



The effect of Schema-based couple therapy on marital satisfaction and emotional dysregulation in discordant couples: Single Subject Research

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this research was the effect of schema-based therapy on marital satisfaction and difficulty in emotional regulation, in discordant couples. **Method:** In term of its purpose, this research had a single-subject design with a pre-test, post-test and follow-up design. The statistical population included all conflicted couples who referred to Parsa counseling and psychotherapy clinic in Bandar Turkmen city in the second quarter of 2021, from which 3 couples (husband and wife) were selected by using targeted sampling. Data collection was done with demographic information checklist (researcher-made form), marital satisfaction scale (MSS), Olson et al. (1987) and Difficulties in emotional regulation scale (DERS), Gratz and Romer (2004). Subjects in one group received 12 sessions each and two sessions per week for 90 minutes. **Results:** The finding of the research during the visual analysis of the data graph based on the indicators of descriptive statistics and visual analysis showed that in the follow-up phase compared to the baseline, the intervention increased the total scores of marital satisfaction and decreased the scores of emotional dysregulation components except the component of the difficulty of purposeful behavior in the schema therapy method, treatment was significant ($P < 0/05$). **Conclusion:** The result of the research shows that schema therapy is effective in increasing marital satisfaction and reducing emotional maladjustment of conflicting and discordant couples and it be used in treatment centers to improve family and marital functioning. **Keywords:** single subject research, schema therapy, marital satisfaction, emotional dysregulation

Introduction

Conflict and disharmony are an inseparable and perpetual part of marriage and marital relationships, which, if couples cannot resolve well, can have destructive effects such as dissatisfaction in married life and difficulty in emotional regulation (Free Cox et al., 2021). Marital satisfaction, the level of interest between partners and a positive attitude towards being married, plays a valuable role in mental health and is a key factor in the continuation of a relationship (Hou et al., 2019). Marital satisfaction is achieved by meeting needs such as emotional and sexual needs, as well as fulfilling the expectations of partners from each other (Qian et al., 2020). On the other hand, emotional regulation difficulties or emotional dysregulation are defined as the inability to flexibly respond to and manage emotions (Thompson, 2019).

It appears that relationship distress, even among satisfied couples, is a common problem in most societies. Therefore, fundamental and applied research is necessary for prevention and intervention to increase marital satisfaction and reduce emotional dysregulation, conflicts, and marital incompatibilities, in order to prevent the adverse psychological and social consequences of divorce and marital conflicts on families. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of schema therapy on marital satisfaction and emotional dysregulation in conflict and inconsistent Turkmen (a specific and ethnic culture) couples, given the research gap in this field.

Method

In term of its purpose, this research had a single-subject design with a pre-test, post-test and follow-up design. The statistical population included all conflicted couples who referred to Parsa counseling and psychotherapy clinic in Bandar Turkmen city in the second quarter of 2021, from which 3 couples (husband and wife) were selected by using targeted sampling. Data collection was done with demographic information checklist (researcher-made form), marital satisfaction scale (MSS), Olson et al. (1987) and Difficulties in emotional regulation scale (DERS), Gratz and Romer (2004). Subjects in one group received 12 sessions each and two sessions per week for 90 minutes.

Results

The finding of the research during the visual analysis of the data graph based on the indicators of descriptive statistics and visual analysis showed that in the follow-up phase compared to the baseline, the intervention increased the total scores of marital satisfaction and decreased the scores of emotional dysregulation components except the component of the difficulty of purposeful behavior in the schema therapy method, treatment was significant ($P < 0/05$).

Conclusion

The result of the research shows that schema therapy is effective in increasing marital satisfaction and reducing emotional maladjustment of conflicting and discordant couples and it be used in treatment centers to improve family and marital functioning.

The findings of this study can provide useful information for counselors and psychotherapists regarding the effectiveness of therapeutic schema. The achievements of this study can be concluded at both theoretical and practical

levels. At the theoretical level, the results of this study can confirm the results of previous studies and theories related to the vital role of fundamental schemas in the emergence of conflicts and inconsistencies. At the practical level, the findings of this study can be used in the development of educational and health programs within the framework of parent-child relationships. For example, considering the role of fundamental schemas in marital turmoil and parental coping styles from the beginning of birth, it is recommended that couples be trained to develop decision-making skills, the ability to accept responsibility, and proper management of emotions. Despite the results obtained from this study, this research is not without limitations, such as difficulty in finding a suitable and accessible center for the target sample, possible biases that may exist in responding to research tools, particularly since the current research sample consisted of Turkmen couples who have their own specific characteristics, as well as interfering variables that may affect the results obtained. Furthermore, due to the nature of the single-case design, it is advised that this model should be carried out with larger samples and randomization with a control group in order to examine its effectiveness using the analysis of variance method. Also, it is suggested that this research be measured with other marital variables, and in order to save time and costs, the effectiveness of the therapeutic method employed can also be examined group-wise on marital satisfaction and difficulty in emotion regulation and their dimensions. Finally, it should be noted that in the field of therapeutic interventions, attention must be paid to the cultural context of couples, who in the current study were Turkmen participants, and techniques and training should be employed accordingly. Taking into account and measuring the therapeutic schema with dependent variables of the current study in various cultural contexts is one of the proposals.

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