



Original Article

Marital burnout and dependence on virtual social networks: Difference between women and men

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Abstract

Introduction: The present study aimed to investigate predictors of marital burnout based on the dependence on virtual social networks and differences between married women and men.

Materials and Methods: The statistical community of this descriptive-correlational study consisted all married men and women in Isfahan in 2017. The sample consisted of 300 people (130 men and 170 women) selected by convenient sampling method. Sabbagh's questionnaire of dependence on virtual social networks and Pines couple burnout questionnaire were used. Data analyzed using Pearson correlation, multiple stepwise regression analysis, and independent t test through SPSS software.

Results: Based on the findings, there is a significant positive correlation between marital burnout and rate of dependence on virtual social networks. Dimensions of the amount of the emotional dependence on virtual social networks and reduction of interpersonal interactions ($\beta = 0.346$, $\beta = 0.257$, $P = 0.001$) predict significant marital burnout. The mean scores of psychological dependence and emotional dependence to virtual social networks, and marital burnout dimensions in women were significantly higher than those of men.

Conclusion: It seems that dependence on virtual social networks plays an important role in occurrence of marital burnout. It is recommended to consider it in premarital counseling and education.

Keywords: Dependency, Marital burnout, Social networks.

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Introduction

The family has a special place in human thought in history. In the meantime, marital relations and their problems have been significant. Despite the importance and vital functions of marriage, a phenomenon that should always be considered, marital adjustment, marital satisfaction, and prevention of any coldness and marital burnout. One of these marital problems that arise from the

mismatch of expectations with the facts is marital burnout. Marital burnout is a gradual process in which intimacy and love gradually become lost and are accompanied by general fatigue (1). When the sincere relationship stops, many conflicts, frequent criticisms, a refuge in silence, lack of emotional dependence, and unsustainable problems that lead to marital maladjustment come to exist (2). Various factors can be associated with marital burnout and an increase in divorce rates that among

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them, the dependence on virtual networks can be mentioned (3). Today, as the easiest way to access virtual social networks, smartphones have made changes in communications with others, find information, have fun, and manage daily lives. Virtual social networking as a multimedia tool has created new boundaries in social and individual communication that is necessary for directing and controlling applications and the importance of the adverse effects of this technology. Virtual social networks seem to play an important role in all steps of romantic relationships, including initiating, intensifying, maintaining, dissolving, and even monitoring on former partner after the dissolution of the relationship (4). In 2018, according to Facebook, in March 2017, there was an average of 1.28 billion active users per day on Facebook sites. The average time spent by Facebook users alone rose from 40 minutes per day in 2014 to 50 minutes in 2016 (6). Nearly quarter (24%) of adult American social networking users seek information on their former partners (4).

There are many reasons why extreme exploitation of virtual networks can negatively affect marriage quality (3). Excessive use of virtual social networks is accompanied by dependency (7). This involves multiple psychological and social problems in the individual's work, education, and daily life (8). In addition, the excessive use of virtual social networks facilitates the reunification of individuals with those involved with them in the past and leads to potential envy in the current relationship among individuals. The formed relationships can be transient, but it would be problematic if it is near current relationships (9). Explaining and exposing these relationships and individuals to the partner, while many of them are unknown to him/her, can increase jealousy and suspicion (10). Kendall states that a significant reduction in partner search costs in virtual social networks can lead to higher levels of divorce. When people have more information from others, searching for a loving partner after marriage is easier. The benefits of a relationship with a new person are more than the cost of solving and preserving the old relationship, which enhances the divorce rate. For example, Facebook, with having search options and reduction in search costs, also boosts the ability to deceive and fraud. In this way, close relationships with others are made, providing a place for

extramarital relationships or separation (11). Since social networking sites have become a significant and growing phenomenon on the internet in the last decade, there is concern that virtual social networks could have a potential negative impact on social adjustment and a person's well-being (12). Despite the growing use of smartphones and the increase in the number of social network users such as Telegram and Facebook, etc., to millions of people, the impact of social networks on the quality, satisfaction, or burnout of couples still are not subject to serious scientific research regarding the gender difference issues. Because marital burnout may reduce interest and love and increase aggressive behaviors, it can lead to marital dissatisfaction and undermine the family foundation. Within the scope of domestic research, researches have been done on the dependence or addiction to cell phone on students, or their pathology on the family and its relationship with general health, attachment style, self-regulation, and self-control, as well as influential factors on satisfaction, intimacy, conflict, quality, and marital adjustment, but none has focused on examining the effects of virtual social networks on marital relationships, especially marital burnout, concerning gender role. On the one hand, there is a contradiction between the research findings on how gender influences marital burnout and social networking affiliation (13-17), and the findings are not consistent, which highlights the need for further research in these areas. Several factors justify the importance of examining the impact of online social networks on the satisfaction of marital relationships. Also, the satisfied relationship predicts overall satisfaction of life and financial success, job satisfaction, and high physical health (18). Given this gap, the purpose of the present study is to predict marital burnout based on the rate of dependence on virtual social networks and its differences in married women and men.

Materials and Methods

The research method was descriptive and correlational, and the statistical population included all married men and women in Isfahan city in 2017. The sample consisted of three-hundred (130 men and 170 women) married individuals. The sample size estimated based on Cochran's formula to unlimited society was three-hundred and seventy people. After implementing the questionnaire, with the

elimination of seventy flawed and incomplete questionnaires, three-hundred married people investigated. A convenient sampling method was used. In order to have an equal distribution of sample members in different parts of the city, the city of Isfahan was divided into five regions: north, south, center, east, and west, and three regions of north, center, and east were selected for implementation of the questionnaire, and in each region, a list of cultural corporations, offices, shopping malls, sports clubs, and cultural and recreational centers was provided. Then the questionnaires were given to the people in these places. The inclusion criteria for inclusion in the research were informed consent, residence in Isfahan, living with their partner, and at least one year of marriage. The criteria for exclusion were informed, such as being single, divorced, unmarried, and not using social networks. In order to investigate the hypothesis, Pearson correlation, multiple stepwise regression analysis, and independent T-test were used.

Research instrument

A) Pines Marital Burnout Questionnaire: Marital burnout is a self-assessment tool designed to measure the degree of marital burnout among couples. This scale has been adapted from the other self-measurement tool used to measure burnout. This scale was developed by Pines (18,19). The questionnaire has 21 items that include three main physical fatigue components (such as tiredness, weakness, and sleep disturbances), emotional loss (depression, disappointment, being trapped), and psychological deterioration (such as feeling worthless, frustrated, and angry with the spouse), all of which are answered on a seven-point Likert scale. Level 1 indicates the lack of experience in the given phrase, and level 7 represents much experience in the given phrase (19). In order to obtain the degree of marital burnout, you must follow the instructions below: First step: The points awarded are as follows: 21-18-17-16-15-14-13-12-11-10-9-8-7-5-4-2-1. Second step: The points given to numbers 3, 6, 19, 20 are added. Third step: The second step of the 32nd is subtracted. Fourth step: The first step points are added to the third step. Fifth step: The fourth step number is divisible by 21. The resulted number indicates the degree of burnout. It should be noted that more significant numbers indicate a higher rate of burnout and vice versa

(19). The evaluation of the coefficient of validity of the marital burnout scale showed an internal consistency between the variables in the range of 0.84 and 0.90. The test-retest reliability test was 0.89 for one-month, 0.76 for two-month, and 0.66 for the four-month period. Internal continuity was measured for most subjects with alpha coefficient, ranging from 0.91 to 0.93 (1). In Iran, Navidi assessed the alpha Cronbach's on two-hundred and forty cases (120 nurses and 120 teachers). It calculated equal to 0.86. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha value obtained from implementing the questionnaire on the sample of 300 people is equal to 0.85 (20).

B) Questionnaire on the Rate of Dependence on Virtual Social Networks: It has been constructed and based on the literature available in this field and adapted from the Risk of Addiction to Social Networks Scale (21) and Humans' attachment to their cell phones (22) questionnaires are designed by Sabbagh (23). The questionnaire for measuring the rate of dependence on virtual social networks consists of three parts: the first part of the demographic information of the sample group, including gender, age, education, occupation, economic status, duration of the marriage, educational level, and age of the spouse and the number of children were examined. The second part involves measuring the frequency of the use of 9 areas of activity in virtual social networks, including receiving the daily news, recreation and entertainment, shopping online, increasing professional knowledge and career, interacting with friends and relatives, searching for porn and sexual interactions, sharing emotions and memories and enhancing sex and marital knowledge. The third part has thirty-seven questions and includes six subscales of psychological dependence, emotional dependency, decreased interest in other activities, interpersonal interactions, adverse work, educational and sexual effects.

In the second part, to determine the frequency of using various social networking facilities, the participant assigns scores from 0 to 6 in terms of their use in each field of activity. The zero scores indicate the lack of use, and the score of 6 represents the highest usage. Scoring the third part of the questionnaire is based on the 5-point Likert range from never to ever (never= 1 and always= 5). By converting the score obtained from each questionnaire to the T score, the scores are interpreted as follows: scores less

than 54 (without dependency), scores between 54 and 74 (dependence boundaries), and scores above 74 (dependence on networks Social virtual) are categorized. To evaluate validity and reliability, several questionnaires related to social networking and internet and smartphone dependencies were translated, and then dimensions and questions related to the studied population and its objectives were added. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was first evaluated by seven professors and experts from psychology field of Yazd University. For this purpose, professors and experts evaluated content validity and content validity index forms, and according to the number of evaluators, questions with a content validity ratio of less than 0.99 were set aside. In the next step, a questionnaire was conducted on thirty participants. The total Cronbach alpha coefficients and the subscales of psychological dependence, emotional dependency, and disinterest in other activities, interpersonal interactions, and job undesirable effects were 0.95, 0.78, 0.60, 0.93, and 0.73. The final Cronbach alpha coefficients in a sample of three-hundred individuals in each subscale of psychological dependence, affective dependence, disinterested in other activities, interpersonal interactions, adverse effects of occupation, and sexual effects were respectively 0.87, 0.86, 0.69, 0.88, 0.65 and 0.78, and Cronbach alpha of the entire questionnaire is equal to 0.96.

After establishing a questionnaire on the rate of dependence on virtual social networks and determining the sample size, sampling was done between selected geographical areas of Isfahan. Then, questionnaires without name and surname, together with confidence in the confidentiality of responses and compliance with ethical standards including informed consent, and privacy were distributed individually. Finally, the purpose of the research for the participants was summarized. After deleting seventy invalidated questionnaires, data related to three-hundred cases were entered into the SPSS-22 software for statistical tests.

Results

In this study, three-hundred participants (170 women and 130 men) who aged 21 to 59 years (mean age 35.21 ± 28.7 years). The mean age of women was 37.87 ± 11.7 years. The mean age of men is 33.98 ± 20.7 years. The lowest frequency in the education variable was for the Ph.D. degree, and the highest frequency was for the bachelor's degree. Also, according to the economic level in men and women, the lowest frequency was for the good economic situation, and the highest frequency was for the poor economic situation.

In term of marital burnout and dependency to social networks, these scores in women were 2.80 and 64.66, respectively. These scores were higher than the scores in men (2.36 and 61.26).

Table 1. Correlation table of variables related to the dependency on virtual social networks and marital burnout

Variable	Dependence on virtual networks	Psychological dependency	Emotional dependency	Disinteresting to other activities	Decrease in interpersonal interactions	Occupational effects	Sexual effects
Marital burnout	**0.553	**0.494	**0.546	**0.445	**0.527	**0.378	**0.219

**Significant Pearson correlation coefficients ($P < 0.001$)

According to Table 1, the dependence rate on social networks and their dimensions are correlated with marital burnout. In order to

predict marital burnout, the variables listed by the stepwise method were entered into multiple regression models.

Table 2. Standard coefficients of multiple regression model of stepwise marital burnout

Variable	B	β	t	F	R	R2	P
Emotional dependency	0.06	0.34	4.51	126.76	0.54	0.29	0.001
Reducing interpersonal interactions	0.04	0.25	3.34	71.16	0.56	0.32	0.001

According to the results of Table 2, in the first step, emotional dependency variables ($\beta = 346.6$) and in the second step were entered into the regression analysis, and other dimensions

were omitted. As a result, the rate of observed F is significant ($P < 0.001$). That significant regression coefficient was shown that in the first step, emotional dependency predicts a

significant marital burnout, and by adding reducing interpersonal interactions, the potential of significant prediction has

increased. Emotional dependency variables and reducing interpersonal interactions ($\beta = 0.267$) explain 32% of marital burnout changes.

Table 3. Independent T-test results between gender and rate of dependence on virtual social networks

Variable	Mean		Levine test		Independent T test		
	Women	Men	F	P	t	Df	P
Dependency on virtual networks	65.64	61.28	0.87	0.35	-1.47	284.77	0.14
Psychological dependency	17.59	15.98	0.48	0.48	-2.28	286.67	0.02
Emotional dependency	16.92	15.45	1.05	0.30	-2.32	286.08	0.02
Disinteresting to other activities	4.91	4.70	0.71	0.39	-0.91	277.39	0.36
Reducing interpersonal interactions	15.54	14.99	1.85	0.17	-0.91	289.33	0.36
Occupational effects	4.66	4.60	2.43	0.12	-0.28	289.55	0.77
Sexual effects	4.95	5.53	21.02	0.00	2.48	230.16	0.01

According to Table 4 and comparison of averages, the mean scores of women in the dimensions of psychological dependence and emotional dependence (17.59 and 16.92) were significantly higher than the mean of male scores (15.98 and 15.45) and in gender effects

of the mean of male scores (5.53) were higher than women's mean scores (4.95). Thus, the gender difference is significant in psychological and emotional dependency dimensions and the gender effects of dependence on virtual social networks.

Table 4. Independent T-test results between gender and marital burnout

Variable	Mean		Levin test		Independent T test		
	Women	Men	F	P	t	df	P
Marital burnout	2.80	2.36	0.006	0.937	-3.909	283.57	0.001

According to Table 5 and a comparison of averages, the mean scores of women in marital burnout (2.80) were significantly higher than scores in men (2.36).

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate predictors of marital burnout based on the rate of dependence on virtual social networks and differences between married women and men in Isfahan. The results showed that marital burnout has a significant positive correlation with the variables of dependence on virtual social networks and their dimensions. The variables of emotional dependency and reducing interpersonal interactions are the best predictor of marital burnout and explain 32% of changes in marital burnout. Similar researches that have exactly measured the relationship between marital burnout and dependence on virtual social networks have not been obtained. This result can be compared with the results in similar fields. Consistent with the findings of the study, a study by Hand on using online social networks, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction, showed that people who use social networks take less time with their partner, and

this can lead to a decreased intimacy in marital relationships (24). The emotional intimacy that can be realized through self-discovery and dialogue can be considered a manifestation of emotional intimacy, which is more prevalent for women than men (25).

Also, Fox, Osborn and Warber also agree with this finding by studying dialectical relationships and social networking sites (the role of Facebook in romantic relationships) and argued social networks have become a tool for monitoring and controlling partners. The ability to monitor interactions, such as the list of friends, comments, or endorsements by anonymous individuals, can threaten each partner and ultimately lead to a sense of jealousy between them. Moreover, social networks can generally be a place for conflict in romantic relationships (26). Consistent with this finding, McDaniel, Drouin, and Cravens concluded that infidelity-related behaviors in social networks were significantly associated with low satisfaction, doubt, and high ambivalence in the relationship between men and women (27). Given the positive relationship between the sexual effects of virtual social networks and marital burnout,

sexual content in virtual social networks seems to change the expectations of spouses, especially men, in the unrealistic form of sexual relations with their spouses. On the other hand, given social networking characteristics, it is easy to find individuals for interactions and sexual relationships. This feature is facilitated by setting up a field for extramarital relationships in couples who have marital burnout and sexual dissatisfaction and increase their problems. Kuss and Griffiths believed that psychological dependence on virtual social networks is also accompanied by the results such as neglecting personal life, mental concern, escaping reality, changing mood experience, tolerance, and hiding addictive behavior (8). These factors can lead to conflicts and dissatisfaction with the marital relationship and lead to marital burnout.

According to these results, the level of emotional dependence on virtual social networks also has a significant positive correlation with marital disturbances. These results are consistent with a similar studies (3-5,10,11). Social media provides these people with continuous rewards such as self-efficacy and satisfaction, and more involved in this activity, which ultimately leads to many problems, such as ignoring real life and relationships with partners and job-educational involvement. The unpleasant mood of the people makes them more entertained by social networks to get rid of their bad mood. As a result, when social network users repeat this cycle pattern to eliminate their unpleasant mood by using social media, the level of emotional dependence on social networks increases, and marital burnout also intensifies. According to the results, the gender difference is significant in psychological and emotional dependency and the sexual effects of the dependence on virtual social networks. Together with these results, the researchers argued women are more likely to be dependent on virtual media than men, and there are gender differences in the use of cell phone and social networks (8,13-16,28).

On the other hand, although the tendency to use social networks in women is higher, the likelihood of more addictive use in men is greater (29). In clarifying the gender difference in engaging and social networking, Jiang and Zhao concluded that the role of excitement and motivation could be partly related to the gender difference in the dependence on social media.

The reason for women's potential dependence on the cell phone and social media dependence can be because they are more concerned with emotional issues with their cell phones and engaging in them, and they tend to involve in reminding and obsessive ruminations of emotional issues (15). Consistent with the results obtained in the researches by Pines (30), Safiporian et al. (31), and Naderi and Azadmanesh (32), women reported marital burnout more than men. Nazari, Fallahzadeh, and Nazarboland argued women, in general, were more vulnerable to marital problems than men (33). Nikobakht, Karimi, and Bahrami found that the quality of marital relationships is important both for men and women. However, women seem to be more affected by destructive relationships such as marital dissatisfaction and marital conflicts, which provides the basis for marital burnout, emotional and real divorces (34). One of the limitations of this research is the use of a questionnaire. Concerning the sexual effects of dependence on virtual social networks, some people may refuse to provide accurate responses and give unrealistic ones. In addition, due to cross-sectional design of the present study, conclude on causation over time is difficult. Also, according to the sampling method, the generalization of the results should be made with caution. It suggested that the current study will be done in other provinces with lower diffusion coefficients of Internet penetration, such as Sistan Baluchistan and West-Azarbaijan too. Also, holding conferences in the field of impacts and boundaries of personal privacy in social networks in marital relations can be helpful likewise, with these elements and the role in the emergence of conflicts, jealousy, and suspicion between partners.

Conclusion

The findings indicate the importance of the effects of virtual social networks on communication between couples, and marital burnout. It is recommended to consider it in premarital counseling and education.

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