

The Mediating Role of Burnout in the Relationship between Communication Skills and Emotional Divorce among Married Employees in Ahvaz Oil Company (2014-2015)

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Abstract

This paper aimed to study the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between communication skills with emotional divorce among married staff in Ahvaz Oil Company. Participants in this study were 300 (263 males and 37 females) who were selected randomly. These participants filled in Maslach Burnout Inventory, Queendom Communication Inventory, and Emotional Divorce Scale. To test the hypothesis of the study, path analysis was used with AMOS software. Results approved above-average fitting to the model with data and the research hypothesis was conformed. Findings also showed that there was a significant negative relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce, and communication skills and burnout. There was a significant positive relationship between burnout and emotional divorce. It was concluded that burnout could be placed as a mediator variable in the relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce accelerating the process of emotional divorce

Keywords: Emotional divorce, Burnout, Communication skills

1. Introduction

Family, as the first socializing institution, plays an important role in society so that social problems are in close contact with the influence of the family. Divorce is one of the social problems which has turned from a private involvement into a public issue (Safa-ee Rad & Varasteh Far, 2013). Iran is currently experiencing an unexpected increase of divorce (Foorootan & Jadid Milani, 2008, quoted by Shakerian, 2014); in addition to increasing legal divorce in the country, a new phenomenon called emotional divorce has also widely spread (Yavari, 2004, quoting by Doorford, 2012). According to the official statistics presented, the number of emotional divorces exceeds legal ones and it can be said that emotional divorce is one of the important factors in the failure of the most basic structure of society, i.e. family (Gharacheh, Azadi, & Afrasiyabi, 2011). Although the couple (in emotional divorce) continue to live together as a social group, they do not feel attracted towards each other anymore, their relationships are broken, or there are no desires and satisfactions between them (Bokhara-ee, 2005, quoted by Zeinali Pour & Abdi, 2014). This issue represents a problem in the correct relationship between the couple and it can be spread to the family and across the society distorting human relations (Bastani, Golzari, & Roshani, 2010), whereas to interact and communicate with others is a basic human psychological need (Tagay, Baydan & Voltan, 2010, quoted by Yildaz & Duy 2013). This issue is so important that a significant portion

of job satisfaction and satisfaction with the family life depends on the quality of relationships with others (Fat'hi, 2005, quoted by Azizi, 2011) and complex life problems have doubled the importance of communication (Farber, 2000, quoted by Ahmadi, 2013). Effective interpersonal communication requires interpersonal communication skills (Gardner, 1983, quoted by Suhaimi, Marzugki & Mustaffa, 2014) which, as the basis of other skills (Korkut, 2004, quoted by Ozkan et al., 2014), are referred to behaviors that help individuals properly express their emotions and needs and achieve personal goals.

These skills are so important that lacking them can lead to loneliness, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and a failure in career success (Farber, 2000, quoted by Ahmadi, 2013).

In this respect (the relationship between communication skills with emotional divorce) some basic and review research has been conducted. For example, the study carried out by Bastani, Golzari, and Roshani (2010) showed that emotional divorce is not a single-factor phenomenon and different factors affect it; one of these factors is deficiency in communication skills. Imani (2012) also studied the most common causes of emotional divorce and noted that failure in life skills and deficiencies in communication skills are among reasons which led to emotional divorce. There are, of course, studies which suggest that there is a relationship between communication skills and concepts such as conjugal satisfaction and marital happiness and concord which overlap with the concept of emotional divorce, or at least are among the most important factors affecting it (Ala-ee, Ahmadi, & Baba-ee, 2011; Nasseri & Baba-ee, 2014; Kazemi & Nik Manesh, 2011; Askari, 2012). On the other hand, the stressful world today has tied life's work and family together. Kinnunen (1996) believes that the quality of family life can be transferred to other areas of life such as occupation and can positively or negatively influence it or be influenced by it (Rahpeima, Kazemi, & Sohrabi, 2012). One of the factors that affect the functions of the family and can reduce couple's quality of life is burnout (Maghsoodi & Mohammadi, 2010). In this regard, Yizhong and Chuikui (2007) in their research on the impacts of work and family conflicts concluded that conflict occurs in both structures and the impact is bilateral. Moreover, Agnostopoulos and Niakas (2010) in their study on the relationship between burnout and quality of life and sickness absence among nurses concluded that burnout has a negative impact on family life. Generally, burnout dramatically affects the personal and organizational life (Khaza-ee, 2004, quoted by Zeinali Pour & Abdi, 2014), and according to research carried out in this area it can affect marital or familial relationships (Rahpeima, Kazemi, & Sohrabi, 2012). Research has shown that burnout is not related to a specific profession and all employees are at risk (Schoufeli, 2008, quoted by Reis, Xanthaopoulou, & Tsaousis, 2015). This syndrome can remain stable in a period of five, ten, or even fifteen years (Hakanen, Bakker & Jokisaari, 2011). It is contagious and is defined as long-term continuous stress that people experience in their professional and social lives (Gold & Bachlon, 2001; quoted by Koruklu et al., 2012). Burnout (as a syndrome) includes three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Magalhaes et al., 2014). The key symptom of this syndrome is emotional exhaustion which is a common reaction to stress (Sonnetage, 2010; Kiekkas, 2010, quoted by Zeinali Pour, 2014; Adriaenssens, Degucht, & Meas, 2015). People who suffer from this syndrome cannot function properly in their work environment, and their physical health and mental performance are ruined (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanzvergel, 2014). Many factors can cause burnout including 'ineffective communication skills' (Bragard et al., 2006). Many researchers have regarded communication skills as a comparative factor which can moderate job stress (Ahmadi et al., 2013). Results of many studies (Akif Afyon & Isikdemir, 2013; Ahmadi et al., 2013; Emlod et al., 2011; Reza-ee, Hosseini, & Khoshknab, 2006), on the relationship between job stress, burnout, and communication skills all corroborated this idea. Therefore, considering the importance of the above (communication skills, emotional divorce, and burnout) vis-à-vis individual and social health and wellbeing, and accepting the fact that emotional divorce fills the home environment with stress (Akbari et al., 2012), this paper sought to study the mediating effect of job burnout in the relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce.

2. Method

This study is a correlation research which aims to determine the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce among married employees of Ahvaz Oil Company.

2.1 Participants

Based on Morgan table, 300 participants (263 males and 37 females) were selected through systematic random sampling from among the study population (2500 married employees in Ahvaz Oil Company). Questionnaires were distributed among participants and were collected after completion.

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Queendom Communication Inventory:

This questionnaire was developed by Queendom (2004) to assess communication skills in adults. It has 34 items and measures five secondary skills including listening skills, understanding verbal and nonverbal message, insight to communication, assertiveness, and emotional regulation. Participants responded to each item based on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Forever). Therefore, the possible score for each participant ranged between 34 to 170. Items 2, 4, and 6 were scored in reverse. Hosseinchari and Fadakar (2005) reported the reliability and validity of this questionnaire 0.69 and 0.71 respectively using Cronbach's alpha.

2.2.2 Maslach Burnout Inventory:

This questionnaire has been made by Maslach (1981). The questionnaire includes 22 items and measures three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Respondents answered each item based on a seven-point Likert scale from 0 (Never) to 7 (Very much). Abedi (2004) reported a reliability of 0.80 for emotional exhaustion, 0.69 for depersonalization, and 0.79 for personal performance (Abedi, 2004, quoted by, Hoshyar, Bardideh, & Mir Jafari, 2013).

2.2.3 Emotional Divorce Scale (EDS):

This questionnaire was designed by Gottman (1995) and has 24 items. Respondents choose between 'Yes' and 'No' (which are scored 1 and 0 respectively) to specify their answers on emotional divorce. Using Cronbach's alpha, Bayat Mokhtari (2013) reported a reliability of 0.91 for this questionnaire.

3. Findings

Table 1 below represents the mean and standard deviation values of communication skills, burnout, and emotional divorce according to participants' gender.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Communication Skills, Burnout, and Emotional Divorce According to Participants' Gender

Variable	Gender	No.	Mean	SD
Communication Skills	Female	37	101.67	7.67
	Male	263	99.11	10.37
	Total	300	99.40	10.10
Burnout	Female	37	98.40	16.70
	Male	263	99.22	17.81
	Total	300	92.12	17.66
Emotional divorce	Female	37	3.67	3.67
	Male	263	4.60	4.60
	Total	300	4.49	5.16

Results showed that women had a higher mean in communication skills and a lower one in burnout and emotional divorce in comparison with men.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficient Matrix between the Variables (Communication Skills, Burnout, Emotional Divorce)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Communication Skills	1		
2. Burnout	-0.14*	1	
3. Emotional Divorce	-0.12*	0.14**	1

*P≤0/0 5 **P≤0/01

As Table 2 shows, there is a significant negative correlation between communication skills and emotional divorce ($P < 0.05$, $r = -0.12$), there is a significant positive correlation between burnout and emotional divorce ($P < 0.01$, $r = 0.14$), and there is a significant negative correlation between communication skills and burnout ($P < 0.05$, $r = -0.14$). In other words, by increasing the communication skills, burnout and emotional divorce decrease and with an increase in burnout, emotional divorce increases too. To test the research hypothesis about the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between communication skills with emotional divorce, path analysis using AMOS software was used.

The direct impact of communication skills on emotional divorce was significant ($\beta = -0.127$, $P = 0.025$). But the question was if the indirect effect was significant too? To answer this question, the conceptual model of the research was developed which is presented in Figure 1.

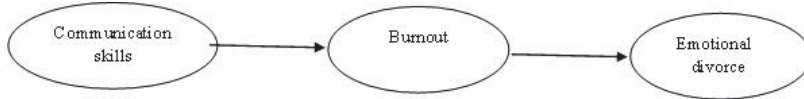


Figure 1. The conceptual model of the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between communication skills with emotional divorce.

Table 3. Direct and Indirect Impacts of Variables on the Criterion Variable

Impact	Non-standardized coefficient (B)	Standardized coefficient (β)	Sig. level
Direct impact of communication skills on burnout	0.0254	-0.145	0.037
Direct impact of burnout on emotional divorce	0.044	0.149	0.002
Indirect impact of communication skills on emotional divorce through burnout	-0.011	-0.022	0.016

As it can be seen in Table 3, the indirect impact of communication skills on emotional divorce through burnout is significant and inverse ($\beta = -0.022$, $P = 0.016$). Model direct coefficients are also significant.

Generally, the coefficients for each of the two endogenous (criterion) variables (burnout, emotional divorce) for the research model totaled 2 percent ($R^2 = 0.02$). It should be noted that in the presence of burnout variable in the model, if the direct path was outlined for communication skills towards emotional divorce, the direct impact of burnout on emotional divorce would be insignificant ($\beta = -0.108$, $P = 0.098$).

Table 4. Path Model Fitting Indices

RMSEA	AGFI	GFI	CFI	X ² /df	df	P-value	X ²
0.091	0.954	0.992	0.817	1.49	1	0.062	3.49

There is no common consensus among experts on fitting indices (Weston & Gore, 2006). But, generally, CFI, GFI, and AGFI indices and those more than 0.90 represent perfect fitting of the model and those above 0.80 represent a relatively good or an average fitting of the model (Kline, 2005). Similarly, if X^2/df is less than 3 (Weston & Gore, 2006), and RMSEA is less than 0.10 (Brown & Cudeck, 1992, quoted by Gera-ee, Piroozmand, & Siyamaki, 2014), or less than 0.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), the model has a good fitting.

Based on Table 4 and according to the above discussion, the path model fitting indices confirm an above-average fitting of the model to the data. Based on these findings, the research hypothesis (proposing the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce) is confirmed.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aimed to study the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce among married employees in Ahvaz Oil Company. The findings of the study confirmed the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce. The results showed that there was a significant negative relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce. This is consistent with research

conducted by Bastani, Golzari, and Roshan (2010), Imani (2012), Ala-ee et al. (2011), Naseri and Baba-ee (2014), Kazemi and Nick Manesh (2011), Askari (2012). To explain this finding regarding research conducted in this area, it can be said that 'communication' is the cornerstone of a healthy and successful family. Personality, learning, confidence, and rational decision making are all affected by communication patterns and can also be one of the main roots of family problems (Olliver and Miller, 1994, quoted by Gholamzadeh, Attari, & Shafiabadi, 2009). Research showed that communication skills could reduce marital discord and conflicts whereas the growth of such conflicts would end in disinterest and disrespect towards a spouse (Tavakkolzadeh, Negatian & Soori 2015; Stanley, 2003; Gottman, 2004; Cohen, 2005; quoted by Hossein Khan Zadeh & Yeganeh, 2013). Reducing such conflicts, on the other hand, would decrease mental health problems (Galinsky & Waite, 2014), depression (Wang, Wang, & Miller, 2014), and impaired sexual function (Metz & Epstein, 2002).

It can increase marital satisfaction and marital adjustment through provoking cognitive responses and impact on behavior (Oprisan & Cristae 2012; Pourheydari et al., 2013; Ala-ee, Ahmadigatab, & Babaee, 2011, Naseri & Baba-ee, 2014; Kazemi & Nick Manesh, 2011; Askari, 2012). It can also create intimacy in couples and increase emotional and affective involvement (Gholamzadeh, Attari, & Shafiabadi, 2009).

Research also suggests issues as the causes of emotional divorce including: lack of attention to the emotional needs of the spouse, disregard and disrespect towards the spouse, marital conflicts, violent behavior, sexual dissatisfaction, lack of mental balance and having mental health problems, and deficiencies in communication skills (Bastani, Golzar, & Roshan, 2010). Moreover, criteria for emotional divorce included intimacy, sexual satisfaction, couples' positive and negative emotions, marriage stability, clinical symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Akbari et al., 2012). Regarding the above-mentioned impacts of communication skills, it can be concluded that training/teaching communication skills (and influencing these factors) can affect emotional divorce.

The results of this research showed that there is a significant negative relationship between communication skills and burnout. This finding is in line with studies conducted by Akifafyon and Isikdemir (2013), Emlod et al. (2011), Ahmadi et al. (2013), and Reza-ee, Hosseini, and Khoshknab (2006) who all concluded in their studies that communication skills could alleviate job stress and reduce burnout. Communication between colleagues is a source of emotional support and of great importance. The more established the relationship is, the fewer employees are likely to undergo stress. In fact, adequate social support protects the individual like a shield from the negative effects of stress. When the relationship between colleagues is weak, the staff feel agitated and unsupported leading to experiencing job stress (Ras, quoted by Ahmadi et al., 2013). While teaching communication skills to individuals helps them define and clear their expectations of others and adapt their expectations to new situations. An effective and efficient relationship in the workplace and a positive perception of the work environment both hinder emotional exhaustion, increase self-actualization, and reduce burnout (Emlod, 2011) while ineffective interpersonal communication creates stress, and stress ensues consequences such as physical ailments, mental disorders, and exhaustion (King, quoted by Ahmadi, 2013). The results of the current study also showed that there was a significant positive relationship between burnout and emotional divorce. This result is consistent with the research carried out by Zeinalipour and Abdi (2014), Yizhong and Chuikai (2007), and Rahpeima, Kazemi, and Sohrab (2012).

Job stress which is the main factor of burnout (Khalefi, Tangestani, & Osanloo, 2014; Tuna & Baykal, 2014) creates job dissatisfaction (Lin et al., 2009; Ahmadi, Iranian, & Parsanezhad, 2011) and also affects marital satisfaction (Mansouri, Mehrabi Zadeh, & Honarmand, 2009, quoted by Rahpeima, Kazemi, & Sohrabi, 2012; Robert & Levenson, 2001; Maghsoodi & Mohammadi, 2010; Ebrahimi, Nafar, & Keramati, 2013; Osharoff, 2011). Job satisfaction has a significant influence in family life satisfaction so that people having job dissatisfaction suffer from much stress in their marital life. Continuous exposure to job stress makes job a priority to conjugal relationship. Couples will unconsciously expect their spouses to understand their job stress and the repetition of this issue over time will cause loss of love and commitment between the couples (Paniz, 1996, quoted by Maghsoodi & Mohammadi, 2010). Job stress of each of the couples will also create emotional and physiological atmosphere in which both wife and husband exhibit many symptoms associated with distress in marital life and a likely separation in the future. In other words, job stress can affect other areas in life including the quality of relationships and marital satisfaction (Robert & Levenson, 2001). In the same vein, an individual who experiences depression as a result of burnout will also show no interest in allocating time for the family (Raheb et al., 2007).

The research results, on the other hand, showed that there was a negative relationship between job stress, burnout, and mental health (Wang, Kong, & Chaire, 2011; Peiman Pak et al., 2012; Moghimi, Chamanzamin, & Maghsoodi, 2013; Einal, 2014). Mental health increases life satisfaction, hence marital satisfaction. Therefore, enhancing mental health will increase marital satisfaction; this relationship is bilateral (Peiman Pak et al., 2012). The research results also revealed that burnout created marital dissatisfaction (Maghsoodi & Mohammadi, 2010) leading to cold family

relationships and reducing partner's sexual satisfaction (Pines & Nures 2003). Burnout negatively correlated with family functions and reduced emotional interaction and emotional response (Raheb et al., 2007; Mohsenzadeh, Kiamanesh, & Goudarzi, 2008).

Therefore, it can be mentioned that burnout affects the process of initiating and experiencing emotional divorce. In general, according to the findings of this study and based on research which was presented, it can be concluded that burnout can be placed as a mediator variable in the relationship between communication skills and emotional divorce accelerating the process of emotional divorce.

This study had some limitations. The results of this study are not particularly applicable to all organizations with different characteristics so it is necessary to replicate such research in other organizations and different working situations to make sure whether such relationships exist in similar contexts.

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