



The Comparative Efficacy of Emotionally Focused and Solution-Focused Couple Therapies in Remediating Marital Conflict: An Examination of Relational Dynamics and Forgiveness Trajectories

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Abstract

Introduction: Marital conflict often disrupts relational dynamics and hinders forgiveness, impacting the overall well-being of couples. This study aimed to comparatively evaluate the effectiveness of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) and Solution-Focused Couple Therapy (SFCT) in improving relational dynamics and fostering forgiveness within couples experiencing marital conflict.

Methods: This study adopted a quasi-experimental framework, implementing a pretest-posttest control group design, to investigate the efficacy of two therapeutic interventions. The study population comprised couples experiencing marital discord who sought assistance from family counseling centers in Ahvaz City during 2024. A total of 45 participants were selected via convenience sampling and subsequently assigned randomly to one of three groups: two experimental groups, receiving either EFCT or SFCT, and a control group. Both experimental interventions consisted of eight 90-minute sessions. Data were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) conducted within the SPSS version 26 statistical software.

Results: The study's results demonstrated that both EFCT and SFCT significantly improved relational dynamics and forgiveness in couples experiencing marital conflict, as shown by post-intervention assessments when compared to the control group ($P < 0.01$). Notably, a direct comparison of the two therapies revealed a significant disparity in their impact on forgiveness, with EFCT exhibiting a substantially greater effect ($P < 0.05$). Conversely, the two interventions did not differ significantly in their ability to enhance relational dynamics.

Conclusions: This study confirms that both EFCT and SFCT are effective in improving marital relationships, but EFCT demonstrates a significantly stronger impact on fostering forgiveness. While both therapies enhance relational dynamics equally, EFCT appears to be particularly beneficial for addressing past relational wounds through facilitating forgiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Marital conflict, a pervasive issue in intimate relationships, disrupts relational dynamics and impedes forgiveness, posing a significant challenge to marital well-being [1]. While families serve as societal foundations and havens, they are also arenas for negotiating diverse perspectives [2]. This study focuses on addressing marital conflict, which arises from divergent needs, values, and emotional responses, often leading to diminished cooperation, reduced intimacy, and impaired communication [3, 4]. Contemporary trends indicate rising dysfunctional behaviors,

exacerbating marital discord. The significance of this problem lies in its profound impact on psychological well-being, physical health, and family stability, with unresolved conflict contributing to mood disorders, sexual dysfunctions, and even divorce [5, 6]. Factors contributing to this include diminished cooperation, reduced intimacy, emotional reactivity, and impaired communication, which collectively erode relationship quality, impacting physical and mental health, and inter-sibling dynamics [5]. Marital conflict is further influenced by individual personality traits and economic

pressures, which can intensify feelings of fatigue and disillusionment [7, 8].

When one partner experiences contentment while the other expresses dissatisfaction, marital conflict destabilizes the family system, impeding emotional and social development [9, 10]. If left unaddressed, such conflict can lead to relational breakdown, emotional turmoil, and reduced quality of life, with high levels of conflict often precipitating divorce [11]. The durability and quality of marital bonds are dependent on partners' communicative expertise, emphasizing the centrality of robust communication [12]. Current therapeutic approaches, such as Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) and Solution-Focused Couple Therapy (SFCT), aim to address these issues by improving communication and fostering forgiveness, which are critical for marital satisfaction and longevity [13-15]. Relational dynamics, encompassing dialogue, harmony, and non-verbal communication, are pivotal in shaping marital satisfaction. Effective communication facilitates problem-solving and intimacy, while positive interactions and conflict resolution enhance relational fulfillment. Furthermore, forgiveness is a fundamental component of marital well-being, promoting longevity, communication efficacy, and overall satisfaction [13]. By mitigating negative affect and establishing a constructive framework during interpersonal grievances, forgiveness fosters adaptation and well-being in married individuals [16].

Kaleta and Jaśkiewicz [17] and others have demonstrated that forgiveness is essential for marital quality, enabling partners to tolerate errors and maintain relationships despite transgressions. Forgiveness serves as a crucial relational response, enabling the preservation of relationships despite transgressions, betrayals, or unmet expectations. It prevents negative emotions, which can impede intimacy, from dominating the individual, and reflects a higher-order cognitive capacity [18, 19]. Forgiveness facilitates relational continuity and reinforces intimacy in the face of relational threats. Consequently, forgiveness is a vital instrument for maintaining and sustaining relationships, as well as mitigating interpersonal conflicts [20].

This study proposes EFCT and SFCT as targeted interventions to address marital conflict by enhancing relational dynamics and forgiveness. EFCT is a potent intervention for marital conflict, promoting relational dynamics and forgiveness [14]. Grounded in personal growth and emotional equilibrium, EFCT addresses familial challenges through a robust theoretical and empirical framework [21]. It emphasizes the integral role of emotional processing in therapy, acknowledging the complex interplay between cognition, emotion, and behavior. Emotions are viewed as transformative and essential for psychological well-being, often exceeding rational understanding [22]. Therapeutic interventions facilitate the re-engagement with negative affect,

fostering positive reappraisal and subsequent emotional reactivity changes [23]. EFCT aims to identify and articulate fundamental needs, reducing attachment insecurities and cultivating secure bonds. By integrating intra-individual and inter-individual domains, EFCT addresses problematic interaction cycles [24].

SFCT represents an alternative therapeutic modality for the enhancement of spousal relationships. Pirmoradi et al. [15] demonstrated, through empirical investigation, the significant efficacy of SFCT in mitigating interpersonal conflict, specifically revealing its substantial impact on reducing marital discord. The contemporary popularity and effectiveness of SFCT can be attributed to its emphasis on rapid therapeutic change and its adherence to client-centered perspectives, both of which align with contemporary healthcare philosophies [25]. SFCT is characterized as a non-pathological, future-oriented, and goal-directed approach, prioritizing the identification and amplification of clients' strengths, successes, and capabilities, while fostering supportive relational contexts, rather than focusing on deficits or limitations [26]. In contrast to traditional clinical approaches, SFCT emphasizes the collaborative establishment of accessible, tangible, and measurable therapeutic goals. The therapeutic process in SFCT comprises five distinct phases: problem and goal identification, the identification and amplification of exceptions, the implementation of interventions or tasks designed to further enhance these exceptions, the evaluation of intervention efficacy, and the subsequent re-evaluation of the problem and goal [27].

The purpose of this study is to comparatively evaluate the efficacy of EFCT and SFCT in improving relational dynamics and forgiveness among couples experiencing marital conflict, addressing a gap in direct comparative analyses of these therapies [15, 21]. By identifying the most effective therapeutic approach, this research aims to inform clinical practice, offering practical applications for therapists to enhance marital satisfaction and reduce conflict-related distress in couples. It is well-established that couples undergoing marital conflict frequently encounter psychological distress, manifesting in reduced capacity for forgiveness and impaired relational dynamics. This study addresses the critical inquiry of identifying the therapeutic intervention that yields the most expedited amelioration of forgiveness and relational dynamics within this population, thus discerning the optimal couple therapy modality. Although prior investigations have substantiated the efficacy of EFCT and SFCT as stand-alone interventions, a notable gap exists in the literature regarding direct comparative analyses of their respective impacts on forgiveness and relational dynamics in couples experiencing marital discord, especially considering their fundamentally distinct therapeutic objectives. Consequently, this research seeks to provide

empirical evidence to guide therapists in selecting the most effective intervention for couples, potentially reducing the risk of relational dissolution and improving overall family well-being.

METHODS

This research employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to evaluate the comparative efficacy of EFCT and SFCT in addressing marital conflict, with outcomes measured for relational dynamics and forgiveness. The study population consisted of couples experiencing marital conflict who were seeking services at family counseling centers in Ahvaz City during 2024. Forty-five couples were recruited using convenience sampling, with entry criteria requiring participants to have experienced marital conflict for at least six months, possess a minimum of secondary education, provide informed consent, and commit to attending all therapy sessions. Marital conflict was identified through self-reports during intake interviews at the counseling centers, where couples described persistent disagreements, emotional distress, or dissatisfaction in their relationship, corroborated by a score of 70 or below on Navran's Relational Dynamics Questionnaire [28], indicating low marital communication quality. Exit criteria included withdrawal from the study, attendance at fewer than six therapy sessions, or non-adherence to research protocols. Participants were subsequently randomized into three groups: an EFCT group, an SFCT group, and a control group, each comprising 15 couples. A flowchart illustrating the study process is included as Figure 1, detailing participant recruitment, randomization, intervention delivery, and assessment time points. Before the intervention, participants completed baseline assessments using the Relational Dynamics Questionnaire and the Interpersonal Forgiveness Measurement Questionnaire to establish

pre-intervention levels of relational dynamics and forgiveness. The EFCT intervention, based on Johnson and Greenberg's model [21], and the SFCT intervention, based on Franklin et al.'s framework [27], were each delivered in eight 90-minute sessions over eight weeks to their respective experimental groups. The eight-session duration was chosen based on established protocols for EFCT and SFCT, which recommend this length to allow sufficient time for addressing core relational issues and achieving measurable therapeutic outcomes while maintaining participant engagement [21, 27]. Educational content for EFCT was delivered through structured therapist-led discussions, experiential exercises, and role-playing to foster emotional expression and attachment restructuring, while SFCT content was delivered via interactive goal-setting activities, solution-focused questioning, and collaborative tasks to amplify strengths and positive behaviors. Post-intervention assessments were conducted immediately following the final session to measure outcomes, with no additional follow-up assessments due to the study's focus on immediate therapeutic effects. Questionnaires were completed at two time points: pre-intervention (baseline) and post-intervention (week 8).

To validate the interventions, the EFCT protocol was adapted from Johnson and Greenberg's [21] empirically supported model, with sessions facilitated by therapists trained in EFCT techniques to ensure fidelity to the established framework. Similarly, the SFCT protocol followed Franklin et al.'s [27] structured approach, with therapists trained in solution-focused techniques to maintain consistency. Treatment fidelity was ensured through session monitoring by a supervising clinician and adherence to detailed session manuals for both interventions. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the session content for both interventions.

Table 1. A comprehensive overview of the content covered in the EFCT and SFCT sessions

Sessions	EFCT Content	SFCT Content
1	Introduction: Conducting pre-test assessments, orienting participants, and building therapeutic alliances with couples.	Introduction: Administering pre-test evaluations, establishing therapeutic relationships with couples, and introducing the solution-focused framework.
2	Unexpressed Emotions: Recognizing underlying issues and suppressed emotional states.	Goal Formulation: Guiding participants in developing positive, tangible, and measurable objectives.
3	Pattern Reconstruction: Analyzing and restructuring patterns of marital communication.	Relationships: Exploring varied interpretations of events and shifts in relational dynamics.
4	Emotion Identification: Examining emotions and the nature of negative emotional experiences.	Exceptions: Identifying positive deviations in interactions with a partner and fostering optimism.
5	Emotion Expression: Assessing individual traits in emotional articulation and providing practical training on emotional communication.	Miracle Question: Challenging dysfunctional behavioral patterns through the use of the miracle question technique.
6	Emotion Expression: Enhancing the capacity to recognize emotions in personal and social contexts.	Emotion Discovery: Exploring others' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
7	Emotion Strengthening: Reinforcing and harmonizing emotional experiences.	Experiencing Emotions: Engaging with novel emotional states beyond previous patterns.
8	Termination: Reviewing progress, providing feedback, and offering concluding recommendations.	Termination: Summarizing outcomes, delivering feedback, and providing final recommendations.

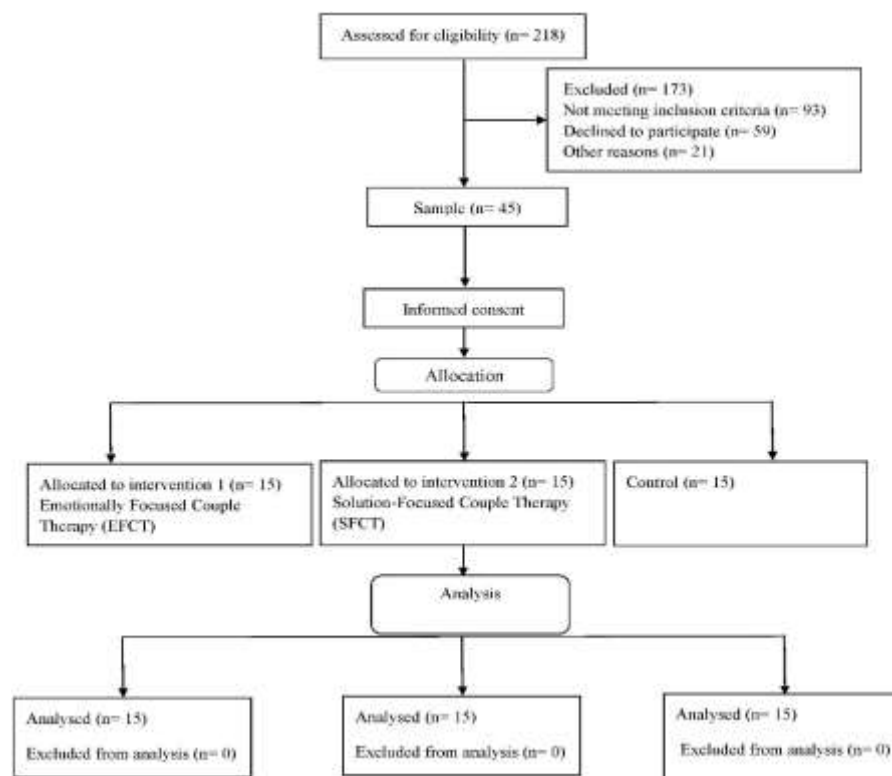


Figure 1. The flowchart of the distribution of participants during the study

Measure

Relational Dynamics Questionnaire

Navran's [28] Relational Dynamics Questionnaire is a 25-item instrument employing a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" to "always," intended to evaluate marital communication and the frequency of verbal and nonverbal behaviors within the dyadic relationship. The aggregate score, derived from the summation of all item responses, serves as a dependable metric for the quality of communication between partners, with elevated scores indicative of enhanced or more positive marital interaction. In this study, the total score of the questionnaire was considered. In the present study, the questionnaire's validity was confirmed through content validity assessment by three family therapy experts, ensuring relevance to marital dynamics. Reliability was established with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86, indicating strong internal consistency.

The Interpersonal Forgiveness Measurement Questionnaire

The Interpersonal Forgiveness Measurement Questionnaire, developed by Ehteshamzadeh et al. [29], is a 25-item tool designed to evaluate interpersonal forgiveness. Responses are recorded on a 4-point Likert scale, where higher scores reflect greater levels of forgiveness. In this study, the total score of the questionnaire was considered. In the current study, content validity was verified by a panel of three clinical psychologists specializing in couple therapy, confirming the questionnaire's applicability to forgiveness in marital

contexts. The questionnaire demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

Statistical Analyses

In this investigation, data were examined using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, as well as non-parametric inferential statistics to accommodate the small sample size of 45 couples. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare differences in relational dynamics and forgiveness across the EFCT, SFCT, and control groups, with Mann-Whitney U tests conducted for post-hoc pairwise comparisons to identify specific group differences. All statistical procedures were conducted using SPSS software, version 26.

RESULTS

This study involved 45 couples experiencing marital conflict. Participant age averaged 36.45 ± 6.71 years in the EFCT group, 35.82 ± 5.39 years in the SFCT group, and 37.60 ± 6.44 years in the control group. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for relational dynamics and forgiveness across all groups. Baseline assessments indicated low levels of both relational dynamics and forgiveness among all participants. Following intervention, significant increases in mean scores for both variables were observed in the EFCT and SFCT groups. Prior to inferential analyses, data were examined for distributional assumptions. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated non-normality for relational dynamics and forgiveness variables ($P < 0.05$), supporting the use of non-

parametric tests. Levene's test was not applicable due to the non-parametric approach, but homogeneity of

variances was visually inspected and deemed acceptable for group comparisons.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations (SD) of relational dynamics and forgiveness

Phase	EFCT group	SFCT group	Control group
Relational dynamics			
Pre-test	64.73 ± 7.80	59.73 ± 8.63	60.40 ± 9.45
Post-test	80.33 ± 9.67	84.60 ± 8.25	60.46 ± 7.89
Forgiveness			
Pre-test	48.73 ± 6.72	45.20 ± 7.17	43.40 ± 5.30
Post-test	62.13 ± 8.88	55.73 ± 6.71	42.33 ± 6.66

Data in table are presented as Mean ± SD.

Table 3. Kruskal-Wallis test results for relational dynamics and forgiveness

Variables	H	df	P	ϵ^2
Relational dynamics	21.57	2	0.001	0.48
Forgiveness	24.42	2	0.001	0.56

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test results for pairwise comparisons of relational dynamics and forgiveness

	U	P	r
Relational Dynamics			
EFCT - SFCT	87.50	0.241	0.19
EFCT - Control	32.51	0.002	0.62
SFCT - Control	25.03	0.001	0.67
Forgiveness			
EFCT - SFCT	65.53	0.045	0.34
EFCT - Control	20.02	0.001	0.71
SFCT - Control	38.04	0.003	0.58

Table 3 presents the findings of the Kruskal-Wallis test conducted to evaluate the impact of the interventions on relational dynamics and forgiveness. The Kruskal-Wallis test yielded statistically significant differences across groups for both relational dynamics ($H=21.57$, $P < 0.001$) and forgiveness ($H=25.42$, $P < 0.001$). These results indicate that, after intervention, significant differences in post-intervention scores for relational dynamics and forgiveness were observed across the EFCT, SFCT, and control groups. Effect sizes, calculated using the epsilon-squared (ϵ^2) statistic for the Kruskal-Wallis test, were 0.48 for relational dynamics and 0.56 for forgiveness, indicating moderate to large effects.

Table 4 presents the results of post-hoc Mann-Whitney U tests conducted to perform pairwise comparisons between groups, addressing significant differences identified in the Kruskal-Wallis test. For relational dynamics, the EFCT group showed significant improvement compared to the control group ($U = 32.5$, $P = 0.002$, $r = 0.62$), and the SFCT group also outperformed the control group ($U = 25.0$, $P = 0.001$, $r = 0.67$). No significant difference was found between EFCT and SFCT ($U = 87.5$, $P = 0.241$, $r = 0.19$). For forgiveness, the EFCT group significantly outperformed both the control group ($U = 20.0$, $P = 0.001$, $r = 0.71$) and the SFCT group ($U = 65.5$, $P = 0.045$, $r = 0.34$), while the SFCT group also showed significant improvement over the control group ($U = 38.0$, $P = 0.003$, $r = 0.58$). Effect sizes (r , rank-biserial correlation) indicate moderate to large effects for significant pairwise comparisons.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to conduct a comparative analysis of the efficacy of EFCT and SFCT in improving relational dynamics and forgiveness among couples experiencing marital discord. The findings suggest that both EFCT and SFCT contributed to positive changes in relational dynamics and forgiveness scores, as indicated by non-parametric analyses. Comparative analyses of the two therapeutic modalities revealed statistically significant differences between EFCT and SFCT in the changes observed for forgiveness, with EFCT showing a greater effect; however, no significant disparity was found in their impact on relational dynamics. These results align with prior research. Specifically, Alavimoghadam et al. [30] reported that EFCT significantly increased forgiveness in individuals. Similarly, Salimi and Sodani [31], in their investigation of SFCT's effects on emotional regulation and forgiveness, observed that therapeutic intervention resulted in a reduction of negative emotional regulation and an increase in both forgiveness and positive emotional regulation. Wiebe and Johnson [32] further supported the efficacy of EFCT, demonstrating its positive impact on resilience and relational dynamics among participants. Lastly, Bazyari et al. [33] corroborated these findings, indicating that EFCT implementation significantly improved relational dynamics in married individuals.

EFCT represents a therapeutic intervention explicitly designed to address the identification, comprehension, and regulation of negative affective experiences within

interpersonal relationships [30]. The pathways through which EFCT influences both relational dynamics and forgiveness are complex and encompass several key components: EFCT aids couples engaged in conflict by facilitating the recognition of maladaptive cognitive patterns that precipitate anger, which frequently manifest as overgeneralization, personalization, and the selective filtering of positive stimuli. This therapeutic paradigm assists couples in deciphering the emotional underpinnings of their relational conflicts. Furthermore, EFCT imparts skills to couples, enabling them to modulate their emotional reactions, including the implementation of relaxation techniques, stress management protocols, and effective communication strategies. A fundamental tenet of EFCT is the bolstering of relational dynamics between partners; specifically, by fostering enhanced communication, couples can more effectively attend to each other's emotional needs and prevent the intensification of relational discord. Finally, this therapeutic methodology assists couples in the development of increased empathic understanding, and by promoting a deeper comprehension of each partner's affective states and perspectives, couples can refine their communicative interactions and mitigate the occurrence of misunderstandings [21].

EFCT is a therapeutic modality focused on the identification, understanding, and regulation of negative affective experiences within relationships [33]. It operates through several interconnected mechanisms to improve relational dynamics and forgiveness. Firstly, EFCT facilitates the identification of dysfunctional cognitive schemas, aiding couples in recognizing maladaptive patterns that fuel anger, such as overgeneralization and personalization. Secondly, it assists couples in exploring the emotional origins of their conflicts, promoting deeper insight into underlying issues. Thirdly, EFCT equips couples with skills to modify emotional responses, including relaxation and effective communication techniques. Fourthly, it strengthens interpersonal communication, enabling couples to better address each other's emotional needs and prevent conflict escalation. Finally, EFCT cultivates interpersonal empathy, fostering a deeper understanding of each partner's affective states, thereby enhancing communication and reducing misunderstandings [15].

The therapeutic process emphasizes the reconstruction of negative interaction patterns by focusing on underlying emotions. By addressing these core affective experiences, EFCT promotes a more secure attachment bond, leading to improved relational functioning [26]. This approach prioritizes emotional safety, facilitating the expression of positive emotions and the modulation of negative ones. Given the close relationship between conflict and emotion, EFCT's focus on affective

processes proves highly effective in enhancing interpersonal relationships.

In contrast, SFCT prioritizes the identification and amplification of existing solutions and relational strengths. Rather than focusing on deficits and challenges, this therapeutic approach underscores effective strategies and resources that facilitate relationship enhancement. The following discourse aims to clarify the mechanisms through which SFCT influences the improvement of relational dynamics and forgiveness within couples. Rather than engaging in extensive problem-focused analyses, SFCT concentrates on the identification and reinforcement of previously successful solutions [31]. This approach enables couples to direct their attention toward constructive actions, thereby mitigating feelings of being overwhelmed by relational difficulties. Furthermore, SFCT facilitates the recognition of couples' inherent strengths and past successes. By emphasizing positive experiences and accomplishments, couples cultivate increased self-efficacy and a sense of agency in resolving their relational challenges. In this therapeutic framework, couples collaboratively establish specific, attainable goals and develop action plans to achieve them [15]. This process promotes a sense of progress and facilitates the couples' advancement along a trajectory of relational improvement.

SFCT cultivates the capacity for positive and constructive dialogue within couples, facilitating a reduction in relational tension and an enhancement of effective communication. By strategically emphasizing solutions and positive experiences, couples cultivate a deeper mutual understanding, fostering strengthened emotional bonds and a reduction in interpersonal conflicts [31]. This therapeutic approach, by shifting the focus from problem-saturated narratives to solution-oriented strategies, effectively mitigates stress and tension associated with relational challenges, thereby contributing to improved communication quality. SFCT establishes a secure therapeutic environment conducive to the expression of emotions and needs. Within this safe context, couples are empowered to engage in open communication and more effectively resolve relational difficulties. By prioritizing solutions and strengths, SFCT facilitates the improvement of couples' relational dynamics [27]. The establishment of clear goals and the enhancement of positive communication patterns contribute to the development of healthier and more stable relationships. In this therapeutic framework, couples are encouraged to shift their focus from past grievances and challenges to present solutions and positive experiences. This reframing process can effectively reduce negative emotionality and foster an increased propensity for forgiveness.

SFCT establishes a secure therapeutic environment conducive to the uninhibited expression of emotions. This safe space enables couples to articulate their feelings without apprehension of judgment, thereby fostering enhanced mutual understanding and facilitating the process of forgiveness. By actively promoting mutual comprehension and empathic responsiveness, SFCT contributes to the amplification of empathy and reciprocal understanding. When couples achieve a deeper understanding of each other's affective experiences, the propensity for forgiveness is significantly augmented [26]. Within this therapeutic framework, couples collaboratively establish shared objectives and actively engage in the enhancement of their relationship. This collaborative process serves to reinforce feelings of belonging and relational proximity, thereby increasing the likelihood of forgiveness. By prioritizing solution-oriented strategies, SFCT facilitates the reduction of negative affective states, such as anger and frustration. This attenuation of negative emotions serves to streamline the forgiveness process and guide couples toward relational improvement [15]. Furthermore, SFCT imparts effective communication skills, enabling couples to articulate their feelings and needs with greater clarity. These skills contribute to the reduction of misunderstandings and enhance the inclination toward forgiveness. Finally, this therapeutic approach encourages couples to revisit positive past experiences and recall shared moments of joy. This recollection of positive experiences strengthens positive affect and increases the willingness to extend forgiveness.

Despite the promising findings, this study has several limitations that warrant consideration. The small sample size of 45 couples limits the statistical power and generalizability of the results to broader populations. The use of convenience sampling may have introduced selection bias, as participants were drawn from counseling centers in a specific geographic area (Ahvaz City), potentially not representing diverse cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the lack of long-term follow-up assessments restricts conclusions about the sustainability of the therapeutic gains observed. The reliance on self-report measures, while validated, may be subject to response biases, such as social desirability. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution and that future research with larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs is needed to confirm these results. The study's findings suggest, rather than definitively prove, that EFCT may be particularly effective for fostering forgiveness due to its focus on emotional processing, while both EFCT and SFCT appear equally effective in enhancing relational dynamics. These results should be interpreted cautiously, as the small sample size and non-parametric analyses limit the robustness of the conclusions. Future research should explore the

specific mechanisms underlying these differential effects and examine the long-term sustainability of these therapeutic gains.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides empirical support for the efficacy of both EFCT and SFCT in ameliorating marital conflict by enhancing relational dynamics and fostering forgiveness. Both therapeutic modalities demonstrated significant improvements relative to the control group, underscoring their clinical utility in addressing marital distress. However, a nuanced analysis revealed a differential impact on forgiveness, with EFCT exhibiting a significantly greater effect size. This suggests that while both therapies promote relational improvement, EFCT may be particularly effective in facilitating the resolution of past relational injuries through enhanced forgiveness. Conversely, the absence of a significant difference between EFCT and SFCT in enhancing relational dynamics indicates that both therapies are equally effective in improving the overall interactive patterns of distressed couples. Future research should explore the specific mechanisms underlying these differential effects and examine the long-term sustainability of these therapeutic gains.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the drafting and revision of the manuscript and are accountable for its accuracy.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study protocol was approved (cod: IR.IAU.ARAK.REC.1403.178) by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University.

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