

Effectiveness of Self-Regulation Couple Therapy intervention on marital satisfaction and partner abuse (Non-physical)

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to investigate effectiveness Self-Regulation Couple Therapy intervention on marital satisfaction and partner abuse. In a semi-experimental with experimental and control group design, 24 couples were selected by convenient sampling method from Family Counseling Center of Ardabil city and were divided into two experimental (12 couples) and control groups (12 couples) through random assignment. Before the treatment, participants completed the Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) and Partner Abuse Scale (Non-physical) (PASNP). Then, Self-Regulation Couple Therapy intervention protocol was implemented for the experimental group in 7 sessions of 90 minutes, and again the questionnaires were completed by both groups after eight weeks. The results showed that Self-Regulation Couple Therapy intervention had a significant increase in marital satisfaction scores and significant reduction in non-physical partner abuse scores in experimental group compared with control group. These results suggest that Self-Regulation Couple Therapy intervention is an effective way to improve marital conflicts and marital satisfaction.

Keywords: Self-Regulation Couple Therapy intervention, marital satisfaction, partner abuse.

Introduction

Partner abuse is a public health problem affecting many families (Aronson, Perkins & Olson, 2014). Partner abuse is an important issue in the study of relationships between couples. As evidence shows, such behavior negatively affects marital satisfaction and relationships between couples. Longitudinal studies suggest that psychological aggression is a predictor of low marital satisfaction in relationships between couples (Panuzio & DiLillo, 2010; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999). Wife abuse and marital dissatisfaction interact mutually (Yoon and Lawrence, 2013). In a research carried out by Carroll, et al. (2010), it was found that psychological aggression predicts marital dissatisfaction and dissociation in couples relationships.

A study by Halford, Farrugia, Lizzio, & Wilson (2010) shows that aggression occurs in newly married couples, and is related to a wide range of risk factors including aggression brought from original family, and is potentially correctable through timely intervention seeking to prevent aggression. Self-reported aggression and violence in 379 newly married Australian couples has been examined in the study, where couples have reported how much they are capable of enriching relation with their spouses. Low relation self-regulation associated with aggression and violence. It was concluded that aggression and violence are common problems among newly married Australian couples, and enhancement of relation self-regulation might contribute to decrease in aggression getting rife. Given the high rate of wife abuse and the importance of the issue, identification of modern intervention methods in order to decrease wife abuse and in turn increase in life satisfaction seems but necessary. Various therapeutic methods and packages are now available and accessible for couples (Gurman, 2009). The main objective of all such interventions methods and approaches is to better couples relationships, and for this purpose numerous methods have been used by different approaches (Oltmanns & Emery, 2012). Self-regulation is one important approach in couple therapy.

Self-regulation couple therapy is an attempt to offer an integrated frame work in order to take benefit of other approaches to couple therapy. This approach

features emphasis on a process enabling people to change their relationships. The development of self-assessment skills for relation behaviors and deciding for and implementation of self-change are certain goals of any therapy (Halford, Markman, Klin & Stanley; 2003). Self-regulation couple therapy makes use of behavioral, cognitive, affect-oriented, and insight-oriented enabling couples to achieve change in their relationships. In this approach, each of the couples is encouraged to select goals for change, so that they can overcome problems and finally realize their goals (Halford, Sanders & Behrence; 2001). This approach to couple therapy is an effective intervention through which couples learn the necessary skills to adjust their behavior (Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halfird & Kimlin., 2005). Halford et al (2001) studied 83 couples; results from their research show that couples who were exposed to high amount of risk factors and were appropriately trained, proved to enjoy higher rates of marital satisfaction compared to couples in the control group. Self-regulation couple therapy significantly affects the relationship quality, leading to development of self-regulation skills and enhancement of marital satisfaction. In addition, when couples learn commitment, this leads to marital satisfaction (Chaiker, 2003).

A study by Halford, Moore, Wilson, Dyre, Farrugia (2004), showed that self-regulation couple therapy leads to reinforcement of relationships and marital satisfaction. There is a relation between couples communicative skills and feeling happiness by them; and couples showed higher rates of interest and marital satisfaction using communicative skills (Kline and Stafford, 2004). A research that carried out by Wilson et al (2005) also supports relation between self-regulation couple therapy and marital satisfaction in newly married couples. There is association between self-regulation couple therapy on the one hand and marital satisfaction and intimate couple relations (Howells & McGillivray, 2006). A study carried out by Halford, Lizzo, Wilson, & Occhipinti (2007) also suggests effectiveness of self-regulation couple therapy in marital satisfaction. A research by Khakzad and Mohammad Tehrani (2015) showed that self-regulation couple therapy causes increase in marital happiness and adaptation.

According to the findings above, it can be said that self-regulation couple therapy is an effective method for improvement of marital relationship. It appears that there is a common component in couples cognitive and emotional regulation techniques on the one hand and marital relationships on the other. Moreover self-regulation can play a major role in emotional self-control whose therapeutic effect might be affected by the same fact. Although previous research has examined the role of self-regulation couple therapy in

aggression and physical wife abuse, the effect of this therapeutic method on emotional abuse of spouse is still unclear. On the other hand, there are few studies examining the role of self-regulation couple therapy in marital satisfaction.

Therefore, the present research seeks to examine the two following objectives: 1) examining the efficacy of self-regulation couple therapy in marital satisfaction, and 2) examining the efficacy of self-regulation couple therapy in emotional wife abuse.

Design

The present study utilized a semi-experimental with experimental and control group design using a pretest-post-test method.

Sample

The population of this study included couples referred to Family Counseling Center of Ardabil city who have been married for at least three years and at most six years. From this population, 24 couples were chosen by convenient sampling method and were divided into two groups of experimental (12 couples) and control (12 couples) through random assignment. The mean age of participants was 32 (SD 3.94) years, and its range was between 22-45. The majority of subjects (83.6%) had average social economic status and literacy level of 64% participant were at the bachelor level. In addition, of the participants 36.3% had governmental job status and 63.7% free status.

Procedure

For this purpose, the couples who had referred to Family Counseling Center of Ardabil city for solving their marital conflicts (the treatment and the control groups) filled out The Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) and Partner Abuse Scale (Non-physical) (PASNP) before and after the treatment. The experimental group was exposed to Self-Regulation Couple therapy intervention for 7 sessions of 90 minutes, while the control group was put on the waiting list. The two groups were again evaluated after an interval of 8 weeks. All the participants in the treatment and the control group filled out the questionnaires, again after the treatment.

Measure

The Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS):

The Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) consists of 25 items that assess the extent to which problems are encountered in romantic relationships (Hudson, 1982a.). Also, this questionnaire is intended to measure relationship satisfaction, and not adjustment levels and was originally developed for use with married couple, any reference to spouse was rewarded as partner. Each item is rated on a five point response scale ranging from “never” to “always.” The score range is from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating more severe problems in the relationship. As recommended by the developer of the scale, a score of 30 or more was used as a cut-off score for unsatisfying relationships. The psychometric properties of the scale have been proven to be satisfactory (Touliatos, Perlmutter, Straus, 2001). The index has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a mean alpha of 0.96; and temporal stability, with a test-retest correlation of 0.96 (Marine & Myriam, 2004). The Cranach's alpha coefficient in the present study was .82.

Partner Abuse Scale (Non-physical) (PASNP):

Partner abuse scale (non-physical) (PASNP). For two-parent families the PASNP was used to measure marital conflict (Attala, Hudson, & McSweeney, 1994). The PASNP is a 25-item scale designed to measure the degree or magnitude of perceived nonphysical abuse from a spouse or partner. The primary focus is the magnitude of verbal aggression. Items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from bNeverQ (1) to bAll of the timeQ (7). A total score with a potential range from 0 to 100 is computed, and higher scores indicate more perceived non-physical abuse. A score greater than 15 indicates a clinically significant problem.). The Cranach's alpha coefficient in the present study was .77.

Ethical considerations

All study subjects were given both verbal information and written summary of the study, where a voluntary participation, guarantee of anonymity, free will of withdrawal from the participation, and no disadvantage upon withdrawal were explained. Upon both verbal and written consent from the subjects, data was collected.

Data analyses

The data was analyzed by using SPSS 22 software. Questionnaire data were initially checked for missing item responses. Overall, .001% of items were

missing from the questionnaire data. A single imputation using the expectation maximization algorithm was therefore utilized to replace these missing items. Missing data were imputed using Missing Values Analysis within SPSS 22.

Data were presented by mean, standard deviation (SD), skewness, kurtoses, Min and Max for dependent variable in control and experimental group. The normality of data was assessed and confirmed by one sample K-S test. To investigate the effect of self-regulation couple therapy on marital satisfaction and partner abuse, a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was applied controlling for pre-test.

Before using the MANCOVA the its assumptions of homogeneity of regressions slopes, and homogeneity of variances were assessed. About the marital satisfaction, significant level of group \times pre-test effect is .128. Since this amount is larger than .05, we conclude that the assumption of homogeneity of regressions slopes is confirmed. As well as, about the partner abuse, the significant level of group \times pre-test effect is .254 that this amount is larger than .05, therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of regressions slopes is confirmed.

The results of Levine's test for marital satisfaction ($p=.082$) and partner abuse ($p=.059$) are not significant, therefore, it is concluded that variances of two group in this variables is homogeneous. Thus, variance homogeneous assumption is confirmed.

Results

The means and standard deviation of control and experimental groups in marital satisfaction and partner abuse in both pre-test and post-test are shown in table (1). There is no difference between the two groups in the pre-test; however, the experimental group reveals a significant increase in the post-test.

Table 1: Descriptive indexes of pre-test and post-test of marital satisfaction and partner abuse in experimental and control group

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Skweness	kurtoses	Min	Max
Marital satisfaction- pretest	Control	12	56.67	10.77	-0.34	-0.20	37.33	72.00
	Experimental	12	56.04	9.17	-0.07	-0.45	38.00	74.67
Marital satisfaction- posttest	Control	12	59.49	9.94	-0.40	-0.05	41.00	73.00
	Experimental	12	65.83	7.99	-0.51	-0.03	47.67	78.33
partner abuse- pretest	Control	12	62.92	13.33	-0.61	0.08	33.33	84.00
	Experimental	12	62.46	12.93	-0.68	-0.55	35.00	80.67
partner abuse- posttest	Control	12	60.47	12.62	-0.54	0.05	32.67	81.33
	Experimental	12	51.45	11.94	-0.50	-0.57	30.00	70.67

Table 2: Covariance analyses results

variable	Resource	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial Eta square
Marital satisfaction	Pre-test	3587.587	1	3587.587	1077.637	.000	.960
	Group	570.663	1	570.663	171.415	.000	.792
	Error	149.811	45	3.329			
	Total	192679.609	48				
partner abuse	Pre-test	6554.510	1	6554.510	757.438	.000	.944
	Group	889.116	1	889.116	102.746	.000	.695
	Error	389.409	45	8.654			
	Total	158231.156	48				

Covariance analysis shows that the pretest effect is significant ($F=1077$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.96$). This means that there is a significant relationship between pretest and posttest scores of marital satisfaction. Also the group effect is significant ($F=171.42$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.80$). This means that after controlling for pre-test scores, the post-test score of marital satisfaction in the control and experimental groups is significantly different. The adjusted mean scores show that the mean score of marital satisfaction in the experimental group (mean=66.11), is significantly more than the control group (mean=59.21). Therefore, we conclude that self-regulation couple therapy has significant effect in increasing of marital satisfaction level.

Table 3: Adjusted mean

Variable	Group	N	Adjusted mean	SE
Marital satisfaction	Control	24	59.210	.373
	experimental	24	66.109	.373
partner abuse	Control	24	60.264	.601
	Experimental	24	51.655	.601

About the effectiveness of Self-Regulation Couple therapy in partner abuse, covariance analysis shows that the pretest effect is significant ($F=757.44$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.95$). This means that there is a significant relationship between pretest and posttest partner abuse scores. Also, the group effect is significant ($F=102.75$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.70$). This means that after controlling for pre-test scores, post-test of the partner abuse in the control and experimental groups is significantly different. The adjusted mean scores show that the average partner abuse in the experimental group (mean=51.66) was significantly less than the control group (mean=60.26). Therefore, we conclude that self-regulation couple therapy had a significant impact in reducing non-physical abuse.

Discussion

The present research was carried out with the aim of examining the efficacy of self-regulation couple therapy in marital satisfaction and wife abuse. Findings from the research suggested that self-regulation couple therapy has been significantly effective in enhancement of marital satisfaction level. This finding is in line with findings from studies by Halford et al. (2007); Chaiker (2003); Halford et al. (2004). The research by Halford et al. (2007) conveys that satisfaction with marital relationship is associated with relationship self-regulation. A study by Chaiker (2003) shows that teaching self-regulation in the relationship texture is significantly effective in behavior, and leads to the development of self-regulation skills and marital satisfaction. In addition, Wilson et al (2005) have confirmed the relation between self-regulation couple therapy and marital satisfaction in newly-wed couples in their study. Investigation of evidences from research on the impact of self-regulation couple therapy suggests that this type of intervention causes enhancement of marital satisfaction and reinforcement of relations between them. Self-regulation couple therapy takes advantage of behavioral, cognitive, emotional, as well as insight-oriented methods to enable couples to achieve change in their marital relationships. In this approach, each couple is encouraged to set goals for change; so that they can overcome problems and realize their objectives (Halford et al., 2001). In this method, couples are taught on assessment and removal of crises from problem interactional cycles, goal-setting, changing interactional positions, creating close bonds, self-change, and implementation of problematic areas. Couples' success in the above-mentioned processes under the protocol leads clients to solve existing conflicts; and success in solving problems in turn leads to life and marriage satisfaction. Moreover, it appears that the role of self-regulation couple therapy in marital satisfaction stems from the impact of this method on cognitive and emotional processes control; so much so that the client- now aware of negative emotions and the ways of regulating them on the one hand, and enjoying and awareness of positive emotions and the ways of augmenting of them on the other, can improve the quality of marital relationship. This in turn leads to marital satisfaction. The findings from the present research showed that self-regulation couple therapy significantly impacts emotional wife abuse. To elaborate, self-regulation couple therapy decreases the level of wife abuse in couples under therapy. On the basis of existing literature, there was no study showing the impact of self-regulation couple therapy on wife abuse; findings from this research though are in tandem with findings from a

study by Halford et al (2010). They suggested that low self-regulation skills is associated with high level of violence in relationships. It can be said that self-regulation couple therapy leads couples to be able to adapt better through changes in thoughts, feelings and behaviors; as well as change the way they interact using emotions control and regulation. Additionally, in this approach grounds are paved for behavior self-regulation making use of identifying threatening factors, facilitating relationship skills, re-configuration of the relationship, letting couples know about tension creating factors and ways to mitigate them, helping couples learn to cooperate, and collaborative decision making. Consequently, harmful and aggressive behaviors gradually replace with healthy ones; the outcome of such changes would be decrease in aggression, and facilitation of problem-solving process, and ultimately marital satisfaction.

By and large, this study showed that couple therapy using self-regulation approach is helpful in increase in marital satisfaction and decrease in wife abuse. Given the effectiveness of self-regulation couple therapy, this therapeutic intervention can be duly taken benefit of in counseling and family therapy clinics.

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