

Original Article

The Effect of couple therapy based on schema therapy and training of couple communication program on marital conflict resolution styles

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Abstract

Introduction: Increasing marital conflicts cause incompatibility and dissatisfaction between couples. The present study was done with the aim of the effect of couple therapy based on schema and training of couple communication program (TCCP) on the marital conflict resolution style of women visiting counseling centers.

Methods: The present study was a quasi-experimental and pre-test-post-test with a control group. The statistical population of this study included all women with conflict who referred to specialized counseling centers for family consolidation in the 19th district of Tehran in 2020 (N=240). The research sample consisted of 60 people who were selected by available sampling method and were randomly assigned to three groups (two experimental groups and one control group). After performing the pre-test, couple therapy based on schema and TCCP was performed on the experimental groups, but the control group did not receive any treatment. At the end, post-test was performed on all three groups. The research instrument included a Rahim Couples Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire (1983) and data were analyzed by analysis of variance.

Results: The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the effectiveness of couple therapy based on schema and TCCP on the marital conflict resolution style of women referred to counseling centers ($P=0.025$). Couple therapy based on schema therapy was more effective than TCCP on women's marital conflict resolution style.

Conclusion: couple therapy based on schema therapy can reduce the marital conflict of women referring to counseling centers to an acceptable level.

Keywords: Education; Family Conflict; Schema Therapy; Women.

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Introduction

Marriage is one human needs, which consists of two people with different abilities and talents, with different needs and interests, and in a word, with different personalities. There are small and large issues can occur that, according to Okafor, if these issues are not properly managed, can lead to marital conflicts (1).

Conflict is a critical point in the communication path. Because couples in the face of conflict, may use negative behaviors such as blaming their partner and rejecting the view. In the face of conflict, some couples fall into a cycle of negative interactions. This situation leads to marital dissatisfaction in the long run (2). Marital conflicts have consequences such as anxiety disorder, depression, maladaptation and aggression, and physical ailments such

as heart disease. There are different styles for resolving marital conflicts that use them appropriately. It is very important. In a comprehensive classification, couples' conflict resolution methods include avoidance style, kind style, conciliatory style, and accompanying style (3). Conflict resolution styles affect marital relationships, in a way that positive and constructive styles are the preserver and maintainer of marital bond, but controlling and competitive styles reduce the satisfaction, cohesion and compatibility of couples (4).

Proper use of gynecological conflict resolution styles is very important. In this regard, there are several methods, including these methods can be referred to couple therapy based on schema therapy and training of couples' communication program. couple therapy based on schema is a relatively new and integrated treatment method that is based on the development of cognitive-behavioral therapy concepts. This approach presented the principles and foundations of cognitive-behavioral schools, Gestalt, object relations, constructivism and psychoanalysis in the form of a therapeutic and conceptual model (5). In this approach, schemas play an important role in marital relationships (6). Wilde and DeSwiz (7) have shown that couple therapy based on schema therapy is effective on various aspects of couples' lives, including depression and relationship problems (8), Reduction of marital conflicts⁷, Increasing marital satisfaction and compatibility (9), couples' psychological distress⁸ and satisfaction with couple relationships (10).

Couple communication program training also emphasizes the acquisition of skills and concepts for building an intimate relationship (11). The program seeks to teach couples the cycle of awareness, speaking skills, listening skills, and conflict resolution skills (12). The effectiveness of this therapeutic approach has been proven in several studies, including its

effectiveness on relationship satisfaction (13), self-efficacy (14) and also show marital conflict resolution (15). Studies have shown that the use of couple therapy based on schema as well as training in couples communication programs in the treatment of marital disorders have increased and several studies have shown the positive effects of these two therapeutic approaches in the treatment of conflicts and problems of couples. However, no research has been done on the effectiveness of couple therapy based on schema and couples' communication program training on marital conflict resolution style. Due to the high frequency of marital conflicts and related psychological damage, it is important to find effective treatment and effective treatment. The aim of this study was to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of couple therapy based on schema and training of couples' communication program on marital conflict resolution style of women referring to counseling centers.

Methods

This study was a quasi-experimental study conducted with a pretest-posttest design. The statistical population of the study included all women with marital conflict (n=240) who referred to specialized counseling centers for family consolidation and sustainable marriage in the 19th district of Tehran in 2019. 107 women with marital conflict were selected by convenience sampling. Based on the criteria study, 60 individuals participated and were randomly assigned the experimental and control groups, which the first and the second experimental groups were couple therapy based on schema and TCCP, respectively.

Inclusion criteria included at least a diploma, at least 5 years of marriage and the couple is not in the process of separation. Excluding criteria were also leaving the absence for more than two sessions, unwillingness to continue therapeutic interventions and use of psychiatric drugs. Pre-test was performed before treatment

and post-test after treatment. Ethical considerations included informed written consent to participate in the study, observance of the principle of confidentiality, and avoidance of any harm to participants.

In order to collect data, the necessary permission was obtained through the university and then, the steps and structure of the meetings were extracted based on scientific texts and relevant sources. After the training sessions were identified, the framework of these sessions was approved by several experts. Before starting the training, all participants in the 3 groups completed the pre-test. Then the meetings were held on a weekly basis. TCCP during 10 sessions of 90 minutes per week, couple therapy based on schema during 8 sessions of 90 minutes per week was presented to each educational group. After completing the training, all participants in 3 groups completed the post-test one week apart. The questionnaire of Couples' conflict resolution styles was used to collect data.

Couples Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire: This questionnaire was designed by Rahim in 1983 (13). The questionnaire has 28 items and five subscales that each subscale shows an interpersonal conflict resolution style. These styles are: avoidance style (6 item), adaptive or mandatory style (6 item), competition or domination (5 item), cooperation or integration (7 item) and compromise or compromise (4 item). Answering the questions is in the form of a 5-point Likert score from a strongly agree 1 to a strongly agree 5. Studies have shown that the questionnaire has good convergence and differential validity. Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.78 (14). Internal consistency was also reported using

Cronbach's alpha from 0.76 to 0.85 (14). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was 0.87.

Couple therapy based on schema therapy

The framework and educational content of couple therapy based on schema is based on the book Schema therapy (16). The training consisted of 8 sessions and the duration of each session was 90 minutes. In this treatment, the role of emotions in the process of change, the use of experimental techniques, initial attachments and interpersonal behaviors were emphasized and help the person to become familiar with maladaptive coping styles related to specific schemas, perform healthy behaviors and change them in the face of life change.

Training of couple communication program

Course and content of the couple relationship program, based on the book Marital Communication Skills: Talking and Listening to each other was designed (12, 17). The training consisted of 10 sessions and the duration of each session was 90 minutes. In this treatment, we tried to resolve the conflict through effective dialogue and choose an effective communication style.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software version 26, as well descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of variance.

Results

Mean of the demographic characteristics of the experimental schema therapy group are shown in table 1. The mean variables of marital conflict resolution styles in experimental and control groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Description of the demographic characteristics of the experimental schema therapy group

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum score	Maximum score
Age	34.40	5.96	29	43
Duration of marriage	10.13	5.08	3	21
Number of children	0.91	1.53	0	3

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the variable of marital conflict resolution styles in experimental and control groups

Variable	Group	Pre-test	Post-test	
		Mean \pm SD	Mean \pm SD	
Marital conflict resolution styles	Collaborative style	couple therapy based on schema therapy	18.86 \pm 3.29	25.66 \pm 3.83
		TCCP	20.46 \pm 4.86	24.40 \pm 3.50
		control group	16.46 \pm 4.12	19.73 \pm 3.83
	Avoidance style	couple therapy based on schema therapy	28.46 \pm 4.3	20.20 \pm 3.36
		TCCP	19.63 \pm 4.12	26.34 \pm 3.54
		control group	15.86 \pm 3.39	17.60 \pm 5.21
	Competitive style	couple therapy based on schema therapy	17.73 \pm 3.50	13.20 \pm 3.51
		TCCP	17.53 \pm 11.78	14.53 \pm 13.50
		control group	16.13 \pm 2.53	16.26 \pm 2.40
	Adaptation style	couple therapy based on schema therapy	17.26 \pm 4.16	22.24 \pm 3.58
		TCCP	17.26 \pm 4.16	21.20 \pm 3.78
		control group	16.20 \pm 4.16	16.53 \pm 4.3
	Compromise style	couple therapy based on schema therapy	9.80 \pm 1.78	13.40 \pm 3.88
		TCCP	10.93 \pm 2.89	14.71 \pm 3.78
		control group	10.60 \pm 2.16	10.60 \pm 2.58

Based on the results of Levene's test, the homogeneity of variance was achieved in all variables ($P \geq 0.05$). Investigation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance and covariance matrices with M.Box test also showed that this homogeneity has been achieved ($P > 0.05$, $F = 0.96$, $\text{Box's } M = 26.38$). The results of Bartlett test also revealed that there is a moderate and significant correlation between dependent variables and can be used for multivariate analysis ($P < 0.05$, $df = 20$, $\chi^2 = 33.95$).

The results of Table 3 showed that there is a significant difference between the two groups in all styles except competitive style and the effect of couple therapy based on schema and couple communication program on conflict resolution styles has been significantly different.

Table 4 shows that the subjects in the pair communication program training group

Table 3. Results of analysis of variance of research variables in two groups

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
group	Collaborative style	239.38	2	106.47	6.93	.000	0.27
	Avoidance style	176.33	2	138.77	3.35	.025	0.15
	Competitive style	33.400	2	11.13	1.29	.286	0.06
	Adaptation style	120.400	2	40.13	6.11	.001	0.24
	Compromise style	247.118	2	115.70	8.60	.000	0.31

have a lower adjusted average. This means that there is a significant difference between the effectiveness of couple therapy based on schema, couple communication program training on women's conflict resolution styles. Also, the comparison of the mean of conflict resolution styles in the two groups indicates that the mean of conflict resolution styles in couple therapy based on schema has increased more. Therefore, couple therapy based on schema has been more effective in improving conflict resolution styles than teaching a couple communication program.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of couple therapy based on schema and TCCP on women's marital conflict resolution style. Based on the results, the comparison of conflict resolution styles in

Table 4. Bonferroni test results comparing the means of couple therapy based on schema and TCCP

Variable	Mean couple therapy based on schema therapy	TCCP	Mean difference	standard error	P-value
Collaborative style	26.62	23.95	2.63	0.72	0.003
Avoidance style	21.52	18.00	3.51	2.63	0.005
Competitive style	15.27	14.22	1.05	0.96	0.017
Adaptation style	21.85	20.64	2.21	0.59	0.004
Compromise style	13.14	13.34	0.60	0.58	0.001

the two groups indicates that the average of conflict resolution styles in couple therapy based on schema has increased more. Therefore, couple therapy based on schema has been more effective in improving conflict resolution styles than teaching a couple communication program. The results of the present study are consistent with the results of the studies of Wolderslund, Kofoed, Ammentorp (14), Chatav and Wishman¹⁰, Neumann, Wagner, Raymore (18) and Blanchard (19).

Explaining the effectiveness of couple therapy based on schema therapy on increasing the use of constructive conflict resolution styles, it can be noted that this therapy is an individual therapy with systemic consequences and the breadth and ease of understanding and application of schema therapy techniques encourage wider use of therapy (20). Couple schema therapy is an integrated method in which the schema of each partner (spouse) is examined to identify how they communicate and interact, then helps spouses to reduce the activation of schemas and an effective way to deal with Learn them. Therefore, by creating insight into the causes of cognitive, emotional, and maladaptive interpersonal behaviors and how to reconstruct schemas, more cognitive and behavioral coordination is created in the individual and leads him to use a more constructive and healthier behavioral style and conflict resolution (20).

The couple therapy based on schema therapy is based on the belief that the unique circumstances one experiences as a child play an important role in creating a set of beliefs about oneself and others called schema. In this approach, it teaches couples

to identify and change schemas and to use more adaptive tools to further satisfy their basic needs (21). Studies have also shown that couple therapy based on schema therapy is effective on various aspects of couples' lives such as depression and relationship problems (7), heart distress and depression (9), and couples' psychological distress⁸ and relationship satisfaction (10). In this study, we also found the effect of couple therapy based on schema therapy on marital conflict resolution styles. Therefore, because this approach focuses on early maladaptive schemas, which is the source of many couples' problems, it is an easy and fast treatment for resolving couples' conflicts.

TCCP is also a program to equip couples with effective communication skills. The program teaches communication skills (speaking and listening and conflict resolution) and awareness skills to stabilize and change the couple system (12). TCCP tries to teach couples the skills needed in communication, but couple therapy based on schema therapy tries to treat and resolve couples' conflicts by influencing the initial maladaptive schemas. In this study, schema therapy by identifying and changing schemas and using more adaptive tools to meet the focus on the needs of couples, has been able to be more effective than TCCP. Therefore, due to the greater effect of early maladaptive schemas on couple conflicts, couple therapy based on schema therapy can have a better performance in improving conflict resolution styles.

This study was conducted only on women with conflict referred to specialized counseling centers for Family counseling and sustainable marriage in the 19th district

of Tehran, which is one of the limitations of this study to generalize the results. It is suggested that therapists use another statistical sample in order to be effective in couple therapy based on schema by teaching couples' communication program on women's marital conflict resolution style.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be said that couple therapy based on schema is more effective on women's marital conflict resolution style than teaching couples' communication program and can provide more effective use of marital conflict resolution styles in couples and the ratio help resolve marital conflicts.

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Authors' contributions

Study concept and design: MC, MA; Data gathering: MC; Data analysis: KA; Writing manuscript: MC, HA; Revise manuscript: MA, KA; Approve manuscript: All authors.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

Informed written consent was obtained.

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