



# The effectiveness of the meta-diagnostic educational package based on cognitive behavioral therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy on marital conflict of women involved in emotional divorce

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## Abstract

**Aim:** The purpose of this research was to determine the effectiveness of meta-diagnostic treatment based on cognitive behavioral therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy on marital conflict of women involved in emotional divorce. **Method:** The current research method was conducted as a quasi-experimental study with a pre-test-post-test and follow-up design with a control group. The statistical population included all women eligible for emotional divorce in Tehran who referred to the Atiyeh Psychology Clinic in 2018, which was done using available sampling method. Among them, 30 people were randomly selected and replaced in the experimental group, meta-diagnostic training based on cognitive behavioral therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy (15 people) and the control group (15 people). The educational package developed by the meta-diagnostic researcher based on thematic analysis technique was implemented in ten 90-minute sessions on the experimental group, but the control group remained on the waiting list. The measurement tools used in the research included marital conflicts questionnaire (Barati & Sanai, 1999) and emotional divorce questionnaire (Gottman, 2008). Analysis of variance with repeated measurements and spss software were used to analyze the data. **Results:** The results indicated that the effect of treatment based on meta-diagnosis of cognitive therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy in reducing marital conflicts ( $F=362.36$ ,  $P<0.001$ ) is effective in follow-up conditions. **Conclusion:** Therefore, it was concluded that transdiagnostic therapy based on cognitive behavioral therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy is effective in reducing marital conflicts.

**Keywords:** Cognitive behavioral therapy, schema therapy, meaning therapy, marital conflict, emotional divorce.

## Introduction

Family is a social unit that is formed on the basis of human traditions and based on which men and women give themselves freely and fully to each other and in this way build an active organization called family. The family, as the first socializing institution and the oldest natural nucleus, has existed in all human societies since the beginning of history. This issue shows the constant presence of this social institution and its existential necessity. Marriage is the basis of family formation and its opposite pole is divorce, which causes its destruction. Divorce leads to personal, family and social collapse and has more negative effects for women than for men (Islami et al., 2020). One of the most important family injuries is divorce, the official divorce statistics do not fully show the extent of spouses' failure in married life, because besides that, the bigger statistics are dedicated to emotional divorce; That is, to silent and empty lives where men and women live together coldly but do not ask for divorce (Kurniati et al., 2021). In fact, some marriages that do not end in divorce become empty marriages that lack love, intimacy, and friendship, and the spouses just go with the flow of family life and pass the time (Manalel et al., 2019).

In the stage of emotional divorce, the couple is still officially husband and wife, but they feel emotionally isolated because they feel little difference between living with their spouse and living alone. Emotional divorce is one of the most painful conditions that a person can be in because of the contradictions in words, actions, and feelings, while the most important feature in marriage, which is love and companionship, is not present in the relationship. People who reach this point do not necessarily divorce each other, but if they do not actively seek to resolve the dispute and, in most cases, seek professional help, their married life is considered over (Jarvan & Alfarhat, 2020).

In general, emotional divorce is an issue that involves the foundation of the family, and despite this issue, in addition to becoming meaningless, cohabitation becomes a suitable environment for the growth of abnormalities and deviance both for its members and for the society. Emotional divorce is a symbol of a problem in the healthy and correct relationship between husband and wife. This communication problem at a small level (family) can spread and expand to a wider dimension (society) and disrupt human communication. When the foundation of the family institution is shaken, the moral and social foundations of the entire social system are shaken and the society is pushed towards various problems. If there was less talk about emotional divorce and its consequences in the past, one of the reasons could be that the number of emotional divorce cases was not as high as it is today. Today's social life has been formed in such a way that it has caused more separation and division and severing of family ties. Excessive husband care of children, high working hours of men and women, non-adherence to values, lack of sexual satisfaction, untidy clothing and appearance of the wife, and lack of personal hygiene are among the factors that provide grounds for emotional divorce. (Radtzky et al., 2022).

In schema therapy, the main focus is on connecting behaviors related to emotional failure with schemas so that patients can gain more awareness and conscious control of their desires and coping functions in themselves (Bach & Bernstein, 2019).

Some people develop early maladaptive schemas due to negative childhood experiences that affect the way they think, feel, and behave in later intimate relationships and other aspects of their lives. On the other hand, the emphasis of the schema therapy approach is on the primary incompatible schemas, which include fixed beliefs and patterns that arise from childhood and adolescence and continue until adulthood.

Transdiagnostic training based on cognitive-behavioral therapy was first used in the scientific literature of the mid-1970s, and the empirical foundations of cognitive-behavioral approaches to psychological problems date back to the beginning of this century. In a relatively short time after that, cognitive behavioral therapy became a leading psychotherapy in most western countries.

On the other hand, meaning therapy is another treatment that seems to be effective on marital conflicts. Meaning therapy is a philosophical approach about people and their existence that deals with the themes and important issues of life such as the meaning of suffering, existential vacuum, life and death, freedom and responsibility towards oneself and others, finding meaning and coping with meaninglessness.

According to the mentioned contents of the current research, will the meta-diagnostic educational package of cognitive therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy for women involved in emotional divorce be effective?

## Method

The current research method was conducted as a quasi-experimental study with a pre-test-post-test and follow-up design with a control group. The statistical population included all women eligible for emotional divorce in Tehran who referred to the Atiyeh Psychology Clinic in 2018, which was done using available sampling method. Among them, 30 people were randomly selected and replaced in the experimental group, meta-diagnostic training based on cognitive behavioral therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy (15 people) and the control group (15 people). The educational package developed by the meta-diagnostic researcher based on thematic analysis technique was implemented in ten 90-minute sessions on the experimental group, but the control group remained on the waiting list. The measurement tools used in the research included marital conflicts questionnaire (Barati & Sanai, 1999) and emotional divorce questionnaire (Gottman, 2008). Analysis of variance with repeated measurements and spss software were used to analyze the data.

## Results

To check the significance of the difference between the score of marital conflict in the two experimental groups and the control group, analysis of variance with repeated measurements was used.

The results of the analysis of variance of the repeated measurement of several variables among the studied groups in the variables of marital conflict showed that the effect between the subject (group) is significant. This effect means that at least one of the groups differs from each other in at least one of the marital conflict variables. The within-subject effect (time) was also significant for the research variables, which means that there was a change in at least one of the average variables during the time from pre-test to follow-up.

Variance analysis is significant for the within-group factor (time) and it is significant between groups. These results mean that considering the group effect, the time effect alone is significant. The interaction of group and time is also significant. Bonferroni's post hoc test was also used for pairwise comparison of groups.

The variable score of marital conflict in the experimental group and in the post-test phase is lower than the control group. In other words, the experimental group had high effectiveness in reducing marital conflict. These results show that there was a significant decrease in marital conflict in the follow-up phase in the experimental group compared to the control group.

### **Conclusion**

The results of analysis of variance showed that the treatment package based on meta-diagnostic cognitive therapy, schema therapy and meaning therapy, all three were effective in reducing the marital conflicts of women involved in emotional divorce and had a significant difference in terms of average post-test scores with the control group.

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