

The effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on marital intimacy, couple burnout and well-being

Leila valipour¹, Mahmood Najafi²

¹. MA student in general psychology, Islamic Azad university of Semnan

². Assistant in clinical psychology, Islamic Azad university of Semnan Email: m-najafi@semnan.ac.ir

Abstract: This research aimed to assess the efficiency of cognitive-behavioral therapy on marital intimacy, couple burnout and well-being. Method: the method of this research was quasi-experimental (pretest-posttest) with a control group. The research sample was 30 couples with marital problems referred to one of the counseling centers of Qaemshahr. They were selected according to sampling method. Marital intimacy, couple burnout and well-being questionnaires were administered among selected sample. Finding: the results indicated that CBT couple therapy in post-test step was effective in increasing marital intimacy and well-being, but it was not effective in reducing couple burnout. Overall, the results indicated the importance and effectiveness of CBT couple therapy in increasing marital intimacy and well-being. Conclusion: findings of the study demonstrated the effectiveness of the therapy on marital conflict. Because of importance of family for society, paying attention to well-being and life skills training seems necessary.

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Key words CBT couple therapy, marital intimacy, couple burnout, and well-being

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important human life events. It consists of two person with different skills, ability and interests. It is a complex, delicate and dynamic relation with special features. It is the most important social practices for satisfying emotional and spiritual needs. Family is the first social organization which is the result of marriage. It has existed since the beginning of human life. It is considered one of the main bases of life and center of assistance, trust, relaxation and healing which relieves the suffering of its members and leads to their prosperity. Intimacy is one of positive and important feelings in marriage.

The need for intimacy and close relationship with another person is one of the basic requirements in life and is an important part of vibrant marriage. According to Sharer and Riz, it is the result of individual experience and its creation and maintenance demands skill and art. Intimacy is a proximity, similarity and loving relationship with another person which demands knowledge, understanding, acceptance and expression of thoughts and feelings. Sometimes couple do not have the skill to maintain this intimacy which results in conflict in marriage. If these conflicts continue, it results in couple burnout. Couple burnout is a gradual process in which intimacy and love are reduced. It is the result of unrealistic expectations and ups and downs of life. According to Linger, burnout is a physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion and it is result of mismatch between expectations and reality.

Conflict is a basic element in marriage. There is always possibility of conflict between couples. As

conflict is a start of separation and divorce, if it is not solved, it may lead to termination of marriage. The solution of this problem is early intervention and resolve of these conflicts. Many therapeutic approaches were tested in this area and results indicated that communication skills training, problem solving training, behavior therapy, rational-emotional couple therapy and short-term solution-focused couple therapy are effective in reducing burnout and conflicts among couples. The results of other researches showed that communication skills training, family therapy, problem solving skills training, emotion-focused couple therapy and cognitive behavioral couple therapy are effective in increasing intimacy of couple. The effectiveness of these methods is that in these methods couples learn some skills by which they can communicate effectively and solve their conflicts.

If these conflicts are resolved, couples feel a sense of satisfaction and relief. Diener investigated satisfaction in psychology for the first time in 1980. He believes that people with high sense of well-being are satisfied with their life and experience fewer negative feeling. Inner well-being is scientific name for the manner of assessment of people of their life. This assessment is according to overall judgment about satisfaction with various aspects of life and emotional states of people. Satisfaction is a feeling which is dream of man and people try to increase this feeling in various ways. One of these ways is educational programs. The results of reaches indicated that couple therapy, family therapy, religious-based cognitive behavioral therapy, cognitive therapy and

communication skills are effective in increasing satisfaction and well-being among couples.

Family is the first foundation of human being. People need healthy family for healthy growth. As the deviation in the family affects the society, prevention of these deviations seems necessary. Prevention requires early intervention and working on factors which increase the strength of family bonds. The main question of this research is if cognitive-behavioral couple therapy affects intimacy, burnout or well-being of couples.

Method:

The method of this research was quasi-experimental (pretest-posttest) with a control group. Statistical society of this research were those couples with marital problem who referred to counseling center in Qaemshar in 1393 and were selected randomly. At the beginning, the sample society were 60 volunteer couples. According to the criteria of study, 30 couples were selected. 15 couple were assigned into experimental group and 15 couple into control group. Entry criteria: couple should be married for at least 2 years, aged between 20-40, having at least diploma and at least one child.

Tools:

1. Marital intimacy questionnaire: it consists of 17 questions which was developed by Walker and Tompson for measuring intimacy. Scoring is according to Likert method ranging from 1(never) to 7(always), upper scores signify more intimacy. Walker and Tompson reported the reliability of the test using Croncach's alpha 91% to 97%. Etemadi calculated the reliability of the scale using Croncach's alpha 96%. Naim calculated the reliability of the scale using Croncach's alpha and split-half method which were respectively 96% and 96%. Naderi et al calculated the reliability of the scale using Croncach's alpha and split-half method which were respectively 92% and 90%.

2. Couple burnout questionnaire: couple burnout scale is a self-assessment tool developed by Pines in order measure the degree of burnout in couples. It consists of 21 clause. 17 clause are negative phrases such as fatigue, upset and being worthless, 4 clause are positive phrases such as happiness and being energetic. Its scoring is on a 7-point likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. Reliability of the scale which was calculated with retest method was 76% in one month. Croncach's alpha was used for calculating the reliability of the scale.

Table 1: a summary of couple therapy sessions based on cognitive behavior approach:

First session	Title: introducing and expressing the logic of treatment, creating positive incentives for interpretation Agenda: creating relationship among member, expressing the rules and of group, training courses, creating incentive for participating in training courses, explaining intimacy, burnout and well-being
Second session	Title: self-assessment Agenda: reviewing assignments of last session, discussing about intimacy, well-being, active listening and expressing emotions, need and demand
Third session	Title: setting a goal Agenda: reviewing assignments of last session, discussing about setting a goal , negative automatic thoughts, self-talk thoughts, exchanging contact, coping strategies sheet, my spouse strategy
Fourth session	Title: creating relationship Agenda: reviewing assignments of last session, teaching how to communicate properly through speech communication skills
Fifth session	Title: beliefs and expectation Agenda: expressing cognitive errors affecting marital conflicts, bringing up reproachful thoughts, labeling, mind reading, enlarging, conflict
Sixth session	Title: negotiation Agenda: reviewing assignments of last session, bringing up rules, situation, emotions, flexibility, back negotiate
Seventh session	Title: problem solving Agenda: reviewing assignments of last session, fluid thinking, purpose, judging the value
Eighth session	Title: assessment Agenda: reviewing assignments of last session, evolution of the rate of achievement of the therapeutic goals, conclusions, questionnaire of population, burnout and well-being, acknowledgment, farewell , end of meetings

3. Life satisfaction questionnaire: life satisfaction scale was developed by Diener et al in order to measure overall judgment about life satisfaction. It consisted of 48 questions. After factor analysis, it reduced into 10 questions. Due to semantic similarity, the questions reduced into 5 questions. 7- point likert scale ranged from totally agree to totally disagree. Diener et al reported the reliability of the scale 84% in two months. Yrdli and Rai reported the reliability of the scale 50% in 10 weeks. Sheikh et al reported the internal consistency coefficient scale 85% and the reliability of the retest 77%. Bayani, Mohammad Kochki and Gudarzi reported the reliability of the scale 83% by using Croncach's alpha and 69% using retest method. Zabrisikie and Ward reported Croncach's alpha coefficient scale 91% to 94%.

Research method:

First, one of the counseling centers of Qaemshahr was randomly selected. Then, 30 couples were selected. Sample people were randomly assigned into experimental and control group. Experimental

group underwent cognitive behavioral couple therapy, but the control group was not treated. Cognitive behavior couple therapy is derived from strength model of Richard Steward (social exchange theory) 1970, jackbson and Margolin brought it up and was used in communication training and behavioral exchange by beck, Epstein, Backum, Christian and Iz datlio. In Cognitive behavior couple therapy, active listening is a technique which was invented by Carl Ragers and was taught to therapists. Identification, assessment and overcoming listening obstacles were brought up by Mckay, Davis and Faning. Two-way communication practice in which participants play a role of speaker and listener was used in Cognitive behavior couple therapy by Datilio and Padsky. Table 1 is the summary of treatment sessions.

Findings:

Descriptive statistics of studied variables according to the groups and two pretest and posttest stage are illustrated in the table 1 and 2.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of studied variables according to the group and type of test in men

Group Variables	Experiment				Control			
	pretest		posttest		pretest		posttest	
	Average	deviation	Average	deviation	Average	deviation	Average	deviation
Intimacy	45	10.98	90.46	12.04	63.13	14.65	60.06	12.78
Corporal fatigue	22.40	3.11	25.40	2.41	21.26	5.50	20	4.61
Corporal fatigue	20.33	3.17	21.20	3.85	23.06	3.19	23.26	3.15
Emotional fatigue	23	3	21.33	3.79	25.86	4.35	26.20	5.25
Psychasthenia	23.06	4.35	23.53	4.54	27.26	5.47	27.80	6.08

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of studied variables according to the group and type of test in women

Group Variables	Experiment				Control			
	pretest		posttest		pretest		posttest	
	Average	deviation	Average	deviation	Average	deviation	Average	deviation
Intimacy	65.60	13.53	89.93	13.86	60.46	13.06	55.60	14.75
Corporal fatigue	22	4.48	26.80	2.88	20.53	5.59	18.93	3.53
Corporal fatigue	20.66	3.43	21.93	3.47	21.93	5.33	22.80	3.07
Emotional fatigue	22.73	4.50	22.80	4.16	24.73	7.35	25.80	5.23
Psychasthenia	23.93	2.65	24.46	3.90	26.26	6.87	27.66	4.30

According to the results of the table, we can conclude that intimacy and well-being increased in men and women in experimental group. Invariant covariance was used for assessing the effectiveness of cognitive behavior couple therapy in increasing intimacy among couples. One of the assumptions of

this test is homogeneity of variance error. Leven test was used for studying this assumption. The results of this test showed no violation of the assumption for men and women.

$F=3.645, p>0.05$: woman; $f=3.480, p>0.05$

Table 3: the results of invariant covariant test for investigating differences of groups in intimacy of couples

Dependent variable	gender	total squares	D.F.	square average	value of F	significant level
Intimacy	Women	6510.708	1	6510.708	76.94	0.0005
	Men	3230.6816	1	3230.6816	80.187	0.0005

According to the above table, there is a significant difference among studied groups. We can conclude that cognitive behavior couple therapy is effective in increasing intimacy among couples. Multivariate covariance was used for investigating the effectiveness of cognitive behavior couple therapy on burnout. The results of covariance test showed no significant difference in the group.

Lambda wilkes(women)=0.816, $f=1.72$, $p>0.001$;
Lambda wilkes(men) =792, $f=2.015$, $p>0.001$

Univariate covariance analysis was used for studying the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour couple therapy on increasing well-being among couples. One of the assumptions of this test is homogeneity of variance error. Leven test was used for studying this assumption. The results of this test showed no violation of the assumption for men and women.

$F=0.062$, $p>0.05$: women; $f=2.684$, $p>0.05$: men

Table 4: the results of univariant covariance test for studying the well-being differences of groups

Dependent variable	gender	total squares	D.F.	square average	value of F	significant level
Well-being	Women	73.841	1	73.841	9.167	0.0001
	Men	229.414	1	229.414	41.24	0.0005

According to the above table, there is a significant difference among studied groups. We can conclude that cognitive behavior couple therapy is effective in increasing well-being among couples.

Conclusion:

The aim present study was studying the effectiveness of cognitive behavior couple therapy on intimacy, burnout and well-being of couples. The analysis of the data showed that cognitive behavior couple therapy was effective in increasing intimacy and well-being among couples but was not effective in burnout. The findings of the present study is in line with Sharifian et al, Farbod et al, sorani et al, Zarepoor, Khodayarifar et al and Mami et al. these researcher concluded that cognitive behavior couple therapy, family therapy, communication skills training are effective in increasing intimacy among couples. . The findings of the present study is not in line with Amani and Letafati, Atari et all, Tizdast et al, Ahamadi et al , Sharif et al and Michele et al. these researcher concluded that behavior therapy, problem solving training and communication skills training are effective in decreasing burnout and conflicts of couples. The findings of this research is in line with Jonson and lebo, shaydish and Baldwin, Gorman and jackbson, Almasi et al, Padash et al Askari et al and Tonekaboni et al. these researchers concluded that couple therapy, religious-based cognitive behavioral therapy and communication skills are effective in couple satisfaction and well-being. Many of the misunderstandings in marriage are irrational comments which lead to fail relationship. When the couple fail in their relationship, they fear of separation and do unsuccessful attempts to improve their relationship, on the other hand they have dysfunctional thoughts and reproach each other. Maybe one of the reasons for impact of cognitive behavioral therapy on intimacy is its effectiveness on these dysfunctional thoughts. The aim of cognitive

behavioral therapy is to help people have a proper understanding of the problems and find proper solution for them. Teaching these skills to couples can help them in their family, social and economic problems and lead to better relationship and intimacy in the life. This intimacy can solve conflicts of life and be a basis for maintaining satisfactory marriage. In this therapy, negative automatic thoughts, cognitive errors and schemas are studied. In cognitive behavioral therapy, people are courage to identify, test and challenge their negative thoughts.

Lack of intimate relationship between couple results from not expressing feeling, lock of knowledge and recognition of their feelings. Inadequate communication leads to family problems and stress among the couples. One of the best solutions for having a good marital relationship is communication skills training. People learn through effective communication to express their excitements, explain their problems and solve their unwanted difference arising from opposing views and increase their intimacy. Communication skills training teaches couple the skills of constructive dialogue and rational discussion.

There is an assumption implying many problems among couple's results from ineffective communication skills. It also implies that communication skill training as a one of the marital therapies solves these problematic relations. Considering concerns and conflicts of everyday life, people may get anxious and have less confidence in solving problem and be willing to escape from the trouble when they are faced with the conflicts. Teaching skills such as communicating skills and problem solving can help them in facing conflicts. Problem solving process consists of five steps: 1. general trend, 2. Definition of problem, 3. Alternative production, 4. Decision-making, 5. Confirmation. These skills help couples identify the main reason of their problem and solve them by using

effective methods. Learning communication skill leads to the exchange of positive and satisfying behaviors and reduction of negative behaviors. Increasing the exchange of positive behaviors satisfies emotional needs of couple and lead to positive feelings in couples. This positive feeling changes the attitude and negative feeling.

In explaining the finding that cognitive behavioral couple therapy is ineffective in decreasing burnout, it should be mentioned that couple burnout is a phenomena which happens gradually and has deep roots. Maybe the reason of ineffectiveness of this therapy is this deep root. As a result in needs a longer treatment and deeper studying. The results of this study indicated the effectiveness of therapeutic approach on couple conflicts. So due to importance of family in society teaching well-being skills seems necessary.

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