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## Research Paper

# The Role of Family Relationships and Conflict Resolution Styles in Marital Burnout of Couples Seeking a Divorce



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This paper expounds the role of family relationships and conflict resolution styles in marital burnout of couples seeking a divorce in Minab city.

**Methods:** This is descriptive and correlational research. The study's statistical population consists of the total number of married couples in Minab city in 2022 who were applied for divorce. Using random sampling, 162 people were selected. The participants were asked to fill out the following questionnaires: the Couple Burnout Measure (CBM); The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI II), and The Brief Family Relationship Scale (BFRS).

**Results:** Pearson's correlation coefficient and simultaneous multiple regression were used to analyze the study findings and examine the relationships between research variables. The study results indicated that family relationships and conflict resolution styles are significantly correlated with marital burnout ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Results analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between family relationships, conflict resolution styles, and marital burnout highlighting divorce as one of the primary family trauma which brings about disintegration on a personal, familial, and social level. Therefore, the identification of the factors contributing to couples' dissatisfaction and burnout have high significance since it affords us to take effective measures to prevent divorce and improve couples' marital life.

## 1. Introduction

Family is the most important social institution; therefore, safeguarding it is of great significance. Family, as the primary social unit, is where the process of human growth, evolution, healing, and trauma recovery takes place. It is within the boundaries of the family where the family relations either flourish or perish. Therefore, family connections play a significant role in holding the family together. Family is the main agent of socialization and personality

formation. Every family has different characteristics that can play an important role in the formation of one's personality. Expression of love and affection increases interactions between family members, which creates more intimacy and less intricacy between couples and improves the quality of complementary relationships between two people who come from different backgrounds (Ahmadi, Yousefi & Gol Parvar, 2021).

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On the one hand, couples' relationship quality plays a key role in their mental health. Also, marital conflicts introduce couples to psychologically compromised situations. Conflict is an argument between at least two interdependent individuals each of which views the other as a barrier to achieving their goals. Marital conflicts arise due to reactions to individual differences which become destructive when feelings of anger, animosity, resentment, hatred, jealousy, and verbal and physical abuse dominate couples' relationships. Conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships. The closer the couples get, the more likely it is that such differences lead in some discord in their relationships. Conflict resolution styles and family connections can play a highly critical role in couple burnout.

Couple burnout is the gradual loss of emotional attachment between couples, which includes an increasing lack of attention, emotional alienation, and a feeling of despondency and indifference toward one's spouse. Couple burnout has three stages, including frustration and disappointment, anger and resentment, as well as discouragement and indifference. According to previously conducted studies, couple burnout occurs in three stages: physical, emotional, and mental burnout as the result of long-term emotional conflicts between the couples. Couple burnout is what causes marital dissatisfaction which threatens the institution of the family (Mirzaei, Delavar & Bagheri, 2022). Couple burnout occurs when a couple realizes that despite all their efforts, their relationship has not and will not add meaning to one's life. Love fades away gradually and it is replaced with a feeling of fatigue. In most extreme instances, couple burnout causes relationship dissolution (Pines & Nunse, 2003). The continuous experience of frustration and tension within one's daily life causes individual disintegration which ultimately leads in burnout. In a failed marriage, one spouse or both experience a sense of alienation from one another. In such a relationship, couples lose interest in each other, minimize their mutual interactions, and experience an overwhelming feeling of anxiety about staying in this relationship while moving toward separation and divorce (Sharifi, rasouli & Beshilideh, 2012).

Marital conflicts arise as the result of a number of things, including couples' discord in terms of their needs, desires, and how to meet them. Moreover, different behavioral models and irresponsible approaches toward one's marriage and marital relationship lead to marital conflicts as well (Yang et al., 2016). Marital conflicts lie at the heart of romantic relationships (Ha, et al., 2013). The ability to handle and solve conflicts constructively can create a strong

bond between couples and help them nurture intimacy in their relationship (Sobral et al., 2015).

Miri and Najafi (2017) reported a significant and positive correlation between intimacy and marital satisfaction. There is a significant and negative correlation between alexithymia and marital satisfaction (Miri & Najafi, 2017; Karukivi, et al., 2014).

Armin et al. (2022), examined the effectiveness of couple relationship enrichment and conflict resolution style training on the optimism, attitudes, and infidelity of couples who have experienced infidelity of their partners. The results indicated that couples' relationship enrichment and the conflict resolution styles training increased optimism and reduced the permissive attitudes toward infidelity in couples who have experienced the trauma of infidelity. Rahespar, Alvand & Juneidy (2022) studied the effectiveness of solution-focused couple therapy on marital conflicts and couple burnout. The study findings indicated that solution-focused couple therapy significantly decreases marital conflict and marital burnout. Wagner, Mosmann & Scheeren (2019) conducted a study on conflict, conflict resolution, and marital quality. The results indicated that constructive conflict resolution strategies predicted marital quality. The study findings highlight the importance of directing the attention of experts to the nature of marital conflicts as reported by couples and the strategies which they employ to solve their conflicts to identify the leading factors in the evaluation of marital quality.

Couple burnout is one of the main challenges that couples face after a period of married life. Marriage is the most fundamental human relationship. That is why the most challenging problems in one's life are those that arise as the result of struggling in one's relationships. Therefore, it is normal to feel frustrated and unhappy when one faces such challenges. Marital problems remain one of the most common reasons in all societies for referring to psychotherapy centers and seeking counseling services. Therefore, creating sincere and satisfying relationships can play an important role in solving marital problems and increasing marital satisfaction, the two of which are the most important issues in family relationship studies in humanities.

Couple burnout is a gradual loss of emotional attachment to one's spouse, accompanied by feelings of alienation, disinterest, and indifference to one another. The hallmark of couple burnout is the dominance of negative emotions over couples' thoughts instead of positive emotions (Meidanchi et al., 2021).

Improving the quality of family relationships can play a significant role in the prevention of marital burnout. Moreover, developing conflict resolution styles can be an effective tool in preventing marital burnout. Since the previously conducted studies have not examined both of these variables simultaneously, this research aims to provide a platform to investigate the role of family relationships and conflict resolution styles in the marital dissatisfaction of couples seeking a divorce. A healthy society is created from healthy families and couples who are satisfied with their marriage. Further, the increasing rate of couple burnout, which has made couples try to enrich marital connections, highlights the significance of conducting more studies in this field to take effective measures to enhance the involved factors. That is why this study aims to evaluate the role of family connections and conflict resolution styles among couples seeking a divorce.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This was a descriptive and correlational study. The study population included the total number of married couples in Minab in 2021 (N=260) who suffered from marital burnout and sought counseling. Using random sampling 152 participants were selected and the sample size was determined using the Morgan table. Due to the probability of participants drop-out, 180 subjects were selected and asked to fill out the questionnaires. Ultimately, 162 participants filled out questionnaires and their data was collected and analyzed. The study tools are represented in the following:

**Couple Burnout Measure (CBM):** The couple burnout measure is a 21-item scale that was created by Pines (1996) and evaluates the three components of emotional, physical, and mental burnout. The subscales are measured on a 7-point Likert scale. To analyze the results, the scores obtained from the questionnaire are divided into the number of items (N=21). If the resulting score is less than or equal to 2, it indicates the couples who enjoy a healthy relationship was healthy. Score 3 warns of the risk of couple burnout. Score 4 indicates the state of couples suffering from burnout. Score 5 suggests a relationship crisis and a score higher than 5 indicates that the marital relationship requires immediate help. The assessment of the reliability coefficient of this scale indicates high internal consistency of the test items in the range of 84% and 90%. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was reported 89% in a one-month period, 76% in a two-month period, and 66% in a four-

month period, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was reported at 91-93% (Kiani, et al., 2018). In Iran, Naderi, et al (2010) assessed the reliability of this scale at 0.78 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and 0.81 with the bisection reliability analysis method (BRAM). In this study, the reliability of this tool was obtained using Cronbach's alpha 0.79.

**Rahim's Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II):** Rahim's organizational conflict inventory was created by Rahim (1983) to measure conflict resolution styles. Rahim's organizational conflict inventory introduces a mechanism for measuring five methods through which people respond to conflicts. This questionnaire contains 28 items and five subscales and aims to measure the couples' styles of handling interpersonal conflicts (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising.). The items on this scale are scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Each item can gain a score ranging from 1 to 5. Rahim (1983) assessed the questionnaire's validity and reliability in a comprehensive study on a sample of 1219 subjects. Acceptable reliability coefficients and internal consistency of the test items were reported using test-retesting. Using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the internal consistency of the inventory was estimated at 0.76 – 0.85 (Rahim, 1983).

In a study by Haghigi et al., (2011), the reliability of the the sub-scales of ROCI-II questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients at 0.70-0.75. In the present study, reliability was obtained at 0.76 using the bisection method.

**The Brief Family Relationship Scale (BFRS):** This scale is derived from the 27-item Brief Family Relationship Patterns Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) containing the sub-scales of cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict (9 items each). These sub-scales measure the support, expression of opinions, and angry conflict in the family. The short form includes 16 items; the first seven of which measure cohesion, the next three measure expressiveness, and the last six measure conflict in the family. Items 11-16 are reverse-coded. The test items are scored on a three-point Likert scale (not at all= 0, somehow= 1, and a lot= 2). Fok et al. (2014) reported acceptable internal consistency of the test. The convergent validity of the family relationship subscale with the Reason For Life Scale was reported within the acceptable range (Fok et al., 2014). This scale was validated in Iran by Kiani et al. (2018) who reported acceptable validity and reliability in Iranian society. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale and the sub-scales of cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict were estimated at 0.89, 0.81, 0.88, and 0.79, respectively.

To meet this study's inclusion criteria, the participants were required to be married, reside in Minab, not suffer from severe psychological disorders and take neuropsychiatric medication. The participants were also required to issue their informed consent before taking part in the research. To analyze the data, statistical indicators such as mean and standard deviation were used. Moreover, Pearson's correlation coefficient and simultaneous multiple regression were used to test the research hypotheses. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS-22.

### 3. Results

The descriptive results of the study denote descriptive information about the samples and variables. Based on the obtained results, 119 females (73.45%) and 43 males (26.54%) participated in this study.

To use multiple linear regression checking the hypotheses, it was required to establish at least five significant hypotheses. Thus, the first hypotheses including the location of the research variables at the distance/relative level, normality of the dependent variable, independence of the error values, non-collinearity of the independent variables, and the normality of the distribution of the error values were evaluated. Since the research tool including interval rating scale questions, the first hypothesis was confirmed for all the research variables.

Skewness-Kurtosis all test for normality used to check

the normal distribution of the test scores. The data was considered to be normal if skewness is between -2 to +2. Since the results of the Skewness-Kurtosis all test for normality of the dependent variable of couple burnout between +2 and -2 at the values 0.370 and 0.787, it can be stated the dependent variable was normally distributed. Moreover, family connections and conflict resolution styles were also normally distributed since their skewness is between +2 and -2. The Durbin-Watson (DW) statistics were used to detect the presence of autocorrelation in the prediction of errors. In this test, the prediction errors were independent when the obtained value was between 1.5 and 2.5. Since the obtained value of the main hypothesis was at 1.56, the first sub-hypothesis at 1.56, and the second sub-hypothesis at 1.53, the results confirmed the hypothesis.

The normality of distribution for error values demonstrated that since the skewness for the distribution of error values in all three stages of the test was between +2 and -2, the distribution of error values was normal. Confirming study hypotheses, it can be used multiple regression analysis.

A correlation matrix of couple burnout with family connection stables demonstrates a significant and negative correlation between couple burnout and cohesion at -0.251, expressiveness at 0.262, conflict at -0.236, and family connections at -0.350, ( $P < 0.01$ ), ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Table 1. Correlation matrix of couple burnout with conflict resolution styles**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. Couple burnout</b>	1					
<b>2. Integrating</b>	-0.362**	1				
<b>3. Dominating</b>	-0.251**	0.206**	1			
<b>4. Compromising</b>	-0.296**	0.250**	0.203**	1		
<b>5. Obliging</b>	-0.235**	0.337**	-0.204**	0.096	1	
<b>6. Avoiding</b>	-0.338**	0.050	0.189*	-0.057	0.036	1

( $P < 0.01$ \*\*)( $P < 0.05$ \*)

Table 1 demonstrates a significant and negative correlation between couple burnout and integrating at -0.362, dominating at 0.251, compromising at -0.296, obliging at -0.235, and avoiding conflict styles at 338. Family connections and conflict resolution styles predicted couples burnout among couples seeking a divorce.

The analysis of the regression equation of the main hypothesis demonstrated the results of multiple

regression analysis using simultaneous multiple regression analysis. Based on this table, family connections and conflict resolution styles were entered into the regression equation with a correlation of 0.620 which could explain 38.4% of the variance of couple burnout. To determine whether the proposed model is statistically significant or not, the F-test was used, the results of which are demonstrated in Table 2.

**Table 2. The results of the F-test of overall significance in regression analysis**

Level	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
1	Regression	9253.69	6	1542.28	16.11	0.001
	Residual	14836.94	155	95.72		
	Total	24090.64	161			

Table 2 demonstrates the results of The F-test of overall significance which indicates whether or not the value of the presented model and the variance explained by the predictor variables are statistically significant. The F value ( $F = 16.11$ ) and p-value, which was smaller than 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ), indicated the significance of the prediction value of the presented regression model. Standardized and unstandardized coefficients were used to examine each hypothesis and

assessed each predictor variable separately. Family connections predict couple burnout among couples seeking a divorce.

Analysis regression equation results demonstrated that variables of family interaction patterns (cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict) were entered into the regression equation and could explain 13% of couple burnout at a correlation coefficient of 0.361.

**Table 3. The results of the F test of overall significance in regression equations in the first sub-hypothesis**

Level	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
1	Regression	3143.66	3	1048.87	7.90	0.001
	Residual	20946.97	158	132.57		
	Total	24090.640	161			

Based on the F statistic ( $F = 7.90$ ), and its significance level which was lower than 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ), the prediction value and the presented model were

significant. Conflict resolution styles predict couple burnout among couples seeking a divorce.

**Table 4. Summary of regression analysis results**

Level	Input variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R	Se
1	Conflict resolution styles	0.563	0.317	0.295	10.27

As shown in Table 4 conflict resolution styles (integrity, dominant, compromise, obliged, and avoidant) were entered into the regression equation

and could explain 13.7% of couple burnout at a correlation coefficient of 0.563.

**Table 5. The results of the F test of overall significance in regression analysis**

Level	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
1	Regression	7626.74	5	1525.34	14.45	0.001
	Residual	16463.89	156	105.53		
	Total	24090.64	161			

According to the F statistic ( $F = 14.45$ ) and its significance level which was lower than 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ), the prediction value and the presented model were significant.

strong family relationships enjoy higher levels of marital satisfaction than those with poor family relationships. Family performance is one of the indicators of family members' quality of life and mental health. Therefore, unhealthy relationship patterns among family members are one of the main factors contributing to mental disorders (Ahmadi et al., 2022). Individuals living in chaotic households are less likely to behave in a supportive manner and resolve conflicts and possess lower levels of agreeableness which facilitates mutual satisfaction. These individuals, as a result, have no communication skills and exhibit behaviors that threaten marital satisfaction and stability ultimately causing couple burnout (Papp, 2018).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study identified the role of family connections and conflict resolution styles in marital burnout among couples seeking a divorce. Family connections predict couple burnout among married couples seeking a divorce. Data analysis results indicated there is a significant relationship between family connections and couple burnout; increased family connections decrease couple burnout. As the result, the first sub-hypothesis regarding the relationship between family connections and couple burnout was confirmed. This finding is consistent with the previously conducted studies by Papp (2018), Grevenstein et al. (2019), Kızıldağ & Yıldırım (2017), Yousefi (2021), Armin et al. (2022), Mirzaei et al. (2022), Rejali & Yousefi (2022), Ahmadi et al. (2021), Zare Baghbidi & Etemadifard (2020), and Keshavarz et al. (2018). That is why individuals with positive and

When family members are encouraged to freely interact, discuss, and exchange opinions about a wide range of issues without worrying about the time it takes, they find themselves on a constructive path to marital satisfaction. In this relatively free environment, not only do couples face their issues but they are also encouraged to discover new beliefs and make fearless decisions to solve their problems. They



receive a sense of approval from their spouses which prompts them to use their abilities in the face of different conflicts (Rajali & Yousefi, 2022). As a result, they experience lower couple burnout.

In general, healthy family relationships are correlated with the state of a couple's married life. If family members enjoy healthy relationships, couples will respect each other's expectations and needs and show empathy once they interact with each other, and that is how they can achieve marital satisfaction. Communication patterns in a family, including the way family members interact with each other to reach common ground and make appropriate decisions, affect couples' marital relationships (Hosseini et al., 2013).

Marital conflicts arise as the result of a number of things, including couples' discord in terms of their needs, desires, and how to meet them. Moreover, different behavioral models and irresponsible approaches toward one's marriage and marital relationship lead to marital conflicts as well. Intimate relationships do not need to be conflict-free. Conflicts arise in married and even the most successful marriages are never conflict-free. The ability to handle and resolve conflicts constructively can create a strong bond between the couples which allows them to build a more intimate relationship. "In fact, when the emotional information cannot be perceived and evaluated in cognitive processing, individuals emotionally and cognitively experience disturbance and agitation. This inability can disturb their organization of cognitions and emotions." (Wallace, Kass & Stanny, 2002). Moreover, it gravely impacts marital relationships resulting in couple burnout. Therefore, it can be suggested that there is a significant relationship between communication skills, including emotional control, active listening, and insight with couple burnout and marital conflicts. Therefore, every couple needs to master these skills to experience an improved married life.

Data analysis results indicated a significant relationship between conflict resolution styles and couple burnout; with the enhancement of conflict resolution styles decreases couple burnout. As a result, the second sub-hypothesis regarding the relationship between conflict resolution styles and couple burnout was confirmed. The study findings in this regard was in line with the findings of Stinson et al. (2017), Wagner et al. (2019), Rahsepar et al. (2022), Niknam & Javaheri (2019).

To further explain the present hypothesis, it can be said that couples who use appropriate conflict resolution styles, while being aware of their own needs and

emotions, continue to pay attention to their spouse's needs. In such an empathetic environment, couples can resolve conflicts and initiate new patterns for resolving the issues at hand in a constructive and communicative manner. In this space, no problem is too big to solve rather they are regarded as an inevitable part of being in a relationship. Instead of suppressing and ignoring problems, which ultimately leads to marital burnout, couples feel free to converse about their issue and introduce creative ways which cultivate empathy to solve them. Moreover, in such a relationship both partners experience higher levels of perceived social support, which, in turn, reduces the chances of experiencing couple burnout. The couple's success in initiating a good relationship, using conflict resolution styles, while focusing on resolving marital issues, and avoiding relationships that are bound to fail, will significantly decrease the feelings of disappointment, anger, worthlessness, depression, and frustration. Moreover, successful relationships increase one's level of empathy, facilitate a better understanding of each other's needs and desires, elevate the desire to continue the marital relationship, and, ultimately, reduce tensions and frustrations (Rahepar et al., 2022). Data analysis results showcased a significant relationship between family relationships and conflict resolution styles with couple burnout. Thus, the study findings confirm the main hypothesis. Regarding the relationship between family connections and couple burnout, the obtained results are consistent with the findings of Kadi and Makini (2021), Grevenstein et al. (2019), Kızıldağ & Yıldırım (2017), Armin et al. (2022), Mirzaei et al. (2021), Rejali & Yousefi (2021), Ahmadi et al. (2021), Zare Baghbidi (2020), and Keshavarz et al. (2018). Regarding the relationship between conflict resolution styles and couple burnout, the obtained results is in line with the findings of Tingchen & li (2017), Stinson et al. (2019), Wagner et al. (2019), Armin et al. (2022), Rahepar et al. (2022), and Niknam & Javaheri (2019).

Positive family relationships are associated with the members' ability to adapt to changes, resolve conflicts, develop solidarity among the members, succeed in instilling disciplinary measures, respect personal boundaries, and adhere to the rules and principles that govern this institution to protect the whole family system. Hence, positive and effective family connections help family members resist the pressures of everyday life events. It can positively impact growth and help family members flourish and make progress in their lives. Positive family connections introduce the family to a center of support, relief, and healing. As a result, couples will

enjoy more satisfying relationships and are less likely to experience marital burnout (Grevenstein et al., 2019). Furthermore, effective conflict resolution styles help couples to maintain a positive mindset, express their thoughts and feelings, seek the other party's approval, reach common ground on issues, and establish mutual trust. People who employ these techniques normally try to meet interpersonal needs and expectations and favor win-win situations (Niknam and Javaheri, 2019). As a result, marital satisfaction will increase and couple burnout continues to decrease.

In general, the study results showcased a correlation between family connections, conflict resolution styles, and marital burnout among couples seeking a divorce. The findings of the study highlight divorce as one of the primary sources of family trauma which brings about disintegration on a personal, familial, and social level. Divorce negatively affects women far more than men. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors which contribute to marital dissatisfaction and couple burnout. The identification of factors that cause couple burnout can provide effective solutions for preventing divorce and leading to an improved married life. These days, couple burnout has increased due to the evolution of social media and the increasing demand for change. These factors can reduce and control couple burnout. In this regard, the results of this study can be used both at the macro-level and micro-level family policies.

Moreover, the findings of this research can be employed to identify the factors which impact family relationships and help resolve marital conflicts. Some of these factors include the ways couples show affection to one another, the ability to recognize and understand the feelings of one's own and one's spouse, meeting the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of one's spouse, and regulating emotions to prevent trauma and resolving conflicts to reduce marital problems. Furthermore, the recognition of individual differences in resolving marital conflicts, the ability to choose emotionally charged terms to extend your gratitude and appreciate one another, the ability to show respect to your spouse and gain their trust, and the ability to identify your spouse's personality traits are the byproducts of researching family relationships used to prevent marital problems and couple burnout.

### **The Limitations of the Study**

Like any other study, conducting this research had some limitations in the scope of the obtained results. The use of self-reporting tools, not controlling

couples' other problems which might have contributed to marital burnout, and the scope of the research which was limited to a specific geographic region were some of the delimitations of the study to name a few. Due to the significant role of family connections in predicting marital burnout and the impact of one's immediate family on the formation of these connections, it is recommended that necessary training on healthy relationships be provided for families. Moreover, organizations need to put the identification of effective conflict resolution styles in marital relationships on their agenda to help families overcome couple burnout through active training

## **5. Ethical Considerations**

### **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

In the process of conducting this research, ethical standards were taken into account. The participants were informed about the research purpose and their data was collected confidentially and used only for research purposes.

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No financial support was received from any institution for this research.

### **Authors' contributions**

All authors of this article participated in all stages of writing and conducting research.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors of the article had no conflict of interest.

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