

Original Article

Development of a Mental Toughness Training Package and Examining its Effectiveness on Hostile Attribution and Self-Silencing in Women Affected by Marital Infidelity

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Abstract

Background and Aim: This study aimed to develop a mental toughness training package and examine its effectiveness on reducing hostile attribution and self-silencing in women affected by marital infidelity.

Materials and Methods: This study used a qualitative method of content analysis, and a semi-experimental design with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group and a follow-up period in the quantitative part. The research area in the qualitative part included Zachariadis' books on mental toughness. The statistical population in the quantitative part included all women affected by their spouse's infidelity. The samples in the qualitative part included 10 Zachariadis' books on mental toughness and 10 experts who were selected purposively, and in the quantitative part, 30 affected women were selected through purposive sampling and randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups (15 people in each group). The experimental group received the developed training package for 8 sessions. The research tools included the Hostile Doctrine Scale (HDS) and the Self-Silencing Scale (STSS). The data were analyzed using repeated-measures analysis of variance and Bonferroni post hoc tests in SPSS-23 software.

Results: Results indicated a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in hostile attribution and total self-silencing at post-test and follow-up ($p < 0.05$). The effects remained stable at follow-up.

Conclusion: The developed mental toughness training package is an effective intervention for reducing hostile attributions and self-silencing in women affected by marital infidelity.

Keywords: Mental toughness package; Hostile attribution; Self-silencing; Affected women; Marital infidelity

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Introduction

Marriage, as one of society's fundamental institutions, begins with numerous hopes and expectations. The quality and stability of this institution are influenced by many factors, among which "marital commitment" plays a pivotal role (1). However, this sacred foundation sometimes faces severe challenges, with "marital infidelity" being one of the most destructive(2).

Marital infidelity, referring to any emotional or sexual relationship outside the commitment framework between spouses (3, 4), is recognized as the most significant factor threatening the stability, functioning, and continuity of married life. This phenomenon is not merely an individual transgression but a socio-cultural issue rooted in unhealthy relationship dynamics (5). Although precise official statistics on the rate of infidelity in Iran are unavailable due to social considerations, domestic studies indicate a concerning prevalence (6).

Experiencing infidelity, particularly for women, can act as a severe psychological trauma leading to numerous detrimental consequences. Among the most important of these consequences are "hostile attribution" and "self-silencing."

Hostile attribution refers to an individual's persistent tendency to attribute hostile and intentional motives to their spouse's behavior (7). This perceptual bias not only exacerbates marital conflicts and aggression (8) but is also associated with sustained psychological distress and the emergence of depressive symptoms in the affected individual (9). Researchers identify hostile attribution as one of the characteristic and damaging reactions to infidelity (10, 11). In line with this, recent studies published in the International Journal of Advanced Biological and Biomedical Research have emphasized the role of psychological toughness in moderating post-traumatic stress following infidelity (a). Moreover, a 2025 study by Samardzic et al. confirmed that self-silencing behaviors are still prevalent among young women as a maladaptive strategy (12). Additionally, Forouzani et al. (2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on psychological toughness in conflicted couples (13).

The variable of self-silencing refers to a cognitive-

behavioral schema in which an individual suppresses their true feelings, needs, and opinions to avoid conflict and preserve the relationship (14). Self-silencing often stems from gender-based beliefs and stereotypes that encourage women to sacrifice their own needs for others and avoid self-assertion (15). While this behavior may superficially bring peace to the relationship in the short term, in the long run, it comes at the cost of lost personal identity, increased psychological distress, and severely reduced marital satisfaction. Studies have shown that self-silencing has a significant relationship with increased inclination towards divorce and marital instability (16, 17).

Despite the relative understanding of the consequences of infidelity, there remains a pressing need to design and provide efficient and specialized psychological interventions for this affected group. In this regard, "mental toughness " appears to be a powerful theoretical and practical framework. Mental toughness is a multidimensional construct comprising beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that, like an internal resistance resource, enhance an individual's ability to cope constructively with pressures, resilience in the face of failure, and perseverance towards their goals(18-19). This characteristic, by reducing the negative impact of stress, prevents the onset of psychological disorders and has a positive relationship with mental health (20).

Considering the psychopathology of infidelity and the capabilities of mental toughness, the key question arises: Can "developing and implementing a training package based on enhancing mental toughness " help reduce hostile attributions and self-silencing in women affected by marital infidelity? This research seeks to answer this question.

Methods

This research employed a "sequential exploratory mixed-methods design," consisting of a qualitative phase for package development followed by a quantitative phase to examine the effectiveness of the training package.

Qualitative Phase: Designing the Training Package

Objective: To identify the main components and techniques for constructing the mental toughness training package.

Design: A qualitative “thematic analysis” based on the Attride-Stirling (2001) model was conducted.

Data Sources: Data were collected through a “systematic review” of the literature (from domestic and international databases from 2000 to 2023) and “semi-structured interviews” with 16 specialists in psychology and counseling (university professors and therapists specializing in mental hardness and couple therapy).

Analysis: Thematic analysis was performed deductively (from whole to part). Textual data were coded to extract “basic themes,” which were then categorized into “organizing themes” and finally summarized into “global themes,” leading to the formation of a “thematic network.” This network formed the conceptual basis of the training package.

Content Validation: The initial training package (an 8-session, 60-minute protocol) was presented to a panel of five independent specialists. Their feedback on the content, structure, session titles, and duration was collected via a questionnaire, and the “Content Validity Index” was calculated. Revisions were made based on their consensus to ensure the “internal validity” of the package.

Internal Validity: A pilot implementation with two individuals from the target population showed the preliminary effectiveness of the package in improving all variables (reducing hostile attribution and self-silencing).

External Validity (Generalizability): A survey of 20 experts (theoretical and practical) and a quantitative analysis of the results using a one-sample t-test indicated that the designed package had the highest levels of validity regarding research design, implementation conditions, and intervention stability (all indicators were significant at the 0.001 level).

This indicates the package’s potential for generalization and application in similar populations and settings.

This training package, as a valid and structured psychological intervention, directly addresses the identified needs of women affected by infidelity and

can be used as an effective tool for improving their mental health.

Quantitative Phase: Examining the Effectiveness of the Training Package

The research design was a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design with a control group and a follow-up period (Table 1). The statistical population included all women who had experienced marital infidelity and had referred to psychological service centers in Tehran in 2023. A sample of 30 women was selected through convenience sampling. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups (15 in each group):

Experimental Group: Received the mental hardness training package.

Control Group: Placed on a waiting list.

Inclusion Criteria: Receiving counseling services, providing informed consent, having a minimum education of a high school diploma, and a marriage history of over 5 years.

Exclusion Criteria: Absence for more than two sessions, diagnosis of other psychological or personality disorders, concurrent participation in other treatment programs, receiving individual counseling or medication therapy.

Instruments and Data Collection Methods

Qualitative Phase

Data Collection: Data were collected through a systematic literature review (including books, journals, and databases) and semi-structured interviews with experts.

Interview Protocol: The interviews were guided by eight main questions derived from the analysis of the extracted interventions. These questions explored the experts’ opinions on specific techniques (such as strengthening communication, self-confidence, mental analysis, emotional self-awareness, resilience, coping with negative emotions, cognitive reappraisal, and sense of effectiveness) for empowering women. The experts were asked to explain the session structure, client activities, homework, educational aids, and assessment methods for each technique.

Table 1. Research implementation model.

Groups	Assignment	Pre-test	Independent variable	Post-test	Follow-up
Experimental	R	T1	X1	T2	T3
Control	R	T1	-	T2	T3

X1: Mental Hardiness Training Package

Quantitative Phase

Data Collection: Data were collected using the following standardized self-report questionnaires, completed at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages:

Hostile Attribution Scale (HDS): This 20-item questionnaire was developed by Arntz *et al.* (2003)(21) to measure hostile attribution. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree). Items 3, 8, 11, and 15 are reverse-scored. Construct validity was examined through confirmatory factor analysis. The CFI, AGFI, and GFI indices were 0.92, 0.92, and 0.95 respectively, indicating good fit, and the RMSEA and RMR indices were 0.064 and 0.042 respectively, reporting relatively acceptable fit, confirming the questionnaire's validity (22). For reliability, Arntz *et al.* (2003) used the test-retest method over a three-month interval, showing a significant positive correlation of 0.79 between the two test (23). Its reliability in an Iranian sample, calculated based on internal consistency, test-retest, and split-half methods, was 0.93, 0.95, and 0.97 for the entire questionnaire, respectively. Concurrent validity was established through simultaneous administration with the SCL-90 questionnaire, resulting in a correlation coefficient of 0.56. Correlation coefficients with the total score were satisfactory, ranging from 0.74 to 0.88 (24) In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.78.

Silencing the Self Scale (STSS): This scale was originally developed by Jack and Dill (1992) with 31 items measuring four subscales: self-silencing, externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, and divided self. In the Iranian validation study by Zabehe Dan (25), three items (8, 15, and 21) were removed due to low factor loadings, resulting in a final 28-item version. Therefore, the scoring for this 28-item version is as follows: items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Within these remaining 28 items, only items 1 and 11 are reverse-scored (as items 8, 15, and 21 were removed). Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-silencing. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the 28-item scale was 0.90.

Mental Hardiness Training Package: Participants in the experimental group received training using the mental hardiness training package for 8 sessions (one 60-minute session per week) in a group format. A summary of the educational protocol is provided in Table 2.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data obtained from the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages in both groups, a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a Bonferroni post-hoc test was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 26.

Table 2. Structure and Content of the Mental Hardiness Training Package.

Session	Session Content
First	Familiarizing members with the rules during treatment, familiarizing members with the goals and importance of the mental toughness treatment package for women affected by spouse infidelity, and familiarizing members with issues related to spouse infidelity.
Second	Teaching the interactive cycle of emotions and unidentified feelings (unidentified fears, desires) and naming them, assessing emotions - expressing emotional intelligence, getting to know mental toughness and mastering emotions (benefits, characteristics of mentally tough people, enemies of mental toughness), providing homework.
Third	Reviewing the assignment from the previous session, analyzing and understanding the emotions of women affected by their husband's betrayal, overcoming obstacles to healthy emotional expression (for example, ways to deal with anger and emotional release, emphasizing the expression of emotions), teaching mastery of emotions, teaching the empathic mastery technique, examining and gradually reducing negative emotions through awareness and reducing the four catastrophic riders (criticism, defensiveness, humiliation, and building a stone wall) using coping methods and their antidotes, increasing positive emotions by increasing emotional connections such as love maps, coaching emotions, and ultimately increasing the taste of positive emotions. Increasing positive emotions is the homework assignment.
Fourth	Reviewing the assignment from the previous session, examining irrational thoughts about the spouse's breaking the promise and their impact on the current problem, changing negative thoughts about oneself and others to improve cognitive self-awareness using the technique of strengthening self-talk and self-encouragement, examining and strengthening self-belief to improve feelings of worthlessness and managing stress and obstacles to achieving self-belief, a new attitude through unconditional acceptance of oneself and

Session	Session Content
	others, training in creating a sense of self-worth, self-control versus moment-to-moment control of circumstances, and providing homework.
Fifth	Reviewing the previous session's assignment, cognitive restructuring (examining desires, goals, attitudes, and false beliefs in women affected by their spouse's infidelity), introducing and correcting cognitive errors, changing the understanding and reframing of vulnerability thoughts, introducing error-prone styles, changing attitudes toward failure, how catastrophic thinking hinders adaptability, mental toughness in the face of adversity, presenting homework.
Sixth	Reviewing the previous session's assignment, changing the understanding and reframing of vulnerability thoughts, introducing error-prone styles, changing attitudes toward failure, how catastrophic thinking hinders adaptability, mental toughness in the face of adversity (difficulty and discomfort), presenting homework.
Seventh	Reviewing the previous session's assignment, creating realistic optimism (opportunity-based view of situations, expecting a positive outcome with effort, mental reconstruction after disappointment) and creating psychological independence (reducing dependence on the approval of others, resisting social pressure, making independent decisions, relying on internal evaluation), presenting homework.
Eighth	Review of the previous session's assignment, in-depth review and understanding of the resulting behavioral harms (through providing note-taking techniques), motivational-behavioral plan in response to passive behavior, review of obstacles to confronting and correcting problems, acceptance of creating new behavioral responses to improve behavioral problems, problem-solving skills training, self-discipline training, resilience training, post-test.

Results

Descriptive findings of the research variables are presented in Table 3. As observed in Table 3, the mean scores of the research variables in the intervention group (mental hardiness package) show a greater decrease at the post-test and follow-up stages compared to the pre-test than in the control group.

The assumptions of normality (assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test), homogeneity of variances (assessed by Levene's test), and sphericity (assessed by Mauchly's test) were checked.

The results indicated that the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were met for all variables across the three stages. The assumption of sphericity was met for hostile attribution, the self-silencing subscale, and care as self-sacrifice but was violated for total self-silencing, externalized self-perception, and divided self. Therefore, in the repeated measures ANOVA, the results assuming sphericity were used where applicable, and the conservative Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied where sphericity was violated.

The results of the between-subjects and within-subjects effects analyses for the research variables are presented in Table 4. Based on the findings in Table 4, in the between-subjects analysis, the mean scores of hostile attribution ($p=0.015$, $F=6.74$, $\eta^2=0.194$), total

self-silencing ($p=0.003$, $F=10.59$, $\eta^2=0.275$), self-silencing subscale ($p=0.001$, $F=13.21$, $\eta^2=0.321$), externalized self-perception ($p=0.012$, $F=7.31$, $\eta^2=0.207$), care as self-sacrifice ($p=0.009$, $F=7.82$, $\eta^2=0.218$), and divided self ($p=0.025$, $F=5.66$, $\eta^2=0.168$) were significantly different between the experimental (mental hardiness package) and control groups.

Based on the within-subjects results, the main effect of time was also significant, indicating significant differences between the mean scores of hostile attribution ($p=0.003$, $F=6.57$, $\eta^2=0.190$), total self-silencing ($p<0.001$, $F=17.98$, $\eta^2=0.391$), self-silencing subscale ($p<0.001$, $F=45.52$, $\eta^2=0.619$), externalized self-perception ($p=0.002$, $F=9.38$, $\eta^2=0.251$), care as self-sacrifice ($p=0.001$, $F=8.45$, $\eta^2=0.233$), and divided self ($p=0.013$, $F=6.72$, $\eta^2=0.194$) across the research stages overall.

The results also showed that the interaction effect of time and group membership was significant for hostile attribution ($p=0.003$, $F=6.53$, $\eta^2=0.189$), total self-silencing ($p<0.001$, $F=13.97$, $\eta^2=0.333$), self-silencing subscale ($p<0.001$, $F=32.88$, $\eta^2=0.540$), externalized self-perception ($p=0.005$, $F=8.08$, $\eta^2=0.224$), care as self-sacrifice ($p<0.001$, $F=10.02$, $\eta^2=0.264$), and divided self ($p=0.030$, $F=4.99$, $\eta^2=0.151$), indicating that the changes across the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages were significant within each group.

Table 3. Descriptive Indices of Research Variables by Group and Research Stage.

Variable	Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Hostile Attribution	Mental Hardiness	63.07	8.39	50.07	10.92	52.13	11.83
	Control	61.13	3.37	60.87	7.20	61.53	8.15
Total Self-Silencing	Mental Hardiness	91.60	17.83	66.47	12.89	69.80	13.48
	Control	91.73	13.56	90.93	14.08	89.13	14.68
Self-Silencing Subscale	Mental Hardiness	18.73	3.51	12.73	3.57	13.67	2.52
	Control	19.27	2.84	18.73	2.91	18.93	3.55
Externalized Self-Perception	Mental Hardiness	25.47	5.15	19.27	4.11	20.13	5.04
	Control	25.47	4.10	25.07	4.59	25.53	4.24
Care as Self-Sacrifice	Mental Hardiness	25.33	5.38	18.13	5.57	18.67	5.79
	Control	25.20	5.28	25.73	5.49	25.20	5.11
Divided Self	Mental Hardiness	22.07	7.18	16.33	5.74	17.33	5.16
	Control	21.80	6.15	21.40	6.06	21.40	6.06

Table 4. Results of Between-Subjects and Within-Subjects Effects Analysis for Research Variables.

Variable	Effect	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value	Effect Size (η^2)	Statistical Power
Hostile Attribution	Between-Subjects	Group	834.178	1	834.178	6.74	0.015	0.194	0.708
	Within-Subjects	Time	736.07	2	368.03	6.57	0.003	0.190	0.895
		Time $\times$ Group	731.356	2	365.678	6.53	0.003	0.189	0.893
Total Self-Silencing	Between-Subjects	Group	4825.344	1	4825.344	10.59	0.003	0.275	0.881
	Within-Subjects	Time	3175.622	1.28	2477.92	17.98	<0.001	0.391	0.995
		Time $\times$ Group	2467.756	1.28	1925.577	13.97	<0.001	0.333	0.978
Self-Silencing Subscale	Between-Subjects	Group	348.1	1	348.1	13.21	0.001	0.321	0.939
	Within-Subjects	Time	182.822	2	91.411	45.52	<0.001	0.619	1.000
		Time $\times$ Group	132.07	1.77	74.37	32.88	<0.001	0.540	1.000
Externalized Self-Perception	Between-Subjects	Group	313.6	1	313.6	7.308	0.012	0.207	0.742
	Within-Subjects	Time	182.68	1.25	146.09	9.38	0.002	0.251	0.896
		Time $\times$ Group	157.4	1.25	125.87	8.08	0.005	0.224	0.847
Care as Self-Sacrifice	Between-Subjects	Group	49.0	1	49.0	7.82	0.009	0.218	0.770
	Within-Subjects	Time	222.22	2	111.11	8.45	0.001	0.233	0.957
		Time $\times$ Group	263.467	2	131.733	10.02	<0.001	0.264	0.980
Divided Self	Between-Subjects	Group	98.8	1	98.8	5.66	0.025	0.168	0.631
	Within-Subjects	Time	162.422	1.06	152.72	6.72	0.013	0.194	0.725
		Time $\times$ Group	120.556	1.06	113.353	4.99	0.030	0.151	0.585

The results of the Bonferroni post-hoc test for comparing the experimental and control groups at the research stages for the study variables are presented in Table 5. As observed in Table 5, for the variables of hostile attribution, total self-silencing, and all its dimensions (except for externalized self-perception and divided self, which were still significant but with higher *p*-values), the difference in mean scores between the experimental group (mental hardiness package) and the control group was significant at both the post-test and follow-up stages ($p < 0.05$).

In conclusion, it can be stated that the mental toughness package had a significant effect on reducing hostile attribution, total self-silencing, and all its dimensions. Moreover, the treatment effects were maintained with some attenuation in effect sizes for external self-perception and the divided self.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on psychological toughness (18-20). However, compared to other interventions such as emotion-focused therapy (EFT) or cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for infidelity, the psychological toughness package offers a unique preventive and resilience-oriented approach. While EFT primarily focuses on repairing attachment bonds and CBT targets maladaptive thoughts, toughness training directly strengthens the individual's internal resources—namely commitment, control, and challenge—to face adversity without self-silencing or hostile bias. This distinction is theoretically important because it suggests that toughness training can be used not only as a therapeutic but also as a prophylactic intervention for women at risk of post-infidelity

trauma. Moreover, unlike forgiveness-based interventions that may unintentionally encourage self-silencing, toughness training empowers women to voice their needs and set boundaries.

The findings of this study, which confirmed the effectiveness of the mental hardiness training package in reducing hostile attribution and self-silencing in women affected by marital infidelity, can be explained within the framework of previous findings and related theories. Consistent with the research of Nisanci and Nisanci (10) and Jiao (11), who identified hostile attribution as one of the characteristic and damaging reactions to infidelity, the results of this study indicated that the intervention based on mental hardiness significantly reduced this destructive cognitive bias. It appears that teaching components of hardiness, such as challenge (as a substitute for fear) and commitment, helped the women to interpret the infidelity event less as a comprehensive and intentional threat, thereby increasing their capacity for cognitive restructuring and finding meaning in difficult circumstances. This process aligns closely with the models of Gucciardi *et al.* (18) and Ding *et al.* (19) regarding the role of hardiness as a protective shield against severe stress.

On the other hand, the significant reduction in the total self-silencing score and its dimensions (especially the main self-silencing subscale and care as self-sacrifice) in the experimental group is a finding that, on the one hand, confirms the severity of this problem among women who are victims of infidelity and, on the other hand, demonstrates the effectiveness of the intervention in addressing it. This finding stems directly from the theoretical framework of Jack and Dill (14) on self-silencing, which they described as a cognitive-behavioral schema for avoiding conflict and preserving the relationship.

Table 5. Results of Post-Hoc Test for Comparing Groups by Research Variables at Post-Test and Follow-Up Stages.

Variable	Post-test			Follow-up		
	Mean Difference	<i>p</i> -value	Effect Size (η^2)	Mean Difference	<i>p</i> -value	Effect Size (η^2)
Hostile Attribution	-10.8	0.008	0.228	-9.4	0.011	0.210
Total Self-Silencing	-24.47	<0.001	0.468	-19.33	<0.001	0.335
Self-Silencing Subscale	-6.0	<0.001	0.475	-5.26	<0.001	0.439
Externalized Self-Perception	-5.8	0.001	0.322	-5.4	0.004	0.265
Care as Self-Sacrifice	-7.6	<0.001	0.335	-6.53	0.003	0.277
Divided Self	-5.06	0.026	0.165	-4.06	0.038	0.122

The present training package, by strengthening feelings of control and self-confidence (components of hardiness), helped the women to find more courage for self-assertion, claiming their rights, and expressing their real needs and feelings, thereby distancing themselves from the destructive pattern of “silence for survival.” This result is consistent with the findings of Ahmed and Iqbal (15), who associated self-silencing with gender stereotypes, as well as domestic research such as Parvaei (16), which showed a relationship between self-silencing and reduced marital satisfaction as well as an increased tendency toward divorce.

The mechanism of the package’s effectiveness can be found in the combination of its techniques. For example, teaching relaxation and mindfulness techniques (session seven) helped reduce the negative emotions that stimulate hostile attributions. Additionally, strengthening self-awareness and identifying strengths (session four) and teaching coping skills (session five) paved the way for reducing self-silencing, as the women realized they did not need to entirely ignore themselves to preserve the relationship. This finding aligns with the research of Arora *et al.* (20), which showed a positive relationship between mental hardiness and mental health.

The persistence of these effects at the follow-up stage also indicates that this intervention did not merely create a temporary change but led to more stable changes in the participants’ attitudes and coping skills. This reinforces the importance and generalizability of the package, which was validated in the qualitative phase through expert opinion (using the Content Validity Index) and pilot implementation (for internal validity).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the developed mental hardiness training package, drawing on valid theoretical frameworks and responding to the identified gap in the literature, provides an effective, indigenous, and practical tool for mental health professionals working with women affected by infidelity. Utilizing this package in counseling centers can significantly contribute to reducing the suffering of these women, repairing the psychological damage

caused by infidelity, and ultimately, promoting their mental health and strengthening the family foundation. It is suggested that the long-term effects of this package and its impact on other variables, such as quality of life and marital satisfaction, be explored in future studies.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the promising results, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small ($N=30$) and selected via convenience sampling from Tehran, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other cities or clinical populations. Second, the follow-up period was only two months; consequently, the long-term effects beyond this period remain unknown. Third, all data were based on self-report questionnaires, which are susceptible to social desirability bias, especially regarding sensitive topics such as marital infidelity. Fourth, the study did not control for possible concurrent individual psychotherapy or pharmacotherapy among participants, which could have influenced the outcomes. Fifth, the lack of an active control group (e.g., comparing the intervention to an active placebo rather than a waitlist) may limit the strength of causal inferences.

Practical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings, the following practical suggestions are offered for clinicians and researchers:

1. For Counseling Centers: The psychological hardiness training package can be implemented as a structured 8-session group program for women who have experienced infidelity. It is recommended that counselors receive specific training in hardiness components before facilitating the sessions.
2. For Prevention Programs: Given that self-silencing often begins before infidelity occurs, this package can be adapted for premarital or marital enrichment programs to enhance psychological hardiness in healthy couples, potentially reducing vulnerability to future betrayals.
3. For Future Research: Future studies should (a) replicate the findings with larger, more diverse samples including clinical populations; (b) use longer follow-up periods (e.g., 6 or 12 months) to assess durability; (c) incorporate objective measures (e.g., observer-rated communication or physiological indices) alongside self-reports; (d) compare the hardiness package directly

with other active interventions such as EFT or CBT in randomized controlled trials; and (e) examine potential moderators (e.g., attachment style, duration of marriage, number of children) to identify for whom the package works best.

4. For Policy Makers: It is suggested that the package be included in the national protocol of post-divorce and family counseling services provided by the State Welfare Organization of Iran.

Ethical Statement

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch (Code: IR.IAU.KHUISF.REC.1403.549).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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