
Investigating the effectiveness of emotion-based couple therapy on marital adjustment

Maryam Omid

(Master of General Psychology, Garmsar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Garmsar, Iran)

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ABSTRACT

Background and purpose: Marital compatibility is a state of compatibility in the relationship between spouses, during which couples respond constructively to the requirements of the relationship. The success of a couple's life depends on their success in marital compatibility, and incompatibility leads to tension; Therefore, this research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of emotion-based couple therapy on marital adjustment.

Research method: The research design was semi-experimental with pre-test and post-test. For this purpose, 30 couples (60 people) from Mashhad City were selected by purpose-based sampling and randomly placed in two experimental and control groups. First, the couples answered the marital adjustment questionnaire, and then the people in the experimental group were trained in EFT emotion-based couple therapy for 10 sessions. SPSS-24 software and covariance analysis were used for data analysis.

Findings: The results of the pre-test and post-test comparison of the two groups showed that emotion-based couple therapy training has a significant effect on increasing marital adjustment.

Conclusion: As a result, emotion-based couple therapy has affected increasing marital compatibility, and the results of this research can be used to reduce marital problems.

1. Introduction

Marriage is the most important event in the human life cycle during which couples are in a mutual relationship with their spouses. This relationship is the most important in every person's life. Interaction is an inseparable part of a marital relationship, like any human relationship, and marital compatibility is one of the success criteria of couple interaction (Mondol, 2014). Adaptation is a type of adaptive behaviour that allows a person to face the demands of the environment (Baharambe, Baviskar, 2013). In a precise definition, adaptation is the tendency to react constructively instead of reacting destructively to a potentially destructive action (Rosbolt, Martz, Agnew, 1998). Mondol considers marital adjustment to be an evolutionary process in the relationship between couples, which refers to a state of matching in different areas of the couple where there may be conflict (Mondol, 2014). In another definition, marital adjustment is the process of modification, compromise and transformation of the individual and the interaction patterns of the couple to achieve maximum satisfaction in the relationship (Bali, Dhingra, Baro, 2010).

Today, the growing number of divorces in the world is very worrying. Although, according to official statistics, Iran is still among the countries with a relatively low divorce rate, over the past ten years, the divorce rate in the country has been increasing day by day. This issue shows the low compatibility of some couples in their relationships and makes it necessary to address the issue of marital compatibility as one of the factors involved in the continuation of marriage or divorce. Research in the past years has shown that marital compatibility has many positive consequences in the lives of couples and their lack of compatibility will have undeniable consequences on their health and relationship. Some studies show that marital compatibility with the health of couples in terms of sleep quality, depression, stress (Srivastava, 2015) life satisfaction (Arshad, Mohsen, Mahmoud, 2014), marital satisfaction (Quek, Fitzpatrick, 2013), quality of life, family functioning (Basharpour, Sheikhu-Islami, 2015) and parent-child relationship (Weig, Jaswal, 2012) have a significant relationship. In another study, it has been shown that the success of a couple's life depends on their success in adapting to each other, and the incompatibility of couples leads to conflict and tension (Saber, 2016).

Guttman, Cowan, Carrer and Swanson, (2018) also found that support and emotional conflict are the basic components of marital relationships and these factors can predict the future of the relationship more strongly than behavioural conflicts. They also noted that the tone of emotional expression between couples is much more important than the content of their conversations and their ability to resolve conflicts. According to them, the main factor of marital incompatibility is not the amount of anger expressed or the number of conflicts, but rather the humiliation and defensive distancing that causes marital disturbances. In another study, Cordova, Gay and Warren (2018) also showed that emotional communication ability is significantly related to marital compatibility and safe intimacy, with this study, the role of identifying and expressing emotions, and understanding and managing negative emotions in maintaining a marital relationship is confirmed. This recent focus on emotions as the main cause of marital problems has created a revolution in couple therapy approaches and brought about the emotion-oriented couple therapy approach. Emotion-focused approach (EFT). EFT is a constructivist approach in which clients are treated as experts in their own experiences. The EFT change process is defined in nine steps, which include three stages. The first stage: prevent the spread of the vicious cycle, the second stage: reconstruct interactive situations, and the third stage: consolidation and integrate (Javidi et al., 2011).

In emotion-oriented family therapy, it is assumed that conflict in married life occurs when spouses are unable to satisfy each other's attachment needs for safety, security, and satisfaction. In other words, troubled marital relationships indicate the failure of couples to establish a relationship with a secure attachment pattern. In meeting each other's attachment needs, such spouses experience secondary emotional responses such as anger, hostility, revenge, or excessive guilt. Key elements such as attachment needs and fears are revealed and critiqued during therapy sessions. To achieve such goals, EFT combines key elements of client-centred therapy with principles of general systems theory (von

Bertalanffy, 1956). We see such a combination in structural family therapy techniques (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981, cited by Harvey, 2011). Attachment theory supports EFT with a non-morbid theoretical concept to understand the importance of emotional bonds, mutual reliance and intimacy in adulthood (Javidi et al., 2011). Also, Henparrovan (2009) showed that couple therapy with an emotion-oriented approach is effective in improving behaviour, desire, emotions, quality and marital satisfaction. Therefore, emotional couple therapy focuses on the emotions of couples to solve their problems and better manage their emotions. Khojaste Mehr, Shirali Nia, Rajabi, and Beshlidesh (2012) showed in their research that emotion-oriented couples therapy reduces the symptoms of depression and improves the emotional regulation of couples. The current research aims to determine the effectiveness of emotion-oriented couple therapy on marital satisfaction among couples. Therefore, the hypothesis of the present research is: that couple therapy based on emotion improves the marital compatibility of couples.

.2Review method

The research design was semi-experimental with pre-tests and post-tests. For this purpose, 30 couples (60 people) from Mashhad city were selected by purpose-based sampling and randomly placed in two experimental and control groups. First, the couples answered the marital adjustment questionnaire, and then the people in the experimental group were trained in emotional EFT-based couple therapy for 10 sessions. SPSS-24 software and covariance analysis were used for data analysis.

Compatibility scale and husband and wife

This scale is a tool that is widely used to measure relationship adjustment and is one of the most widely used tools in the family and couple field (Spanier & Thompson, 1982; Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995). This 32-question tool was made to evaluate the quality of marital relationships and measured four dimensions: couple satisfaction, couple solidarity, couple agreement and affection expression. The overall score of this scale is obtained from zero to one hundred and fifty by summing the scores of the questions. Answering these 32 questions is in the Likert scale style, to increase its validity, some questions are designed positively and some negatively; Therefore, some questions require reversing the direction of scoring. reported the validity of this scale as 0.96. Carey, Spector, Lantinga and Cross (1993) also found a high internal consistency (0.95) throughout the validity of this scale. Molazadeh et al. (2008) obtained a validity of 0.86 for this scale using the retest method with a thirty-seven-day interval on 92 people. In addition, Cronbach's alpha on this scale was 0.89. The reliability of this tool in the present study was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, 0.71.

Table (1): Content of emotion-based couple therapy sessions (EFCT)

| The content of the session | meeting |
|---|---------|
| getting to know and establishing a therapeutic relationship; Getting to know the general rules of treatment; Checking the motivation of the company; defining emotion and its application; Assessing the nature of the problem and the relationship; Evaluating of goals and expectations of spouses from treatment. | First |
| Recognizing the negative interactive cycle and creating conditions for spouses to reveal their negative interactive cycle; Evaluation of the relationship and bond of attachment between couples; assessment of attachment problems and obstacles; Acquaintance of couples with the principles of emotion-oriented therapy and the role of emotions in interpersonal interactions; rebuilding interactions and increasing the flexibility of spouses; Create a therapeutic agreement. | second |
| access to unrecognized emotions that underlie interactive situations; focus more on emotions; attachment needs and fears; creating a safe communication space for couples; Facilitating the interaction of spouses with each other and validating their experiences, needs, and attachment tendencies, focusing on secondary emotions that are revealed in the interactive cycle and exploring them to achieve underlying and unknown emotions; Discussion about primary emotions; Processing them and raising couples' awareness of initial emotions and hot cognitions. | third |
| reframing the problem in terms of underlying emotions and attachment needs; Emphasizing the client's ability to express emotions and show attachment behaviours to his wife; Informing couples about the impact of their fear and defence mechanisms on cognitive and emotional processes; coordination between the diagnosis of the therapist and the couple; Describing cycles in the context and context of attachment. | fourth |

| | |
|--|---------|
| Encouragement to identify rejected needs and aspects of self that have been denied; drawing the attention of couples to the way they interact with each other and reflecting their interaction patterns with respect and empathy; Expressing attachment needs and identifying denied needs and increasing acceptance of corrective experience. | fifth |
| Informing people about the underlying emotions and revealing the position of each spouse in the relationship; Emphasis on accepting the spouse's experiences and new ways of interaction; Tracking known emotions. | sixth |
| Highlighting and re-explaining attachment needs and pointing out that they are healthy and normal. | seventh |
| facilitating the expression of needs and desires and creating emotional conflict; Developing early emotional experiences in the field of attachment and recognition of inner needs and relationships; Creating new attachments with a secure bond between spouses. | eight |
| Creating new interactive situations between couples and ending old patterns; Clarifying interactional patterns, and recalling attachment needs. | ninth |
| Review of past meetings and questions and answers | tenth |

3. Findings

Table (2): Average and standard deviation of couple compatibility scores in experimental and control groups, pre-test and post-test

| variable (marital compatibility) | Statistical index | group | the level |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|-----------|
| 85/42 16/32 87/40 23/19 | Average standard deviation Average standard deviation | the experiment Control | pre-exam |
| 118/31 16/21 88/50 26/34 | Average standard deviation Average standard deviation | the experiment Control | post-test |

The results of the significance tests of multivariate covariance analysis, including Pillai's effect and Vickers' lambda, indicated that the experimental and control groups differed from each other in at least one dependent variable. To check the assumptions of Mankova, first, the homogeneity of the slope of the pre-tests with the post-tests was calculated. Investigations showed that there is no difference between the pre-test and post-test of marital adjustment in experimental and control groups. Also, the significant level of the group to marital adjustment indicated that the slope between the linear combination of pre-tests and the linear combination of post-tests is the same for the experimental and control groups. Therefore, the most important condition of covariance analysis is that pre-tests and post-tests are the same. To understand this difference, two single-variable covariance analyzes were performed in the Mankwa text, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

Table (3): The results of single-variable covariance analysis in the text of Mankva on the mean scores of the marital compatibility post-test.

| Significance level | F | mean square | Degrees of freedom | sum of squares | Source of changes |
|--------------------|-------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <0.001 | 62/41 | 398/34 | 1 | 398/34 | Marital compatibility |

The results of Table 3 show that there is a significant difference between the two groups in terms of marital compatibility (F: 62.41) at the $p < 0.01$ level.

4. Discussion

This research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of emotion-based couple therapy on marital adjustment. The analysis of the results showed that the emotion-based couple therapy approach in the post-test phase had a significant effect on marital adjustment and led to a significant increase in

marital adjustment. The results of this research are in agreement with the findings of Gehlert et al. (2017), Schmidt and Lakot and Gehlert (2015), Morrow et al. (2016), Hendrix et al. colleagues (2015), Martin and Bilawski (2011), Javid, Khalili and Afkari (2016), Abdulvand et al. (2015), Ziaulhaq et al. (2013) are aligned. consistent with the therapeutic goals of EFCT; Couples get to know, understand and experience secondary and primary emotions, express emotions, and recognise interactive patterns in creating a safe relationship with the help and support of the therapist, and this is a step towards changing and deepening relationships and creating a safe atmosphere in the relationship (Johnson, 2004/ Hosseini. , 1389)

In Davis and Shaver's (2006) research, a strong and meaningful relationship has been observed between attachment styles and sexual tendencies, feelings and behaviours, and it seems that the emotional strategies of regulating needs are related to attachment styles and in the effort to achieve sexual relationships and satisfaction. It is effective in marital relations. On the contrary, when marital dissatisfaction is manifested in the relationship of couples with complaints, accusing each other, blaming and finding fault with each other, the couple's attachment to each other is more threatened. In fact, for couples, a marital relationship is an entry point for achieving harmony and joint activity and creating positive emotions towards each other (Javidi, 2011); Therefore, in explaining the hypothesis, the emotion-oriented couple therapy approach must be possible by changing the couple's attachment styles and changing the cycle of defective marital interactions and creating a safe communication space to better control the emotions and control the behaviour of the couple and increase marital compatibility. Also, negative emotions lead to a decrease in spouses' satisfaction with each other, and positive and reassuring emotions cause an increase in spouses' sexual satisfaction. Also, positive emotions and calmness combined with trust prevent the burnout of spouses and strengthen their relationship (Salimi et al., 2007).

Ethical Considerations: After the necessary approvals and obtaining permission from the university, to complete the questionnaires, the goals and working methods were explained to all the people participating in the study, their consent was obtained and they were assured that the results of the research will be available to them if they wish. They will be placed. Also, people were assured that they were free to participate or not participate in the research. People were assured that they could decide to withdraw from the research at any stage of the research and this would not have any negative consequences for them.

Limitations of the research: This research, like other research, had limitations, and one of these limitations was the mental and emotional state of the participants when answering the questions, which may affect the accuracy and accuracy of their answers, this limitation was uncontrollable.

Conflict of interest: The authors hereby declare that this work is the result of independent research and does not have any conflict of interest with other organizations and persons.

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5. Resources

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