

Predicting family functioning based on life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations of couples in women working in the Ministry of Labor, Cooperatives, and Social Affairs

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ARTICLE INFO

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received: 29 May 2025

Revised: 15 June 2025

Accepted: 29 June 2025

Keywords:

Family functioning,
life skills,
locus of control,
couples' marital expectations.

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to predict family performance based on life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations of couples in working women. The method of the present study was predictive correlation. In the present study, the statistical population consisted of all women working in the Ministry of Labor, Cooperatives, and Social Affairs of Tehran during the period 1400-1401, which, according to the department's report, had 541 employees. The sample size was 225 women working in the Ministry of Labor, Cooperatives, and Social Affairs of Tehran, using the Morgan and Krejcie table proportional to the population. This sample was selected by convenience sampling. The instruments in this study were the Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop Family Performance Questionnaire (1980), Saatchi Life Skills (2010), Rutter Locus of Control (1966), and Omidvar Marital Expectations (2007). Pearson, and multiple regression tests were used to analyze the data using SPSS 24 software. The test results showed that there was a significant relationship between life skills and family performance ($r = 0.365$), between locus of control and family performance ($r = 0.446$), and between couples' marital expectations and family performance ($r = 0.254$). Also, life skills could predict family performance by 36 percent, locus of control by 22 percent, and couples' marital expectations by 44 percent.

Introduction

Today, the modern world encourages women to actively participate in the workforce. In other words, the demand for labor is no longer met solely by men; women also play a significant role in this regard. However, the primary responsibility traditionally assigned to women has been to maintain harmonious relationships within the family. Accordingly, considerable emphasis has been placed on their roles as mothers and wives. Given the key and decisive influence of women in the family, their participation in employment can profoundly affect family dynamics and alter relationships between spouses, children, and even extended relatives (Mahmoudi & Honarparvaran, 2019).

The family is the first social institution in which an individual is nurtured, and the quality of learning and development within it is directly related to the family's overall functioning (Nikzad et al., 2017). Family functioning broadly encompasses the structural and social characteristics of the family. Moreover, family interactions and relationships—particularly those involving conflict—reflect the degree of compatibility and quality of relationships among family members (Alderfer et al., 2018). Family functioning, therefore, represents a harmonious and balanced relationship among family members and between the family and the



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22111/IJOP.2025.52479.1051>

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Publisher: University of Sistan and Baluchestan

How to Cite: Hedayati, A., & Mohammadmehr, R. (2025). Predicting family functioning based on life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations of couples in women working in the Ministry of Labor, Cooperatives, and Social Affairs. *Iranian Journal of Organizational Psychology*, 2(3), 44-52 <https://doi.org/10.22111/IJOP.2025.52479.1051>

outside world (Shalchi & Esmaeili Shahna, 2019). The ways in which family members relate to one another, maintain balance, sustain relationships, make decisions, and solve problems are all influenced by this functioning (Kahana et al., 2015). For this reason, factors that affect family functioning must be examined and strengthened—among them life skills (Ashouri et al., 2015), locus of control (Nikzad et al., 2015), and marital expectations (Bazazian et al., 2018).

Life skills represent one of the practical applications of psychology across various individual and social domains, aiming to enhance physical and mental health while preventing psychological, social, and behavioral harm (Wolford, 2015). These skills enable individuals to cope effectively with life's conflicts and challenges, to act positively and adaptively in their interactions with others, and to preserve their mental health. Through the learning and practice of life skills, individuals' attitudes, values, and behaviors are strengthened or modified, thereby preventing or resolving many problems by fostering healthy and constructive behavioral patterns (Mardanchi, 2015; cited in Ashouri et al., 2017).

Another critical factor influencing family and marital dynamics is locus of control. This personality construct significantly shapes individuals' behaviors and their capacity to manage environmental circumstances and life events. The concept, rooted in Rotter's theory (1959), distinguishes between internal and external loci of control. According to social learning theory, individuals attribute success or failure either to internal factors (such as effort and ability) or to external ones (such as luck or fate) (Neviski et al., 2017). Rotter defined locus of control as follows: "If an individual does not attribute rewards to effort or behavior, this view aligns with an external locus of control. Conversely, if an individual perceives a consistent relationship between personal characteristics and outcomes, this reflects an internal locus of control" (Polizzi et al., 2015; cited in Nikzad et al., 2017).

Within marital relationships, couples hold certain expectations regarding their shared life. These expectations encompass what each partner anticipates from the other, from their respective families, and from the institution of marriage itself, as well as their conception of an ideal spouse (Miller & Toder, 2011). Marital expectations consist of cognitive frameworks, standards, assumptions, and perceived dos and don'ts concerning one's spouse and married life, which may or may not correspond to reality (Fang et al., 2018). Often unspoken at the beginning of a relationship, these expectations typically emerge when conflicts arise (Michele & Fraser, 2015; cited in Bagheri et al., 2019). Such expectations and assumptions establish predetermined frameworks and implicit rules regarding one's partner and married life (Balghanabadi et al., 2013).

Expectations function as psychological goals that activate confirmation processes through two mechanisms: perceptual confirmation and behavioral confirmation (Murray & Murray, 2014). Marital expectations evolve over time, shaped by social values, prior experiences, and observations of other relationships (Griffin, 2011). These expectations can be either realistic or idealized; the former promote marital satisfaction and stability, whereas the latter may lead to disappointment and conflict. Many communication problems and instances of marital dissatisfaction stem from unrealistic or ambiguous expectations, or from discrepancies between pre-marital ideals and post-marital realities (Ellis, 2011; cited in Ebrahimi et al., 2019).

In today's complex world, satisfaction with family functioning is a crucial aspect of human well-being. Effective family functioning provides a foundation for a strong family unit, within which individuals can develop essential life skills, establish an appropriate locus of control, and form realistic marital expectations. Such an environment fosters personal growth and self-actualization, enabling individuals to create positive and meaningful change in their own lives, within their families, and throughout society. Employment, too, constitutes an essential component of one's social identity and continues to be a major subject of discussion in contemporary societies. As family functioning is one of the most significant predictors of life satisfaction—impacting mental health, well-being, income, academic achievement, and job satisfaction among couples—it can be concluded that family functioning affects nearly all dimensions of family life.

Accordingly, the central question of this study is:

Can family functioning be predicted based on life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations among couples with working women?

Sample and Sampling Method

The method of the present study was correlational predictive. The statistical population consisted of all women employed at the Ministry of Labor, Cooperatives and Social Affairs in Tehran during 1400-1401. According to the department's report, the total number of employees was 541. Using the Morgan and Krejcie table, a sample size of 225 women was determined proportionally to the population. This sample was selected through convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria for participants were being employed at the Ministry of Labor, Cooperatives and Social Affairs in Tehran, aged between 25 and 50 years, and having more than three years of work experience.

Tools Used

Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop Family Function Questionnaire

The Family Functioning Questionnaire is a 60-item instrument developed to assess family function based on the McMaster model introduced earlier. In Iran, Najarian (1995) was the first to translate, standardize, and evaluate family function using this tool. In a study involving 501 students at the University of Tehran, he confirmed the validity of the Persian version of the test (FAD-I), which contains 45 items, reporting an overall validity coefficient of 0.93. Besides the 45-item FAD-I, other versions of the questionnaire with 41, 43, 53, and 60 items have also been standardized and factor analyzed in Iran. The questionnaire's cutoff score is 120, with scores ranging from 1 to 80 indicating poor family functioning, 80 to 160 indicating moderate functioning, and 160 to 240 indicating high family functioning. Factor analysis consistently revealed seven factors across the different versions. In this study, the 60-item version was employed. An independent study conducted on 178 couples, aged approximately 60, found that this tool had a moderate correlation with the Locke-Wallace Marital Satisfaction Scale and demonstrated fairly good predictive power for scores on the Philadelphia Geriatric Mood Scale. Moreover, the questionnaire effectively differentiates between clinical and non-clinical family members, confirming its good validity across its seven subscales. In a parallel analysis with the Locke-Wallace Marital Satisfaction Scale, family functioning accounted for 11% of the variance ($R = 0.34$) in husbands' scores and 12% of the variance ($R = 0.36$) in wives' scores, indicating a relatively strong predictive power.

Saatchi Life Skills Questionnaire

The Saatchi Life Skills Questionnaire (2010) is a 40-item instrument rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "very little" (score 1) to "very much" (score 5). The questionnaire's total score ranges from 0 to 200, with a cutoff point of 100. It encompasses ten subscales, including self-awareness, purpose in life, communication skills, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, mental health, problem-solving, participation, creative thinking, and critical thinking. The questionnaire's validity was confirmed through expert evaluation of its face and content validity. Pilot testing on 30 participants yielded a high reliability coefficient (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.97$). Previous studies have also demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's α values of 0.93 and 0.95 reported by Baharifar (2002) and Yousefi (2004), respectively, indicating that this tool is both reliable and valid for assessing life skills.

Rutter's Locus of Control Questionnaire

The locus of control scale was developed by Rutter (1966) to assess individuals' expectations regarding their locus of control. It consists of 29 items, each presenting two options (A and B), with participants selecting one option per item. In 1999, Rutter refined the scale to include 23 items specifically targeting locus of control expectations, while the remaining 6 items are neutral. According to this scale, individuals scoring less than 9 are classified as having an internal locus of control, while those scoring above 9 are considered to have an external locus of control. The scale's validity and reliability have been extensively studied. Robinson and Shaver (1966) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.73 using the classification

method on students at Ohio University. Reliability assessed by the Kuder-Richardson formula on 400 subjects was 0.70. Test-retest reliability was 0.83 over a one-month interval and 0.55 over two months in a sample of 30 students. Factor analysis on scores from 1,000 students demonstrated significant correlations between all items and the general personality factor, confirming construct validity. The Spearman-Brown and Kuder-Richardson methods also yielded reliability coefficients above 0.70 in various samples. In Iran, Darby's research reported a test-retest reliability of 0.75 with 51 male and female participants. Additionally, scores on this locus of control scale were significantly correlated with academic performance in a study involving 32 participants over a three-week interval.

Omidvar's Marital Expectations Questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed and modified by the researcher in a study conducted by Omidvar (2007). To examine the content validity, the questionnaire was provided to five counseling specialists at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Isfahan University, and the content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed. Then, this questionnaire was administered to 41 people for two purposes: to correct the initial questions and to obtain the initial Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Thus, the test reliability coefficient using the Cronbach's alpha method was 80%. And the questions were corrected. This questionnaire consists of 32 questions and has a Likert scale of "always-4" to "not at all-0". To determine the basic structures and factors of the questionnaire, factor analysis using the Varimax method with inclined rotation was used, which ultimately resulted in 3 factors based on 37.5% of the total variances of the first eight factors. These three dimensions are: expectations from the spouse as a friend and supporter, expectations from married life, expectations from the ideal relationship. The cutoff point of the questionnaire is 64. A higher score in this questionnaire indicates that the individual's expectations from his or her spouse have been met in married life. Therefore, scores between 0-43 indicate low marital expectations, scores between 43-86 indicate medium marital expectations, and scores between 86-128 indicate high marital expectations.

Procedure

In this study, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and graph and other central and dispersion indices) and inferential statistics including Pearson's test and regression were used using SPSS20 software.

Results

Family functioning can be predicted based on life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations of couples in working women.

Table 1- Pearson correlation coefficient test between family functioning with life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations.

Family functioning	Correlation coefficient	Sig
Life skills	0.366**	0.001
Self-awareness training	0.350**	0.001
Having a purpose in life	0.387**	0.001
Human communication skills	0.281**	0.001
Interpersonal relationships	0.246**	0.001
Decision making skills	0.298**	0.001
Health and mental health	0.236**	0.001
Problem solving skills	0.259**	0.001
Participation and cooperation skills	0.333**	0.001
Creative thinking	0.283**	0.001
Critical thinking	0.301**	0.001
Control source	0.225**	0.001
Internal control source	0.250**	0.001

External control source	0.282**	0.001
Marital expectations	0.446**	0.001
Expecting your spouse to be a friend and supporter	0.229**	0.001
Expectations from married life	0.277**	0.001
Expectations of an ideal relationship	0.269**	0.001

**Significant at the 0.01 level.

In Table 1, the correlation coefficient between family functioning and life skills (0.365), between family functioning and locus of control (0.225), and family functioning and marital expectations (0.446) shows that there is a significant relationship between the variables at the 0.01 level of error and with 99% confidence ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, it can be said that the higher the life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations (predictor variables), the better the level of family functioning (criterion variable) in working women.

In Table 1, the correlation coefficient between family functioning and self-awareness training (0.350), between family functioning and having a purpose in life (0.387), between family functioning and human communication skills (0.281), between family functioning and interpersonal relationships (0.246), between family functioning and decision-making skills (0.298), between family functioning and mental health and well-being (0.236), between family functioning and problem-solving skills (0.259), between family functioning and participation and cooperation skills (0.333), between family functioning and creative thinking (0.283), between family functioning and critical thinking (0.301) shows that at the 0.01 error level and with 99% confidence, there is a significant relationship between the variables, which is positive and direct ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, it can be said; The higher the level of self-awareness training, having a purpose in life, skills related to human communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making skills, mental health and well-being, problem-solving skills, participation and collaboration skills, creative thinking, and critical thinking (predictor variables), the better the level of family functioning (criterion variable) in working women.

In Table 1, the correlation coefficient between family performance and internal locus of control (0.250) and between family performance and external locus of control (0.282) shows that at the 0.01 error level and with 99% confidence, there is a significant relationship between the variables, which is positive and direct ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, it can be said that the higher the internal locus of control and external locus of control (predictor variables), the better the level of family performance (predictor variable) in working women will be.

In Table 1, the correlation coefficient between family performance and expectations from the spouse as a friend and supporter (0.229), between family performance and expectations from married life (0.277), and between family performance and expectations from an ideal relationship (0.269) shows that at the 0.01 error level and with 99% confidence, there is a significant relationship between the variables, which is positive and direct ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, it can be said that the higher the expectation from the spouse as a friend and supporter, the expectation from married life, and the expectation from an ideal relationship (predictor variables), the better the level of family performance (criterion variable) in working women.

Table 2- Regression coefficients and T-test results in predicting family performance.

Variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Unstandardized coefficients	t	Sig
	Std. Error	Std. Error	Beta		
Fixed value	138.749	7.901		17.561	0.001
Life skills	0.213	0.137	0.36	5.717	0.001
Control source	0.222	0.190	0.22	3.118	0.001
Marital expectations	0.145	0.148	0.44	3.936	0.030

The results of Table 2 and the regression analysis show that the variables of life skills, locus of control, and marital expectations all have an effect on family performance, which is a positive and direct relationship ($p < 0.05$), such that the contribution of the variable of life skills is 0.36 percent, the contribution of the variable of locus of control is 0.22 percent, and the contribution of the variable of marital expectations is 0.44 percent.

The regression equation of the above analysis is:

(Marital expectations) 0.44 + (locus of control) 0.22 + (life skills) 0.36 + 749.138 = family performance

As can be seen in the regression equation above, it can be said with 95 percent confidence that the contribution of the variable of marital expectations is greater than the contribution of other variables in predicting family performance. Life skills can predict family functioning in working women.

Discussion

The results indicate that all three predictor variables significantly affect family functioning. Specifically, life skills account for 36% of the variance, locus of control contributes 22%, and marital expectations account for 44%. These findings align with previous research by Shams al-Din et al. (1400), Eshghi-Iraqi et al. (1398), Groth (2020), and Adamis et al. (2019).

In explaining this, it can be argued that in today's society, women, by entering new social spaces, inevitably shoulder traditional burdens. Each day, they take on new responsibilities in addition to their previous duties. The most fundamental responsibility of a woman is to meet her husband's emotional and sexual needs, which, in terms of value, is considered equivalent to the most challenging religious duty for a man: jihad. If women participate as essential labor within the family, their responsibilities toward their spouse and children—which ensure the family's stability—are often overshadowed by their employment and income generation. The family is meant to serve as a sanctuary that alleviates the psychological pressures on its members, fostering their growth and prosperity. Many family traditions, such as visits, weddings, mourning, holidays, and other gatherings, offer opportunities for emotional rejuvenation and help mitigate life's burdens. If the family environment is healthy and constructive, addressing both physical and psychological needs, individuals benefit from a natural source of support, reducing their reliance on external medical institutions (Sharafi, 2015).

In examining the causes of divorce, we observe that emotional relationships are often weak and cold long before separation. Women's full-time employment outside the home and their emotional fulfillment in workplace relationships can reduce their emotional dependence on their spouse, contributing to marital dissatisfaction. Moreover, women's economic independence—one of the outcomes of their employment—has also led to an increase in divorce rates. Work-related fatigue and challenges may also prevent women from fulfilling marital duties, such as maintaining cleanliness at home, which is a critical factor in marital stability (Mahmoudi & Honarparvan, 2019). Research shows that unmet marital expectations and a mismatch between expectations and the realities of the relationship often lead to emotional distance and marital dissatisfaction (McNulty, 2017). Marital dissatisfaction is one of the key factors in reducing commitment within marital relationships (Hu et al., 2018; cited from Bezazian et al., 2018).

The results demonstrate that life skills can predict family functioning in working women. This aligns with findings from Shams al-Din et al. (1400) and Yousefi (2016). In explaining this, it can be said that resolving family problems is a crucial ability within the family unit. When spouses address issues in a timely manner, other family members do not feel threatened or insecure. Family problems typically fall into two categories: instrumental (addressing physiological needs) and emotional (managing concerns, anger, and depression). Therefore, problem-solving is a vital function of the family (Ahmadi, 2018), and individuals must possess sufficient skills to effectively address these issues. Life skills are instrumental in fostering adaptation and well-being, reducing the negative effects of psychological stress. These skills teach individuals essential tools for success, helping them develop the abilities, knowledge, and traits necessary for a healthy and successful life, which in turn enhances family functioning.

Additionally, life skills training increases self-awareness, helping individuals recognize their strengths and weaknesses, understand their limitations, and adapt to reality in a more balanced way. The group

dynamics inherent in life skills training can also have a positive effect, as individuals realize that others face similar challenges. This shared experience boosts self-esteem and self-concept, ultimately improving family dynamics. Life skills training helps people manage their emotions and thoughts effectively, enabling them to navigate positive and negative emotions. By understanding that their thoughts and emotions influence their behavior, individuals can exercise greater control over their emotional responses, preventing stress, anxiety, and other negative psychological traits, while promoting positive emotions like happiness and hope. As a result, life skills contribute significantly to enhancing family functioning in women.

The results show that locus of control can predict family functioning in working women. These findings are consistent with research by Soltanzadeh (2018), Feizi-Manesh & Yarahmadi (2017), Groth (2020), and Noveski et al. (2017). Locus of control refers to an individual's belief about the causes of their experiences in unpredictable situations—whether they attribute responsibility to external factors or to themselves. Those with an internal locus of control believe they can influence their lives and environments, whereas those with an external locus of control feel less able to do so.

Locus of control plays a critical role in family dynamics, as the family is one of society's most important institutions. Proper family functioning promotes resilience and reduces risks related to adverse circumstances. In well-functioning families, problem-solving occurs effectively, roles are clearly defined, and communication is open and consistent. Individuals with an internal locus of control are more likely to make independent decisions, utilize information effectively, and contribute to a healthier family environment. In contrast, those with an external locus of control may struggle with decision-making and interpersonal dynamics, which can negatively affect family functioning.

The results indicate that couples' marital expectations can predict family functioning in working women. This finding aligns with research by Bezazian et al. (2018), Parwandi et al. (2016), Fang et al. (2018), and Miller & Toder (2011). Marital expectations help individuals understand, predict, and manage events in relationships. When expectations are met, individuals experience greater satisfaction and commitment, and they are more likely to use adaptive strategies to resolve conflicts. Conversely, unmet or unrealistic expectations can contribute to marital turmoil.

Research shows that individuals' expectations about romantic relationships and their fulfillment are crucial predictors of marital outcomes. Those who feel their needs are met are more likely to experience satisfaction and demonstrate commitment. Expectations can serve as goals that motivate individuals to seek confirmation, either through cognitive or behavioral means (Murray & Murray, 2014). Over time, expectations evolve based on social values and personal experiences, influencing how individuals perceive and engage in relationships (Griffin, 2011).

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended to develop educational programs within the framework of premarital education, couple empowerment, and pre-divorce interventions. These programs should focus on fulfilling basic psychological needs and managing marital expectations, which can improve family functioning. By fostering an environment that addresses these needs and expectations, we can enhance marital commitment, reduce infidelity, and mitigate the social consequences of divorce, ultimately contributing to the stability of marriage and the overall quality of life for couples.

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