

The Mediating Role of Empathy in the Relationship Between Burnout and Marital Adjustment of Married Women Working in Law Enforcement

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Marital adjustment, empathy, burnout, woman law enforcement

Anahtar kelimeler

Evlilik uyumu, empati, tükenmişlik, kadın kolluk çalışanları

Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of empathy in the indirect relationship between burnout and marital adjustment among married women working in law enforcement. A total of 211 participants, including 81 female private security officers, 98 female police officers, and 32 female military personnel, participated in the study. The socio-demographic information form, Marital Adjustment Scale, Interpersonal Reactivity Index, and Maslach Burnout Inventory were used. Burnout was addressed with components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, while empathy was considered with components of empathic concern, perspective-taking, and personal distress. The findings indicated that the burnout levels of married women working in law enforcement negatively predicted their marital adjustment. The indirect relationships between burnout and marital adjustment varied according to the components of burnout and empathy. Specifically, an increase in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization was indirectly related to a decrease in marital adjustment through increased personal distress. Conversely, an increase in depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment predicted a decrease in marital adjustment through weakened perspective-taking.

Kolluk Kuvvetlerinde Çalışan Evli Kadınlarda Tükenmişlik ve Evlilik Uyumu Arasındaki İlişkide Empatinin Aracı Rolü

Öz

Bu çalışmada, kolluk kuvvetlerinde çalışan evli kadınlarda, tükenmişliğin evlilik uyumuyla dolaylı ilişkisinde empatinin aracı rolü incelenmektedir. Araştırmaya, 81 kadın özel güvenlik görevlisi, 98 kadın polis ve 32 kadın askeri personel olmak üzere toplamda 211 kişi katılmıştır. Çalışmada, sosyo-demografik bilgi formu, Evlilik Uyum Ölçeği, Kişiler Arası Tepkisellik İndeksi ve Maslach Tükenmişlik Envanteri kullanılmıştır. Tükenmişlik; duygusal tükenme, duyarsızlaşma ve düşük kişisel başarı hissi ile empati; empatik ilgi, perspektif alma ve kişisel sıkıntı bileşenleriyle ele alınmıştır. Bulgular, kolluk kuvvetlerinde çalışan evli kadınların tükenmişlik düzeylerinin, evliliklerindeki uyumu negatif yönde yordadığına işaret etmiştir. Tükenmişlik ve evlilik uyumu arasındaki dolaylı ilişkiler, tükenmişlik ve empati bileşenlerine göre değişmektedir. Buna göre, duygusal tükenme ve duyarsızlaşmadaki artış, kişisel sıkıntının artması aracılığıyla evlilik uyumundaki düşüşle dolaylı olarak ilişkilidir. Buna karşılık, artan duyarsızlaşma ve düşük kişisel başarı hissi, perspektif almanın zayıflaması aracılığıyla evlilik uyumunda düşüşü yordamaktadır.

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“Marital adjustment” refers to the compatibility and satisfaction that spouses experience in various aspects such as love, sexuality, understanding, joint decision-making, household and family responsibilities, social roles, spending time together, and managing the family budget (Locke & Wallace, 1959). A compatible marriage is associated with higher life satisfaction, increased happiness, and better physical health (Be et al., 2013; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Proulx et al., 2007). Conversely, marital discord is linked to negative outcomes such as behavioral problems in children (Jouriles et al., 1991), increased psychological distress (Li et al., 2016), reduced forgiveness (Taysi, 2010), and decreased parental support (Bonds & Gondoli, 2007).

One of the key factors related to marital adjustment is work life (Karaffa et al., 2015). Work-life is linked with many aspects of marriage, from leisure activities and meeting interests and expectations to other marital issues (Borum & Philpot, 1993). Particularly demanding professions, such as law enforcement, pose challenges to marital compatibility. Law enforcement is known to be one of the most stressful professions. The job requirements include intense work, adapting to changing working hours, dealing with dangerous situations, and maintaining good relationships with colleagues and the public (Jackson & Maslach, 1982). Failure to adapt to the demands of the job or to cope effectively with stress exposes employees to risks such as burnout (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006; Santa Maria et al., 2021). Burnout is defined as a chronic state of stress caused by job demands and manifests in three forms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion arises from overwork, dealing directly with people’s problems, tension, frustration, and psychological fatigue. Individuals experiencing emotional exhaustion lack the emotional strength and physical energy to meet job demands. Emotional exhaustion can lead to the development of depersonalization. Employees adopt an indifferent attitude towards their work and the people they serve, creating emotional distances between themselves and others as a reaction to unmanageable stress. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization trigger feelings of inadequacy related to job performance. In the reduced personal accomplishment dimension of burnout, employees develop negative thoughts about their job performance and feel dissatisfied with their inability to solve problems or provide adequate care (Maslach et al., 1996).

Studies show that job-related stress and burnout in law enforcement personnel spill over into the family environment (Jackson & Maslach, 1982). Job-related stress, time spent at work, low energy, and fatigue translate into unmet needs and desires in marriage (Karaffa et al., 2015) and negative interactions (Roberts & Levenson, 2001). Officers often come home exhausted, sad, angry, tense, anxious, and complaining (Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Lain, 1983). This situation, associated with emotional exhaustion, may cause issues such as not spending enough time with the family, failing to fulfill familial responsibilities (like childcare), and transferring work-related tensions to the home environment, resulting in negative communication in marriage (e.g., yelling at the spouse) (Karaffa et al., 2015). Spouses of depersonalized officers report that their partners cannot trust others as they used to, approach family members with suspicion, act controlling and domineering, show insufficient interest in family matters, and become emotionally distant from their spouses (Karaffa et al., 2015). Depersonalization is related to reduced communicative and cognitive compatibility between spouses. Officers use words of affection, approval, or encouragement less frequently, and the resulting emotional distances trigger conflicts. In disagreements, the likelihood of exhibiting a positive attitude decreases and spouses show less their compatibility in trust, respect, sensitivity, and cooperation (Rani & Garg, 2010). Conversely, when officers experience a higher sense of personal accomplishment, they are more likely to meet their spouses’ expectations or maintain cohesion with them (Lain, 1983; Rani & Garg, 2010).

Burnout can also reduce spouses' interest, understanding, and compassion toward each other, thereby lowering marital adjustment. Each of these traits is associated with empathy. Empathy is seen as the foundation of a happy relationship (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Kimmes et al., 2014). Studies indicate that forgiveness, tolerance for the partner's mistakes, conflict resolution, support provision, and reduced relationship stress are achievable through being an empathic partner or having one (Chung, 2014; see Davis, 2017; McDonald et al., 2018; O'Brien et al., 2009). Empathy, in general, refers to understanding and sharing another person's feelings from their perspective (Davis, 1983) and is often defined by two characteristics: cognitive and emotional. Cognitive empathy, referred to as perspective-taking, involves understanding another person by imagining oneself in their place or seeing from their viewpoint. Emotional empathy, on the other hand, is characterized by feelings directed towards others (other-oriented) or oneself (self-oriented). Empathic concern is an other-oriented response characterized by feelings of compassion, pity, and sadness towards another person, often motivating actions to help the person. In contrast, personal distress is a self-oriented emotional response involving anxiety, fear, and discomfort triggered by witnessing another person's distress (Davis, 1983). Understanding the role of empathy in close relationships can be better grasped through its cognitive and emotional components.

Cognitive empathy is one of the crucial elements that enhance compatibility in a romantic relationship (Long & Andrews, 1990). Higher levels of perspective-taking (both self-perceived and perceived in the partner) increase compatibility between spouses (Morgenstern, 1996). Perspective-taking promotes positive attitudes and behaviors such as being balanced, sincere, self-confident, friendly, and trustworthy, while reducing the likelihood of negative behaviors. A partner with a high level of perspective-taking does not remain indifferent to their spouse's issues or avoids possessive behaviors by making more accurate predictions about the partner's situation (Davis & Oathout, 1987). When necessary, a partner with a high level of perspective-taking provides the needed support to their partner (Verhofstadt et al., 2016). These positive attitudes and behaviors increase relationship satisfaction (Davis & Oathout, 1987).

Similarly, the level of empathic concern is related to positive behaviors and high relationship satisfaction. Individuals with high empathic concern are loving, supportive, trustworthy, communicate well, exhibit fewer negative behaviors (Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992), and avoid criticizing their partner by recognizing their needs (Verhofstadt et al., 2016). However, some studies indicate that the relationship between empathic concern and marital adjustment may vary by gender. According to this, the level of empathic concern of the male partner positively enhances marital adjustment, while the empathic concern of the female partner does not make a difference in the harmony between spouses (Morgenstern, 1996). In some studies, empathic concern tends to decrease depending on the duration of the marriage (Chee, 1988).

Personal distress, unlike the other two dimensions of empathy, has a negative relationship with marital adjustment. Studies generally show that personal distress is associated with negative relational behaviors (such as being possessive or unreliable), whereas it does not correlate with positive behaviors or gives a negative direction to positive behaviors (such as being optimistic or honest) (Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992). Similarly, partners with high levels of personal distress, being more preoccupied with their own anxieties during a problem, may exhibit tendencies to blame their partners or minimize the issue (negative support) instead of understanding them (see Davis, 2017; Verhofstadt et al., 2016). Studies also suggest that the relationship between personal distress and marital adjustment, like empathic concern, may vary by gender. For instance, a study found that as women's levels of personal distress increased, the perceived marital adjustment decreased, whereas men's personal distress scores (as perceived by themselves and their partners) were not related to marital adjustment (Morgenstern, 1996). In another study with married couples, personal distress did not show

a significant relationship with marital satisfaction (Chee, 1988). These findings on empathic concern and personal distress suggest that these two empathic responses may vary in the context of romantic relationships, whereas the relationships between perspective-taking and marital adjustment may exhibit more consistent patterns (Davis, 2017; Morgenstern, 1996).

However, as mentioned at the outset, empathic responses can weaken due to burnout. Numerous studies, particularly in professions requiring face-to-face interactions (such as police officers, doctors, and nurses), provide evidence that burnout impairs empathy (Brazeau et al., 2010; Cole et al., 2024; Correia et al., 2023; Seo et al., 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Studies also indicate that each dimension of burnout has a different relationship with empathic responses (Delgado et al., 2023). Emotional exhaustion is associated with a decrease in perspective-taking and empathic concern, while it is linked to an increase in personal distress. This connection can be explained by the fact that emotionally exhausted individuals may lack the cognitive effort to understand another's distress (Paro et al., 2014) or the strength to exhibit emotions such as sadness and compassion (Thomas et al., 2007). On the contrary, emotional exhaustion may trigger self-oriented emotional sensitivity (Delgado et al., 2021). In individuals experiencing depersonalization, tendencies towards indifference or blaming others as self-protective mechanisms (Ferri et al., 2015) can hinder perspective-taking and empathic concern (Thomas et al., 2007) while increasing levels of personal distress (Paro et al., 2014). Similarly, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment may result in inadequacy in showing empathic concern and perspective-taking (Thomas et al., 2007). Conversely, feelings of inadequacy or diminished self-esteem may lead to a self-focus (Davis, 1990), triggering increased personal distress (Delgado et al., 2021). Research also shows that emotional exhaustion is the burnout dimension least associated with empathy (Delgado et al., 2023). However, it is important to note that a significant portion of the studies summarized here were conducted with healthcare professionals. There is less information on the relationship between burnout and empathy among law enforcement officers (Lopez, 2022). Existing information may indicate different outcomes from the summarized findings. For example, in one of these studies, workplace injuries—a significant stress factor—were found to be associated with an increase in officers' empathic responses (Lopez, 2022). Another study found that burnout is related to emotional empathy but does not explain cognitive empathy (Correia et al., 2023).

Studies also show that burnout and empathy are experienced differently by women and men. In terms of burnout, the differences are prominent in two dimensions. Accordingly, women report higher levels of emotional exhaustion compared to men, while men are more likely to experience depersonalization compared to women (Delgado et al., 2023; Purvanova & Muros, 2010). According to researchers, this situation is related to gender roles. Social roles expect men to conceal their emotions and women to express their emotions openly. These expectations may subsequently trigger higher levels of emotional exhaustion in women and more tendencies towards depersonalization in men (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). In a study supporting this information, it has been observed that female police officers who adhere to traditional gender roles report higher levels of burnout compared to both non-traditional female officers and male officers. Conversely, the burnout levels of non-traditional women are not significantly different from those of their male counterparts (Artz et al., 2022). Female law enforcement personnel, unlike their male counterparts, may face challenges associated with working as women in a male-dominated profession (Alexander, 1999). This could affect their perception of competence in meeting job demands, which is related to burnout (a reduction in the sense of accomplishment). However, a similar situation may not be observed among male employees. For example, practicing male doctors, even if they experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, are observed to maintain their sense of personal accomplishment related to their work (Samra, 2018). In contrast to these findings, some studies suggest that burnout or job stress does not differ by gender (Davis, 1984), and in some

cases, male police officers experience more stress than female officers (Norvell et al., 1993). Other studies highlight that female officers, compared to their male counterparts, have higher levels of personal accomplishment and experience more depersonalization (Lambert et al., 2019).

Similarly, empathic experiences can vary by gender. Generally, there is a widespread belief that women are more empathic than men (Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987). However, studies on this subject yield different results. Some research indicates that women are more successful in empathic concern, personal distress, and perspective-taking (Davis, 1980), while other studies find no significant gender differences in cognitive empathy (Riggio et al., 1989). Other studies point to similarities between genders, suggesting that differences may be related to gender roles (Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987). For instance, while self-report measures indicate that women score higher in empathy, physiological assessments of empathy (such as EEG) show that women and men exhibit similar levels of empathy (Pang et al., 2023). Women are more encouraged to express themselves with emotional traits such as sensitivity, concern, compassion, and anxiety towards others, as part of traditional roles. On the other hand, being masculine is seen as a trait less associated with empathy (Karniol et al., 1998). Although the findings on gender differences in burnout and empathy are not consistent, they suggest that gender may play an important role in these two variables.

In conclusion, burnout appears to be a significant risk factor for marital adjustment among law enforcement personnel. This risk associated with burnout can be mitigated through empathy. However, the relationships between burnout and empathy are complex. Both traits have different components, and the relationships between these components can vary. Therefore, the relationship between each dimension of burnout and marital adjustment should be tested through different components of empathy. Mediator models established for this purpose can reveal the contributions of empathy components to these relationships and provide insights into the prominent empathy component. To the best of our knowledge, no study has tested these relationships. Moreover, research on burnout and empathy among law enforcement officers is less extensive compared to other professional groups. Additionally, the summarized findings suggest that burnout and empathy may exhibit different relational patterns for female law enforcement personnel. Based on this information, the current study investigates the mediating role of empathy in the relationship between burnout and marital adjustment among female law enforcement officers. It is expected that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment will negatively predict marital adjustment through empathic concern and perspective-taking, while higher scores on burnout dimensions are anticipated to explain the decrease in marital adjustment through increased personal distress.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study was conducted by convenience sampling with 211 married women working in Turkish law enforcement (81 of them were private security personnel, 98 were police officers, and 32 were military personnel). Their mean age difference between them and their spouses was 2.52 ($SD = 2.23$), and their mean duration of marriage was 4.42 ($SD = 3.66$) years. The ages of the participants could not be obtained because they preferred not to disclose them. After being approved by the authors' university ethics committee (Reference: 21/01/2019-5452), implementations were made face-to-face by the first researcher (February - March 2019). Before these, the participants were informed about the research process, the study was conducted with volunteer participants, and data collection took approximately 25-35 minutes.

Measurements

Sociodemographic Information Form: This form collected data on participants' age, education, occupation, marital status, number of children, and length of service in law enforcement.

Marital Adjustment Test: The Turkish form of the 15-item measure was utilized in this study (Locke & Wallace, 1959; Tutarel Kışlak, 1999). In the test, one item is related to general adjustment (level of happiness in marriage), eight items are related to conflict resolution (e.g., display of affection), and six items are related to dependency and communication ("Do you confide in your mate?"). Some items are scored using a 7-point scale (Item 1), a 6-point scale (Items 2-9), and a 4-point scale (Items 11, 13, and 15), while others use 2- and 3-option responses (Items 10, 12, and 14). Higher scores indicate higher levels of marital adjustment.

Maslach Burnout Inventory: The Turkish form of the 22-item measure was utilized in this study (Ergin, 1992; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In the inventory, nine items are about emotional exhaustion ("I feel frustrated by my work."), five items are about depersonalization ("I'm afraid that my work makes me emotionally harder."), and eight items are about personal accomplishment ("I feel full of energy."). Replies are evaluated on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Higher scores on the subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment indicate higher levels of burnout.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index: Empathy was evaluated in this study using a 21-item Turkish form of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980; Engeler, 2005). The index has three subscales consisting of seven items each as empathic concern ("I am often quite touched by things that I see happen."), perspective-taking ("I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision."), and personal distress ("I tend to lose control during emergencies."). Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale with response options varying between does not describe me well (1) and describes me very well (5). Higher scores in each subscale indicate higher levels of the quality measured by the subscale.

Data Analysis

To examine the mediating role of empathy (empathic concern, perspective taking, and personal distress) in the relationship between each dimension of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) and marital adjustment, parallel mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS model 4. The analyses employed the bootstrap method with 5000 resamples. In this method, the mediator effect of each variable was assessed based on the criterion that the bootstrap confidence interval's range should not include a zero (0) value (Hayes, 2013). Additionally, the variables of age differences between partners and marriage duration were statistically controlled in the mediator effect analysis.

Results

The correlations of the variables and their descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. According to the results, emotional exhaustion is negatively related to marital adjustment and empathic concern, whereas it is positively related to personal distress. The correlation between emotional exhaustion and perspective-taking is not significant. Depersonalization is negatively related to marital adjustment, empathic concern, and perspective-taking, whereas it is positively related to personal distress. Low personal accomplishment is negatively related to empathic concern and perspective-taking, whereas it is positively related to personal distress. The correlation between low personal accomplishment and marital adjustment is not significant.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotional exhaustion	-						
2. Depersonalization	.71*	-					
3. Low personal accomplishment	.05	.09	-				
4. Empathic concern	-.17*	-.31*	-.24*	-			
5. Perspective taking	-.12	-.25*	-.36*	.50*	-		
6. Personal distress	.35*	.44*	.15*	-.04	-.10	-	
7. Marital adjustment	-.14*	-.15*	.11	.06	.24*	-.26*	-
<i>M</i>	24.15	11.34	19.50	26.90	25.12	18.63	43.88
<i>SD</i>	8.78	4.59	4.91	4.29	4.61	4.71	8.71
Cronbach's alpha	.91	.80	.69	.59	.66	.57	.87

* $p < .05$.

In the first model, the indirect relationships between emotional exhaustion and marital adjustment through components of empathy were tested (see Figure 1). The results indicate that the established model is significant ($B = -.18$, $SE = .07$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-.32, -.04]$). Accordingly, emotional exhaustion explains 7% of the variance in marital adjustment, $F(4, 201) = 3.63$, $p < .05$. The indirect relationship between emotional exhaustion and marital adjustment is mediated only by personal distress ($B = -.08$, $SE = .03$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-.16, -.02]$). The indirect relationships through empathic concern ($B = .02$, $SE = .02$, $p = .28$, 95% CI $[-.00, .06]$) and perspective-taking are not significant ($B = -.03$, $SE = .02$, $p = .18$, 95% CI $[-.09, .01]$). The model also points to the full mediation role of personal distress. In other words, the direct relationship between emotional exhaustion and marital adjustment loses its significance with the inclusion of personal distress in the model ($B = -.09$, $SE = .07$, $p = .22$, 95% CI $[-.23, .05]$). To clarify, according to this model, emotional exhaustion increases personal distress, which in turn reduces the level of marital adjustment (Figure 1).

In the second model, the indirect relationships between depersonalization and marital adjustment through components of empathy were tested (see Figure 2). The results indicate that the established model is significant ($B = -.40$, $SE = .14$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-.67, -.12]$). Accordingly, depersonalization explains 7% of the variance in marital adjustment, $F(4, 201) = 4.07$, $p < .05$. The indirect relationship between depersonalization and marital adjustment is mediated by perspective-taking ($B = -.15$, $SE = .06$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-.29, -.06]$) and personal distress ($B = -.20$, $SE = .08$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-.38, -.06]$). The indirect relationships through empathic concern are not significant ($B = .06$, $SE = .05$, $p = .20$, 95% CI $[-.02, .18]$). The model also points to the full mediation role of perspective-taking and personal distress. In other words, the direct relationship between depersonalization and marital adjustment loses its significance with the inclusion of perspective-taking and personal distress in the model ($B = -.11$, $SE = .15$, $p = .48$, 95% CI $[-.41, .19]$). Accordingly, high depersonalization reduces perspective-taking, which in turn reduces marital adjustment. Conversely, increased depersonalization is related to increased personal distress; thereby, it is linked to lower marital adjustment (Figure 2).

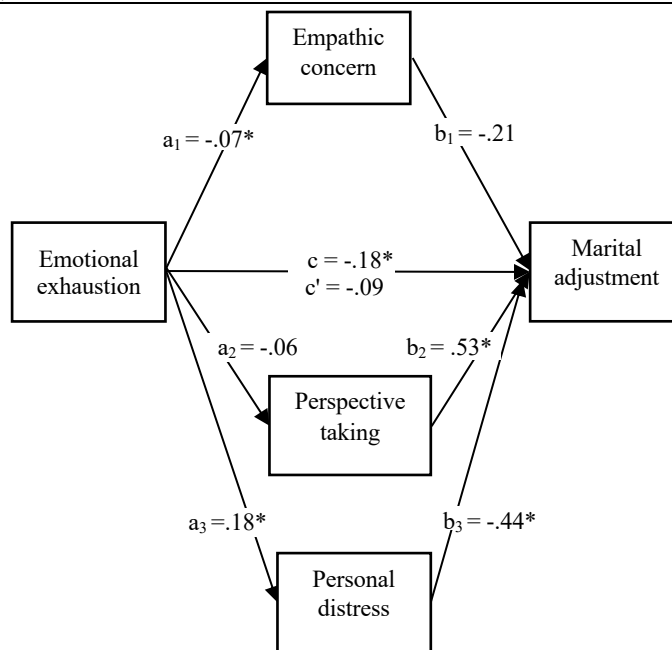


Figure 1. Mediator Effects of Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Personal Distress on the Relationship Between Emotional Exhaustion and Marital Adjustment

Note. Non-standardized regression coefficients are included. * $p < .05$, c = total effect, c' = direct effect.

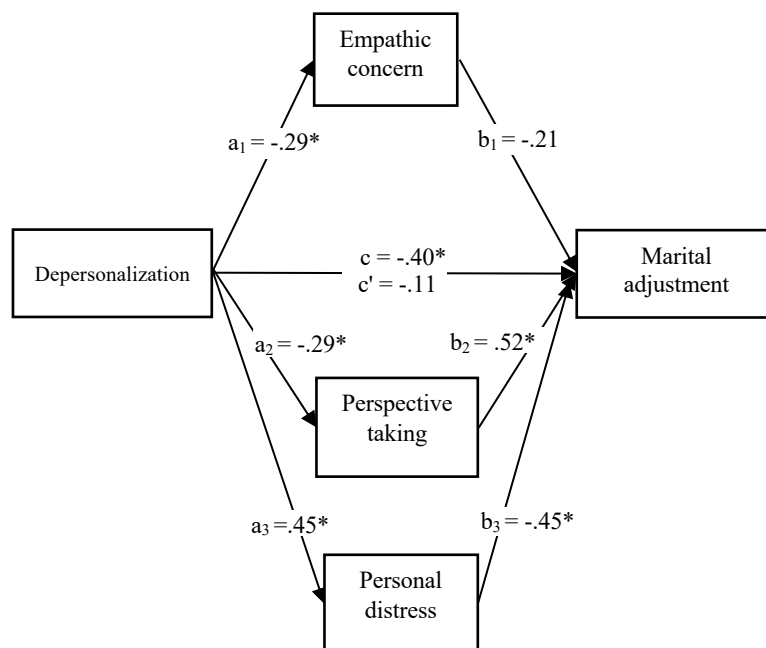


Figure 2. Mediator Effects of Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Personal Distress on the Relationship Between Depersonalization and Marital Adjustment

Note. Non-standardized regression coefficients are included. * $p < .05$, c = total effect, c' = direct effect.

In the final model, the indirect relationships between low personal accomplishment and marital adjustment through components of empathy were tested (see Figure 3). The results indicate that the overall model is significant ($B = -.27$, $SE = .12$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-.50, -.02]$). Accordingly, low personal accomplishment explains 6% of the variance in marital adjustment, $F(4, 201) = 3.16$, $p < .05$. The indirect relationship between low personal accomplishment and marital adjustment is mediated only by perspective-taking ($B = -.17$, $SE = .06$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-.29, -.06]$). The indirect relationships through empathic concern ($B = -.04$, $SE = .04$, $p = .24$, 95% CI $[-.02, .14]$) and personal distress are not significant ($B = -.06$, $SE = .04$, $p = .20$, 95% CI $[-.16, .01]$). The model also points to the full mediation role of perspective-taking. In other words, the direct relationship between low personal accomplishment and marital adjustment loses its significance with the inclusion of perspective-taking in the model ($B = -.08$, $SE = .12$, $p = .54$, 95% CI $[-.32, .17]$). Accordingly, low personal accomplishment reduces perspective-taking, which in turn reduces the level of marital adjustment (Figure 3).

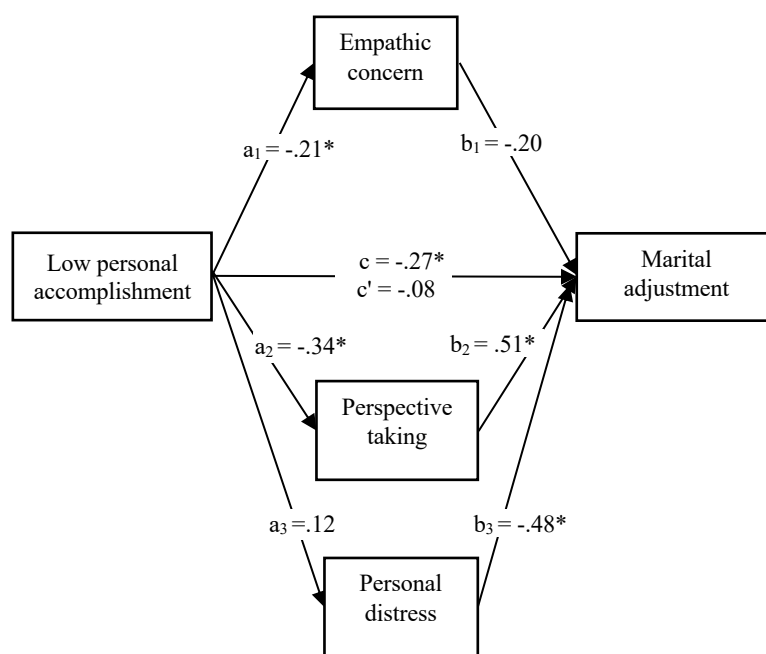


Figure 3. Mediator Effects of Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Personal Distress on the Relationship Between Low Personal Accomplishment and Marital Adjustment

Note. Non-standardized regression coefficients are included. * $p < .05$, c = total effect, c' = direct effect.

Discussion

In the current study, indirect relationships between burnout and marital adjustment through empathy were examined. Three separate mediation models were tested for the dimensions of burnout. The role of empathy was analyzed with its cognitive and emotional components: empathic concern, perspective-taking, and personal distress. Overall findings indicate that the fundamental assumptions of the study were supported. Specifically, dimensions of burnout predict decreases in marital adjustment. These results align with existing research suggesting that law enforcement officers, who endure a stressful profession, often face challenges such as work-family imbalance, marital conflict, and decreased relationship satisfaction (Burke & Mikkelsen,

2006; Burke et al., 1984; Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Lambert et al., 2019; Martinussen et al., 2007; Mikkelsen & Burke, 2004; Neidig et al., 1992).

Moreover, the findings show an indirect relationship between burnout and marital adjustment mediated by empathy. When empathy components were included in the models, direct relationships between burnout and marital adjustment were not significant. However, some components of empathy did not show the expected mediating relationship. Upon closer examination, perspective-taking appears to be a significant factor in marital adjustment as expected (Davis, 2017; Long & Andrews, 1990; Morgenstern, 1996). Perspective-taking decreases due to both depersonalization and a low sense of accomplishment, which in turn reduces marital compatibility. As will be recalled, perspective-taking is related to cognitive-level responses. Perspective-taking involves understanding a situation by imagining oneself in another's position or considering their perspective (Davis, 1994). Yet, this effort can diminish under conditions such as reduced sensitivity or developing indifference towards others (Thomas et al., 2007). Depersonalization is one of the main reasons for psychological distances established between oneself and others. Depersonalized individuals, in a way, create cognitive and emotional distances between themselves and others as a way to cope with the negative outcomes of burnout. This is because it becomes increasingly difficult to meet the emotional demands of the job, such as caring for and responding to others' needs (Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001). In contrast, perspective-taking reduces psychological distances between people by bringing together the mental representations of oneself and others. According to researchers, this closeness established through perspective-taking plays a key role in conflict resolution and interpersonal compatibility (Davis, 2004; Goldstein et al., 2014). Indeed, the spouses of law enforcement officers most frequently complain about the emotional distance they perceive in their partners (Borum & Philpot, 1993). According to our findings, perspective-taking also weakens with a decrease in the sense of personal accomplishment. This result is also in the expected direction (Thomas et al., 2007). When individuals develop negative perceptions about themselves (such as low self-esteem), their anxiety about failures increases. This anxiety leads them to focus on what others think of them rather than viewing things from another person's perspective, thus causing a decline in their willingness to engage in perspective-taking (Hewitt, 1976). Additionally, perceptions of failure can trigger feelings of inadequacy in expressing empathy. For example, thinking that one is not successful enough can weaken their beliefs in their ability to respond to the emotions and needs of others (service recipients) (empathic self-efficacy, Bandura et al., 2003; Di Giunta et al., 2010). Consequently, the perceived inadequacies in the jobs of female law enforcement officers are negatively related to marital adjustment through a decline in perspective-taking. The reduced willingness to take another's perspective may decrease the likelihood of accurately predicting a partner's emotions or understanding any issue requiring compromise from the partner's viewpoint. However, contrary to what might be expected, perspective-taking (e.g., Paro et al., 2014) does not mediate the relationship between emotional exhaustion and marital adjustment. Although this result does not meet our expectations, it is supported by other research findings. Some studies indicate that emotional exhaustion is related to the emotional components of empathy but not to cognitive empathy. This suggests that emotional exhaustion may be more related to the emotional rather than cognitive aspects of empathy (Correia et al., 2023; Lopes & Nihei, 2020).

Emotional empathy components exhibit different relationships with burnout and marital adjustment. In models established through personal distress, the indirect relationship between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization with marital adjustment is negative. In contrast, personal distress did not mediate the indirect relationship between a sense of low personal accomplishment and marital adjustment. These findings underscore that personal distress among female law enforcement officers experiencing burnout is a significant factor in reducing marital adjustment. As it will be recalled, recognizing another person's distress does not

always elicit an other-oriented response aimed at solving the problem or providing help. On the contrary, such a situation can create self-oriented negative emotions such as discomfort or a loss of control (Davis, 1980, 1994). Experiences such as fatigue, stress, or frustration are expected to have a high likelihood of triggering these emotions (Wilczek-Rużyczka, 2020). Therefore, under emotional exhaustion, people may focus more on their own empathic distress rather than the suffering of others (Delgado et al., 2021). The increase in personal distress is subsequently associated with partners to be less interested in matters related to their spouses or marriages, to exhibit less supportive or constructive attitudes, and thus to show less agreement or harmony (Davis & Oahaut, 1987). Our findings also suggest that personal distress can be triggered by depersonalization. This outcome can be explained by the increased emotional distance associated with depersonalization, which directs the empathetic focus towards oneself (Maslach et al., 1996; Paro et al., 2014). Consequently, this reduces marital harmony among female law enforcement officers. However, contrary to expectations (e.g., Lopes & Nihei, 2020), a low sense of personal accomplishment was not found to be related to an increase in personal distress. This suggests that feelings of failure associated with burnout do not necessarily elicit a personal distress response among female officers. A possible explanation for this result can be articulated as the following. As it will be recalled, personal distress and empathic concern are two different empathic emotions, the former being self-oriented and the latter other-oriented. In addition to the difference in the focus orientation of empathy, the situational content that activates these two forms of empathy can also vary. High-impact needs, such as in an urgent or dangerous situation, tend to create more personal distress; whereas empathic concern can arise in response to both low and high-impact needs (Batson, 2023). From this perspective, it can be suggested that among female law enforcement officers, a sense of low personal accomplishment does not create a high-impact need situation; in contrast, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization may be perceived as high-impact situations in terms of empathic responses. Considering that emotional exhaustion involves situations such as stress and anxiety, while depersonalization is related to emotions such as anger and blame (Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001), this explanation seems plausible.

Finally, the findings indicate that models established through empathic concern are not significant. The relationships in the model show that while the three dimensions of burnout explain the decrease in empathic concern, empathic concern does not predict marital adjustment. More specifically, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment, with their negative effects such as psychological and physical fatigue, rigid and indifferent attitudes, or preoccupation with negative thoughts about oneself, prevent empathic concern for others, yet the decreased empathic concern does not make a difference in marital adjustment. Although this result was unexpected, it is consistent with the notion that empathic concern can vary in relational contexts and that the role of feeling sorrow or worry for another in developing positive relationships is not clear (Davis, 1983; Morgenstern, 1996). Moreover, some studies suggest that empathic concern might be associated with marital adjustment depending on the partner's gender. Specifically, in some studies, it has been found that it is not the empathic concern of women but that of male partners that is linked to increased marital adjustment (Morgenstern, 1996).

In conclusion, the findings emphasize the significant role of empathy in marital adjustment among female law enforcement officers. These officers experience work-related burnout, which diminishes marital adjustment. However, empathy can play a crucial role in mitigating marital adjustment issues associated with burnout. For instance, female officers who are better able to take perspectives may reduce the negative impacts of depersonalization and feelings of inadequacy related to their work on their marriages. Because female officers who can take perspective in an empathic response situation (e.g., regarding a matter with their spouse/marriage) will try to understand the situation from their spouse's perspective by narrowing the

emotional distance with their spouse and focusing on their spouse's problems instead of their own negative thoughts. Similarly, attempting to reduce personal distress will render the negative effects of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization insignificant in terms of marital adjustment. In such a situation, female officers will try to be less preoccupied with their own empathic distress by realizing that the empathetic focus is on them. The results also indicate that the determining empathic emotion in the indirect relationship between burnout and marital adjustment is personal distress. According to these findings, empathetic traits such as being compassionate or sensitive are not linked to marital adjustment. Marital adjustment is more associated with the extent to which the partner directs their empathetic attention to themselves; in other words, it depends on how self-centered or self-oriented a tendency they exhibit in an empathetic process.

Future studies should focus on the roles of perspective-taking and personal distress in marital adjustment among female law enforcement officers. For this purpose, researchers could undertake studies that further explore the relationships between burnout and perspective-taking, as well as conduct research aimed at enhancing perspective-taking skills. Researchers can also conduct studies aimed at raising awareness of self-oriented empathic responses. Additionally, they can keep observational records of actual behaviors in laboratory settings or use methods such as journaling to longitudinally track developments related to awareness of empathic responses. Besides empirical studies, female law enforcement officers can be educated through various training activities about burnout and the role of empathy in coping with it. Practitioners working in the field can provide necessary support to clients by focusing on perspective-taking and feelings of personal distress to enhance empathic skills.

When evaluating the findings, the limitations of the study should also be taken into account. Although mediation models provide significant insights into the relationships between variables, testing similar relationship patterns using experimental and longitudinal methods is crucial for understanding the causal relationships between burnout, empathy, and marital adjustment. Additionally, comparing these relationship patterns in terms of gender can shed light on relationships that were not found to be associated or that were inconsistent with the literature in this study.

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