



# Marriage Burnout: When the Emotions Exhausted Quietly Quantitative Research

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## Abstract

**Background:** When the spouses are aware of the fact that each one has emotional needs that must be fulfilled, it will lead to decrease the marital satisfaction, such as the lack of awareness which will lead to marriage burnout in a long-term period.

**Objectives:** The aim of this study was to examine the impacts of the spouses' age, years of marriage, and the nature of marriage burnout dimensions, especially the emotional exhaustion.

**Methods:** The researcher of the present study applied a Maslach burnout inventory (MBI) scale to 392 families whose ages were within the range of (23 - 67) years. Those spouses were married for (1 - 35) years and had children.

**Results:** Descriptive statistics showed a higher marriage burnout level among the spouses who work in a full-time job and the ones who do not work in comparison to the ones who work in a part-time job. Emotional exhaustion is mostly influenced by the increase in the spouses' ages and years of marriage. Although there was no impact for the years of marriage on depersonalization, personal accomplishment and depersonalization were mostly influenced by the spouses' nature of work.

**Conclusions:** Marriage burnout is a painful state of emotional exhaustion and physical and emotional depletion experienced by spouses. This state results from emotional exhaustion, work exhaustion, and failure to fulfill the requirements of their marital relationships, especially the emotional requirements. Spouses having children are more exposed to experience marriage burnout.

**Keywords:** Marriage Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Maslach Burnout Inventory, Years of Marriage

## 1. Background

Marriage is a need that most people seek and desire. It can achieve several benefits for husbands and wives. Such benefits include social, psychological, physical, and intellectual benefits. Can we consider marriage as a complex phenomenon in our changing society today? People get married for various reasons, including falling in love, fulfilling sexual needs, feeling a sexual attraction, ensuring economic security, receiving protection, having a companion, and feeling emotional security. Such reasons also include avoiding the feelings of loneliness, a sad home situation, and achieving common interests.

When married, it is likely to experience some hardships and external pressures on the spouses. In addition, spouses may face many obstacles that may prevent them from fulfilling their needs. This will make marital agreement difficult and exhausting because achieving it would require exerting a lot of efforts by spouses. When their efforts are useless, this may lead to "marriage burnout", which may lead to divorce.

Burnout is a chronic state that results from emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion and depletion. Such exhaustion and depletion result from experiencing -for a long-term period- stress and emotionally charged of social situations that are accompanied by predetermined personal expectations and assumptions of perfection about the social and professional performance of the other spouse (1-3).

Most researchers who have conducted studies tackling Burnout were guided by the vision of Maslach and Jackson period (4). Their study indicates that burnout has three dimensions, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is characterized by loss of energy and depletion of emotional and physical resources. It results from work pressure, bad social relations, and lack of motivation. Depersonalization refers to the development of impersonal behaviors such as mistreatment of others and apathy. Finally, low personal accomplishment relates to the individual's sense of worthlessness and competence, whereby the individual feels dissatisfaction with his performance and

the conviction to reach goals, and with the continuation of this feeling in the long-term, frustration, depression, low self-esteem, and low satisfaction become more acute because it is not within the expectations and ideals set for himself.

Maslach and Jackson (5) believe that emotional exhaustion is considered a key stage in the burnout phenomenon. Maslach (6) states that burnout is a symptom of emotional exhaustion, and an indicator of experiencing chilliness of feelings, and a decline in personal achievement usually experienced by dedicated individuals who provide services to others. All of the aforementioned issues will make one suffer from emotional exhaustion. These factors, in addition to predetermined personal expectations and emotional demands, as well as suffering from the failure of meeting those expectations and demands, contribute to marriage burnout (7, 8). Bakker et al. (9) suggest that marriage burnout is represented in experiencing emotional exhaustion and dullness in personal feelings that shift from wife to husband and vice versa till both spouses feel a similar degree of the chilliness in feelings.

There are several factors that lead to experiencing emotional exhaustion. Such factors may turn emotional exhaustion into emotional burnout. Emotional burnout is a dynamic state that one goes through. It is considered an indicator of the existence of psychological and emotional exhaustion and experiencing problems related to social and professional conduct (10-12). The marriage burnout is a gradual process that goes through several developmental stages. It can end the marital relationship. This occurs when the couples realize that their relationship is no longer meaningful to them, despite the efforts they are exerting (13, 14).

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The sample population of the study was determined by the department of statistics. A systematic random sampling was conducted in three stages from Amman. In the first stage, a residential block sample was conducted at a ratio of 3%. While in the second stage, a buildings sample was conducted at a ratio of 5%, and eventually, a family study was conducted at 5%. The family sample was comprised of 400 middle-class families with educated parents (BA, diploma degree) who had children. The ages of the sampled husbands and wives were within the range of (23 - 67) years. Some of the sampled spouses did not work; others worked in a part-time job, while other spouses worked in a full-time job.

### 2.2. Measure

The researcher of the present study implemented the Maslach burnout inventory (MBI) scale (original form); The MBI is designed to assess the three components of the burnout syndrome; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment. There are 22 items, which are divided into three subscales. The nine items in the Emotional exhaustion subscale assess the feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's marital relationship. The five items in the depersonalization subscale measure an unfeeling and impersonal response to couples of one's service, care treatment, or instruction. The eight items in the Personal accomplishment subscale assess feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's marital relationship. The items were answered in terms of the frequency in which the respondent experiences these feelings, on a 7-point fully anchored scale (ranging from 0, "never" to 6, "every day").

### 2.3. Reliability

The reliability of the study's instrument was checked by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The scale will be considered reliable if the value of the coefficient is greater than (0.60) (15). The closer the latter value to 100%, the higher the instrument's reliability is. The values of the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the marriage burnout dimensions (0.86) are the following: emotional exhaustion (0.89), depersonalization (0.88), and personal accomplishment (0.83). Thus it can be concluded that the study's instrument is reliable and the data obtained are suitable for measuring the study's variables.

### 2.4. The Accuracy of the Study's Model

Before analyzing the collected data quantitatively and statistically, skewness coefficient values of all the study's variables were calculated. These values are less than 1. They were calculated to check the normal distribution of the study's data. Thus it can be concluded that there is no problem in relation to the normal distribution of the study's data.

### 2.5. The Statistical Description of the Items of the Study's Scale (i.e. the Items of the MBI Scale)

The present part deals with the statistical description of each statement of the questionnaire's statements. Such description is provided using arithmetic means, standard deviations and the overall mean. The overall mean reflects the attitudes of the study's sample. The researcher has adopted specific criteria for classifying the overall mean of the respondents' attitude. The criteria adopted by the

researcher for classifying the overall mean of the respondents' attitude consist of  $6 = 7.0 - 6.3$ ,  $5 = 6.2 - 5.4$ ,  $4 = 5.3 - 4.5$ ,  $3 = 4.4 - 3.7$ ,  $2 = 3.6 - 2.8$ ,  $1 = 2.7 - 2.0$ ,  $0 = 0 - 1.9$ . Interval class = (0.86); ( $m = 6/7 = 0.86$ ), there is no bias in any of the previous estimates, describing equity in estimating trends.

The 7-level frequency scale for all MBI scales is as follows: never (0); a few times a year or less (1); once a month or less (2); a few times in a month (3); once a week (4); a few times a week (5); every day (6).

All MBI items are scored using a 7-level frequency scale from "never" to "daily". Initial development had 3 components: emotional exhaustion (9 items), depersonalization (5 items), and personal accomplishment (8 items). Each scale measures its own unique dimension of burnout. Scales should not be combined to form a single burnout scale. Scales include reverse-scored items. Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter describe an item scoring from 0 to 6. While a common convention is to avoid zeros for scales, one should be aware that altering the original 0 - 6 scores will not align with the categories of each scale. The scores are defined as low, moderate, and high levels for each component/scale based on the 0 - 6 scoring. Using a 1 - 7 scale with the original category ranges will inflate the number of people in the upper 2 categories. Furthermore, comparisons in existing literature may be misleading.

### 2.6. Test of Normality

The researcher of the present study calculated the values of Kurtosis and Skewness coefficients. They were calculated to make sure that the study's data are distributed normally. The results showed that all the values of the Kurtosis and Skewness coefficients were within the range of ( $\pm 2$ ). This means that all the data concerning the study's variables were distributed normally (16). The value of skewness for emotional exhaustion = -1.688- and kurtosis = 2.139, while the value of skewness for depersonalization = 0.122 and kurtosis = -1.323, finally, the value of skewness for personal accomplishment = -0.209- and kurtosis = 0.240.

The researcher of the present study concluded that there is no statistically significant difference -at the statistical significance level of ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )- between customers' attitudes towards the study's dependent and independent variables. That was concluded based on the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In light of that, the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. The null hypothesis claims that all the arithmetic means are distributed normally. The alternative hypothesis claims that the arithmetic means are not distributed normally. Based on the aforementioned issues, the means of all the examined dimensions were distributed normally.

## 3. Results

In the beginning, the researcher of the present study selected 400 families and distributed questionnaire forms among them. However, (8) some families were excluded because their questionnaire forms were not valid for statistical analysis. Table 1 shows that after conducting the statistical analysis, the overall marriage burnout level was moderate among the sampled married couples. Table 2 indicates that the overall mean of the sample's attitudes towards all the examined dimensions is moderate (3.97). However, the overall mean of the sample's attitudes towards emotional exhaustion is high (4.66) followed by the mean of personal accomplishment (3.81). In contrast, the overall mean of the sample's attitudes towards depersonalization is low (3.44) in comparison to the means of the other dimensions.

In order to examine the statistical significance of the differences between the means of wives and husbands' attitudes toward marriage burnout, the independent two-sample *t*-test was conducted. The results of this test are presented in Table 3. These results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between wife and husband's attitudes. In other words, the overall attitudes of the wife and husband were moderate.

The study also calculated the Kendall rank correlation coefficient. It was calculated to identify the relationship between marriage burnout on the one hand and spouses' ages and years of marriage on the other hand. Based on the results presented in Table 4, there was a statistically significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.084^*$ ,  $P \text{ value} \leq 0.05$ ) between marriage burnout level and spouses' ages. In addition, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.079^*$ ,  $P \text{ value} \leq 0.05$ ) and personal accomplishment ( $r = 0.113^{**}$ ,  $P \text{ value} \leq 0.01$ ) on the one hand and spouses' ages on the other hand. This result indicated that marriage burnout levels, especially emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment levels, increased with the increment of the respondent's age. Moreover, there was a statistically significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.079^*$ ,  $P \text{ value} \leq 0.05$ ) between emotional exhaustion and years of marriage. In other words, the emotional exhaustion level increased with the increment of years of marriage. However, there was no statically significant impact for the years of marriage or spouses' ages on depersonalization.

In order to examine the statistical significance of the differences between the respondents' marriage burnout levels, which could be attributed to their work nature, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Based on the results presented in Table 5, there were statistically significant differences -at the statistical significance level of ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )- between the respondents' marriage burnout levels.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the 392 Study Participants with Marriage Burnout

Variables	Gender				Total	
	Husband		Wife		Count	Within Sex, %
	Count	Within Sex, %	Count	Within Sex, %		
<b>Work</b>						
Part-time	45	11.5	77	19.6	122	15.6
Full-time	329	83.9	173	44.1	502	64.0
Do not work	18	4.6	142	36.2	160	20.4
Total	392	100.0	392	100.0	784	100.0
<b>Spouses' age</b>						
23 - 30	22	5.6	121	30.9	143	18.2
31 - 45	242	61.7	210	53.6	452	57.7
46 - 67	128	32.7	61	15.6	189	24.1
Total	392	100.0	392	100.0	784	100.0
<b>Age of marriage</b>						
1 - 10	175	44.6	175	44.6	352	44.9
11 - 20	186	47.4	186	47.4	372	47.2
21 - 35	31	7.9	31	7.9	62	7.9
Total	392	100.0	392	100.0	784	100.0

**Table 2.** The Arithmetic Means  $\pm$  Standard Deviations (SD) of the Participants' Attitudes Toward Marriage Burnout<sup>a</sup>

Dimensions of Marriage Burnout	Gender		Total
	Husband	Wife	
Emotional exhaustion	4.6978 $\pm$ 0.65238	4.6315 $\pm$ 0.73214	4.6647 $\pm$ 0.69376
Depersonalization	3.4526 $\pm$ 1.04575	3.4332 $\pm$ 1.07576	3.4429 $\pm$ 1.06023
Personal accomplishment	3.8622 $\pm$ 0.84543	3.7675 $\pm$ 0.76030	3.8149 $\pm$ 0.80487
Burnout total score	4.0042 $\pm$ 0.63005	3.9441 $\pm$ 0.62025	3.9741 $\pm$ 0.62549

<sup>a</sup>Values are expressed as mean  $\pm$  SD.

**Table 3.** Means of Wives and Husbands' Attitudes Toward Marriage Burnout

Dimensions of Marriage Burnout	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-Test for Equality of Means						
	F	P Value	T	Df	P Value (2-Tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
<b>Emotional exhaustion</b>									
E. v. assumed	3.456	0.063	1.339	782	0.181	0.06633	0.04953	-0.03090-	0.16355
E. v. not assumed			1.339	771.821	0.181	0.06633	0.04953	-0.03090-	0.16355
<b>Depersonalization</b>									
E. v. assumed	1.547	0.214	0.256	782	0.798	0.01939	0.07578	-0.12936-	0.16814
E. v. not assumed			0.256	781.375	0.798	0.01939	0.07578	-0.12936-	0.16814
<b>Personal accomplishment</b>									
E. v. assumed	6.116	0.014	1.649	782	0.100	0.09471	0.05743	-0.01802-	0.20744
E. v. not assumed			1.649	773.354	0.100	0.09471	0.05743	-0.01803-	0.20744
<b>Burnout total score</b>									
E. v. assumed	0.230	0.632	1.347	782	0.178	0.06014	0.04465	-0.02752-	0.14780
E. v. not assumed			1.347	781.808	0.178	0.06014	0.04465	-0.02752-	0.14780

$\leq 0.01$ ) between the respondents' marriage burnout levels, especially the depersonalization and personal accomplishment levels, which can be attributed to their work nature. Table 5 represents the means of respondents' attitudes in accordance with their work.

Table 6 indicates that marriage burnout levels- especially the depersonalization and personal accomplishment levels- are significantly lower among the couples who work in a part-time job in comparison to the ones who work in a full-time job or do not work.

**Table 4.** Correlations Between Dimensions of Marriage burnout and Spouses' Age, as Well as the Age of Marriage

Variables	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Accomplishment	Marriage Burnout
<b>Spouses' age</b>				
Correlation coefficient	0.113 <sup>a</sup>	0.020	0.079 <sup>b</sup>	0.084 <sup>b</sup>
P value (2-tailed)	0.002	0.571	0.027	0.019
No.	784	784	784	784
<b>Age of marriage</b>				
Correlation coefficient	0.079 <sup>b</sup>	-0.003	0.053	0.046
P value (2-tailed)	0.027	0.937	0.140	0.199
No.	784	784	784	784

<sup>a</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

<sup>b</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 5.** The Differences Between the Respondents' Marriage Burnout Levels in Accordance with Their Work

Dimensions of Marriage Burnout	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P Value
<b>Emotional exhaustion</b>				1.746	0.175
Between groups	1.678	2	0.839		
Within groups	375.183	781	0.480		
Total	376.861	783			
<b>Depersonalization</b>				13.625	0.000
Between groups	29.674	2	14.837		
Within groups	850.486	781	1.089		
Total	880.160	783			
<b>Personal accomplishment</b>				9.653	0.000
Between groups	12.236	2	6.118		
Within groups	495.009	781	0.634		
Total	507.246	783			
<b>Burnout total</b>				8.689	0.000
Between groups	6.668	2	3.334		
Within groups	299.674	781	0.384		
Total	306.342	783			

#### 4. Discussion

The sample population consists of 392 families. These families consist of a husband and wife who live with each other and have children. The ages of the sampled husbands and wives are within the range of (23 - 67) years, and they have been married for (1 - 35) years. Some of the sampled spouses do not work; others work in a part-time job, while other spouses work in a full-time job. After applying the Maslach burnout inventory scale, it was concluded that the marriage burnout levels of the sampled husbands and wives are moderate. To further illustrate, the overall marriage burnout level of all the sampled spouses is 3.97. While it is 4.00 for the overall marriage burnout level of the sampled husbands. Moreover, it is 3.94 for the overall marriage burnout level of the sampled wives. The emotional exhaustion level among the sampled spouses is high, having a mean of 4.66. The personal accomplishment level among the sampled spouses is moderate, having a mean of 3.81. These values indicate that emotional exhaustion and

personal accomplishment are transferred from husband to wife, and vice versa (9).

It was concluded that the marriage burnout level - particularly the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment- would increase with the increment of spouses' ages. In addition, the marriage burnout level-particularly the emotional exhaustion level- would increase with the increment of the years of marriage. Having a high emotional exhaustion level indicates that such exhaustion is considered the main characteristic of marriage burnout and a basis for its occurrence. It should be noted that emotional exhaustion is considered a reason for marital dissatisfaction and the eventual collapse of the marital relationship. Emotional exhaustion may be attributed to experiencing sexual dissatisfaction or inability to interact intimately and constantly in a way that satisfies both spouses (3, 4, 17, 18). It was concluded that there was no statistically significant impact for the years of neither marriage nor spouses' ages on depersonalization.

It was also concluded that the spouses who are exces-

**Table 6.** The Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Respondents' Attitudes Towards Marriage Burnout in Accordance with Their Work

Dimensions of Marriage Burnout	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Emotional exhaustion</b>				
Part-time	4.7632	0.03895	4.6861	4.8403
Full-time	4.6350	0.03447	4.5673	4.7027
Do not work	4.6826	0.04607	4.5916	4.7736
Total	4.6647	0.02478	4.6160	4.7133
<b>Depersonalization</b>				
Part-time	2.9902	0.07593	2.8398	3.1405
Full-time	3.5319	0.04844	3.4367	3.6270
Do not work	3.5087	0.08302	3.3448	3.6727
Total	3.4429	0.03787	3.3685	3.5172
<b>Personal accomplishment</b>				
Part-time	3.5246	0.05077	3.4241	3.6251
Full-time	3.8738	0.03776	3.7996	3.9479
Do not work	3.8516	0.06217	3.7288	3.9743
Total	3.8149	0.02875	3.7585	3.8713
<b>Burnout total score</b>				
Part-time	3.7593	0.03732	3.6854	3.8332
Full-time	4.0135	0.03079	3.9531	4.0740
Do not work	4.0143	0.03998	3.9354	4.0933
Total	3.9741	0.02234	3.9303	4.0180

sively committed to their jobs showed more signs of marriage burnout. Those spouses work in an idealized manner and expect that working will give meaning to their lives. Thus they work harder for long hours in order to achieve self-realization (2, 19). That is why the personal accomplishment and depersonalization levels are higher among the spouses who work in a full-time job in comparison to the ones who work in a part-time job (10).

In addition, marriage burnout involves experiencing emotional depletion by the spouses. The depletion is experienced due to work exhaustion (12). The spouses will feel exhausted and fatigue due to working excessively and facing social pressures that they are not able to keep up or cope with. Exhaustion will turn into burnout due to facing such pressures constantly and failing to fulfill the emotional requirements associated with them. When the spouses experience burnout, they will experience difficulty in dealing with others at work and home. In such a case, they will exaggerate their responses, experience emotional outburst, or they may show hostility and difficulty in communicating with work colleagues, friends, relative, and family members at homes (7, 20, 21).

On the other hand, the spouses who do not work show higher marriage burnout levels than the ones who work in a part-time job. These results are attributed to holding on to idealized expectations that the spouse has about his/her own personality. These expectations are connected to self-realization, work, roles, and the outcomes of his/her professional activities. Furthermore, these expectations are

also connected to the assessment that the spouse has for his own personality based on the values acquired from the surrounding social environment. When a spouse is unemployed, he/she may experience a feeling of inferiority and low self-esteem. He/she may also experience feelings of helplessness and depression due to the urgent need of having a source of income for fulfilling his/her needs is unable to fulfill. That may lead him/her to eventually marriage burnout (10).

It should be noted that the researcher of the present study chose spouses who have children. Thus it can be concluded that having children may increase the possibilities of marital burnout. This may be attributed to the fact that children add an additional distraction that prevents spouses from focusing on each other. Furthermore, spouses may have disagreements on matters relating to how they raise their children, which may further aggravate the marital relationship (22).

4.1. Conclusions

The marriage burnout refers to the state of emotional exhaustion and physical and emotional depletion experienced by spouses because of failure in dealing with their collective and individual problems such as emotional fatigue, work exhaustion, and a failure to fulfill the requirements of their marital relationship, especially the emotional requirements. The level of marital burnout in the marital relationship is positively correlated with the increments in spousal age and years of marriage when the

spouses work in a full-time job. Finally, having children may increase the burden on a relationship, which can contribute to marriage burnout.

### Footnotes

**Clinical Trial Registration Code:** It is not to be declared by the authors.

**Declaration of Interest:** The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

**Ethical Approval:** The manuscript does not need ethical approval code because it consists of the collection or analysis of data and the information is freely available in the public domain.

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