



## Effectiveness of Interpersonal Psychotherapy on Decreasing the Burnout of Women on the Verge of Divorce in Ahvaz

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**ABSTRACT:** The current research aim was surveying the effectiveness of supportive interpersonal therapy on decreasing the burnout of women on the verge of divorce in Ahvaz. The research method was semi experimental with pre-post Test, follow up and control group. The sample consisted of 30 women who were matched from age, education status, duration of marriage acquiring one standard deviation above the mean and other criteria consisted in this research. The instrument was Couple Burnout Measure (CBM). The experimental group administered 10 sessions of interpersonal psychotherapy but the control group didn't receive any intervention. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between experimental and control group in marital burnout ( $P < 0.0001$ ). The rate of burnout in experimental group in comparison with pre-test and control group significantly decreased. These results significantly persisted after follow-up period. The current study indicates the importance of IPT in improving the couples' relationships and decreasing the couple burnout.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Psychotherapy, Couple Burnout, Divorce

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### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the most complex tasks of adulthood, which at the same time has been defined as the simplest and most romantic stage of life cycle, in which each of the couples could experience the deepest emotions [1]. In fact most of the couples begin their common life with love and at this time they never think about this matter that may be one day their flame of love will be off. According to Alice, newlyweds think less about this matter that maybe one day their love will be faded and this is exactly the time when burnout begins [2]. Burnout is defined as a symptom of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting in the constant feeling of stress, hopelessness, despair and being trapped with the loss of enthusiasm, energy, idealism, perspective and purpose [3]. Couple burnout happens due to a set of unrealistic expectations and irrational thoughts and ups and downs of daily life, and contrary to the opinion of most of the clinical approaches used in couple therapy it is not due to the existence of some errors in one or both individuals. Disenchantment with love or burnout is a gradual process and it rarely happens unexpectedly [4]. In fact love and intimacy gradually diminishes and it brings about general burnout. This phenomenon begins with relationship breakdown and with growth, awareness and attention toward things that are not as pleasant as before, and if nothing happens to prevent its progress at this stage, everything becomes worse than before and at the worst stage burnout results in relationship break off [5,6].

It seems that one of the therapies that could improve these relationships is IPT which is rooted from researches of Stak Sullivan and Adolf Meyer, and it is considerably influenced by the Psychoanalytic Theory especially by the John Bowlby's attachment theory. IPT is primarily concerned with interpersonal functioning and symptoms, presumed to have biological, psychological, and social precipitants. There is a specific focus on social interactions, communication, social supports, and interpersonal functioning. IPT is a concentrated and short-term therapy which concentrates on improving different communicational factors in the individual's life [7]. IPT sessions focus on examining the person's interpersonal relationships, linking them to changes in mood, identifying a major problem area) that is, grief, interpersonal role disputes, role transitions or interpersonal deficits), relating symptoms to the problem area, and exploring alternative ways of being in relationships with others [8]. According to the supporters of IPT the individuals' mental growth is the product of continuous change in having interactions with others. Important events appearing in the growth process are some of the factors forming in interpersonal interactions and their aim is growth and change of interpersonal relationships among human beings, and if these relations are frustrating they will form the foundation for mental abnormalities in the future [9]. Due to this matter Sullivan considers that the cause of misconducts are interpersonal relationships, and believes that by teaching the interpersonal relationships and social skills it is possible to help individuals evaluate their interactions with others, and ultimately have more rational and appropriate behaviors [10].

Related to the current subject matter no research has been found that directly surveys the effectiveness of IPT on the couple burnout, thus researches that are somehow related to the current subject are pointed out.

In a research Tarkhan [9] surveyed the effectiveness of short-term group interpersonal psychotherapy on the mental welfare and quality of life of couples having addicted partners and research result showed that IPT had a significant effect on the mental welfare and quality of life in a combined analyses, and by teaching the interpersonal skills it is possible to improve the mental welfare and quality of life in couples having addicted partners.

In a research Attari et al. surveyed the effectiveness of teaching communicational skills with method of couples' communication on decreasing the couple burnout in couples, and the results indicate that using communicational skills with the program of couples' communication is effective on decreasing the couple burnout and this effect had the required stability in the follow up session[11].

A research was conducted by Sodani et al. [12] with the aim of surveying the effectiveness of teaching Transactional Analysis (TA) on the couple burnout and quality of life and the results showed that teaching TA results in decreasing the couple burnout and increase of quality of life [12].

In another research AdibeRad and AdibeRad [2] surveyed the correlation between relationship beliefs and the couple burnout and comparing it in women who want divorce and women who want to continue their common life. Results showed that a difference exists between the relationship beliefs and its subscales in women who want divorce and women who want to continue their common life, and women who have tendency toward divorce have irrational relationship beliefs along with more burnout compared to the women who want to continue their common life .

Hamid and Dehghani [13] in a research investigated Effectiveness of the Course of Religion-Based Transactional Analysis (TA) on the Degree of Love, Affection, and Respect to the Spouse and on Marriage Satisfaction. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of degree of love, affection and respect to the spouse and concerning marriage satisfaction. That is, the degree of love, affection and respect to the spouse, as well as marriage satisfaction in the experimental group is significantly more than that before the test or that of the control group.

Regarding what has been mentioned earlier, and regarding this matter that family is considered as one of the most important parts of the society, and having a healthy society depends on having healthy families, and realizing a healthy family depends on having sub-components with mental health and having desirable relationships with each other, thus healthy family members and their relationships undoubtedly result in more positive effects in the society, and paying attention to the effect of burnout on the quality of marriage and its importance in maintaining the continuity of family the current research aim is surveying the effectiveness of IPT on decreasing the burnout of women on the verge of divorce in Ahvaz.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current research project is semi-experimental with pretest-posttest, follow up with control group. By the use of convenience sampling 30 individuals were chosen from women visiting the counseling and psychotherapy center in Ahvaz who had several problems and they were on the verge of divorce, and they were chosen considering age, economic-social condition, duration of marriage, achieving a standard deviation higher than the mean in the couple burnout inventory and other variables in the research, and they were randomly put into two groups of experimental and control group. The experimental group was treated by interpersonal psychotherapy during ten 90-minute sessions but the control group did not receive any interventions. Both groups completed the burnout inventory in pre-intervention, post-intervention and three-month follow up session.

### INSTRUMENTS

**Couple Burnout Measure (CBM):** This scale is a self-assessment tool designed by Pines [5] for measuring the degree of couple burnout among couples. This inventory includes 21 items consisting of three main subtypes of physical exhaustion (fatigue, weakness, and sleep disorders ...), emotional exhaustion (depression, disappointment, and being trapped,) and mental exhaustion (decrease in self-confidence, self-dissatisfaction and anger toward spouse). This scale is scored in a 7-point Likert scale in a range from 1 (never) to 7 (always), in which the examinees determine the number of times the mentioned thing happened in their marriage. 4-item scoring is conducted inversely, and the examinee's higher score in this scale indicates more burnout [14]. Navidi [15] conducted the mentioned inventory on 240 samples (120 nurses and 120 teachers) in order to calculate the reliability and validity and the inventory reliability coefficient calculated through Cronbach's Alpha was 0.86 and the reliability coefficient through retest method in the one-month, 2-month and 4-month period was reported to be 0.89, 0.76 and 0.66 . In the current research two methods of Cronbach's Alpha and bisection method were used for determining the reliability of couple burnout inventory and for the whole inventory it was reported to be 0.95 and 0.93 which indicates the reliability coefficients of mentioned questionnaire.

## RESULTS

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation of couple burnout in women who want divorce in pretest-posttest and follow up levels. As it is observable in the results of table 2, the pre-hypothesis of equality of variances of scores in both experimental and control group is confirmed. As it is

observable in the results of table 3 by controlling the pretest in women who want divorce in both experimental and control group a significant difference exists in terms of couple burnout ( $F= 11405.31$  ,  $P\leq 0.0001$ ). In other words regarding the mean of couple burnout in experimental group compared to the mean of women in control group IPT resulted in decreasing the couple burnout in women who want divorce in experimental group.

**Table 1.** Mean and SD of couple burnout in women who want divorce in pretest-posttest and follow up levels

Variable	Level	Group statistical indicators	Mean	SD
couple burnout	Pretest	Experimental	108.45	3.49
		Control	106.12	1.87
	Posttest	Experimental	65.23	1.91
		Control	104.40	3.66
	Follow up	Experimental	64.21	2.85
		Control	105.92	1.23
Component of physical exhaustion	Pretest	Experimental	35.12	1.87
		Control	34.80	2.36
	Posttest	Experimental	23.12	4.91
		Control	35.62	5.16
	Follow up	Experimental	24.32	4.87
		Control	34.85	3.22
Component of emotional exhaustion	Pretest	Experimental	37.16	3.67
		Control	35.82	2.12
	Posttest	Experimental	22.64	4.59
		Control	34.92	3.64
	Follow up	Experimental	21.34	2.12
		Control	36.08	1.99
Component of mental exhaustion	Pretest	Experimental	31.29	2.14
		Control	32.87	1.93
	Posttest	Experimental	25.39	2.06
		Control	31.23	4.92
	Follow up	Experimental	24.69	2.33
		Control	32.33	1.97

**Table2.** Results of Levene's test about the pre-hypothesis of equality of variances of burnout scores and the components of both groups in the society

Level	Variable	F	Df1	DF2	Sig
Pretest	couple burnout	2.22	1	28	0.165
	Component of physical exhaustion of couple burnout	2.31	1	28	0.139
	Component of emotional exhaustion of couple burnout	3.05	1	28	0.92
	Component of mental exhaustion of couple burnout	2.34	1	28	0.145

**Table 3.** Results of ANCOVA analysis, comparing the mean of couple burnout of women in experimental and control group by controlling the pretest

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig	Eta squared	Statistical power
Pretest	613.03	1	613.03	5.35	0.015	0.45	0.69
Group	11405.31	1	11405.31	138.39	0.0001	0.86	1
Error	2161.03	27	80.04	-	-	-	-

Results of table 4 show that by controlling the posttest between two experimental and control groups at least in terms of one of the dependent variables a significant difference exists ( $F= 40.05$  ,  $P\leq 0.0001$ ). In order to figure out this difference the one-way MANCOVA test has been conducted on the posttest of mean of scores of couple burnout balances. As the table results show by controlling the pretest in women in both groups in terms of physical exhaustion ( $F= 34.51$ ,  $P\leq 0.0001$ ), emotional exhaustion ( $F= 105.43$ ,  $P\leq 0.0001$ ), and mental exhaustion ( $F= 102.87$ ,  $P\leq 0.0001$ ) a significant difference exists. In other words, the IPT results in decreasing the couple burnout and its components.

**Table 4.** Results of MANCOVA analysis on the mean of scores of posttest of components of couple burnout in women of both groups by controlling the posttest

Test name	Value	Hypothesis df	Error Df	F	Sig
Pillai's Trace	0.832	3	23	40.05	0.0001
Wilks' Lambda	0.157	3	23	40.05	0.0001
Hotelling's Trace	4.39	3	23	40.05	0.0001
Roy's Largest Root	4.39	3	23	40.05	0.0001

**Table 5.** Results of ANCOVA analysis on the mean of scores of posttest of couple burnout components in women who want divorce in both groups by controlling pretest

Variables	Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig
Component of physical exhaustion	pretest	23.46	1	23.46	1.52	0.243
	group	759.88	1	759.88	51.34	0.0001
	error	401.95	25	16.078	-	-
Component of emotional exhaustion	pretest	6.97	1	6.97	0.483	0.491
	group	1396.32	1	1396.32	105.43	0.0001
	error	219.12	25	8.7648	-	-
Component of mental exhaustion	pretest	36.69	1	36.69	4.61	0.097
	group	1169.23	1	1169.23	102.87	0.0001
	error	259.73	25	10.3892	-	-

## DISCUSSION

The research findings show that IPT results in decreasing the couple burnout in women visiting the counseling and psychotherapy center. No research has been found about the research subject that directly surveys the effect of IPT on the couple burnout, but the result of this research was indirectly consistent with the findings of Sodani et al. [12], Tarkhan [9] and Attari et al. [11].

The high rate of divorce in societies confirms this reality that most couples do not have tendency toward continuing failed marriages. Waller [16] was the first researcher who suggested that divorce may have root in couples' frustration and thus accumulation of frustrations and daily life tensions result in mental degradation and ultimately result in burnout. In couple burnout couples experience gradual decrease of emotional attachment to spouse which is accompanied by alienation, lethargy and indifference toward each other and replacing the positive emotions with negative emotions [17]. In a failed marriage one of the couples or both of them feel a kind of disassociation of spouse and reduction of interests and interrelations while having considerable concerns about increasing degradation of relationship and advancement toward break up, and divorce [18]. It seems that women are more vulnerable toward the marital stressors than men and the marital stressors affect them more than men, and this matter could be due to their more attention toward intimate relationships and the need for maintaining these relationships [19, 20]. Interpersonal relationships are the base and foundation of identity and perfectionism of human being and they are the base of correct link between the human being and others, and in fact it is a process through which the information and emotions are communicated through verbal and non-verbal messages with others. It seems that by teaching the interpersonal relationships it is possible to help individuals to evaluate their interactions with others and thus they could have more rational behaviors [10]. In IPT method the interpersonal problems are targeted and solving the current problems are considered [21], and regarding the fact that effective relationships could provide the prosperity and improvement of individuals' relationships thus IPT could affect the relationships between couples and decrease their burnout.

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