

Modeling Marital Burnout Based on Love Styles with the Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Strategies among Married Adults in Bushehr

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Ebrahimi, A., Barzegar, M., Sohrabi, N., & Zarnaghash, M. (2027). Modeling Marital Burnout Based on Love Styles with the Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Strategies among Married Adults in Bushehr. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 8(5), 1-14.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.6476>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to develop and test a structural model of marital burnout based on love styles, with emotion regulation strategies as mediating variables among married women and men in Bushehr, Iran.

Methods and Materials: This applied study employed a descriptive-correlational design and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the proposed relationships among the study variables. The statistical population consisted of married women and men attending selected centers in Bushehr, Iran, in 2025. A total of 420 eligible participants were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Pines Marital Burnout Questionnaire (1996), the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003), and Sternberg's Love Scale (1986). Pearson correlation analysis and path analysis within the SEM framework were used to evaluate direct and indirect relationships among love styles, emotion regulation strategies, and marital burnout.

Findings: The inferential analyses indicated that the dimensions of love, including passion, intimacy, and commitment, exerted significant indirect effects on marital burnout through the mediating roles of emotion regulation strategies, namely cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Love styles significantly predicted the use of emotion regulation strategies, which, in turn, were significantly associated with marital burnout. Accordingly, variations in emotion regulation contributed to either decreasing or increasing marital burnout depending on the regulatory strategy employed. The indirect pathways linking love dimensions to marital burnout through emotion regulation were statistically significant. Furthermore, the proposed structural model demonstrated an acceptable overall fit to the observed data, and the model fit indices supported the adequacy of the hypothesized relationships among the constructs ($p < .01$).

Conclusion: The findings support an integrated explanatory model in which love styles are associated with marital burnout partly through emotion regulation processes. These results highlight emotion regulation as an important psychological mechanism connecting the quality of romantic love with marital functioning and suggest that interventions aimed at strengthening adaptive emotion regulation and constructive dimensions of love may contribute to reducing marital burnout and improving marital relationship quality.

Keywords: Marital Burnout; Love Styles; Emotion Regulation Strategies; Cognitive Reappraisal; Expressive Suppression; Married Adults

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most significant interpersonal institutions in adult life and provides a central

context for emotional intimacy, companionship, psychological security, social support, and the fulfillment of relational needs. Despite its potential protective functions, marital life also exposes spouses to persistent emotional

demands, role expectations, interpersonal conflict, financial and occupational pressures, caregiving responsibilities, and repeated negotiation of individual and shared goals. When such demands exceed the psychological and relational resources available to spouses, the marital relationship may gradually lose its emotional vitality and become characterized by exhaustion, detachment, disappointment, and reduced relational engagement. This condition is commonly conceptualized as marital burnout, a multidimensional phenomenon involving emotional, psychological, and physical exhaustion resulting from prolonged relational stress and unmet expectations. Marital burnout is therefore not simply equivalent to temporary dissatisfaction or episodic conflict; rather, it reflects a progressive erosion of emotional energy and relational investment that may ultimately undermine marital stability, intimacy, and well-being. Empirical evidence has linked marital burnout with emotional divorce, maladaptive attachment-related processes, dysfunctional beliefs, and deficits in relational regulation, indicating that it should be understood as a complex outcome emerging from the interaction of cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal factors (Havassi et al., 2017; Jafarimanesh et al., 2021; Sorkhabi Abdolmaleki et al., 2022).

The clinical importance of marital burnout is particularly evident because its consequences extend beyond dissatisfaction within the couple relationship. Spouses experiencing elevated burnout may report diminished affection, emotional withdrawal, irritability, reduced sexual and relational satisfaction, avoidance of communication, and increased hopelessness regarding the future of the marriage. In severe cases, burnout can create conditions in which partners remain formally married while experiencing profound emotional disengagement. This pattern may contribute to the development of emotional divorce and increase vulnerability to marital breakdown. Intervention studies have shown that marital burnout is sufficiently dynamic to respond to therapeutic approaches, including Gottman-based marital therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, schema-focused approaches, and enhanced cognitive-behavioral couple therapy, suggesting that the mechanisms underlying burnout are modifiable rather than fixed (Hassani et al., 2023; Havassi et al., 2017; Jafarimanesh et al., 2021; Vaslehchi et al., 2024). Identifying the psychological mechanisms that explain why some couples remain emotionally resilient despite relational stress, whereas others progressively develop burnout, is

therefore of considerable theoretical and applied significance.

One of the most relevant frameworks for understanding marital functioning concerns the nature and organization of love within intimate relationships. Love is not a unitary emotional state but a multidimensional relational construct that includes different components reflecting closeness, attraction, and long-term relational investment. In Sternberg's conceptualization, love consists of three primary components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy refers to emotional closeness, connectedness, mutual understanding, trust, and the experience of psychological proximity between partners. Passion involves romantic and sexual attraction, physiological arousal, desire, and motivational intensity within the relationship. Commitment reflects the cognitive decision to maintain the relationship and invest in its continuity over time. The relative strength and interaction of these components may shape the quality and durability of marital relationships. When intimacy, passion, and commitment are sufficiently developed, they may provide psychological resources that buffer partners against relational stress; conversely, weakening of these components may increase the likelihood of emotional distance, frustration, and marital exhaustion. Research examining love schemas and marital goal orientations has demonstrated that patterns of love are associated with marital burnout, indicating that the way spouses experience and organize love is relevant to the emergence of relational exhaustion (Yaarmohammadi Vaseel et al., 2021).

The association between love and marital burnout, however, may not operate solely through direct pathways. Love components affect the way spouses interpret interpersonal events, respond to conflict, express emotions, regulate distress, and recover from negative interactions. Intimacy may facilitate emotional disclosure and empathic responsiveness; commitment may increase tolerance for short-term relational difficulties and strengthen motivation to preserve the relationship; and passion may enhance positive affect, attraction, and relational engagement. Conversely, deficits in these dimensions may intensify perceptions of rejection, emotional deprivation, or relational stagnation. Afsari Gargari reported that components of love were related to marital burnout and that this relationship could be explained through family communication patterns, indicating that relational processes may transmit the effects of love components to marital outcomes (Afsari Gargari, 2022). A closely related investigation similarly demonstrated an association between love components and

marital burnout through the mediating role of family communication patterns (Afsari Gorgari, 2022). These findings support the broader proposition that love does not influence marital functioning in isolation; instead, its effects are expressed through specific behavioral, communicative, and emotional mechanisms that shape everyday interactions between spouses.

Among these mechanisms, emotion regulation has emerged as one of the most influential psychological processes in couple functioning. Emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals influence which emotions they experience, when these emotions occur, and how emotional responses are interpreted, expressed, or modified. Within intimate relationships, emotion regulation is especially important because emotionally salient interactions often involve vulnerability, attachment needs, perceived rejection, criticism, jealousy, unmet expectations, and conflict. Partners who can effectively regulate emotional responses are more likely to maintain constructive communication, reinterpret ambiguous interpersonal events, control impulsive reactions, and recover from relational distress. In contrast, ineffective emotion regulation may intensify conflict, prolong negative affect, increase avoidance or hostility, and gradually exhaust the emotional resources required to maintain intimacy. Several studies have shown that difficulties in emotion regulation are associated with greater marital burnout, confirming that emotional dysregulation is not merely an individual vulnerability but an important relational risk factor (Ahmadi & Rajabi, 2023; Mousavi Mirkalaei, 2023; Zamani et al., 2023).

Contemporary emotion regulation theory distinguishes between strategies that may have different consequences for psychological and interpersonal functioning. Cognitive reappraisal involves changing the interpretation of an emotion-eliciting situation in order to alter its emotional impact, whereas expressive suppression involves inhibiting or concealing the outward expression of an already activated emotional response. Cognitive reappraisal is generally considered a more adaptive strategy because it intervenes relatively early in the emotion-generative process and may reduce the intensity of negative emotional responses without substantially disrupting interpersonal communication. Expressive suppression, by contrast, may reduce visible emotional expression while leaving internal emotional arousal relatively unchanged and may interfere with emotional disclosure, authenticity, and responsiveness between partners. In marital contexts, these distinctions are

particularly important. A spouse who cognitively reappraises a partner's behavior may interpret a disagreement less catastrophically and respond more constructively, whereas habitual suppression may prevent the open expression of needs and concerns, potentially increasing emotional distance. Research has shown that emotion regulation strategies are significantly associated with marital burnout and may interact with other psychological variables, including learned helplessness and attachment styles (Alizadeh Akbari & Garzin Motaii, 2024). Likewise, negative affect and maladaptive emotion regulation have been identified as important predictors of marital burnout (Ghasemi & Ahmadi, 2023).

The relevance of emotion regulation to marital burnout has also been demonstrated across different populations and explanatory models. Among married women, difficulty regulating emotions has been shown to predict greater marital burnout, particularly when accompanied by elevated social anxiety (Mousavi Mirkalaei, 2023). In women experiencing premenstrual syndrome, emotion regulation, together with early maladaptive schemas, has also been identified as a significant predictor of marital burnout (Mohammadvardi et al., 2024). Similarly, studies examining early maladaptive schemas suggest that cognitive emotion regulation can mediate the relationship between deeply rooted dysfunctional schemas and marital burnout, highlighting the role of regulatory processes in translating cognitive vulnerability into relational distress (Basirifard & Salameh Zavareh, 2025). From a therapeutic perspective, improvements in emotional regulation have accompanied reductions in marital burnout following couple-focused interventions, further suggesting that regulatory skills constitute a modifiable mechanism relevant to marital adjustment (Hassani et al., 2023; Vaslehchi et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings indicate that understanding marital burnout requires attention not only to the presence of negative emotional experiences but also to how spouses process, reinterpret, manage, and communicate those experiences.

Recent research has increasingly moved beyond simple bivariate associations toward models that conceptualize emotion regulation as a mediating mechanism in marital functioning. Ahmadi and Rajabi showed that emotion regulation difficulties mediated the relationship between stress and marital burnout, indicating that stressful experiences may contribute to burnout partly because they overwhelm or disrupt individuals' capacity to regulate emotional responses effectively (Ahmadi & Rajabi, 2023).

Similarly, Zamani and colleagues emphasized the relationships among alexithymia, emotion regulation difficulty, and marital burnout from an emotion-focused perspective, suggesting that difficulties in identifying, understanding, and regulating emotional states may contribute to the progressive exhaustion observed in distressed couples (Zamani et al., 2023). These findings are theoretically important because they shift the explanatory focus from external marital stressors alone to the internal regulatory processes through which such stressors are transformed into persistent relational exhaustion. In this framework, emotion regulation may function as a psychological pathway through which relatively stable relational characteristics, including love components, exert their influence on marital burnout.

Emerging evidence from international research further strengthens this interpretation. Koçyiğit and Uzun demonstrated that the relationship between couple burnout and marital satisfaction can be explained through serial mediation involving mindfulness and emotion regulation, underscoring the central role of emotional self-regulation in marital functioning (Koçyiğit & Uzun, 2024). More recent research has also indicated that emotion regulation may mediate the association between couple burnout and marital satisfaction, suggesting that individuals' regulatory capacities are closely embedded within the broader relational system (Kocyigit, 2025). These findings are consistent with systemic perspectives on marriage, according to which marital experiences are generated through reciprocal interactions between intrapersonal processes and interpersonal dynamics. In such a system, the emotional meaning of love may influence how partners regulate their reactions, while regulatory patterns may determine whether intimacy, passion, and commitment are translated into relational resilience or become eroded under stress.

The potential mediating role of emotion regulation is particularly plausible when the three dimensions of love are considered separately. Intimacy requires emotional openness, mutual responsiveness, and the capacity to engage with a partner's emotional states without becoming overwhelmed or defensive. Adaptive regulation may therefore strengthen the protective effect of intimacy by enabling spouses to communicate vulnerable feelings and reinterpret relational tensions more constructively. Passion, although frequently associated with positive activation and attraction, can also involve intense emotional reactions; the manner in which such emotions are regulated may determine

whether passion supports closeness or contributes to volatility and conflict. Commitment may provide a cognitive framework for maintaining the relationship during difficult periods, but its protective value may depend on whether spouses can regulate frustration, resentment, and disappointment in ways that preserve constructive interaction. Thus, the same love component may have different implications for marital burnout depending on the regulatory strategy through which emotional experiences are managed.

Although previous studies have documented relationships between love components and marital burnout and have separately established the importance of emotion regulation, fewer studies have integrated these constructs within a single structural model. Existing research has often emphasized family communication patterns as mediators between love and marital burnout (Afsari Gargari, 2022; Afsari Gorgari, 2022), or has examined emotion regulation in relation to stress, schemas, negative affect, attachment, or marital satisfaction (Ahmadi & Rajabi, 2023; Alizadeh Akbari & Garzin Motaii, 2024; Basirifard & Salameh Zavareh, 2025; Ghasemi & Ahmadi, 2023; Kocyigit, 2025). While these studies have substantially advanced understanding of marital burnout, the specific pathway by which the dimensions of love may influence burnout through cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression remains insufficiently clarified. Testing this mechanism can provide a more precise account of how positive relational resources are translated into psychological protection against marital exhaustion.

This gap is also important from an intervention perspective. If emotion regulation mediates the association between love components and marital burnout, therapeutic and preventive programs may be more effective when they do not focus exclusively on increasing affection, intimacy, or commitment, but also teach spouses how to regulate the emotions that arise within intimate interactions. For example, strengthening cognitive reappraisal may help partners reinterpret conflict, reduce hostile attribution, and maintain emotional connection, whereas reducing excessive expressive suppression may facilitate more authentic communication of needs and concerns. Such an integrated approach is consistent with findings showing that interventions targeting relational and emotional processes can reduce marital burnout and improve couple functioning (Havassi et al., 2017; Jafarimanesh et al., 2021; Vaslehchi et al., 2024). It is also compatible with the observation that burnout is embedded in wider relational pathways that may

ultimately influence emotional divorce and long-term marital stability (Sorkhabi Abdolmaleki et al., 2022).

Accordingly, constructing and empirically testing a model that simultaneously incorporates intimacy, passion, commitment, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and marital burnout may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological architecture of marital exhaustion. Such a model can clarify the relative contributions of different love components, identify whether adaptive and maladaptive emotion regulation strategies operate as meaningful mediators, and generate findings with direct implications for couple counseling, psychoeducational programs, and marital enrichment interventions. By focusing on married adults in Bushehr, the present research also contributes context-specific evidence to a literature that increasingly recognizes the importance of sociocultural context in shaping emotional expression, marital expectations, and relational behavior.

Therefore, the present study aimed to model marital burnout based on love styles, with emotion regulation strategies as mediating variables among married women and men in Bushehr.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was conducted to model marital burnout based on love style, with emotion regulation strategies serving as mediating variables among married women and men in Bushehr. In terms of purpose, the study was applied, and in terms of data collection, it employed a descriptive-correlational design. Structural equation modeling was used to examine the relationships among the study variables and to test the proposed conceptual model. The statistical population consisted of all married women and men attending the selected centers in Bushehr in 2025. From among the eligible individuals, 420 participants were selected as the study sample using a non-probability convenience sampling method.

The research process began with a review of the theoretical foundations and scientific studies related to marital burnout, love styles, and emotion regulation strategies. At this stage, the concepts and theoretical dimensions of the study variables were examined, and an initial conceptual model was developed based on the theoretical framework and available empirical evidence. In this model, love style was considered the predictor variable, marital burnout the criterion variable, and emotion

regulation strategies the mediating variables. The purpose of developing this model was to examine the direct and indirect relationships among these variables and to determine the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies in the relationship between love style and marital burnout.

After the theoretical framework of the study had been specified, measurement instruments appropriate to the variables under investigation were selected. In selecting the instruments, attention was given to the consistency of questionnaire content with the objectives of the study, their applicability to married populations, their psychometric properties, and their ability to assess the intended dimensions. The research instruments included questionnaires measuring marital burnout, love style, and emotion regulation strategies. In addition, demographic information was collected from the participants, including age, gender, educational attainment, duration of marriage, and other characteristics relevant to the study topic. These data were collected to describe the characteristics of the sample and to provide a clearer understanding of the demographic composition of the participants.

In the next stage, access to the statistical population and selection of the study sample were carried out. For this purpose, the selected centers in Bushehr were considered the data collection settings, and married individuals attending these centers during the implementation period were screened for eligibility. Because convenience sampling was used, participants were selected based on accessibility, fulfillment of the eligibility criteria, and willingness to participate in the study. This sampling procedure made it possible to collect data from married women and men attending the selected centers. During data collection, the general objective of the study and the importance of examining factors associated with marital burnout were first explained to the participants. The nature of the research, the procedure for responding to the questionnaires, and the manner in which the collected information would be used were also described. Given that the study concerned private aspects of marital life and individuals' emotional experiences, adherence to research ethics was considered particularly important. Accordingly, participants were assured that their information would remain confidential, that the data would be used exclusively for scientific purposes, and that individual responses would not be disclosed. Participation was voluntary and based on the individuals' personal consent and willingness, and efforts were made to provide conditions in which participants could

respond to the questions without feeling pressured or concerned about being judged by others.

After the necessary explanations had been provided, the research questionnaires were distributed to the participants. At the time of administration, instructions for completing the questionnaires were explained, and participants were asked to read each item carefully and provide responses based on their actual feelings, attitudes, and experiences in marital life. It was also emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and that the purpose of administering the questionnaires was to assess individuals' psychological and emotional states and examine the relationships among the study variables. This procedure was intended to reduce socially desirable responding and increase the honesty of participants' responses.

In administering the love style questionnaire, the purpose was to examine individuals' attitudinal and emotional patterns toward love and marital relationships. In this section, participants read the items pertaining to the dimensions of love style and indicated the extent to which each statement corresponded to their own attitudes and experiences. The information obtained from this questionnaire was used to examine the role of love style in explaining individual differences in marital burnout. In the section concerning emotion regulation strategies, participants' responses were examined to identify the strategies they used to manage, modify, and express emotions. This variable was conceptualized as a psychological mechanism within the study model that might account for part of the relationship between love style and marital burnout. Finally, the marital burnout questionnaire was administered to assess the degree of exhaustion and depletion experienced within the marital relationship, and the resulting scores were used as the indicator of the criterion variable in the statistical analyses.

Given the sensitivity of the research topic, efforts were made to ensure that the questionnaires were administered under conditions that allowed participants sufficient calm and concentration. Independent responding was also emphasized so that participants' answers would, as much as possible, remain unaffected by the opinions of their spouses, other family members, or individuals present in the setting. When participants had questions about how to respond to specific items, explanations were limited strictly to the procedure for completing the instruments, and any guidance that might influence the content of their responses was avoided.

2.2. Measures

Marital Burnout Measure. This questionnaire was developed by Pines (1996). It consists of 21 items rated on a seven-point scale and comprises three components: emotional exhaustion, psychological exhaustion, and physical exhaustion. Each item is rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never), indicating no experience of the stated condition, to 7 (always), indicating a high degree of experience of the stated condition (Pines, 1996). The total score ranges from 21 to 147, with higher scores indicating greater marital burnout. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the components of the questionnaire have been reported to range from .84 to .90. Negative correlations between this questionnaire and positive relational characteristics, with correlation coefficients exceeding .30, supported its validity. Translated versions of the Marital Burnout Measure have also been successfully used in Norway, Hungary, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Finland, and Israel (Pines & Nunes, 2003). In Iran, Navidi (2005) administered the questionnaire to a sample of 240 individuals to assess its reliability and reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .86. A correlation coefficient of $-.40$ was also reported between this measure and the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, indicating satisfactory validity and reliability.

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire was developed by Gross and John (2003) to assess emotion regulation strategies. The questionnaire consists of two subscales: cognitive reappraisal, comprising six items, and expressive suppression, comprising four items. Participants respond using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In the study by Gross and John, internal consistency coefficients of .79 for cognitive reappraisal and .73 for expressive suppression were obtained. Kraaij and Garnefski reported internal consistency coefficients of .83 for cognitive reappraisal and .79 for expressive suppression.

Sternberg Love Scale. This scale was developed by Robert Sternberg in 1986 and consists of 45 items measuring three components of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment. The first 15 items (Items 1–15) assess intimacy, the middle 15 items (Items 16–30) assess passion, and the final 15 items assess commitment. Responses are recorded on a nine-point scale. After determining whether an individual obtains a low or high score on each subscale, the individual's pattern of romantic love is identified.

Cronbach's alpha for the scale has been reported as .90, and convergent correlational analysis was used to evaluate its validity. Correlations of .73 between intimacy and commitment and .71 between commitment and passion were reported (Pato, 2002). In an Iranian sample, Mahmoudi et al. (2013) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .93 for intimacy, .95 for passion, .96 for commitment, and .95 for the total questionnaire.

2.3. Data Analysis

After completion of the data collection phase, the completed questionnaires were examined for completeness of responses and suitability for statistical analysis. At this stage, the data were prepared for entry into the statistical software, and participants' responses were coded in accordance with the scoring instructions for the research instruments. Scores for the principal variables and their respective dimensions were then calculated. During data

preparation, missing data, invalid responses, outliers, and other characteristics that could potentially affect the results of the statistical analyses were examined. The purpose of this stage was to produce an analyzable dataset and minimize the likelihood of errors in estimating relationships among the study variables. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient, path analysis, and model fit indices in AMOS version 18.

3. Findings and Results

The findings showed that 71.67% of the participants were women and 28.33% were men. The mean age of the participants was 34.60 ± 5.20 years. The mean duration of marriage was 10.07 ± 5.80 years. The distribution of the number of children indicated that the majority of participants had one or two children. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Main Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Min	Max
Love (Intimacy)	44.07	8.66	-0.12	0.20	20	68
Love (Passion)	47.56	9.09	-0.22	0.15	21	72
Love (Commitment)	50.27	7.88	0.01	-0.10	24	71
Emotion Regulation (Expressive Suppression)	18.69	4.28	0.28	-0.09	8	27
Marital Burnout	67.39	16.47	0.33	0.12	28	112

As shown in Table 1, examination of the skewness and kurtosis indices indicated that all variables were within the acceptable range of ± 2 . Nevertheless, skewness values approaching the critical threshold were observed for variables such as commitment and cognitive reappraisal, suggesting a slight departure from normality. Given the large sample size ($n > 400$) and the approximately normal distributions, the use of parametric tests remained valid and reliable. The score distributions of the variables were considered normal, and the assumption of normality required for parametric analyses, including Pearson's correlation and structural equation modeling, was therefore satisfied. In fact, based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results, all variables were statistically normally distributed

($p > .05$). However, the skewness and kurtosis indices for some variables, including commitment, intimacy, and cognitive reappraisal, were close to the ± 2 threshold, indicating approximate normality with minor deviations. Therefore, assuming normal distribution of the data, structural equation modeling could appropriately be performed. To increase the accuracy of structural modeling and prevent extreme cases from adversely affecting model fit, 17 cases were removed, reducing the final sample size to 403 participants. Specifically, 17 multivariate outliers identified using Mahalanobis distance were excluded to improve model fit and minimize potential bias in the path coefficients. Following their removal, the model fit indices improved and the data structure became more homogeneous.

Table 2

Correlations Among the Study Variables

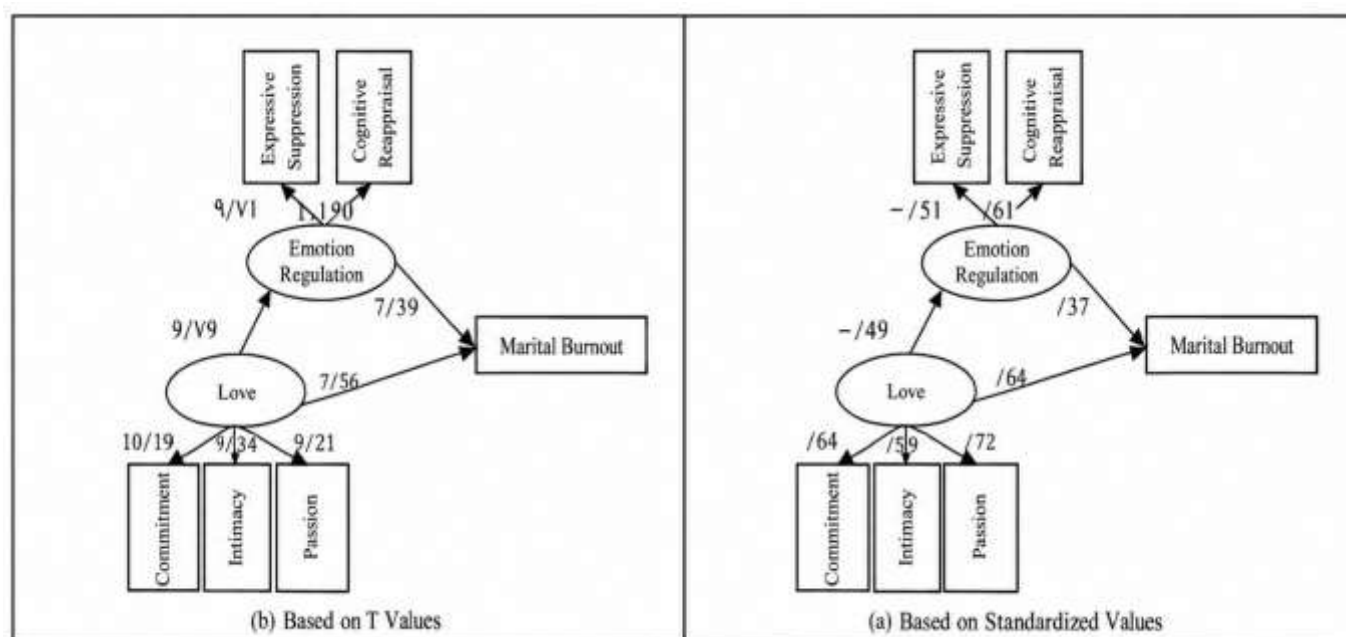
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Intimacy (Love)	1							
2. Passion (Love)	.42**	1						
3. Commitment (Love)	.47**	.39**	1					
4. Total Love Score	.85**	.77**	.82**	1				
5. Cognitive Reappraisal	-.36**	-.21*	-.24**	-.33**	1			
6. Expressive Suppression	.33**	.17*	.20**	.29**	-.28**	1		
7. Total Emotion Regulation Score	.38**	.21*	.23**	.33**	-.32**	.81**	1	
8. Marital Burnout	-.40**	-.28**	-.36**	-.43**	-.33**	.37**	.41**	1

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that marital burnout was significantly associated with nearly all independent and mediating variables. The directions of these relationships were largely consistent with the theoretical predictions and the conceptual model of the study, demonstrating a coherent pattern of associations. In most cases, the correlation coefficients were of moderate

magnitude (.30–.50), indicating that the relationships were not only statistically significant but also substantively meaningful. Overall, the findings suggest that marital burnout is directly and indirectly associated with love styles and emotion regulation strategies. These relationships provide an appropriate statistical basis for the subsequent path analysis and structural modeling.

Figure 1

Pathways of the Model and the Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Strategies



As shown in Figure 1, the direct pathways of the model indicated that the love dimensions of passion, intimacy, and commitment exerted significant indirect effects on marital burnout through the mediating roles of emotion regulation

strategies, namely expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal. In other words, love styles indirectly decreased or increased marital burnout by influencing the emotion regulation strategies used by individuals.

Table 3

Fit Indices for the Proposed Model

Fit Index	Description	Observed Value	Acceptance Criterion	Fit Evaluation
χ^2	Chi-square	142.83	—	—

df	Degrees of freedom	71	—	—
χ^2/df	Relative chi-square	2.01	< 3	Good
NFI	Normed Fit Index	.92	≥ .90	Acceptable
CFI	Comparative Fit Index	.95	≥ .90	Excellent
TLI	Tucker–Lewis Index	.93	≥ .90	Excellent
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	.065	< .08	Very Good
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index	.91	≥ .90	Good

As shown in Table 3, the findings indicated that the structural model proposed for the fifth sub-hypothesis demonstrated satisfactory fit. All overall model fit indices were within acceptable ranges, thereby supporting the adequacy of the proposed conceptual model.

Table 4

Bootstrap Analysis of the Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Strategies in the Fifth Hypothesis

Predictor	Mediating Path	Indirect Effect	95% Confidence Interval	Mediation Result
Intimacy	Intimacy → Expressive Suppression → Marital Burnout	.13	[.06, .17]	Partial and significant
Intimacy	Intimacy → Cognitive Reappraisal → Marital Burnout	.14	[.07, .18]	Partial and significant
Passion	Passion → Expressive Suppression → Marital Burnout	.07	[.01, .11]	Weak and significant
Passion	Passion → Cognitive Reappraisal → Marital Burnout	.08	[.02, .12]	Weak and significant
Commitment	Commitment → Expressive Suppression → Marital Burnout	.12	[.05, .17]	Partial and significant
Commitment	Commitment → Cognitive Reappraisal → Marital Burnout	.11	[.06, .17]	Partial and significant

As shown in Table 4, the 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero for any of the tested pathways, indicating that emotion regulation significantly mediated the relationships between the predictor variables and marital burnout. Although some of the coefficients were relatively small (.08–.14), their practical effects may still be clinically meaningful because emotion regulation processes play a fundamental role in couple therapy and communication training. This pattern of findings suggests that love dimensions, particularly intimacy and commitment, may significantly reduce the severity of marital burnout when they operate through increased use of adaptive strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, or decreased use of maladaptive strategies, such as expressive suppression.

4. Discussion

The present study examined a structural model of marital burnout based on the dimensions of love, with emotion regulation strategies as mediating mechanisms among married adults in Bushehr. The findings supported the proposed model and showed that intimacy, passion, and commitment were significantly associated with marital burnout and that emotion regulation strategies contributed to explaining these relationships. The correlational findings

To examine the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies, specifically expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal, in the relationship between love styles and marital burnout, the bootstrap method was also employed.

indicated that intimacy, passion, commitment, and the total love score were negatively associated with marital burnout, whereas expressive suppression showed a positive association with marital burnout. Cognitive reappraisal was also significantly related to marital burnout in the opposite direction, indicating that more adaptive regulation of emotional experiences was associated with lower marital burnout. Moreover, bootstrap analyses confirmed significant indirect effects of the love dimensions on marital burnout through both expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal. The structural model also demonstrated satisfactory fit, with $\chi^2/df = 2.01$, NFI = .92, CFI = .95, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .065, and GFI = .91. Taken together, these findings support a model in which marital burnout is not determined solely by the quality of love within the relationship, but is also shaped by the ways in which spouses regulate the emotional experiences arising from their intimate interactions.

The negative relationships between intimacy, passion, commitment, and marital burnout are consistent with previous evidence indicating that the components of love are important protective factors against relational exhaustion. Earlier studies have shown that love components are significantly related to marital burnout and that the effect of love on burnout may be transmitted through relational processes such as family communication patterns (Afsari

Gargari, 2022; Afsari Gorgari, 2022). Similarly, Yaarmohammadi Vasel et al. demonstrated that love schemas and marital goal orientations were capable of predicting marital burnout, emphasizing that the way spouses experience and organize romantic attachment is closely related to their vulnerability to exhaustion within marriage (Yaarmohammadi Vasel et al., 2021). The present findings extend these observations by showing that love may exert its influence not only through interpersonal communication but also through intrapersonal emotional regulation processes. In other words, the emotional resources represented by intimacy, passion, and commitment may influence the way spouses interpret and respond to stressful marital experiences, thereby affecting the degree to which such experiences accumulate into burnout.

Among the love dimensions, intimacy and commitment showed stronger correlations with marital burnout than passion. This pattern is theoretically meaningful because intimacy and commitment represent relatively stable foundations of long-term marital functioning. Intimacy includes emotional closeness, mutual understanding, trust, and self-disclosure, all of which may reduce feelings of isolation and emotional depletion within marriage. When spouses perceive their partners as emotionally available and responsive, interpersonal stress may be less likely to be interpreted as rejection or indifference. Commitment, similarly, may provide continuity, security, and motivation to preserve the relationship during periods of conflict or stress. Passion can contribute to attraction and vitality, but it may fluctuate more strongly over the course of marriage and may therefore be less protective against chronic burnout than intimacy and commitment. The present pattern corresponds with previous research showing that relational qualities associated with love and communication are closely linked with marital burnout (Afsari Gargari, 2022; Afsari Gorgari, 2022). It is also consistent with evidence suggesting that weakened relational bonds can contribute to broader processes of emotional disengagement and emotional divorce (Sorkhabi Abdolmaleki et al., 2022).

Another important finding was the significant relationship between emotion regulation and marital burnout. Expressive suppression was positively associated with marital burnout, whereas cognitive reappraisal was associated with lower burnout. This finding is consistent with the theoretical distinction between adaptive and maladaptive emotion regulation strategies. Cognitive reappraisal allows individuals to reinterpret emotionally

provocative events before emotional responses become fully intensified. In marital interactions, such a strategy may help spouses consider alternative explanations for a partner's behavior, reduce hostile interpretations, and respond to conflict in a more flexible and constructive manner. Expressive suppression, by contrast, involves concealing or inhibiting outward emotional expression after an emotional response has already developed. Although suppression may occasionally prevent immediate escalation, habitual suppression can inhibit emotional disclosure, reduce perceived authenticity, and prevent partners from communicating unmet needs. Over time, such patterns may contribute to emotional distance and psychological exhaustion.

The observed relationship between emotion regulation and marital burnout is strongly supported by previous studies. Ahmadi and Rajabi found that difficulties in emotion regulation mediated the relationship between stress and marital burnout, suggesting that emotional dysregulation is one of the mechanisms through which psychological pressure becomes translated into relational exhaustion (Ahmadi & Rajabi, 2023). Ghasemi and Ahmadi likewise reported that negative affect and emotion regulation predicted marital burnout, indicating that both emotional vulnerability and the manner in which emotions are regulated are relevant to marital functioning (Ghasemi & Ahmadi, 2023). Mousavi Mirkalaei also found that emotion regulation difficulties were important predictors of marital burnout among married women (Mousavi Mirkalaei, 2023). From an emotion-focused perspective, Zamani et al. demonstrated significant relationships among alexithymia, emotion regulation difficulty, and marital burnout, further emphasizing that inability to understand and regulate emotional states may intensify chronic relational exhaustion (Zamani et al., 2023). These studies collectively support the present finding that emotion regulation should be regarded as a central psychological mechanism in the development and maintenance of marital burnout.

The mediation results represent one of the most important contributions of the present study. The bootstrap findings showed that both expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal significantly mediated the relationships of intimacy, passion, and commitment with marital burnout. The 95% confidence intervals for all tested indirect effects excluded zero, demonstrating statistically significant mediation. The indirect effects were stronger for intimacy and commitment than for passion, although all pathways reached significance. These results suggest that love

components influence marital burnout partly because they shape the ways in which spouses manage emotional experiences. A person who experiences greater intimacy and commitment may be more motivated to process marital difficulties constructively, tolerate short-term distress, and maintain emotional engagement. Conversely, deterioration in the quality of love may be accompanied by increased emotional avoidance, suppression, or ineffective management of negative feelings, thereby increasing susceptibility to burnout.

These mediation findings are consistent with recent research emphasizing the explanatory role of emotion regulation in couple functioning. Koçyiğit and Uzun showed that mindfulness and emotion regulation serially mediated the relationship between couple burnout and marital satisfaction, demonstrating that regulatory processes constitute an important bridge between psychological functioning and relationship outcomes (Koçyiğit & Uzun, 2024). Kocyiğit further demonstrated that emotion regulation plays a mediating role in the association between couple burnout and marital satisfaction, providing contemporary evidence that the quality of emotional regulation can alter the effects of burnout on marital experiences (Kocyiğit, 2025). Although these studies addressed somewhat different structural pathways, they converge with the present results in identifying emotion regulation as a mechanism through which relational experiences are connected to marital well-being or dysfunction. The present study adds to this line of evidence by positioning love components as antecedent relational resources and emotion regulation strategies as mechanisms through which these resources may influence marital burnout.

The findings can also be understood in light of studies linking marital burnout with deeper cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities. Basirifard and Salameh Zavareh found that cognitive emotion regulation mediated the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital burnout among married women (Basirifard & Salameh Zavareh, 2025). Mohammadvardi et al. similarly reported that both emotion regulation and early maladaptive schemas predicted marital burnout among women with premenstrual syndrome (Mohammadvardi et al., 2024). Alizadeh Akbari and Garzin Motaii demonstrated relationships among emotion regulation strategies, learned helplessness, attachment styles, and marital burnout (Alizadeh Akbari & Garzin Motaii, 2024). These findings indicate that emotion regulation does not operate independently; rather, it is

embedded within broader personality, cognitive, attachment, and relational systems. The present findings fit this broader framework because love dimensions may provide the relational context within which emotional regulation becomes either adaptive or maladaptive. Greater intimacy and commitment may increase psychological safety and reduce the need for defensive emotional strategies, whereas weakened emotional bonds may promote suppression, avoidance, and ineffective regulation.

The present results are also compatible with evidence derived from therapeutic studies. Hassani et al. reported that schema therapy improved emotional regulation and related marital outcomes in individuals experiencing marital burnout (Hassani et al., 2023). Vaslehchi et al. found that enhanced cognitive-behavioral couple therapy was effective in improving emotional regulation and reducing marital burnout among couples at risk of divorce (Vaslehchi et al., 2024). Similarly, Gottman marital therapy has been shown to reduce marital burnout by addressing dysfunctional interaction patterns and strengthening relational functioning (Havassi et al., 2017). Acceptance and commitment therapy has likewise demonstrated effectiveness in reducing marital burnout among couples experiencing marital conflict (Jafarimanesh et al., 2021). These intervention findings support the present structural model because they suggest that modifying emotional and relational processes can influence burnout. If marital burnout were merely a fixed outcome of personality or demographic variables, interventions targeting emotion regulation, communication, acceptance, or schemas would be expected to have limited effects. Instead, the demonstrated responsiveness of marital burnout to psychological treatment suggests that mediating mechanisms such as emotion regulation are clinically meaningful and modifiable.

The satisfactory fit of the structural model provides further support for the proposed conceptual relationships. The relative chi-square was below the commonly accepted threshold of 3, while NFI, CFI, TLI, and GFI exceeded .90, and RMSEA was below .08. These indices indicate that the hypothesized relationships among love, emotion regulation, and marital burnout provided an adequate representation of the observed data. The model therefore supports a multidimensional understanding of marital burnout in which both relational and emotional processes contribute to its development. This is important because marital burnout has sometimes been approached primarily as an outcome of dissatisfaction, conflict, or unmet expectations. The present findings suggest that this perspective is incomplete unless

the emotional processing mechanisms operating within the individual are also considered. Burnout may emerge when relational resources weaken and spouses simultaneously lack effective strategies for managing the emotional consequences of relational strain.

The pattern of findings also has implications for understanding marital burnout as a progressive rather than sudden phenomenon. Emotional exhaustion within marriage is likely to accumulate across repeated interactions. When partners experience conflict but can reinterpret the situation, communicate openly, and maintain emotional connection, the negative effects of isolated stressors may be contained. In contrast, when negative emotions are repeatedly suppressed or poorly regulated, unresolved emotional material may accumulate, leading to psychological distance, resentment, and reduced investment in the relationship. Over time, these processes may contribute to a cycle in which weakened love dimensions increase maladaptive regulation, maladaptive regulation further damages intimacy and commitment, and the resulting deterioration intensifies marital burnout. This reciprocal interpretation is compatible with research linking marital burnout to emotional divorce and broader patterns of relationship disengagement (Sorkhabi Abdolmaleki et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

Overall, the present study supports an integrated interpretation of marital burnout. Love dimensions appear to function as relational resources, whereas emotion regulation strategies represent psychological mechanisms determining how relational experiences are processed and expressed. Intimacy, passion, and commitment may protect against burnout when they facilitate adaptive emotional processing, while maladaptive strategies such as persistent expressive suppression may weaken the protective effects of love. The findings therefore complement previous research on family communication, marital goals, negative affect, stress, schemas, attachment, mindfulness, and marital satisfaction (Afsari Gargari, 2022; Afsari Gorgari, 2022; Ahmadi & Rajabi, 2023; Ghasemi & Ahmadi, 2023; Koçyiğit & Uzun, 2024; Yaarmohammadi Vassel et al., 2021). By simultaneously modeling relational and emotional variables, the study provides a more comprehensive account of the processes associated with marital burnout and highlights emotion regulation as a meaningful pathway through which love styles may influence marital functioning.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the correlational and cross-sectional design does not permit definitive causal conclusions regarding the direction of the relationships among love dimensions, emotion regulation strategies, and marital burnout. Although structural equation modeling and mediation analysis are useful for testing theoretically specified pathways, temporal precedence cannot be established without longitudinal data. Second, participants were selected through convenience sampling from married adults attending selected centers in Bushehr, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to married individuals in other regions, cultural settings, socioeconomic groups, or those who do not attend such centers. Third, all variables were measured using self-report instruments, which may be influenced by social desirability, response tendencies, recall bias, or participants' willingness to disclose sensitive marital experiences. Fourth, the study did not examine potentially important contextual variables such as duration of marriage, socioeconomic status, number of children, severity of marital conflict, personality characteristics, attachment security, or major life stressors as moderators or control variables. Finally, removal of multivariate outliers improved model fit but may have slightly reduced the representation of individuals with particularly extreme relational or emotional experiences.

Future studies should replicate the proposed model using longitudinal and prospective designs to clarify the temporal ordering of love dimensions, emotion regulation, and marital burnout and to examine whether changes in emotion regulation predict subsequent changes in marital exhaustion. Probability sampling and multicenter studies involving participants from different cities, cultural groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds would strengthen external validity. Dyadic research designs are also recommended so that data are obtained from both spouses and analyzed using actor-partner models, allowing researchers to determine whether one partner's love style and emotion regulation strategies influence the other partner's burnout. Future research could incorporate observational assessments of couple interactions, clinician ratings, or physiological indicators of emotional arousal alongside self-report measures. Additional mediators and moderators, including attachment styles, communication patterns, mindfulness, psychological flexibility, perceived partner responsiveness, sexual satisfaction, conflict-resolution styles, and early

maladaptive schemas, could also be incorporated into expanded structural models. Experimental and intervention studies would be particularly valuable for determining whether deliberate improvement in cognitive reappraisal and reduction in maladaptive suppression can weaken the relationship between deteriorating relational bonds and marital burnout.

The findings suggest that marital counseling and couple-therapy programs should simultaneously address the quality of love within the relationship and the emotion regulation skills of both partners. Assessment of marital burnout may be strengthened by evaluating intimacy, passion, commitment, cognitive reappraisal, and expressive suppression rather than focusing only on overt conflict or marital satisfaction. Couple-based interventions can include training in cognitive reappraisal, emotional awareness, constructive expression of negative affect, empathic listening, and identification of habitual suppression patterns. Counselors may also help couples strengthen intimacy through emotional disclosure, responsiveness, shared positive experiences, and mutual validation, while supporting commitment through clarification of shared goals and relational values. Premarital and marital-enrichment programs could incorporate emotion regulation training as a preventive component, particularly for couples experiencing persistent stress or declining emotional connection. Because emotion regulation represents a potentially modifiable mechanism, strengthening adaptive regulatory skills may provide a practical pathway for reducing marital burnout and preserving the emotional quality and stability of long-term marital relationships.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

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