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*Research Article*

# The Effect of the Family Training Program on Married Women's Couple-Burnout Levels\*

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effect of Modules 2 and 3 of the Family Communication Section of the Family Training Program as prepared by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies on married women's couple-burnout levels. The study group consists of 40 married women in total: 20 constituting the experimental group and the remaining 20 constituting the control group. Each session lasted approximately 120 minutes, and the program continued for 12 weeks. Research data were collected using the Couple Burnout Measure. A randomized pretest-posttest control design was used in the study. At the end of the sessions, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a difference between the mean pretest and posttest scores of the Couple Burnout Measure for the experimental and control groups; the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to detect any significant difference among the mean pretest, posttest, and follow-up test scores. According to the findings, Modules 2 and 3 of the Family Communication Section of the Family Training Program were determined to help decrease married women's couple-burnout levels. The couple-burnout posttest scores for the women who had participated in the program were seen to be lower compared to those who had not taken part in the program. Additionally, the posttest scores for the women in the experimental group were found to be significantly lower than their pretest scores. No significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of women in the control group was found. The positive effect observed on the experimental group was determined to last for two months (eight weeks). The obtained findings were interpreted in light of the literature, and suggestions have been presented.

## Keywords

Family training program • Couple burnout • Married women • Marriage • Family

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The most basic subsystem of a family maybe accepted the spouses, which consist of a woman and a man. The health of this system affects all members of the family. It is not likely that couples who cannot succeed in being spouses can healthily perform other functions related to the family.

These days, choosing a spouse is left up to the individual. Also, the ideas that the most essential factors in spouse selection are romantic love and that life will gain meaning when an individual finds his or her soulmate as a pursuit of one's most humane right are imposed on individuals through various channels. Although not for every marriage, a high number of women and men who are fascinated by romantic love still get married with the irresistible happiness and high expectation of finding their soulmate, and this cannot be ignored. When the magic of romantic love is lost over time, their life loses the meaning they assumed their soulmates had given them. They are left alone with serious disappointment and feelings of burnout (Pines, 1996, 2010).

Burnout in couples is a sorrowful state that devastates individuals who had expected that romantic love would give meaning to their lives. It manifests itself physically, emotionally, and mentally, such as not being able to enjoy the relationship, continuously feeling physically tired, and believing that problems will remain forever unresolved. Moreover, those affected by burnout are not only the individuals themselves, but also their families and social relationships. Burnout is a highly destructive state that affects all areas of an individual's life with feelings of continuous stress, hopelessness, despair, and entrapment that burnout causes (Babaoğlu, 2006; Pines, 1996; Pines & Aronson, 1988).

On the other hand, couple burnout may provide positive contributions to couples in two respects. First, it indicates an aspect of the relationship that needs to end in order to prepare for a new beginning; second, it is a turning point for couples who want to save their marriage (Pines, 1996). Coping with burnout is possible by turning the problems that occur within the marriage relationship into an opportunity. According to Pines (2010), it is necessary to enable couples to develop awareness regarding the aspects they had found attractive in each other before marriage and the aspects that currently cause problems, empathetic attitudes, communication skills, healthy dialogue between couples, and certain behavioral changes that would appeal to one another. Obviously, relationship dynamics are of utmost importance in order to be able to cope with couple burnout. The common point shared by couples who can lead long-term, loving relationships is that they hold on and make effort in their marriages. While this awareness occurs at the beginning of the relationship in some couples, it is gained at later stages in others (Pines, 1996). In this regard, gaining new skills to strengthen the relationship is the best weapon for couples to be able to cope with couple burnout. These skills can be increased through training programs about couple relationships. Several marriage-relationship training programs of a preventive

nature have been developed that aim to strengthen the relationship between couples and to teach skills for preventing problems. These programs enrich the marriage relationship and increase the quality of marriage (Kalkan, 2002). The content of these programs consists of topics such as communication skills, conflict resolution, changing dysfunctional behaviors, and role sharing (Busby, Larson, Holman, & Halford, 2015; Cavedo & Guernsey, 1999; Gottman & Gottman, 1999; Kalkan & Ersanlı, 2009; L'Abate & Sloan, 1984; L'Abate & Weinstein, 1987; Landhausser, Faas, & Treptow, 2014; Wampler & Sprenkle, 1980; Wilde & Doherty, 2012). This content, which aims to provide couples with new skills, may contribute to married individuals' ability to cope with couple burnout.

When the literature is reviewed, the rather limited number of experimental studies conducted on marriage relationships and family training attracts attention. The effects of marriage-relationship training programs on marital satisfaction; marital adjustment; quality of life; and couples' communications, problem-solving skills, level of empathy, tendency toward passive conflict, marital stability, and stress have been investigated in existing studies (Askari, Noah, Hassan, & Baba, 2012; Burchard et al., 2003; Canel, 2007; Daire et al., 2012; Faircloth & Cummings, 2008; Faircloth, Schermerhorn, Mitchell, Cummings, & Cummings, 2011; Hahlweg & Richter, 2010; Heidari, Sanaei Zaker, Delavar, Navabi-Nejad, & Shafiabady, 2010; Kalkan & Ersanlı, 2008; Karahan, 2007; Sardoğan & Karahan, 2005). No studies were encountered in the literature that had thoroughly examined couple burnout experimentally, which is the dependent variable of the present study. Furthermore, only a limited number of studies exist where couple burnout has been examined together with variables related to a couple's relationship. In these studies, dyadic adjustment (Çapri & Gökçakan, 2013) and spousal support, dyadic trust, and interpersonal cognitive distortions were found to significantly predict couple burnout (Pamuk & Durmuş, 2015); couple burnout showed a decrease as positive perspectives and communication increased (Kafry & Pines, 1980); and jealousy between partners was related to couple burnout (Pines, 1996). Additionally, factors such as gender, length of time married, number of children, and level of education caused differences in terms of couple burnout (Çapri & Gökçakan, 2012; Pamuk & Durmuş, 2015; Nikoubakht, Karimi, & Bahrami, 2011; Pines, Neal, Hammer, & Ickson, 2011). As mentioned in the studies, variables like dyadic adjustment, trust, and communication are highly related to couple burnout. Considering that communication skills, which is the main content of programs that aim to enrich the marriage relationship, are effective at coping with couple burnout (Pines, 1996, 2010), putting forth the extent to which a family training program affects the burnout levels of couples appears important.

The review of survey and workshop studies examined within the scope of this study show that women are the ones who mostly suffer from couple burnout (Çapri, 2008; Kafry & Pines, 1980; Laes & Laes, 2001; Pines, 1996, 2010; Pines et al., 2011). Based

on this information, the present study was conducted with a study group consisting of married women in order to observe the effects of the Family Training Program (Aile Eğitimi Programı, or AEP) on couple burnout more efficiently.

The AEP (prepared by the Turkish Republic's Ministry of Family and Social Policies, General Directorate of Family and Social Services) was implemented within the scope of the study. The AEP modules included in the study were Module 2 (Marriage and Family Life) and Module 3 (Family Life Skills). These aims to provide knowledge and skills to couples on topics that would have a positive effect on family communication between married couples, such as family life, communication, problem solving, role sharing, and conflict resolution (Canel, 2012a, 2012b). The AEP, which is national in scope, was scientifically tested through this study. This study is considered to be able to contribute to research and development studies on AEP.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the extent to which these modules from the AEP affect the couple burnout levels of married women who experience burnout in their marriage relationships. In line with this aim, the following hypotheses have been constructed:

**Hypothesis 1.** The “couple burnout” scores of the experimental group after the family training program are significantly lower than their scores before the training.

**Hypothesis 2.** There is no significant difference between the couple-burnout posttest and pretest scores of the control group.

**Hypothesis 3.** There is a significant difference between the differences of the pretest and posttest scores for the experimental and control groups after the family training program, in favor of the experimental group.

**Hypothesis 4.** There is no significant difference between the couple-burnout follow-up test scores and posttest scores of the experimental group.

**Hypothesis 5.** There is no significant difference between the couple-burnout follow-up test scores and posttest scores of the control group.

## Method

### Research Model

The randomized pretest-posttest control design, a realistic experimental design, was used in the study. Two groups were formed (experimental and control) using random assignment to investigate the effect of AEP on married women's couple burnout. The 12-session AEP program was implemented on the experimental group.

No implementations were conducted on the control group. A follow-up test was administered to the experimental and control groups eight weeks (two months) after completing the training program to examine the longevity of the effect of AEP. The Couple Burnout Measure (CBM) was administered to both groups as the pretest, posttest, and follow-up test.

## Study Group

The study group consisted of married women who had applied to KADEM (Konya Metropolitan Municipality Family Support Center) in 2011 and 2012. The criteria used for selecting the groups from among the applicants were: on a voluntary basis, being in their first marriage for at least two years, being a parent, and having a CBM score of 3 or more. Accordingly, the study group consisted of a total of 40 married women, 20 of whom constituted the experimental group and the remaining 20 of whom constituted the control group. A pilot study was conducted with 11 women who were not a part of the experimental or control groups, who had scored 3 or higher on the CBM, and who had volunteered to take part in the training.

The experimental and control groups were formed as the result of the stages specified below:

1. The list of married women who had applied to KADEM between 2011 and 2012 was formed. From this, 82 married women were called by phone and invited to KADEM to be informed about a new family training program that was about to start meeting.
2. Two women who came to the center were ruled out, as they had been married less than two years.
3. The CBM was administered to 80 married women at KADEM by the researcher. Before administering the measure, an explanation was given with the statement "The questionnaires are administered to understand the feelings you experience about your relationship as a couple." Examples were given to explain how the scale would be filled in. They were told their responses would be kept confidential, emphasizing the importance of sincere responses in order for the implementation to reach its goal. The measure was then administered.
4. The results of the administered CBM were evaluated by the researcher. Having a mean CBM score of three or higher was used as the criterion for forming the experimental and control groups' sample list.
5. The 21 married women who had scored less than three on the CBM were left out of the formed sample list so that only married women with high levels of couple burnout would constitute the research group.

- 6. Another criterion that was taken into consideration when forming the experimental and control groups was the ability to regularly join group sessions. Because 12 women who had been administered the CBM and scored higher than three points said they would be unable to participate in the AEP regularly due to reasons such as work, residing in different areas, problems finding caretakers for their children, and so on, and seven other women said they would be unable to participate in the AEP due to personal and family-related reasons (their spouse objected, parent or child in need of care, being illiterate, etc.), these women were left out of the sample list.
- 7. The 40 married women who remained on the obtained sample list were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, 20 per group.
- 8. Experimental group were individually interviewed by the researcher and informed about the AEP and its content (as prepared by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies; Canel, 2012a, 2012b), and the date, time, and place of the training. The experimental and control groups' formation and evaluation processes are schematized in Figure 1.

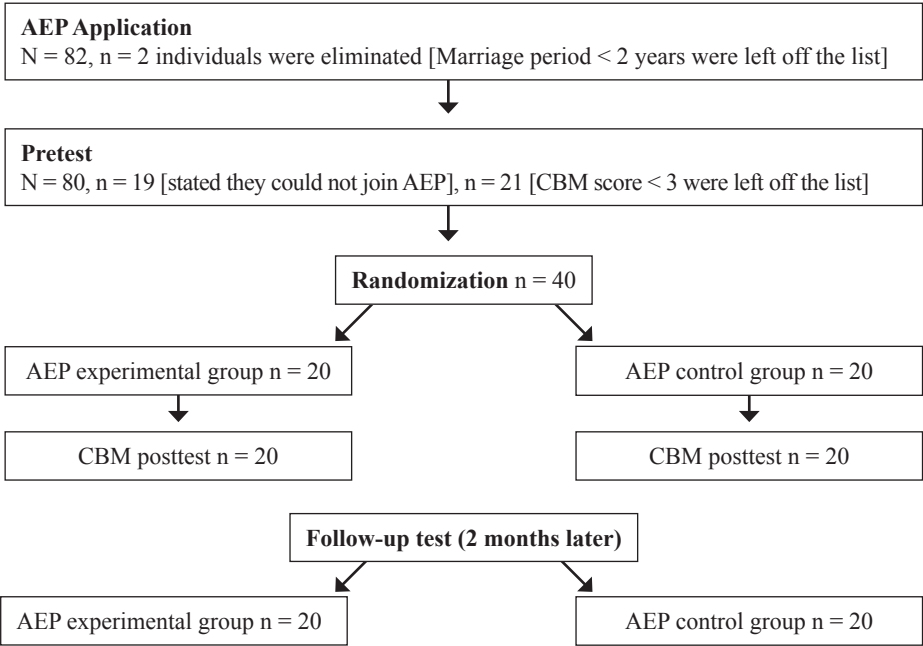


Figure 1. Experimental and Control Group Evaluation Flow Chart.

That the experimental and control groups share similar characteristics in terms of the traits to be examined within the scope of a study is important, as this increases the internal validity of the study (Isaac & Michael, 1995). All characteristics of the subjects in the experimental and control groups (the study group) need to be at equal levels and quantities (Erkuş, 2005; Özdamar, 2004). Information regarding the study group of this research is presented below.

Table 1

*Personal information regarding the married women that were included in the study group*

Variables		Experimental		Control	
		F	%	F	%
Age	20-29 years	5	25.0	4	20.0
	30-39 years	13	65.0	15	75.0
	40 years or older	2	10.0	1	5.0
Educational status	Primary School	7	35.0	7	35.0
	Secondary School	1	5.0	2	10.0
	High School	8	40.0	7	35.0
	Two-year degree	2	10.0	3	15.0
	Undergraduate	2	10.0	1	5.0
Educational status of their spouse	Primary School	1	5.0	1	5.0
	Secondary School	3	15.0	1	5.0
	High School	6	30.0	6	30.0
	Two-year degree	4	20.0	6	30.0
	Undergraduate	3	15.0	5	25.0
	Masters	3	15.0	1	5.0
Years married	1-5 years	3	15.0	4	20.0
	6-10 years	7	35.0	6	30.0
	11-15 years	5	25.0	4	20.0
	16-20 years	3	15.0	5	25.0
	21 or more years	2	10.0	1	5.0
Number of children	1 child	3	15.0	3	15.0
	2 children	12	60.0	12	60.0
	3 children	4	20.0	5	25.0
	4 children	1	5.0	-	-
Monthly income of the family	0 - 1,500 Turkish Lira	10	50.0	9	45.0
	1,501 - 3,000 TL	9	45.0	11	55.0
	3,001 - 4,500 TL	1	5.0	-	-

Through random assignment, the 40 married, female participants were determined for the experimental and control groups, 20 per group. Their ages varied between 20 and 40+ years old, with a median age of 32 in the experimental group and a median age of 34 in the control group. The frequency and percentages for the data regarding educational status, spouse's educational status, marriage duration, number of children, and monthly income of these women's families are given in Table 1. When examined, the experimental and control groups are seen to be equal in terms of personal variables.

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted on the data to test whether the experimental and control groups were equivalent in terms of couple-burnout levels; no statistically significant difference was found between the mean pretest scores of the two groups. The results obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Married Women's CBM Pretest Scores from the Experimental and Control Groups*

Dependent variable	Group	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	z	p
Couple burnout	Experimental	20	20.45	409.00	199.00	-.027	.989
	Control	20	20.55	411.00			

As seen in Table 2, the experimental and control groups can be said to be equivalent in terms of their mean CBM pretest scores.

Data Collection Tools

**Personal Information Form.** The personal information form was developed by the researcher to determine the married women's ages, educational status, their spouse's educational status, years married, number of children, and monthly family income.

**Couple Burnout Measure (CBM).** The CBM, originally developed by Pines in 1996, aims to measure the burnout levels of individuals who are in any type of relationship characterized as a couple. CBM is a one dimensional, seven-point Likert-type self-assessment scale consisting of 21 items. A single total score is obtained from CBM through five-step scoring, and the burnout level of the individual is evaluated under four categories. In the first category, scores of two or less are evaluated as showing no burnout. In the second category, a score of three is interpreted as a distress signal for burnout. In the third category, a score of 4 is evaluated as being in a state of crisis. In the final category, scores of five or higher are assessed as cases that need immediate help. The items of the measure are self-graded from one (never) to seven (always).

The measure's study for adaptation to Turkish culture was performed by Çapri (2008). As this research group consists of only married women, after getting permission from Çapri, the Turkish adaptation form was used and the validity and reliability of the measure were retested using the data collected from 121 married women.

As a result of factor analysis, the items were grouped under four factors that explained 79.400% of the variance of the scale. While the eigenvalues for each component were 11.936, 2.215, 1.433, and 1.090, each component were found to



explain 56.838%, 10.550%, 6.822%, and 5.190% of the variance, respectively. According to these data, the measure was observed to have one factor comprised of 21 items.

Within the scope of the reliability studies on the CBM, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated for the entire measure and for each subcomponent. Overall, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the CBM was .925. For the first subcomponent  $r = .91$ , for the second subcomponent  $r = .90$ , for the third subcomponent  $r = .76$  and for the fourth subcomponent  $r = .86$ . In light of these findings, the measure was shown to be a reliable and valid measurement tool.

## Procedure

This study used the relevant modules and units in the Family Communication Section from the training pack for Married Families with Children in the Family Training Program (AEP), as prepared by the Turkish Republic's Ministry of Family and Social Policies (Canel, 2012a, 2012b).

**Pilot Implementation.** Within the scope of the study, a pilot implementation was carried out to observe how comprehensible married women found the relevant module, units, and aims selected from the family education and communication section to be, to test whether the selected content was sufficient to enable adopting the targeted behaviors, and to assess whether the time determined for the sessions and the activity was adequate. The pilot study was conducted with 11 married women from among those who had applied to KADEM between 2011 and 2012 and who had volunteered to take part in the program.

In the pilot study, Sessions 2, 5, 7, and 9 (the most intensive modules of the training) from the "Marriage and Family Life" and "Family Life Skills" modules of the Family Education and Communication Section (Canel, 2012a, 2012b) of the training pack for married families with children were implemented by the researchers for assessment in line with the objectives stated above. The sessions were recorded using a video camera and evaluated with the permission of the 11 married women. As a result of the evaluations, the researchers decided to add the *those were the times* activity to Session 2, the *tug of war* activity to Session 5, and the *who is doing what* activity to the Session 7 from the training program; it was then made ready for actual implementation.

The AEP aims to build awareness and skills by approaching family life in a sophisticated manner and by giving information about the problems that one can encounter in family life, as well as solutions. The module, unit, and session objectives

for each session of the original program that were implemented on the experimental group after changes had been performed based on the pilot implementation within the scope of this general aim are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Module, Unit, and Session Objectives of the Family Training Program (AEP)*

Module(M)/Unit(U)/Session(S)	Session objectives
- /- /S1	To maintain group integrity
M2/U3/S2: First years of marriage	How to analyze the effects of the first years of marriage and choice of spouse on possible couple burnout
M2/ U4/S3: Transition to parenthood	How realize the effects of being a parent on marriage
M2/ U5/S4: Principal factors of a couple's healthy relationship	How to realize the principal factors for a couple's healthy relationship
M2/ U6/S4: Women, men, and sexuality	
M2/ U7/S5: Factors causing marital conflict and solution paths	How to realize the factors that cause marital conflict and how to develop solutions
M2/ U9/S6: Couples spending quality time together	Objective I- To embrace the meaning of and to plan for spending quality time as a couple.
M2/ U13/S6: The importance and support of the family union	Objective II- To embrace the meaning of and to plan for spending quality time with the family.
M2/ U8/S7: Division of roles in the family	Objective I- How to realize the relationship between the division of roles in the family and a healthy married life.
	Objective II- How plan the division of roles.
M2/ U10/S8: Relatives' effects on the marriage relationship	Objective I- How to realize relatives' effects on the marriage relationship
	Objective II- How to understand precautionary measures that decrease relatives' negative effects on the marriage relationship.
M3/ U1/S9: Principal factors of family communication	How to adopt effective communication skills.
M2/ U11/S10: Basic characteristics of a healthy, functional family	Objective I- How to realize the opportunities and strengths a family provides.
M2/U12/S10: Opportunities and strengths provided by the family	Objective II- How to understand the basic characteristics of a healthy, functional family.
M3/U2/S11: Gaining problem-solving skills by using the family's own natural resources	How to enable the family to gain problem-solving skills by using their own natural resources.
M3/U3/S12: The case of divorce as a crisis situation	Objective I- How to realize the case of divorce as a crisis situation in all aspects.
	Objective II- End the training program.

The AEP, the independent variable of the study, was implemented for the experimental group once per week for 12 weeks, 120 minutes per session. The control group was not given any training.

The activities that the researcher developed to increase the effect of the program on participants' couple-burnout levels were added to Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11 of the program. Facts versus myths, role playing, discussions, question-

and-answer, brain storming, movie scenes, thought intensifiers, family meetings, and imaging techniques were used throughout the training program.

## Data Analysis

Because there was an inadequate number of married women in the experimental ( $n = 20$ ) and control ( $n = 20$ ) groups ( $n < 30$ ), the hypothesis that data would be normally distributed (among the most important assumptions for implementing a parametric test) was determined to be unusable (Büyüköztürk, 2012; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Thus, non-parametric tests were used for statistical analyses.

The CBM was implemented on both groups as a pretest prior to the AEP, as a posttest after the training, and as a follow-up test eight weeks after the training program had been completed. The couple-burnout scores for each married woman in the experimental and control groups were calculated, and the Mann-Whitney U test was used to examine whether there had been a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of couple-burnout scores. In the research analyses, the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was used to compare the pretest and posttest, and posttest and follow-up test scores within the  $2 \times 3$  ([*Experimental-Control group*]  $\times$  [*Pretest-Posttest-Follow-up test*]) groups to investigate the effects of the family training program on couple burnout in the sub-hypotheses. The level of significance was found to be .05.

## Findings

The findings of the study on the effects of the Family Training Program on the couple-burnout levels of married women are as follows. The  $n$ ,  $\bar{x}$ , and SD values for the pretest, posttest, and follow-up test scores of the experimental and control groups from the couple burnout measure were examined using the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4.

Measurement	Experimental Group			Control Group		
	$n$	$\bar{x}$	SD	$n$	$\bar{x}$	SD
Pretest	20	4.15	0.98	20	4.13	0.81
Posttest	20	2.45	0.77	20	4.14	0.79
Follow-up Test	20	2.50	0.82	20	4.19	0.75

As seen in Table 4, the mean pretest scores for the experimental group before the training were higher than their mean posttest scores. The mean follow-up test score was similar to the posttest. When examining the control group, no significant difference was observed among their mean pretest, posttest, or follow-up test scores.

The Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was used to test Hypothesis 1 (experimental group's couple-burnout scores after AEP are significantly lower than their scores before AEP). The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
*Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test Results for the Experimental Group's Couple-Burnout Pretest & Posttest Scores*

Posttest & Pretest	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	p
Negative Rank	20	10.50	210.00	3.92	.000*
Positive Rank	0	.00	.00		

\* $p < .05$ .

As can be seen in Table 5, significant difference was observed between the pretest and posttest CBM scores for the experimental group ( $z = 3.92$ ;  $p < .05$ ). According to this finding, Hypothesis 1 has been accepted.

Hypothesis 2 (there is no significant difference between the couple-burnout posttest scores and pretest scores of the control group) was tested using the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test. These results are given in Table 6.

Table 6  
*Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test Results for the Control Group's Couple-Burnout Pretest & Posttest Scores*

Posttest & Pretest	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	p
Negative Rank	7	10.86	76.00	0.41	.678
Positive Rank	11	8.64	95.00		

When Table 6 is examined, no significant difference is seen between the CBM pretest and posttest scores for the control group ( $z = .41$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Hypothesis 2 has been accepted in accordance with this finding.

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to test the Hypothesis 3 (there is a significant difference between the differences of the pretest and posttest scores for the experimental and control groups after AEP in favor of the experimental group). The test results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7  
Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Differences in the Experimental and Control Groups' Couple-Burnout Pretest and Posttest Scores

Dependent Variable	Group	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	z	p
Couple Burnout	Experimental	20	30.50	610.00	.000	-5.416	.000*
	Control	20	10.50	210.00			

\* $p < .05$ .

As seen in Table 7, a significant difference is observed between the experimental and control groups' pretest and posttest CBM scores, in favor of the experimental group ( $z = -5.41$ ;  $p < .05$ ). In accordance with this finding, Hypothesis 3 has been accepted.

To test Hypothesis 4 (there is no significant difference between the couple burnout follow-up test scores and posttest scores of the experimental group), scores from the follow-up test and posttest were compared using the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test. These results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8  
*Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test Results for the Experimental Group's Couple-Burnout Posttest and Follow-Up Test Scores*

Posttest & Pretest	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	$z$	$p$
Negative Rank	11	9.27	102.00	-.28	.778
Positive Rank	8	11.00	88.00		

When Table 8 is examined, no significant difference can be seen between the posttest and follow-up test CBM scores for the experimental group ( $z = -.28$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Based on this finding, Hypothesis 4 has been accepted.

Hypothesis 5 (there is no significant difference between the control group's couple-burnout follow-up test scores and posttest scores) was tested using the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test to compare the difference between the scores. The results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9  
*Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test Results for the Control Group's Couple-Burnout Posttest & Follow-Up Test Scores*

Posttest & Pretest	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	$z$	$p$
Negative Rank	7	6.50	45.50	-1.16	.244
Positive Rank	9	10.06	90.50		
Ties	4				

When Table 9 is examined, no significant difference is seen between the posttest and follow-up test scores for the control group ( $z = -1.16$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Based on this finding, Hypothesis 5 has been accepted.

## Discussion

The discussion and results regarding the findings that serve as evidence for the hypotheses that had been determined in accordance with the aim of the study are presented below.

According to the findings regarding Hypothesis 1 (the couple-burnout scores for the experimental group after AEP are significantly lower than their scores before

AEP), the CBM scores of the married women in the experimental group after training were significantly lower than their CBM scores before training (see Table 5). Based on this finding, the AEP is seen to have created a positive change in the couple burnout of the women in the experimental group, and it was an effective method for decreasing their couple-burnout levels.

It is seen when examining the Family Training Program (AEP) as implemented on the experimental group (see Table 3) that Session 4 of the AEP involves investigation of the principal factors of a healthy couple's relationship; Session 5 involves marital conflict and solution paths; Session 6 involves spending quality time as a couple and with the family; Session 9 covers the key elements of communication; and Session 11 includes acquiring problem-solving skills. These programs, which aim at enriching the marriage relationship, are seen to especially concentrate on providing basic skills such as communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution ([Askari et al., 2012](#); [Burchard et al., 2003](#); [Canel, 2007](#); [Daire et al., 2012](#); [Duran & Hamamcı, 2010](#); [Ersanlı & Kalkan, 2003](#); [Faircloth & Cummings, 2008](#); [Faircloth et al., 2011](#); [Hahlweg & Richter, 2010](#); [Heidari et al., 2010](#); [Kalkan, 2002](#); [Kalkan & Ersanlı, 2008](#); [Karahan, 2007](#); [Öğretir, 2004](#); [Sardoğan & Karahan, 2005](#); [Yıldız, 2010](#)). Studies have reported that the development of these skills increases positive attitudes, mutual tolerance, feelings of trust, problem-solving skills, marital adjustment, and satisfaction, while decreasing aggressive behaviors, destructive conflicts, miscommunications, anxiety, stress, and the inclination to divorce.

Additionally, in studies where the AEP has been used as the independent variable, it was observed to increase marital adjustment and affective responsiveness within the family ([Ekşi & Kahraman, 2012](#)), marital satisfaction, marital problem-solving skills, and psychological levels of well-being ([Akça-Koca, 2013](#)).

Couple burnout is associated with communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills. In addition, tolerance, positive perspective, and trust are other variables that relate to relationships associated with couple burnout ([Çapri & Gökçakan, 2013](#); [Pamuk & Durmuş, 2015](#)). The communications of couples who are experiencing burnout are short and mechanical ([Pines, 1996](#)). [Pines \(1989\)](#) stated that the biggest difference between couples in high and low burnout groups originates from the quality and quantity of their communications, and communication is one of the variables with the highest correlation to burnout as a significant predictor. In another study by [Pines \(1996\)](#), several variables were found to be related to marriage and relating, such as positive perspectives, communication, and security as significant predictors of couple burnout. In these previously mentioned sessions of the AEP, the content that aimed to develop conflict resolution skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, and positive perspectives, affected married women's couple-

burnout levels. This effect was observed through a decrease in the couple-burnout posttest scores for the experimental group.

In addition to this, several researchers have agreed on the idea that burnout is an internal psychological experience that involves expectations, attitudes, and perceptions, and emerges at a personal level (Avşaroğlu, Deniz, & Kahraman, 2005). Feeling of burnt out makes communication with those at work and home more difficult. When conflict inevitably occurs, the victim of burnout will most likely overreact with a sudden outburst or with intense enmity (Potter, 1995). Such a situation gradually makes communication between couples more difficult. Couples show a tendency to drop away from communicating. While happy couples define themselves as individuals “who can talk about everything,” couples who experience burnout define themselves as individuals “who cannot talk about even unimportant things” (Pines, 1996).

According to the findings regarding Hypothesis 2 (there is no significant difference between the couple burnout posttest scores and pretest scores for the control group), no significant difference was observed between the CBM scores of married women in the control group after the training and their CBM scores before the training (see Table 7). Based on this finding, no difference in the couple-burnout levels of married women in the control group (who hadn't received any training) could be said to exist. In addition, this finding can be interpreted as another indicator that shows the positive effect of AEP on married women's couple-burnout levels.

The age, educational status, spouse's educational status, marriage duration, number of children, and monthly family income of the women assigned to the experimental and control groups showed similarities (See Table 1 and Table 2). Apart from these variables, the factor that caused a difference between the experimental and control groups is considered to be *not* implementing the AEP to the control group. The control group was not given any treatment for enriching their marital relationships to cope with couple burnout.

The aim of forming experimental and control groups in studies on marital enrichment programs is to reliably observe the effects of training. Statistics performed only on an experimental group to test the effectiveness of a program would not be adequate in such program studies. Including a control group in these studies is of great importance for proving the effectiveness of the program (Larson, 2004). Program studies in which the difference between experimental and control groups have not been explored are considered to be in need of revision.

When examining studies conducted using a pretest- posttest implemented experimental design with a control group, no difference is seen to be observed

between the control groups' pretest and posttest scores in these studies, while the procedure implemented on the experimental group is seen to cause a change (Askari et al., 2012; Aydemir-Sevim, 1996; Burchard et al., 2003; Daire et al., 2012; Duran & Hamamcı, 2010; Erbek, Beştepe, Akar, Alpkan, & Eradamlar, 2005; Ersanlı, 2007; Ersanlı & Kalkan, 2003; Faircloth & Cummings, 2008; Faircloth et al., 2011; Heidari et al., 2010; Kalkan, 2002; Kalkan & Ersanlı, 2008; Karahan, 2007; Öğretir, 2004; Sardoğan & Karahan, 2005; Yıldız, 2003).

The findings regarding Hypothesis 3 (There is a significant difference between the differences in pretest & posttest scores for the experimental and control groups after the AEP in favor of the experimental group) show a significant difference to exist between the couple-burnout mean difference scores for these two groups in favor of the experimental group (see Table 7). Based upon this finding, the AEP can be said to cause a positive change in the couple-burnout levels of married women, whereas no change will exist in the couple-burnout levels of women in the control group as they had received no training.

The study group consisted of female spouses. The most important reason for this selection is that the sufferers of couple burnout are generally women. In the majority of findings obtained from studies conducted on couples experiencing burnout, women were reported to experience higher levels of burnout than men (Çapri & Gökçakan, 2013; Laes & Laes, 2001; Pamuk & Durmuş, 2015; Pines, 1989, 1996, 2010; Pines et al., 2011). The reason for women's higher burnout levels is considered to be that they begin their marriage with higher expectations than men, and the difficulties and stress that married women endure when trying to cope with their duties as wives and mothers is greater than the stress that men experience when performing their duties as husbands and fathers (Çapri, 2008; Pines, 1989). The overload on women is an environmental factor that causes burnout. The load and general stress levels of female spouses cause burnout syndrome and symptoms of depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999). Sessions 3 and 7 of the program (see Table 3) enable spouses to review the division of roles and responsibilities and to maintain an increase in marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is considered to be gained from actions that cause a decrease in couple-burnout levels. In a study conducted by Pamuk and Durmuş (2015) couple burnout was found to show a decrease as the partners increased their support of each other. According to Pines (2010), whether traditional or egalitarian, conflict decreases and marital happiness is achieved if both spouses believe in the same gender roles.

The effects of factors such as choice of spouse and its effects on marriage, power sharing, division of roles, and initial arrangement of family relationships in the first years of marriage on spouses' burnout levels in the following years is discussed in



Session 2 of the training program and was implemented on the experimental group. In this session, the group members stated that *their partners were more interesting during the flirtation/engagement period; they seek the fondness and intimacy of a father in their husband; the strong and charismatic characteristics that first seemed appealing have now turned into over-controlling attitudes in their marriages; the calmness which was once found attractive now causes social feelings of monotony and isolation*. The group members' emphasis on *men generally making the decisions in the marriage relationship* is remarkable.

According to Pines (1996; 1997; 2010), the first step in treating couple burnout is exploring their partners' traits that they had found attractive at the start of the relationship, as well as the connection between these qualities and the traits that have now become a problem for them. Reviewing the relationships with their parents and their parents' relationship between each other, and also realizing the main effects experienced in their relationship is highly important for turning problems into opportunities. Having group members establish a connection between their spouse's characteristics that they once found attractive and those they now find unattractive, associating any crisis experienced in the first years of marriage with burnout, and adopting cognitive skills that help turn these crises into opportunities in this session are considered to have an effect on decreasing the experimental group's CBM posttest scores.

Session 6 enabled group members to plan various new activities that they could perform together with their spouses. These changes planned within the marriage relationship are thought to be able to save the couple's relationship from monotony. According to Pines (1996), changes can help increase excitement and emotional stimulation, revive romanticism, and decrease burnout in a couple's life.

One of the important effects observed in the experimental group is the remedial effect on the group. Group member's realization that although their causes and effects were not the same, their problems' similarities to each other were observed to both bring the group members closer together and to decrease their levels of distress. In the last training session, the group members stated that *being together with women who had experienced similar problems in their marriages was a relief, and they felt more competent in problem solving by joining these group sessions every week*. According to Yalom (2002), most people believe they're the only ones with problems. When these individuals hear in a group that others have also experienced similar problems, they don't feel so alone and can share their feelings. This maintains change and improvement. This effect is considered to act as a catalyst in the decrease observed in the experimental group's burnout levels.

According to the findings regarding Hypothesis 4 (There is no significant difference between the couple burnout follow-up test scores and posttest scores of

the experimental group), no significant difference was observed between the CBM posttest scores and the follow-up test scores of the experimental group, which was implemented eight weeks after the training program completion (see Table 8). Based on this finding, the effects of the training can also be said to continue for eight weeks.

A review of family-training and marital-relationship developmental psycho-educational programs shows that studies where long-term effects have been investigated reveal positive results similar to those from the AEP. In the study by Faircloth, Schermerhorn, Mitchell, Cummings, and Cummings (2011), follow-up assessments were performed six months, one year, and two years after the completion of the Happy Couples and Happy Kids psycho-education program. Based on their statistical analyses, improvements were observed in constructive conflicts and problem-solving skills over time. Consequently, the training program was observed to have a positive effect on families' mental health and well-being. Similarly, in the study by Faircloth and Cummings (2008), follow-up assessments were performed after the psycho-education program had been implemented to decrease the negative effects of marital conflicts on marital relationships. According to the results of the follow-up assessments, the program was found to have long-term effects on marital conflict. In Öğretir's (2004) study on the effect of positive-thinking group-training programs on increasing the positive thoughts of mothers to help them develop positive attitudes towards their husbands, a follow-up test was administered three months after the psycho-education program. The results of the follow-up test showed that the program was still effective at increasing the number of mothers' positive behaviors and at decreasing the number of negative behaviors; this effect was found to be long-term.

The modules in the family training and communication section of the AEP aim to provide information regarding problems that could be experienced in different periods of life and aim to provide the awareness and skills that can contribute to resolving these problems (Canel, 2012a, 2012b). Topics that are important in family and marital life are discussed in Sessions 8, 10, and 12 of the training program (see Table 3).

In Session 10, giving positive messages and showing appreciation, approval, and forgiveness were behaviors emphasized for permanently coping with burnout. According to Pines (1996), appreciation, approval, and a positive perspective are important shields against couple burnout. There is an inverse relationship regarding approval and feeling appreciated with burnout (Pines, 1989). The more that positive perspectives, approval, and appreciation are shown, the less a relationship suffers from burnout. As spouses approve and appreciate each other more and more, each spouse will occasionally get more than they give (Pines, 1996). In a study on the

effects of reconciliation and forgiveness on couple relationships, Burchard et al. (2003) reported that a training program on forgiveness and reconciliation through empathy increases couples' quality of life, and forgiveness contributes to individuals' well-being. Improvements in behaviors of approval, appreciation, and forgiveness were considered to enable decreases in the experimental group's couple-burnout levels and to allow these effects to continue long term.

The findings obtained from the follow-up test revealed that the contribution and positive effects of the AEP on the women in the experimental group continued to decrease their burnout levels. Married women's couple-burnout levels can be said to decrease, or at least not to increase, when programs and activities for decreasing their burnout are planned and when these women are provided with support and solutions regarding their burnout.

When the results regarding Hypothesis 5 (there is no significant difference between the couple-burnout follow-up test scores and posttest scores of the control group) are examined, no significant difference is observed in the control group's couple-burnout levels (see Table 9). This unfavorable result in the control group can be interpreted as another finding which shows the positive effects of AEP on married women's couple-burnout levels. In light of these results, it is suggested that units and activities developed on couple burnout be added to the "Marriage and Family Life" and "Family Life Skills" modules of the AEP, as these units and activities would increase the effectiveness of the program regarding burnout.

For future studies, it is recommended to design training programs for married and unmarried individuals to cope with couple burnout. Studying the effects of AEP on dependent variables related to marriage and family, such as forgiveness, marital satisfaction, quality of life, dysfunctional beliefs, and gender roles, as well as comparative studies of programs such as ACME, PREPARE/ENRICH, MMCP, SYMBIS, and PREP, are considered to be able to contribute to both AEP research and development studies and the literature in this field.

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