

Original Article

The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on the Psychological Capital of Couples Seeking Divorce

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy as one of the approaches to counseling and family therapy, is an effective way to solve many psychological problems. The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on the psychological capital of couples seeking divorce referred to Gorgan Social Emergency Department.

Materials and Methods: This study was a quasi-experimental study with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. In this study, 40 couples seeking divorce were selected from the couples who referred to the Gorgan Social Emergency Center in the autumn and winter of 2018. Subjects were divided into two groups of 20 experimental and control. The experimental group received cognitive-behavioral training in 9 sessions, while the control group did not receive this training. The research tool was Lutans Psychological Capital Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance in SPSS-23 software.

Results: The results showed that cognitive-behavioral Therapy led to an increase in psychological capital and its components ($P > 0.0001$).

Conclusion: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy effectively increased Psychological Capital because of their emphasis on different psychological aspects. On the other hand, cognitive-behavioral therapy through enhancing social interactions, positive emotions, hope training and optimism increased Psychological Capital.

Keywords: Cognitive-behavioral therapy, Couple, Divorce, Psychological capital

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Introduction

One of the major problems in married life is divorce. The increasing prevalence of which has prompted researchers in the field of family and marriage to study the causes and factors

affecting it (1). Divorce is a process that begins with the experience of emotional crisis in both couples and ends with the attempt to resolve the conflict by entering a new situation with new roles and lifestyles (2). According to official statistics in Iran, out of every thousand cases of marriage, about two hundred cases

lead to divorce, and Iran is the fourth country in the world in terms of the ratio of divorce to marriage (3). The experience of divorce affects the adjustment of individuals in all dimensions (psychological, physical, social, and emotional) and reduces the performance and inefficiency of family members after divorce (4). In examining the factors related to divorce, in addition to social, economic, and legal factors, personal and psychological variables, including psychological capital, are of special importance (5). Psychological capital has four perceptual-cognitive components; hope, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism. These components, in an interactive and evaluative process, give meaning to a person's life, continue the person's effort to change stressful situations, and ensure his resistance and stubbornness in achieving goals (6). Having psychological capital allows people to not only cope with stressful situations, but also have less stress, high power against problems, a clear view of themselves and less affected by daily events. Therefore, such people have better mental health (7). People with rich psychological capital also relate positive events in life to permanent personal factors. And they set realistic, achievable, and predictable goals for themselves and strive to achieve them with the desire and talent that they show (8). Divorce has dire consequences for women's psychological capital. The rule of discriminatory ideas, living alone and with depression, hopelessness and insecurity, the wrong attitude of society towards these people, opportunities and social relations and unfavorable cultural, social and educational situation for themselves and their children, lack of umbrella and financing and favorable society are among the problems that lead to a decrease in the psychological capital of divorced women (9). Zineldin's research showed that divorce leads to a significant reduction in psychological capital in couples, especially divorced women (10). Today, various approaches to couple therapy and family therapy have been developed with the aim of reducing conflicts, communication disorders and improving psychological capital between couples (3). One of the effective and popular approaches in the field of marriage is the cognitive behavioral family therapy approach (11). This approach arose from the gradual expansion of behavioral couple therapy and its treatment strategies and the addition and emphasis on

cognitive factors in the treatment of marital disorders (3). The goal of couple therapy is to help couples to adapt better to current problems and to learn effective communication methods (12). One of the most important hypotheses of this view is that couples' emotional and non-functional behavioral responses to events are affected by improper information processing (12). While cognitive assessment of events is distorted or overstated or assessed in accordance with erroneous or extreme standards of communication (3). Various studies have confirmed cognitive-behavioral couple therapy in marital and family context. For example, Ahmadi Tabar et al. In a study showed that cognitive-behavioral couple therapy has a significant effect on improving resilience and quality of life of couples (13). One of the most important tasks of the therapist in this approach is to help couples to actively observe and evaluate their automatic cognitions, as well as their specific assumptions and standards. Behavioral cognitive approaches assume that positive changes in emotions and behaviors occur when people change the way they process their information and cognitions (14). Also, Azimifar et al. (15) showed that cognitive-behavioral couple therapy has increased marital happiness and optimism of couples (15).

Considering that the phenomenon of divorce is one of the main problems of Iran and severely affects the family and couple system due to its destructive effects, (16) it is important to pay attention to this phenomenon and treat its destructive effects on the marital and family system. On the other hand, considering that the results of the research conducted by the researcher showed that little research has been done on psychological capital and controlled and clinical research on this variable are very few. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral counseling on the psychological capital of couples seeking divorce referred to the social emergency of Gorgan.

Methods

The present study was a quasi-experimental study with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. The statistical population included all couples seeking divorce in Gorgan who filed a case in the social

emergency center in the fall and winter of 2018. Samples were selected as available. Subjects were randomly divided into two groups of 20 people. Due to the use of quasi-experimental research method, the optimal volume for each group is 10 people (17). In addition, the present study has a code in the ethics committee of the Islamic Azad University of Gorgan (IR.IAU.GORGAN.REC.1397.02). Criteria for entering the research include couples seeking divorce, having at least one child, were willing to participate in the research. Exclusion criteria also include absence of more than two sessions in training sessions, simultaneous participation in similar training intervention.

Materials

The researcher then stated in a meeting the importance and necessity of the research for all participants. All participants were then informed of their written consent to participate in the study and assured that the information collected would remain confidential. Participation in the research did not require any costs, did not threaten any harm to the participants, they were allowed to leave the training sessions and not continue to cooperate with the researcher, and in order to maintain personal secrets and not invade the privacy of individuals, the results It will be reported in the form of general indicators and will be provided to psychologists and specialists to be used to advance educational and rehabilitation goals. The subjects of the experimental group participated in the cognitive-behavioral couple therapy program after performing the pre-test. The purpose and content of the cognitive-behavioral counseling program are divided into sessions in Table 1.

All subjects were evaluated before and after the intervention using the "Lutans" psychological capital questionnaire(18) and their scores were taken as pre-test and post-test, respectively. The data obtained before and after the training sessions for both groups were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance. SPSS-23 statistical software was used to analyze the data.

Lutans Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ)

This questionnaire was developed by Luthans et al.

This questionnaire has 24 questions in four dimensions of hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy in which each subscale has 6 items. Luthans et al. Reported the reliability of the questionnaire above 0.90 (18) which after translation and revision, its content validity in the research of Hoveida et al. Was confirmed by 5 experts in industrial and managerial psychology. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.77 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study (19).

Results

The Demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2. The results in Table 2 show most of the research subjects in the age range of 31 to 40 years had a diploma and average economic status. The mean and standard deviation of the components of psychological capital are presented in Table 2.

The hypothesis of normality of data distribution in all variables was confirmed using Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test ($P > 0.05$). To determine the effect of cognitive-behavioral counseling on the psychological capital of the couple, the box test confirmed the assumption of variance-covariance homogeneity, which was equal to (M Box 58.3 and $P = 0.45$). The results of Leven test also confirmed the assumption of homogeneity of variances in all variables ($P > 0.05$). The regression line slope assumption for the variables and the relationship between the variables were linear. Bartlett sphericity test showed sufficient correlation between dependent variables ($P > 0.001$). Therefore, the assumptions of the statistical test of analysis of covariance were multivariate. For this purpose, the components of psychological capital in the experimental and control groups were calculated in the statistical default of the largest root of zinc ($P < 0.001$ and $F = 20.08$); Therefore, the experimental and control groups have significant differences in at least one of the variables. The results of multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) test are shown in Table 3.

Table 1: Summary of Contents of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy sessions (20).

Sessions	Contents
1	Strengthen the relationship by accepting and supporting each other.
2	Describe personality differences that enrich relationships and make life more interesting.
3	Negotiation and agreement on the creation of common strategies.
4	Negotiate each other's different interests and respect those interests.
5	Agree on long-term financial planning for savings and spending.
6	Commit yourself to strengthening the relationship through recognition, respect and companionship.
7	The role of relatives and friends in the family.
8	Creating a positive and supportive home environment for marital relationships.
9	Practicing involving others in your thoughts and feelings in a way that increases intimacy.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the participants.

Variables	Range	Experimental Group		Control group	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Age	20-30	4	20	5	25
	31-40	11	55	10	50
	41-50	5	25	5	25
Education	Diploma	10	50	11	55
	Bachelor	7	35	6	30
	Master	3	15	3	15
Economic situation	Good	5	25	4	20
	Moderate	12	60	11	55
	Poor	3	15	5	25

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of psychological capital components in the groups.

Variables	Stage	Experimental Group		Control group	
		Mean(M)	Standard deviation(std)	Mean(M)	Standard deviation(std)
Efficacy	Pretest	19.26	4.25	18.40	3.31
	Posttest	23.46	3.47	18.43	3.57
Hope	Pretest	19.83	5.14	19.53	2.64
	Posttest	22.80	3.25	19.30	2.65
Resilience	Pretest	22.40	4.01	19.20	4.85
	Posttest	28.53	4.25	20.12	2.90
Optimism	Pretest	21.56	3.65	21.23	4.12
	Posttest	26.80	3.68	21.32	4.12
Psychological capital	Pretest	82.16	12.62	79.13	10.93
	Posttest	88.42	9.43	77.86	11.21

In order to find significant differences in the components of psychological capital, univariate analysis of variance (ANCOVA) was used, and the results are presented in Table 5. According to the results of Table 4, the group had a significant effect on self-efficacy ($P < 0.001$ and $F = 5.68$); Resilience ($P < 0.001$ and $F = 30.11$); Had optimism ($P < 0.001$ and

$F = 7.67$) and hope ($P < 0.001$ and $F = 4.76$). And based on ETA squares, it can be stated that 36, 64, 53 and 22% of the changes in each of the variables of self-efficacy, resilience, optimism and hope are due to the effect of the intervention, respectively.

Table 4: Analysis of Mancovato examining the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on the psychological capital.

Source of change.	Amount	F	df	P	Effect size	Test power
Pilay effect	0.7	20.08	4	0.001	0.7	0.99
Wilks Lambda	0.29	20.08	4	0.001	0.7	0.99
Hotling effect	2.36	20.08	4	0.001	0.7	0.99
The biggest root on	0.36	20.08	4	0.001	0.7	0.99

Table 5: Analysis of covariance between subjects to examining the effectiveness the cognitive-behavioral therapy on the psychological capital.

Variable	Source	SS	Df	MS	F	P	Eta coefficient
Life expectancy	Pretest	78.62	1	78.62	3.77	0.38	0.12
	group	101.40	1	101.40	4.76	0.001	0.22
	Error	649.97	37	17.567	10.77		
Resilience	Pretest	352.53	1	352.53	10.77	0.31	0.16
	group	511.252	1	511.225	30.11	0.001	0.64
	Error	628.211	37	16.979			
Optimism	Pretest	114.4	1	114.4	5.69	0.008	0.11
	group	243.22	1	243.22	7.67	0.001	0.53
	Error	454.34	37	12.279			
Efficacy	Pretest	92.87	1	92.87	4.35	0.008	0.10
	group	143.50	1	143.50	5.68	0.001	0.36
	Error	367.152	37	9.923			

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on psychological capital and its components in couples seeking divorce (with children) referred to the social emergency in Gorgan. The results of the present study showed that cognitive-behavioral counseling trainings led to improved self-efficacy, resilience, optimism and hope of couples. This finding is in line with the findings of Ahmadi Tabar et al. (13); Azimifar et al. (15); Moradi and Fathi (21); Suranata et al. (22) and Epstein and Zheng (23) are similar. In explaining this finding, it can be said that counseling trainings in a cognitive-behavioral manner increase positive and pleasant behaviors, improve communication, and develop problem-solving skills, changing couples' harmful or distorted patterns of thinking, finding ways to prevent the escalation of destructive conflicts, and trying to change destructive patterns of behavior. In

fact, cognitive-behavioral couple therapy provides an opportunity for couples to learn the necessary ways to identify and correct their destructive thoughts and behaviors and use them in the future when faced with various issues. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy, while emphasizing the elimination of cognitive or mental errors (wrong mentalities) in the relationship between spouses, also considers ways to increase desirable behaviors and reduce undesirable behaviors (15).

In CBT, through learning emotion regulation skills and cognitive reappraisal, individuals gain the ability to generate positive emotions and modulate negative emotions, which is likely to lead to improved self-efficacy in couples. The main techniques of CBT such as replacing negative thoughts with rational beliefs, imagining, exposure, and cognitive reconstruction can also reduce anxiety and depression and improve life expectancy in couples. CBT reduce fatigue severity and increase its tolerance level by increasing the couple's awareness of negative thoughts and cognitive errors and

by emphasizing active coping strategies such as attempt to perform tasks despite fatigue and disregard for it. Hence, it can be said that the use of various CBT techniques such as problem-solving have a significant role in reducing fatigue in couples.

Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy by changing distorted thought patterns and negative attributes can increase the level of satisfaction and satisfaction with life in couples and reduce negative emotions. In fact, in the present study, the change in the couple's view of life events and realities has affected their feelings and behaviors towards each other. In addition to cognitive and behavioral strategies and life skills training, through changing thoughts, interpretations, identifying errors and cognitive distortions, identifying couples' attribution patterns and its impact on the relationship, increasing positive and enjoyable interactions, improving communication, and building problem solving skill has strengthened positive emotions and reduced negative emotions and has increased the level of marital happiness in couples (11). Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy through the acceptance that change is a part of life; Move towards the goal; Cultivate a positive attitude about oneself; Improves the resilience of couples. In fact, this treatment leads couples to learn healthy skills to deal with problems and to have a strong and content reservoir of useful solutions by using confrontational and problem-oriented when facing problems in life (15).

Using tools such as the priming video, the visualization script, and the various homework assignments can help improve optimism. The basis of cognitive behavioral therapy is to restructure thoughts in order to change behavior. The process of restructuring thoughts can be done through identifying self-defeating beliefs, determining the accuracy of those beliefs, and then adjusting them based on their accuracy. Using several processes, such as inner speech, cognitive structures, and results of previous behaviors, an individual can begin to identify those beliefs and change their behaviors (24, 25). However, it also means that once the tools being used are taken away or abandoned, the optimism levels may not always stay at the level to which they were raised. This suggests that changes developed through cognitive behavioral therapy need continuous attention. They

may not be completely permanent but rather something for an individual to keep working towards (20).

There were some limitations to the current study. First, this study was performed only on divorce applicants with single children in Gorgan, the sample size was small and due to time constraints, the researcher did not have the opportunity to perform the follow-up test. It is suggested that in future research, the effectiveness of this treatment on a larger sample be investigated. It is also suggested that another treatment method be compared with or combined with the treatment method of this study to be effective on the dependent variables of the study. It is suggested that counselors, psychologists with the help of appropriate packages to enrich the couple's personality and promote their positive factors and personality and psychological capital.

Conclusion

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None.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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