



# Investigating the effect of emotion-oriented couple counseling on marital stress and negative emotions of couples in Isfahan city

Mojtaba. Reisi Sarteshneizy<sup>1\*</sup>  
Ameneh. Reisi Sarteshneizy<sup>2</sup>

1. \*Corresponding author: PhD in Educational Psychology, Department of Psychology, Shahrekord Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord, Iran
2. Counseling (Family) Counseling Department, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Isfahan, Iran

Email: mojtabahreisisarteshneizy2023@gmail.com | Received: 17.03.2023 | Acceptance: 29.12.2023

*Journal of Applied Family Therapy*

eISSN: 2717-2430  
http://Aftj.ir

Vol. 4, No. 5, Pp: 222-234  
Winter 2023

### Original research article

#### How to Cite This Article:

Reisi Sarteshneizy, M., & Reisi Sarteshneizy, A. (2023). Investigating the effect of emotion-oriented couple counseling on marital stress and negative emotions of couples in Isfahan city. *aftj*, 4(5), 222-234.



© 2023 by the authors. Licensee Iranian Association of Women's Studies, Tehran, Iran. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

#### Abstract

**Aim:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of emotion-oriented couple counseling on marital stress and negative emotions of couples. **Method:** The method of this research was quasi-experimental and of the pre-test-post-test type with a control group and a follow-up phase. To select the desired sample from the number of 110 couples, 40 couples (80 people) were selected as volunteers and randomly placed in two experimental and control groups (20 couples in the experimental group and 20 couples in the control group). To measure marital stress, Weiss et al.'s (1973) Change Areas Scale questionnaire was used, and to measure negative emotions, Watson et al.'s (1988) questionnaire was used. The independent variable was Johnson's emotion-oriented couple counseling (2004), which was applied to the experimental group in ten sessions, and during this period, no action was taken for the control group. The data were analyzed using repeated measure variance. **Results:** The results showed that emotion-oriented couple counseling was effective on negative emotions ( $F=5.09, P < 0.013$ ) and marital stress ( $F=7.04, P < 0.031$ ) and this effect was stable in the follow-up phase ( $P=0.05$ ). **Conclusion:** Therefore, it can be concluded that emotion-oriented couple counseling reduces marital stress and reduces negative emotions of referring couples. **Keywords:** emotion-oriented couple counseling, marital stress, negative emotions.

## Introduction

Today, most marriages are under stress due to the multiple roles that spouses experience. Spouses often feel pressured to fulfill their commitments to children, work, extended family, friends, and the community (Wang et al., 2018). Women, in particular, often feel especially stressed. These women work during the day and often face an unfair burden of responsibility when they return home. Similarly, husbands are often equally stressed. Men's self-esteem is strongly tied to their jobs, and many become workaholics. However, unlike previous families, they now feel committed to helping at home and paying attention to their children's schooling (Weber et al., 2021). Problems related to financial pressure, job insecurity, issues with children, illness, and issues with other parents arise when stress becomes pervasive (Sadeghi, 2008). Considering these problems, there is a felt need to assist couples and families. Among couple therapy approaches, emotions have not been given much attention as an agent of change. Indeed, in the field of couple therapy, there has been a phobia of emotions (Kiyhan et al., 2023).

Despite the very good efficiency and empirical support for Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy abroad, few articles and researches in Iran have been devoted to this approach. Considering the studies conducted, the effects of this therapeutic approach on marital stress and negative emotions, as well as threatened self-image of couples in Iran, have not been examined, and most studies focus on marital compatibility and satisfaction. Adequate knowledge of the efficiency and impact dimensions of this type of couple therapy, which emphasizes both cognitive and emotional aspects, can help in choosing the right treatment based on the problems of the client and predictable outcomes. This research has taken a step towards examining the efficiency of this approach. The importance of conducting this research lies in addressing a new concept in the field of counseling and psychotherapy. Conducting such research is essential to enhance the knowledge level of psychotherapists, family counselors, and psychologists. The results of this research can be effective in improving the interactions of couples and increasing their satisfaction. This research, while offering an appropriate treatment plan, can pave the way for further research and motivate other researchers to propose better and more effective plans in this field. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the impact of Emotion-Focused Couple Counseling on marital stress and negative emotions of couples in Isfahan. The hypotheses of the study are:

1. Does Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy affect marital stress and negative emotions of couples in the post-test stage?
2. Does Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy have a lasting effect on marital stress and negative emotions of couples in the follow-up stage?

## Method

The method of this research was quasi-experimental and of the pre-test-post-test type with a control group and a follow-up phase. To select the desired sample from the number of 110 couples, 40 couples (80 people) were selected as volunteers and randomly placed in two experimental and control groups (20 couples in the experimental group and 20 couples in the control group). To measure marital stress, Weiss et al.'s (1973) Change Areas Scale questionnaire was used, and to measure negative emotions, Watson et al.'s (1988) questionnaire was used. The independent variable was Johnson's emotion-oriented couple counseling (2004), which was

applied to the experimental group in ten sessions, and during this period, no action was taken for the control group, The data were analyzed using repeated measure variance.

### **Results**

The results showed that emotion-oriented couple counseling was effective on negative emotions ( $F=5.09$ ,  $P < 0.013$ ) and marital stress ( $F=7.04$ ,  $P < 0.031$ ) and this effect was stable in the follow-up phase ( $P=0.05$ ).

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this study was to examine the impact of Emotion-Focused Couple Counseling on marital stress and negative emotions in couples. The result of the first hypothesis of the study indicated that since the obtained F-value ( $F = 7.046$ ) is greater than our alpha level of 0.05, we conclude that Emotion-Focused Couple Counseling significantly affects marital stress in couples, meaning the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed with 95% confidence. This implies that Emotion-Focused Couple Counseling is effective for couples experiencing marital stress. In line with this, Wood et al. (2005) in their study demonstrated that Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy is significantly more effective than separate behavioral couple therapy interventions for treating marital stress. This result is consistent with the studies of Parham (2023), Bababi Garmkhani et al. (2017), and Javidi (2012). According to the emotion-focused perspective, one of the marital functions playing a significant role in creating marital stress is insecure attachment. When a spouse is unsure of their partner's emotional responsiveness during times of stress or crisis and doubts their emotional availability and responsiveness, they feel insecure. This insecurity causes each partner to feel alone in facing life's stresses, thereby increasing their stress. In the process of Emotion-Focused Therapy, the therapist works to eliminate this sense of insecurity. Therefore, when therapists identify negative interactional cycles indicative of insecure attachment, they restructure these cycles based on the expression of underlying attachment needs, allowing couples to express their needs easily and accept the attachment needs of their partner. Change in Emotion-Focused Therapy occurs when therapists help spouses change destructive elements in the relationship. When the negative cycle is disrupted and responses begin to change, a more positive cycle emerges, helping the couple move towards a more secure bond (Rodio et al., 2020). The limitations of this study include its restriction to the city of Isfahan, which necessitates caution in generalizing the results to other cities and regions. Furthermore, the study focused solely on couples with superficial problems and lacked a follow-up stage. It is recommended that similar studies be conducted in other regions of the country for better decision-making regarding the generalizability of these findings. Comparing other couple therapy approaches with this one and analyzing their results against those of the current study is also suggested. It is proposed that this therapeutic intervention be applied to other ethnic and cultural groups.

### **References**

- Alavi, S. Z., Amanelahi, A., Attari, Y., & Koraei, A. (2019). The effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy on emotional and sexual intimacy of incompatible couples. *Family counseling and psychotherapy*, 8(2), 25-46.
- Abedi Firouzjani, R. (2012). Comparison of the relationship between self-concept and the perception of cognitive competence of pre-university students in different fields

- of study in Babol city, master's thesis in general psychology, Al-Zahra University. (In Persian)
- Behrad Far, R., Jazayeri, R., Bahrami, F., Abedi, M. R., Etemadi, O., & Fatemi, S. M. (2021). A comparative scrutiny of the effectiveness of Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) and Narrative Couple Therapy (NCT) in the marital quality and emotional, cognitive and behavioral impaired functioning of distressed couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 3(1), 3-16.
- Babaei Gharmkhani M, Rasouli M, Davarniya R. (2017). The Effect of Emotionally-Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) on Reducing Marital Stress of Married Couples. *Zanko J Med Sci*, 18 (56): 56-69. URL: <http://zanko.muk.ac.ir/article-1-168-fa.html> (In Persian)
- Denton, W.H, Burleson, B.R.Clark,T.E. (2000). A randomized of trial of emotion focused therapy for couples in a training clinic. *Journal of marital and family therapy*, 26.
- Hashemi, Z., & Eyni, S. (2020). The Effectiveness of the Integrated Behavioral Couple Therapy on the Emotional Divorce. *Family Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 10(1), 1-20.
- Hosseini, B. (2012). Comparison of the effectiveness of emotion-oriented and solution-oriented therapy on improving the components of intimacy and marital adjustment of couples and building a proposed model, Doctoral counseling thesis, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabatabai University. (In Persian)
- Irfan Manesh, R. (2008). The effectiveness of emotion-oriented couple therapy on marital adjustment, *Counseling Researches (News and Counseling Researches)*, 8(31): 7-26. (In Persian)
- Johnson, S. M. (2004). The revolution in couple's therapy: A practitioner- scientist perspective. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 29, 365–385. therapy. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Kayhan, F., Ghanifar, M. H., Ahi, Q. (2022). Comparison of the effectiveness of emotion-oriented couple therapy and couple therapy based on acceptance and commitment on spiritual indicators (patience and forgiveness) in couples affected by extramarital relationships. *Journal of Applied Family Therapy*, 3(3), 20-34. (In Persian)
- Mehdigholi, M., Dokaneifard, F., Jahangir, P. (2023). The effectiveness of emotion-oriented couple therapy on marital burnout and resilience of young couples. *Journal of Applied Family Therapy*, 4(2), 47-59. (In Persian)
- Parham R. (2020). The Effectiveness of Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy on Happiness and Quality of Married Life of Both Working Couples. *Rooyesh*, 11(7): 209-220 (In Persian).
- Rasouli, R. (2008). A comparison of the effectiveness of an intervention focused on emotion in a couple and individual way on reducing the helplessness of the relationship of couples with a child with a chronic disease, doctoral dissertation in counseling, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran. (In Persian).
- Roddy, M. K., Walsh, L. M., Rothman, K., Hatch, S. G., & Doss, B. D. (2020). Meta-analysis of couple therapy: Effects across outcomes, designs, timeframes, and other moderators. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 88(7), 583.
- Rajaei, A., Daneshpour, M., & Robertson, J. (2019). The effectiveness of couples therapy based on the Gottman method among Iranian couples with conflicts: A quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 18(3), 223-240

- Samaei S, Ziaei M, Khodapanahi M, Heidari M. (2012). The Effect of Various Negative Emotions on Moral Judgment among University Students. *Advances in Cognitive Sciences*, 14 (2):73-86 (In Persian).
- Waller, G., Kennerley, H., & Ohanian, V. (2007). Schema-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for eating disorders. In L.P. Riser, P.L.du Toit, D.I. Stein, & I.E.Young(Eds), *Cognitive schema and core beliefs in psychological problems: A scientist-practitioner guide*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Watson, D., Clark L.A. (1992). On Traits and Temperament: General and Specific Factors of Emotional Experience and Their Relation to the five-Factor Model. *Journal of Personality*, 60, 441-476.
- Wong, C. W., Kwok, C. S., Narain, A., Gulati, M., Mihalidou, A. S., Wu, P.,... & Mamas, M. A. (2018). Marital status and risk of cardiovascular diseases: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Heart*, 104(23), 1937-1948.
- Weber, D. M., Pentel, K. Z., Baucom, D. H., Wojda-Burlij, A. K., & Carrino, E. A. (2022). Flipping the curve: Patterns of emotional communication in same-sex female couples before and after couple therapy. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*.
- Yaori, F., Aghaei J., Asghar, Golparvar, M. (2021). Comparing the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and metacognitive emotion-oriented couple therapy on family behavior control and marital intimacy of couples with hyperactive children. *Quarterly Journal of Cognitive Analytical Psychology*, 12(44): 129-146. (In Persian).