



## The Effectiveness of Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) on Marital Burnout in Married Women

Niloofar Mikaeili<sup>1</sup>, Seifollah Aghajani<sup>1</sup>, Narges Habibi<sup>1</sup>, Elham Fathi<sup>2\*</sup>, Abolfazl Hatami Varzaneh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Counseling, Faculty of Humanities, Hazrat-e Masoumeh University, Qom, Iran.

Received: 1 October 2021

Accepted: 25 October 2021

### Abstract

**Background:** This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the prevention and relationship enhancement program (PREP) on marital burnout in married women.

**Methods:** Thirty married women were selected and randomly replaced in experimental (n=15) and control (n=15) groups. The quasi-experimental research method was conducted in the pretest-posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of the PREP on marital burnout in married women. The sessions of the PREP were implemented for the experimental group during 8 sessions of 90 minutes, one session per week, and no educational intervention was performed for the control group. Multivariate analysis of covariance was used as a statistical method.

**Results:** The results showed that there was a significant difference between the control and experimental groups in psychological and emotional aspects of marital burnout ( $Pvalue \leq 0.02$ ). Our results also showed that the total burnout score was significantly different from pre-test to post-test in the experimental group ( $Pvalue \leq 0.01$ ).

**Conclusions:** It can be implied from the results of our study that PREP can have different implications in Iranian culture.

**Keywords:** Prevention and relationship enhancement program (PREP), Marital burnout, Married women.

\*Corresponding to: E Fathi, Email: fathielham@ymail.com

**Please cite this paper as:** Mikaeili N, Aghajani S, Habibi N, Fathi E, Hatami Varzaneh A. The effectiveness of prevention and relationship enhancement program (PREP) on marital burnout in married women. Int J Health Stud 2022;8(2):36-40

## Introduction

Love always begins with great hopes, the hope that one day we will be fully known and accepted, the hope of belonging, supporting and being supported, and the hope of deep love and lasting bond, but this hope is not the reality of life. As needs do not always match together, anger causes separation and distance, judgments prevent acceptance, and loneliness overshadows distant lives.<sup>1</sup> Many marriages end in divorce, and worst of all, many couples refuse to divorce but suffer from lifelong marital dissatisfaction.<sup>2</sup> When romantic expectations are not met, feelings of frustration are directly attributed to the spouse and cause the decline of love, and commitment, and boredom replaces love.<sup>3</sup>

According to Paynes et al. (2011), symptoms of marital boredom include general lack of desire, dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, numbness, and lack of interest.<sup>4</sup> Marital burnout is a long-term response to family stress and includes

three key dimensions: extreme fatigue, pessimism, and family abandonment.<sup>5</sup> This condition can affect the individual, family, and social functioning of individuals. Some may leave family life because of this experience, while others may remain in family life with minimal ability. Decreased quality of performance and reduced mental and physical health can not only be harmful to the individual and family but can be harmful to all people who deal with such a person.<sup>6</sup> Maher, Igou, van Tilburg (2019) showed that the desire to discover new topics, frustration, and loneliness are the three key factors in boredom.<sup>7</sup>

Research results have shown that there is a negative relationship between marital burnout with optimism, sexual self-efficacy, marital satisfaction, and feeling lonely.<sup>8</sup> Marital burnout mediates the relationship between the tendency to emotional divorce and communication patterns.<sup>9</sup> The results of Sabbagh, Salehzadeh, and Zarei (2016) showed that the mean scores of marital burnout were significantly higher among women than the mean scores of men.<sup>10</sup> Thus, marital burnout is one of the factors affecting the desire of individuals to maintain marriage permanently, remain faithful to their spouse, family, values, and general adherence to marital obligations.<sup>11</sup>

Marital burnout is mostly due to weakness in communication skills, marital adjustment, intimacy, and marital interactions.<sup>12,13</sup> Therefore, interventions are needed that, on the one hand, reduce the factors leading to the weakening of the couple's intimacy and, consequently, marital boredom, and, on the other hand, strengthen the efficient and effective functioning of couples and families through preventive programs.<sup>14</sup> Marriage educations help people to improve their relationships while maintaining the quality of those relationships over time.<sup>15</sup>

The prevention and relationship enhancement program (PREP), developed by Markman and his colleagues at the center for women and family studies at the university of Denver in 1990. The PREP education includes concepts of love styles, fun, friendship, problem-solving, personality, communication danger signs and time out, anger and stress, events, issues and hidden issues, and commitment.<sup>16</sup> This program has shown its effectiveness in various ethnic and religious groups such as low-income Spanish couples,<sup>17</sup> single African couples,<sup>18</sup> married African couples<sup>19</sup> and Iranian couples.<sup>16</sup> This program increases communication skills and problem-solving and intimacy of couples and reduces divorce

and aggravation of women laundering problems<sup>20,21</sup> and has been effective in increasing overall marital satisfaction and its components like communication skills, personality issues, conflict resolution, financial management, and religious orientation.<sup>22</sup> This program can increase love, respect, and intimacy between couples and lead to a change in attitudes towards marriage and reduce dysfunctional communication beliefs of couples and reduce the incidence of boredom and divorce of women.<sup>4,20,21,23</sup>

According to the negative consequences of marital burnout and the importance of using marital education programs, this study aims to answer the question that whether PREP is effective for marital burnout or not?

## Materials and Methods

The present study is a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest and a control group. The statistical population of this study consists of all married women who were referred to one of the counseling centers in Zanjan province after the researcher called for a marital education program. In this study, the available sampling method was used. Thus, after enrolling among married women, volunteering, and considering the inclusion criteria, which were being in a formal marriage, being able to read and write, age ranging between 20-40 years, no history of mental illness, no personal counseling services outside the psychoeducation sessions, and completing the consent form and willingness to participate in the training course. 30 people were selected and randomly replaced in experimental and control groups (15 participants in each group).

Exclusion criteria were having an acute psychological and physical disorder, simultaneous participation in other psychological and therapeutic programs or sessions, simultaneous use of psychiatric and psychotropic drugs, drug addiction, and unwillingness to continue to participate in the research process.

Before the training sessions, a pre-test was conducted and participants responded to the research tool. Then, the sessions of the program were presented for the experimental group (n=15) during 8 sessions of 90 minutes, one session per week, and no educational intervention was performed for the control group (n=15 people). After getting acquainted with the group and stating the goals and building trust, the beginning of the next sessions was dedicated to reviewing the previous week's assignments, then the sessions continued by presenting the main content of the training. In the end, following the educational contents, homework was presented to the experimental group for the next week. After the sessions, the post-test was performed again for the two groups, and after the end of the research, the above training course was held for the control group to observe the ethical principles.

Couple burnout scale (CBM) is a self-assessment tool designed to measure the degree of marital burnout among couples. It was invented by Pinez (1996). The questionnaire

has 21 items that include three main elements of physical, emotional, and psychological burnout.<sup>24</sup> The entire items are scored on a seven-point Likert scale (1= not at all, 7=always). It takes 15-20 minutes to fill out this questionnaire.<sup>25</sup> An evaluation of the reliability of CBM showed that the internal homogeneity of the items ranged from 0.84 to 0.90. Enrich's marital satisfaction scale was used to test the validity of CBM. The correlation between these two questionnaires was obtained to -0.40 at Pvalue level less than 0.001.<sup>26</sup>

## Results

The number of participants in the present study was 30. Participants were 20 to 44 years old, with the highest frequency being in the age range of 25 to 29 years (46.7%). Also, the duration of marriage of the participants was between 0-14 years, the highest frequency was related to the period of 6 to 11 years (60%). The number of children of the participants was between 0-3, the highest frequency was related to one child (46.78%) (Table 1).

To test the effectiveness of PREP on marital burnout MANCOVA was used. Marital burnout included three components of physical, psychological, and emotional burnout. First, the mean, and standard deviation of marital burnout were reported in Table 2. As can be seen, the average total burnout before the psychoeducation is 74.80 and the average total burnout after the psychoeducation is 50.53.

Before testing this hypothesis, the hypothesis of homogeneity of variance was tested by the Levin test. The results obtained according to the amount of significance level (Pvalue) obtained in all factors, which is higher than 0.05, indicate that there is no significant difference between the groups. This means that variance is homogenous (Table 3).

After examining the assumption of homogeneity of variance, since the components of marital burnout were 3 cases, as mentioned, multivariate analysis of covariance was used. The results of the analysis of covariance showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups of pre-test and post-test (Table 4).

After reviewing the results of the multivariate test, the results of the Univariate test were evaluated. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the control and experimental groups in the components of psychological and emotional aspects (Table 5). The average of psychological and emotional burnout in the experimental group decreased.

Finally, the univariate covariance of the total marital burnout score between the pretest and posttest groups was calculated ( $F(1,27)=9.52$ ,  $Pvalue=0.00$ ), which showed that the total burnout score was significantly different from pre-test to post-test. The mean of the experimental group decreased from pre-test to post-test, while in the control group the mean changes were not significant.

**Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants**

Age	F*	% F	Duration of marriage	F	% F	Number of children	F	% F
20 to 24	1	3.3	0 to 2	2	6.7	0	11	36.7
25 to 29	14	46.7	3 to 5	7	23.3	1	14	46.7
30 to 34	9	30.0	6 to 8	9	30.0	2	4	13.3
35 to 39	5	16.7	9 to 11	9	30.0	3	1	3.3
40 to 44	1	3.3	12 to 14	3	10.0	Total	30	100.0
Total	30	100.0	Total	30	100.0			

\*Frequency

**Table 2. Mean, and the standard deviation of marital burnout**

Variables	Dimensions	Assessment time	Groups			
			Experimental		Control	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Marital burnout	Physical	Pre-test	22.67	6.60	16.80	3.88
		Post-test	16.40	3.18	17.13	6.92
	Psychological	Pre-test	26.73	7.54	20.60	6.85
		Post-test	18.33	2.66	20.73	7.43
	Emotional	Pre-test	25.40	9.11	18.13	5.03
		Post-test	15.80	3.49	17.93	6.65
	Total	Pre-test	74.80	21.87	55.53	13.71
		Post-test	50.53	8.20	55.80	20.11

SD. Standard deviation

**Table 3. Homogeneity test of variance in marital burnout (Levin's tests results)**

Variable	Dimensions	F	df1	df2	Pvalue
Marital burnout	Physical	2.12	1	28	0.16
	Psychological	6.06	1	28	0.02
	Emotional	1.50	1	28	0.23

**Table 4. Results of Multivariate analysis of covariance**

Error source	Test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Pvalue	Effect size
Groups	Pillai's trace	0.21	4.07	3	23	0.02	0.21
	Wilks' lambda	0.79	4.07	3	23	0.02	0.21
	Hotelling's trace	0.27	4.07	3	23	0.02	0.21
	Roy's largest root	0.27	4.07	3	23	0.02	0.21

**Table 5. Results of univariate analysis of covariance**

Variables	SS	Df	MS	F	Pvalue	η <sup>2</sup>
Groups	Physical	71.1	1	71.21	2.94	0.10
	Psychological	138.46	1	138.46	5.48	0.03
	Emotional	128.63	1	128.63	6.18	0.02
Error	Physical	606.03	25	24.24		
	Psychological	631.41	25	25.26		
	Emotional	520.73	25	20.83		

## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the prevention and relationship enhancement program (PREP) on marital burnout in married women. The results of multivariate analysis of covariance showed that the PREP had a significant effect on reducing marital burnout and also there was a

significant difference between the control and experimental groups in psychological and emotional and total burn out. The results of other studies in Iran and other countries indicated the effectiveness of this program as an educational model of skills training, on the improvement of marital satisfaction, stability,<sup>16,22</sup> conflicts resolution skill, marital commitment, and intimacy,<sup>21</sup> mindfulness and emotion regulation, quality of

marital relationship, correction of dysfunctional beliefs,<sup>27-29</sup> conflict resolution styles skill, quality of marital relationships,<sup>20</sup> love, intimacy, respect,<sup>14</sup> and changing attitudes towards marriage.<sup>23</sup>

Paynes and Nunes (2003) believe that a person who is bored with their relationship, feels complete exhaustion, fatigue emptiness, and life does not seem to have any meaning. The person feels like being in a trap and dysfunctional in performing various social roles, and have no control over life, and is reluctant with others.<sup>24,25</sup>

The PREP education includes concepts of love styles, fun, friendship, problem-solving, personality, communication danger signs and time out, anger and stress, events, issues and hidden issues, commitment, and road mapping. The PREP helps couples to communicate effectively with each other by learning the technique of speaker-listener and resolving conflicts. This technique helps couples learn to talk about their feelings, listen actively to their spouse, and interpret the message effectively and efficiently. The empathy they get from each other and new way of talking lets freshness and emotional release, more understanding, and less burnout. Furthermore, the PREP educates about love styles and encourages fun, friendship, and enjoyable activities so that they can have more happiness like early years of marriage. They learn how to resolve their conflicts, solve their problems and manage their stress and anger so that they can talk in a safe atmosphere.

The results are limited as we applied available sampling, self-assessment tools, and educating on women only, therefore, generalizability and inference from the results will be limited. It is recommended couples participate together and report the posttest mutually. Also, according to the results obtained from this study, it is suggested that this program be used in different populations and groups, such as troubled families, divorced, or separated couples.

It is recommended that counselors and specialists of family crisis intervention centers, family counseling centers, and public and private centers in charge of family education use this program to reduce and solve marital problems of couples, and promote healthy and efficient relationships among different populations and groups such as unsuccessful adults, troubled families, divorced or separated couples, and troubled couples.

## Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank all the participants who kindly cooperated in the process of the study. The present study was approved by the institutional review board of the Mohaghegh Ardabili university with code No: IR.UMA.REC.1400.014

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## References

- McKay M, Fanning P, Paleg K. Couple skills: Making your relationship work. New Harbinger Publications 2006.
- Hou Y, Jiang F, Wang X. Marital commitment, communication, and marital satisfaction: An analysis based on the actor-partner interdependence model. *International Journal of Psychology* 2019;54:369-76. doi:10.1002/ijop.12473
- Panahi M, Kazemi Jamarani SH, Enayatpour Shahrbabaki M, Rostami M. Effectiveness of integrative behavioral couple therapy on reducing marital burnout and fear in couples of intimacy. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 2017;3:373-92. doi:20.1001.1.20084331.1396.11.4.4.7
- Pines AM, Neal MB, Hammer LB, Ickson T. Job burnout and couple burnout in dual-earner couples in the sandwiched generation. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 2011;74:361-86. doi:10.1177/0190272511422452
- Alsawalqa RO. Marriage Burnout: When the emotions exhausted quietly quantitative research. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences* 2019;13:e68833. doi:10.5812/ijpbs.68833
- Ahmadimehr Z, Yousefi Z, Gol Parvar M. Exploration and explanation the marital disillusionment among married women: Grounded Theory. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 2020;14:290-69. doi:10.29252/apsy.2021.216280.0
- Maher PJ, Igou ER, Van Tilburg W. Disillusionment: A prototype analysis. *Cogn Emot* 2020;34:947-59. doi:10.1080/02699931.2019.1705764
- Ahadizadeh N, Khalatbari J. The relationship between optimism, sexual self-efficacy, and loneliness with couple burnout in married women. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health* 2020;22:91-7. doi:10.22038/jfmh.2020.16149
- Khosravi J, Moradi O, Ahmadiyan H, Yousefi N. Causal model of tendency to emotional divorce based on couples' communication patterns mediated by marital boredom (Case Study: Qasrshirin City). *Population Studies* 2019;5:185-210. doi:10.30495/jzv.2021.24337.3168
- Sabbagh Z, Salehzadeh M, Zareei H. Marital burnout and dependence on virtual social networks: Difference between women and men. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health* 2020;22:361-9. doi:10.22038/jfmh.2020.17342
- Sepahvand T. The effectiveness of integrated model of self-regulation-attachment couple therapy on dimensions of marital satisfaction of insecure couples. *Avicenna Journal of Neuro Psychophysiology* 2018;5:159-68. doi:10.32598/ajnp.4.3.275
- Welch TS, Lachmar EM, Leija SG, Easley T, Blow AJ, Wittenborn AK. Establishing safety in emotionally focused Couple Therapy: A single-case process study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 2019;45:621-34. doi:10.1111/jmft.12398
- Shapiro AF, Gottman JM, Fink BC. Short-Term change in couples' conflict following a transition to parenthood intervention. *Couple Family Psychology* 2015;4:239-51. doi:10.1037/cfp0000051
- Mortazavi M, Rasooli R, Hosseini S, Zareei H. Effectiveness of the prevention and relationship enhancement program based on Gottman & Glaser's integrated approach to love, respect, and marital intimacy. *Journal of Applied Psychological Research* 2020;11:137-49. doi:10.22059/JAPR.2020.274730.643157
- Scuca RF. The radical nature of the relationship enhancement expressive skill and its implications for therapy and psychoeducation. *The Family Journal* 2011;19:30-5. doi:10.1177/1066480710387491
- Fathi E, Daneshpour M, Hatami Varzaneh A. The effectiveness of preparation for marriage education with PREP in Iran. *Marriage & Family Review* 2021;57:312-28. doi:10.1080/01494929.2020.1861164
- Daire AP, Harris SM, Carlson RG, Munyon MD, Rappleyea DL, Beverly MG, et al. Fruits of improved communication: The experiences of Hispanic couples in a relationship education program. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy* 2012;11:112-29. doi:10.1080/15332691.2012.666498
- Owen J, Quirk K, Bergen C, Inch LJ, France T. The effectiveness of PREP with lower-income racial/ethnic minority couples. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 2012;38:296-307. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2012.00294.x
- Beach S, Hurt T, Fincham F, Franklin K, McNair L, Stanley S. Enhancing the cultural sensitivity of marital enrichment through spirituality: Efficacy data for prayer focused PREP (PFP). *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 2011;3:201-16. doi:10.1037/a0022207
- Eslami F, Farahbakhsh K, Salimi H. The effectiveness of prevention and relationship education program (PREP) on communication beliefs. *Journal of Applied Family Therapy* 2020;1:17-34. doi:10.22034/AFTJ.2020.111370
- Heydarnia A, Nazari AM, Soleimanian AA. The effectiveness of prevention and relationship enhancement program (PREP) on marital intimacy. *Clinical Psychology Studies* 2014;4:61-78.
- Bagheri E. The effectiveness of prevention and relationship education program (PREP) on promoting marital satisfaction of married female students. [Master Thesis]. Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology: Tabriz University 2019.

23. Azimi Khoei A, Zaharakar K, Ahmadi K. The effectiveness of premarital education based on the prevention and relationship improvement program (PREP) on communication beliefs and attitudes toward marriage of couples on the verge of marriage. *Islamic Life Journal* 2021;4:63-73.
24. Pines AM, Nunes R. The relationship between career and couple burnout: Implications for career and couple counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling* 2003;40:50-64. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1920.2003.tb00856.x
25. Pines AM, Keinan G. Stress and burnout: The significant difference. *Personality and Individual Differences* 2005;39:625-35. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2005.02.009
26. Kebritchi A, Mohammadkhani S. The role of marital burnout and early maladaptive schemas in marital satisfaction between young couples. *International Journal of Medical Research & Health Sciences* 2016;5:239-46.
27. Ghazanfari B, Keshavarzi Arshadi F, Hassani F, Emamipour S. Effectiveness of couple therapy based on choice theory on conflict resolution styles and marital relationship quality of incompatible couples. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 2018;12:47-62. doi:20.1001.1.20084331.1397.12.1.3.7
28. Killawi A, Fathi E, Dadras I, Daneshpour M, Elmi A, Altalib H. Perceptions and experiences of marriage preparation among US Muslims: Multiple voices from the community. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 2018;44:90-106. doi:10.1111/jmft.12233
29. Grills C, Villanueva S, Anderson M, Corsbie-Massay CL, Smith B, Johnson L, et al. Effectiveness of choice theory connections: A cross-sectional and comparative analysis of California female inmates. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 2015;59:757-71. doi:10.1177/0306624X13520129