



The effectiveness of integrative couple therapy on the quality of marital relationships and cognitive regulation of emotions in incompatible couples

Seyedeh Raziye. Mousavi Diva¹

Shaban. Heydari^{2*}

Hossein Ali. Ghanadzadegan³

1. PhD student, Department of Psychology, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran

2. *Corresponding author: Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran

3. PhD student, Department of Psychology, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this research was to compare the effectiveness of integrative couple therapy on the quality of marital relationships and cognitive regulation of emotions in incompatible couples.

Methods: The current research was a semi-experimental type with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population included all the couples who referred to the counseling centers of Amol city during March 2021, who referred because of incompatibility or the psychologists of the center identified the cause of the conflict as incompatibility. The sample size, the number of 20 couples (40 people) (10 couples for the experimental group and another 10 couples for the control group) from the entire statistical population, the cluster sampling method was used, and finally, with this method, five centers were used to select the samples. The training sessions of the integrative couple therapy group were implemented using Christensen and Jacobson's (2000) integrative couple therapy. The questionnaires of the study were Busby et al.'s Marital Relationship Questionnaire (1995) and Garnefski et al.'s (2001) Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Findings were analyzed using repeated measures with a mixed design. **Results:** The results of the research showed that the results showed that integrative couple therapy training increases the quality of marital relationships ($P < 0.001$, $F = 46.30$) and positive emotional cognitive regulation ($P < 0.001$, $F = 62.35$) and negative ($P < 0.001$, $F = 137.80$) has been effective. **Conclusion:** Therefore, it can be concluded that integrative couple therapy was effective in improving the quality of marital relations and cognitive adjustment of incompatible couples.

Keywords: cognitive emotion regulation, couples therapy, incompatible couples, marital relationship quality.

Introduction

The family can be viewed as an emotional and interconnected unit of relationships that is built upon the marital bond between a man and a woman, and a person's satisfaction with their marital life is considered indicative of their satisfaction with the family, which in turn, facilitates the growth, material and spiritual progress of society (Parsakia, Rostami, & Saadati, 2023). One dimension of marital relationships is the quality of marital relationships, which plays a fundamental role in the overall quality of family relationships. Compatibility in life and the resulting satisfaction does not arise automatically, but rather requires the effort of both partners (Behmanesh, Falahchai, & Zarei, 2012). One of the integrated approaches that has gained considerable attention in recent years to assist couples in dealing with communication difficulties is the integrative couple therapy approach. The intervention strategies used in cognitive-behavioral integrative couple therapy largely focus on the emotional responses of couples to the differences and conflicts that arise from them. The main goal of this type of therapy is to create emotional acceptance of the current differences between the couples and differences that may arise (Christensen, Atkins, Yi, Baucom, & Georgiou, 2006). Research has shown the effectiveness of this approach in improving marital compatibility (Christensen, Atkins, Baucom, & Yi, 2010), emotional and sexual intimacy of couples (Hoyer, Ohan, Rambau, & Jacoby, 2009), and improving communication patterns (Pryor, & Baraca, 2013). Studies have shown that various types of couple therapy have statistically significant or clinically significant effects (Snyder, Castellani, & Wiseman, 2006). Therefore, identifying vulnerable stages of marital relationships and designing educational and therapeutic interventions to preserve, continue and improve this very sensitive social unit is one of the necessities of family and couples therapy specialists. The design of educational and preventive programs is also more important to prevent couples from entering the ongoing cycle of relationship problems related to marital relationships. In light of the issues stated, the present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of integrative couple therapy on the quality of marital relationships and cognitive emotional regulation in incompatible couples. The research sought to answer the following questions:

- 1- Was integrative couple therapy effective on the quality of marital relationships and cognitive emotional regulation in incompatible couples in the post-test phase?
- 2- Was integrative couple therapy effective on the quality of marital relationships and cognitive emotional regulation in incompatible couples in the stable follow-up phase?

Method

The current research was a semi-experimental type with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population included all the couples who referred to the counseling centers of Amol city during March 2021, who referred because of incompatibility or the psychologists of the center identified the cause of the conflict as incompatibility. The sample size, the number of 20 couples (40 people) (10 couples for the experimental group and another 10 couples for the control group) from the entire statistical population, the cluster sampling method was used, and finally, with this method, five centers were used to select the samples. The training sessions of the integrative couple therapy group were implemented using Christensen and Jacobson's (2000) integrative couple therapy. The questionnaires of the study were Busby et al.'s Marital Relationship Questionnaire (1995) and

Garnefski et al.'s (2001) Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Findings were analyzed using repeated measures with a mixed design.

Results

The results of the research showed that the results showed that integrative couple therapy training increases the quality of marital relationships ($P < 0.001$, $F = 46.30$) and positive emotional cognitive regulation ($P < 0.001$, $F = 62.35$) and negative ($P < 0.001$, $F = 137.80$) has been effective.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that integrative couple therapy was effective in improving the quality of marital relations and cognitive adjustment of incompatible couples.

The present research, like other studies, had certain limitations in its process, some of which are outlined here: the research was conducted in counseling centers in the city of Amol with a limited sample, which may face limitations in generalizing the results to the broader population. Another limitation was the failure to consider demographic variables such as economic, educational, social, and cultural variables, which could have an impact on the research results. The use of self-report questionnaires was another limitation, which could also affect the research results.

Given the importance of the variables under discussion in the research, such as the quality of marital relationships and emotion regulation, it is suggested that workshops on integrative and reality therapy for couples should be conducted in counseling centers before divorce. As prevention is always better than cure, it is also recommended to include training on communication skills and necessary attitude changes for married life in premarital education workshops. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that this therapeutic approach be included in the list of programs for couples and family therapy so that therapists can address issues related to communication problems and enhance intimate relationships in couples and families.

One of the problems and conflicts in marital relationships is the emotions of couples. Given the effectiveness of these two therapeutic approaches in cognitive emotion regulation and, consequently, improving the quality of marital relationships, it is recommended that these two therapeutic methods be included in the list of counseling programs for couples and family therapy. It is also suggested that in future research, this study should be conducted on other communities and extensive samples for comparison with other studies. The use of open-ended questions and interviews along with questionnaires during the follow-up period after conducting the research can also provide greater confidence in the effectiveness of the intervention methods. These factors should also be considered in future research. It is recommended that the effectiveness of this therapeutic approach be examined in future studies based on variables such as the duration of marriage, gender, and age of participants.

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