which is often accompanied by feelings of anger, helplessness, suffering, anxiety or fear, and the ability to manage conflicts can prevent these consequences. 4). Conflict management actually means the correct application of conflict resolution methods in facing them and is one of the most important factors in effective and constructive management between people (5). Proper management of conflicts by the counselor minimizes interpersonal problems, increases clients' satisfaction and results in positive psychological results (6). Various factors can affect conflict management, among which empathy and basic beliefs can be mentioned.

Empathy is defined as a person's ability to perceive and be sensitive to the emotions and viewpoints of others (7). The contribution of empathy in responsible decision-making has been widely studied in the field of social and emotional skills (8). Empathy (or empathic concern) is a source of moral emotion that has great motivational force and subsequent positive action (9). In a research, Bagham, Vahdat Borashan and Hosni (10) addressed the modeling of participatory management on conflict management with the mediating role of expressive empathy and showed that expressive empathy had a direct and significant effect on conflict management. Also, participatory management with the mediator role of expressive empathy had an indirect and significant effect on conflict management ($P < 0.05$). In a study, Klimaki (11) also reported the role of empathy in interpersonal and intergroup relationships, including meaningful intractable conflicts.

Basic beliefs, as relatively stable structures, are one of the most important individual characteristics that can include a large part of a person's feelings and thoughts (12). According to this view, a person automatically has an implicit theory that includes a theory about himself, relationships with others, the world, as well as propositions that relate these theories (13). Despite the theoretical emphasis on basic beliefs, as a fundamental and influential cognitive construct, researchers have often ignored its important role in various psychological outcomes, among these few studies, we can refer to Alwandi and Seddiq's (14) studies. The study of predicting social well-being and social trust through the belief in a just world in the clients of counseling centers has pointed out. This research was carried out by correlation method and targeted sampling among 100 people who referred to counseling centers in Tehran and the research results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between belief in a just world and social well-being ($r=0.46$, $p < 0.01$).). Considering the relationship between

the predictor variables of empathy and basic beliefs with the variable of conflict management, the role of mediating variables such as cognitive flexibility and social acceptance is of particular importance in explaining this model. Cognitive flexibility is defined as the ability to change cognitive attitudes with the aim of adapting to changing stimuli and refers to the level of a person's experientiality in front of internal and external experiences (15). This factor requires the ability to communicate with the present and the power to separate a person from inner thoughts and experiences (16). People who have less flexibility can hardly forget their early learnings, they insist on their previous learnings which have negative consequences for them and this insistence harms their adaptation to new conditions. (17). In this regard, Khosh Sarwar and Mikaili (18) investigated the role of social comparison, interpersonal sensitivity and cognitive flexibility in predicting disordered eating attitudes in 200 female students using a multi-stage random sampling method. and Pearson's correlation and step-by-step regression, and their findings showed that cognitive flexibility ($\beta=0.143$, $p<0.01$) can negatively and significantly predict disordered eating attitudes in It is students.

Social acceptance is actually the result of several social phenomena such as social influence, social conformity, social judgment and people's attitudes (19). Social acceptance means that most people act in order to fit in with others from their point of view. This often prevents others from revealing their true selves honestly (20). People who have favorable levels of this social dimension have a positive view of human nature, trust other people and believe that people are capable of being good. Every human being has an urgent need for social acceptance, which makes a person resistant to all kinds of physical and mental problems and gives him enough self-confidence to face the problems of life (21). The researches of Rahspar, Kheir, Barzegar and Koreshnia (22), which aimed to investigate the mediating role of social acceptance and emotional schemas in the relationship between family communication patterns and students' academic motivation, showed that social acceptance and emotional schemas in the relationship between patterns Family communication and students' academic motivation play a mediating role. Considering the importance of conflict management in the relationship between counselor and client and little research in this field, the present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the prediction of conflict management based on empathy, emotional contagion and basic beliefs with the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and social acceptance. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the question whether basic beliefs, empathy and emotional contagion can predict conflict management, and if this model is confirmed, can emotional cognitive flexibility and social acceptance play a mediating role in this model?

Research Method:

In terms of the objective, the current research was part of the applied research, and in terms of the method, it was a type of correlation studies and path analysis, which was used to investigate the causal relationships of the research variables. The exogenous variable in this research was empathy and basic beliefs, the mediating variable (endogenous) was cognitive flexibility and social acceptance, and the endogenous variable (main dependent) was conflict management. Data were analyzed with SPSS-25 and LISREL software. The research community was made up of all counselors and psychologists working in the field of counseling and psychology in

Tehran who were studying at Payam Noor University and Azad University in the spring of 1402, from among them 230 people were selected as a sample. Entry criteria included having at least a bachelor's degree in counseling and psychology and work experience for at least one year in this field, and exclusion criteria included not having at least one reference during the last month. Regarding the sample size in path analysis modeling method, the sufficient sample size is 10 times the number of model parameters and the best sample size is 20 times the number of model parameters. Therefore, it is better for the sample size to be between 10 and 20 times the number of model parameters (23), so first by checking the statistical assumptions using skewness and skewness tests, outliers were identified and then using the Mahalanobis test Outliers were removed, then the number of samples was reduced to 224. Research tools:

Robbins Conflict Management Questionnaire: This questionnaire is designed based on the theory of Putnam and Wilson and it clarifies the conflict management style of people. The questionnaire has 30 items, which are graded on a Likert scale from always to never, and finally three subscales are calculated for it: non-confrontation and non-competition (avoidance), problem-solving (cooperation and compromise), control (competition).). The answers in this questionnaire are specified on a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5). The minimum score of a person in each of the styles is 3 and the maximum is 15. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of conflict management styles questionnaire is 0.76. The reliability of this questionnaire in the country has been estimated by Taherpour, Shokohi Fard and Samai (24) with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.8. In the present study, the reliability of this test was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.75.

Catlin and Epstein's Basic Belief Scale: This questionnaire has 102 items, the Persian version of which after adaptation and validation by Hijazi, Sadeghi and Shirzadi-Fard (24), was reduced to 50 items and consists of two belief subscales. To the meaningful world (15 items) and to the ideal self-belief (9 items) is composed of the basic beliefs questionnaire. Participants answer the items on a 5-point Likert scale, including a continuum of options from completely agree (5) to completely disagree (1). The evidence obtained from previous researches indicates the validity and reliability of this tool. Hejazi et al. reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire at the desired level of 0.84 (25). In the present study, the reliability of this test was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.69.

Jordan et al.'s empathy scale questionnaire: This questionnaire includes two subscales, which are added to the interpersonal response subscale, to evaluate empathy in the narrower sense of emotional contagion as well as behavioral contagion. These two subscales each have seven questions and are arranged in a 5-point Likert scale structure (from "This is my biography at all" = 0 to "It is not my biography at all" = 4). Cronbach's alpha for empathy and behavioral contagion subscales in the main foreign sample was 0.71 and 0.73, respectively (26) and in Samani, Golbabai and Burhani's research (27), Cronbach's alpha for these two subscales was 0.72 and 0.72, respectively. 0.74 has been obtained. In the present study, the reliability of this test was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.76.

Dennis and Vanderwaal Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire: It is a short 20-item self-report tool that measures a type of cognitive flexibility that is necessary for a person's success in challenging ineffective thoughts and replacing them with more efficient ones. It works. The scoring of this questionnaire is based on a 7-point Likert scale (completely disagree = 1 to completely agree = 7) and options 2, 4, 7, 9, 11 and 17 are scored inversely. The total score of

this questionnaire can vary from 20 to 140, and the higher the score, the higher the cognitive flexibility. This tool measures three aspects of cognitive flexibility: a) the desire to perceive difficult situations as controllable situations, b) the ability to perceive several alternative explanations for events and human behavior, and c) the ability to create several solutions. Considers alternatives for difficult situations. In Iran, Shaare, Farmani and Soltani (2014) reported the retest coefficient of the whole scale as 0.71 and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the whole scale as 0.90 (28). In the present study, the reliability of this test was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.72.

Social Acceptance Questionnaire of Crown and Marlowe: This questionnaire contains 33 questions that can be answered correctly or incorrectly, and after correcting the questionnaire, the level of social acceptance of the person is interpreted according to the received score, and the minimum score in This tool is 0 and maximum 33. In 2008, Sedekpour et al. reported the reliability of this test using Cronbach's alpha method as 0.75. Also, in Sharafuddin's research in 2009, two methods of Cronbach's alpha and Tansif were used to determine the reliability of the mentioned questionnaire, which are equal to 0.70 and 0.67, respectively, and indicate acceptable coefficients (29). In this study, the reliability of this tool was obtained through Cronbach's alpha value of 0.72.

Research findings:

The characteristics of the respondents in this study were analyzed using the demographic variables of gender, education level, employment history and marital status. In this research, 67.3% were women and 32.7% were men, the lowest age range was 3.4% among people less than 24 years old and the highest age range was 40.1% from 36 to 42 years old, as well as consultants with a bachelor's degree 54.2 and work experience 1 Up to 5 years with 50.5 percent accounted for the most frequency. In table (1), the mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of the research variables are reported.

Table 1- Mean, standard deviation and Pearson coefficients of research variables

Average	The standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	
Basic beliefs	42	4/498	1				
Empathy	33.3	2/47	**0/460	1			
Cognitive flexibility	76/42	19/068	**0/564	*0/144	1		
social acceptance	21/6	3/9	**0/357	**0/390	0/027	1	
Conflict Management	25/71	1/91	**0/660	**0/480	**0/436	**0/417	1

As seen in Table 1, the significant correlation ($P < 0.01$) between the variables of basic beliefs, empathy, cognitive flexibility and social acceptance with conflict management provides the possibility of path analysis. Also, the results of the Kolmogorov Smirnov test

showed the normality of the variables ($p < 0.5$) and the Watson camera value in this research was reported in the acceptable range (1.5 to 2.5), which indicates the independence of the errors. One of the other conditions is the non-collinearity of predictor variables, and the measure of this condition is the variance inflation factor. If this numerical factor is less than 10, the non-collinearity of the variables is confirmed. In the present study, the variance inflation factor in all variables was smaller than 10 and the non-collinearity was confirmed. Path analysis method was used to test the desired model. The measurement parameters of direct relationships are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Estimates of the direct effect coefficients of the exogenous variable (cognitive flexibility) with emotion regulation (intermediate dependent) and generalized anxiety and social anxiety (main dependent)

Direction	T	Standard coefficient	Significance level
From basic beliefs to conflict management	5/93	0/40	0/40
From empathy to conflict management	3/5	0/19	0/19
From basic beliefs to cognitive flexibility	10/22	0/63	0/63
From basic beliefs to social acceptance	3/31	0/22	0/22
From empathy to cognitive flexibility	-2/367	-0/14	-0/14
From empathy to social acceptance	4/2	0/28	0/28
From cognitive flexibility to conflict anagement	2/99	0/17	0/00
From social acceptance to conflict management	3/62	0/19	0/00

As can be seen in Table 2, all the variables whose direct paths end with the criterion variable have a T value greater or smaller than ± 1.96 and have a significant effect ($P < 0.05$) on the criterion variables. Also, the coefficients of the indirect path of the effects of the variables and the significance of the estimated parameters are presented. Also, in order to investigate the significance of the effect of variables on conflict management with the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and social acceptance, bootstrap was used and its results were reported to be significant ($P < 0.01$) due to the sign of the lower and upper limits.

Table 3- goodness of fit indices of the research model

model fit indices	X2/DF	(NFI)	(CFI)	(IFI)	(GFI)	(RMSEA)
	3/42	0/96	0/98	0/98	0/98	0/022

Table 3 show the good fit of the data with the proposed model, which show that the model for measuring the research variables is a suitable model. Therefore, basic beliefs and empathy with the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and social acceptance can predict conflict management among psychological counselors.

Discussion and conclusion:

According to the results of this research, basic beliefs have a positive and significant effect on conflict management, and this finding is in line with Alwandi and Sadiq's research (14). In explaining this finding, it can be said that due to the complexities of personality and differences in people's thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs, conflict is an inevitable part of human communication, which is considered a natural and normal thing in everyday life, as well as in counselor-client relationships. It is seen in abundance. Therefore, the success of real consultants depends on the management of these conflicts. Conflict management is actually a process to solve problems in which efforts are made to minimize negative results and maximize positive results, so this finding is based on assumptions that form basic beliefs, including the extent to which a person means the world, others. Supportive and reliable, considers himself valuable and the world meaningful, it is explained. When a person looks at the world with an optimistic and meaningful view and considers others trustworthy and himself valuable, he can understand conflicts and different views on issues and manage them better. Also, the findings supported the significant positive effect of empathy on conflict management, which is in line with Bagham et al.'s (10) and Klimaki's (11) researches. In explaining empathy with conflict management, it can be said that empathy leads to understanding and accepting clients' needs and having cognitive and emotional connections with them. Successful counselors are actually people who can create a safe environment for their clients where they can easily express their concerns, feelings and attitudes. Therefore, the contribution of empathy in responsible decision-making when faced with aggression is increased and better management is done in this field.

Also, according to the findings, social acceptance and cognitive flexibility play a mediating role in the relationship between basic beliefs and empathy with conflict management. This finding is in line with Khosh Sarwar and Mikaili's research (18) on the significant mediating role of flexibility and Rahspar et al.'s (22) studies on the mediating role of social acceptance. Conflict management using social acceptance seeks to find a point where the parties agree on the desired solution by passing a part of their demands. The parties to the conflict must give up some of their demands in order to reach an agreement on a bigger issue, and this compromise can increase the sense of cooperation in the continuation of the counseling process and make the clients feel that their words are being heard. The level of social acceptance of people is different, in such a way that a group of people always speak according to their opinions and beliefs, if they are asked about a subject, they answer the questions honestly, they are firm in their opinions and under They give the same answer to the questions in any situation, even if their answers lead to social rejection. Another group speaks in such a way as to be approved by others. If they are asked about a subject, they answer in a way that they think others would like to be answered. They try to show compatibility with social rules and norms and avoid social rejection, so social acceptance has an effect on conflict management.

Also, cognitive flexibility is effective in the relationship between basic beliefs and empathy. People who have the ability to think flexibly, use alternative justifications, positively reconstruct their thinking framework, and accept challenging situations or stressful events, have more acceptance and tolerance for conflict management than people who have little

flexibility (30). . In other words, counselors who have the ability to think flexibly, by understanding the clients' requests and needs and also showing a kind of softness and flexibility in their behavior, establish a successful relationship with the clients, and this successful relationship leads to better conflict management. guarantees On the other hand, regarding the role of the variables of basic beliefs and empathy on the mediating variables of cognitive flexibility and social acceptance, it can be said that people who scored higher in basic beliefs probably consider the world and its events to have a certain order and believe that They can control the events of their life, they have a better evaluation of life, and emotionally they experience a more favorable situation and report more favorable emotional experiences. In other words, believing in a meaningful world can also refer to the purposefulness of life and that the active person can be effective in this purposefulness (31). This agency is also related to a person's ability to control life conditions. Therefore, a person can also influence social acceptance and cognitive flexibility and thus have an indirect effect on conflict management. Also, empathy, by establishing a positive and sincere relationship with the client, can provide a safe environment to listen to his words, and in this way, the counselor can learn about the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and needs of the client and understand him better (32). Correct understanding affects cognitive flexibility and social acceptance.

Research limitations

This study was associated with limitations, the most important of which was not considering the effect of personality traits, economic and social level of counselors and clients participating in the research. Also, due to the fact that the present research was conducted among consultants in Tehran, it limits the ability to generalize the results to other people in other cities as well as other jobs that are in contact with the clients. Different cultures of the country and other occupations that are in contact with the clients should take place, and it is also suggested that training classes related to conflict management be held in various occupations that are in contact with the clients, in order to create a basis for a beneficial relationship between the consultant. and create references.

Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations of this plan included: written information about this research to the participants and giving them assurance about the confidentiality of the information and its use only in research matters, voluntary participation and obtaining the written consent of the participants to participate in this research. .Conflict of interest

This article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

Application of research

This research has important results in the field of conflict management and consulting services, and based on this, it is possible to provide guidelines for future research.

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