



Comparing the effectiveness of McMaster's functional model and Gottman's cognitive-systemic model in marital conflicts and emotional divorce of divorce applicants

Hasan. Naseri¹

Vahideh. Babakhani^{2*}

Mojtaba. Amiri Majd³

Alireza. Jafari⁴

1. PhD student, Counseling Department, Abhar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abhar, Iran.
2. *Corresponding author: Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, Abhar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abhar, Iran.
3. Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, Abhar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abhar, Iran.
4. Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, Abhar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abhar, Iran.

Email: vahidehbabakhan@yahoo.com | Received: 15.03.2022 | Acceptance: 12.12.2022

Journal of Applied Family Therapy

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

Vol. 4, No. 1, Pp: 466-490
Spring 2023

Original research article

How to Cite This Article:

Naseri, H., Babakhani, V., Amiri Majd, M., & Jafari, A. (2023). Comparing the effectiveness of McMaster's functional model and Gottman's cognitive-systemic model in marital conflicts and emotional divorce of divorce applicants. *aftj*, 4(1): 466-490.



© 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: McMaster's functional model and Gottman's cognitive-systemic model in marital conflicts and emotional divorce of divorce applicants. **Method:** The current research method was a semi-experimental type with a pre-test, post-test and follow-up design. In this research, from the number of 85 couples who referred to the psychodynamic psychological interventions clinic due to marital disputes and divorce requests during the year 2020, according to the conditions of the research and with the available sampling method, 21 couples were selected as the research sample. They were randomly placed in three groups (experimental group 1, experimental group 2 and control group). Then, the first experimental group was trained in the McMaster model (Epstein et al., 1978) during ten sessions, and the second experimental group was trained in Gottman's systemic approach (Gottman, 2019) during ten sessions. The tools used in this research were Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale (Gottman, 2008) and Marital Conflicts Questionnaire (Sanaei, 1996), which was used in three stages: pre-test, post-test and follow-up test (three months). **Results:** The findings obtained from the two-way analysis of variance test (mixed) showed that both therapeutic approaches used in the research (McMaster and Gottman) reduced emotional divorce ($F=1598.03$; $P>0.001$) and the reduction of marital conflicts ($F=207.14$; $P>0.001$) in couples, and on the other hand, in measuring the durability of the effect, which was followed up, both approaches showed positive results. In the estimation of Bonferroni's post hoc test, it was found that there is a significant difference between the two approaches, and this means that the effectiveness of McMaster's approach in reducing emotional divorce as well as reducing conflicts between couples is higher compared to Gottman's approach. **Conclusion:** According to the research findings, counselors and psychologists are suggested to pay attention to McMaster's functional approach in working with couples requesting divorce. **Keywords:** *McMaster's functional model, cognitive model, Gottman's system, emotional divorce, marital conflicts.*

Introduction

The family environment is the first place where the personality, intellectual, emotional and physical patterns of every part of the people and ultimately the society are cultivated. In fact, all cultures believe that the health of the society depends on the health of the family. The function of the family is to provide the mental and physical needs of each member, and failure in its duties brings problems, which, if not paid attention to, causes secondary problems, and efforts to solve these problems and problems of this small social unit can give hope for a healthy society. , be valuable and dynamic. It is safe to say that no society can claim health in its various dimensions unless it has healthy families (Ardalan & Ardalan, 2016).

Tension between husband and wife usually leads to separation because emotional divorce is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that can never be caused by one factor alone. Emotional divorce is one of the effective and important factors in increasing marriage instability and reducing the proper functioning of families (Omidi & Taleghi, 2017). Various factors, including economic, cultural, social, family, etc., are influential in the appearance of emotional divorce and practical action to divorce. Seven factors that play a fundamental and key role in the emergence and spread of emotional divorce include: Lack of initial conditions, acceptance with many conditions, forced marriage without love and passion, lack of engagement period and initial reconciliation, not allocating enough time to express love and affection, poor social interactions, stubbornness and unresolved emotional problems. Negative emotional interactions between spouses also play a significant role in creating and expanding emotional divorce and practical divorce (Rezaei et al., 2017).

Various approaches have been presented to help couples who are in conflict, and one of the special models for examining family functioning is the McMaster model. This model, which is based on a systemic approach, describes the structure, organization, and exchange pattern of the marital unit and makes it possible to test and examine family or marital relationships in a range of levels, from mental health status to severe mental disorder. (Carlosen, 2005; Buterhon et al., 2015).

Another approach to couple therapy is Gottman's theory, which many studies have proven useful in solving couples' problems and conflicts (Gottman, 1994). Communication is the main goal of marriage and it provides the possibility for husband and wife to share their issues and problems by working together. The most common issue raised by unhappy couples is the lack of success in establishing a relationship (Rossi, Holtzors-Monroe, & Rudd, 2016). Communication is an important issue in marital relations. Communication includes verbal and non-verbal interactions between family members aimed at exchanging information within the family system (Gottman, 2019). Among family communication models that teach how to establish communication between couples and how to talk, this model is very effective in reducing family conflicts (Tabez, 2015), and the two mentioned models emphasize communication the most.

In general, it should be said that one of the best ways to reduce marital and family conflicts is to use appropriate therapeutic approaches. In our country, we see different types of intervention approaches in the field of family and marital conflicts, this diversity of models on the one hand shows the validity and value of these interventions, and on the other hand, it can lead to triviality and unwanted consequences. Therefore, the scientific and detailed examination of these psychological interventions from the dimensions of effectiveness, target society,

effective variables and their content can have fundamental and practical values in this field (Daemi et al., 2016).

Therefore, according to this article, the researcher tries to answer this question: Is McMaster's functional model and Gottman's cognitive-systemic model effective in marital conflicts and emotional divorce of divorce applicants in the post-test stage? Is McMaster's functional model and Gottman's cognitive-systemic model stable in marital conflicts and emotional divorce of divorce applicants in the follow-up phase?

Method

The current research method was a semi-experimental type with a pre-test, post-test and follow-up design. In this research, from the number of 85 couples who referred to the psychodynamic psychological interventions clinic due to marital disputes and divorce requests during the year 2020, according to the conditions of the research and with the available sampling method, 21 couples were selected as the research sample. They were randomly placed in three groups (experimental group 1, experimental group 2 and control group). Then, the first experimental group was trained in the McMaster model (Epstein et al., 1978) during ten sessions, and the second experimental group was trained in Gottman's systemic approach (Gottman, 2019) during ten sessions. The tools used in this research were Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale (Gottman, 2008) and Marital Conflicts Questionnaire (Sanaei, 1996), which was used in three stages: pre-test, post-test and follow-up test (three months).

Results

Before the method of mixed variance analysis with repeated measurement, the assumptions of the statistical test were examined using Mbox, Mauchly and Levene's sphericity tests.

The results of Mbox test are significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the same homogeneity of the covariance matrix in the variables is not confirmed. However, variance analysis is resistant to this assumption in case of equality of groups. The results of Levin's test in the post-test and follow-up are statistically significant. Therefore, the condition of homogeneity of inter-group variances has been met ($p < 0.05$). The results of Makhli's sphericity test are statistically significant, which does not indicate the assumption of sphericity. The results can be interpreted based on the epsilon greenhouse.

The results of Wilks's lambda indicate that the main effect of stage (pre-test, post-test and follow-up) is significant in the variable of emotional divorce. In other words, there is at least a significant difference between the average of two performances. In the variable of emotional divorce, the interaction effect of stage with group (that is, the existence of differences between groups during the measurement stages) is significant. That is, at least in one of the three measurement times, a statistically significant difference has been observed between the average groups.

The results of the single-variable within-subjects effects test have been shown to compare the emotional divorce of the intervention and control groups. According to the results presented in Table 5, the F values related to the interaction effects between groups and repetition (that is, the existence of differences between groups during the measurement steps) are significant at the alpha level of 0.01 ($p < 0.01$). The significance of the interaction effect indicates the existence of a difference between the change process of the groups during the measurement stages.

Based on the results obtained in the control group, the difference between the scores of the pre-test stage and the post-test and follow-up stages, as well as the difference between the scores of the post-test stage and the follow-up scores, is not significant ($p < 0.05$). In the McMaster functional model group, the difference between the average scores of the pre-test stage and the post-test and follow-up stages is significant ($p < 0.01$). The difference between the scores of the post-test phase and the scores of the follow-up phase is significant ($p < 0.05$), which indicates the stability of the treatment effect over time. In the Gottman Systemic Cognitive Model group, the difference between the average scores of the pre-test stage and

the post-test and follow-up stages is significant ($p < 0.05$). However, the difference between the scores of the post-test phase and the scores of the follow-up phase is not statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Based on the results obtained in the pre-test, no significant difference was observed between the groups. In the post-test, the scores in the experimental groups are significantly lower than the control group ($p < 0.05$). Regarding the comparison of McMaster and Gottman groups, McMaster group is significantly lower than Gottman ($p < 0.05$). In the follow-up stage, the scores in the experimental groups are significantly lower than the control group ($p < 0.01$). Regarding the comparison of McMaster and Gottman groups, McMaster group is significantly lower than Gottman ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of comparing the effectiveness of McMaster's functional model and Gottman's cognitive-systemic model in marital conflicts and emotional divorce of divorce applicants. The results showed that both therapeutic approaches and interventions based on them have been effective in reducing marital conflicts in women seeking divorce. Regarding the comparison of these two interventions, it should be said that (McMaster's functional model was noticeably and significantly more effective than Gottman's systemic cognitive model).

References

- Abbasi, M. B., Alizadeh, M., Omidvar Salmani, S., Hosseini, S. M., Khatibi, A., & Safakish, M. (2018). Divorce in Iran. Civil Registration Organization of the country, Tehran.
- Amato, P. R., & Marriott, B. H. (2016). A Comparison of high-and low Distress Marriages that end in Divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, (69)2, 621-638.
- Ardalan, M., & Ardalan, F. (2016) Examining the relationship between family functioning and mental health among employees of Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences. *Quarterly Journal of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine*, 295 (1):21-12.
- Beigi, M., & Hosseini, H. (2021). Generational difference in attitudes towards divorce in Iran: the application of the multi-level model, *Strategic Studies of Iran's Social Issues*, 34: 27-44.
- Boterhoven de Haan, K. L., Hafekost, J., Lawrence, D. Sawyer, M. G., & Zubrick, S. R. (2015). Reliability and validity of a short version of the general functioning subscale of the McMaster Family Assessment Device. *Family process*, 54(1), 116-123.
- Brown, N., McIlwraith, T., & Gonzalez, L. T. (2020). *Perspective: An Open Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, American Anthropological Association, 2nd Edition.
- Carlson, J. Sperry. L & Lewis, JA. (2005). *Family therapy techniques*. New York: Routledge Sciences, 114 (1), 584-592.
- Daemi, F., Mahdavi, N., Kianpour, S., & Kianpour Hasani, J. (2016). A review of a decade of his expertise in the field of intervention in family and marital conflicts. *Journal of Pathology, Counseling and Family Enrichment*, 2(2):101-83.
- De Vuijst, E., & et al. (2017). Cross-sibling effects on divorce in the Netherlands. *Journal of Advances in Life Course Research*, (34)12, 1-9.
- Ebrahimi, L., & Heidari R. (2020). Prediction of emotional divorce tendency based on personality traits, metacognitive beliefs and emotional maturity of couples. *Scientific Journal of Counseling*, 19(74): 61-26.
- Ebrahimi, L., & Mohammadlou, M. (2021). A systematic review of the underlying factors of consensual divorce of couples in the last decade in Iran (88-98). *Women and Society*, 12: 19-29.

- Eslahi, N., Arefi, M., Hosseini Al-Sadat, S., & Amiri, H. (2018) Comparison of the effectiveness of Gutman's emotion-oriented and cognitive-systemic couple therapy on marital harmony of conflicted couples. *Journal of Psychological Sciences*, 17(71): 856-849.
- Faircloth WB, Cummings EM. (2008). Evaluating a parent education program for preventing the negative effects of marital conflict. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*; 29 (2): 141-156.
- focused therapy. *Current Opinion in psychology*, 13, 65–69.
- Fuladi, A., & Shah Nemat Gavgani, N. (2015) on the causes of divorce in East Azarbaijan Province (Tabriz). *Cultural Research Society, Research Institute of Human Sciences and Cultural Studies*, 6(2): 109
- Ghazanfari, B., Keshavarzi Arshadi, F., Hasani, F., & Emamipour, S. (2017). The effectiveness of couple therapy based on choice theory on conflict resolution styles and relationship quality of incompatible couples. *Applied Psychology Quarterly*, 12(45), 62-47.
- Gottman J, Gottman J. (2019) *The Alphabet of Couple Therapy*. Translated by Fatemeh Naderi and Abbas Moziri. Tehran: Arjmand.
- Harvey, M. *Couple Therapy*, translated by Khodabakhsh Ahmadi and Zahra Akhavi and Ali Akbar Rahimi, Tehran: Dangier Publishing, 2012; 123.
- Heshmati, R., Gharadaghi Jafari, I., & Gholizadegan, M. (2017). Prediction of marital instability of couples seeking separation with knowledge of demographic identifiers, full-fledged mind and emotional resilience. *Journal of Family Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 7(23): 1-22.
- Hewitt, B. & Churchill, B. (2020). Convergence and difference: Marriage and family life from a cross-cultural perspective *Cross-Cultural Family Research and Practice* (pp. 57-102): Elsevier.
- Jalali, N., Heydari, H., Davodi, H., & Al-Yasin, S. A. (2019). Comparison of the effect of the educational intervention based on the emotional approach and Gutman's relationship enrichment approach on the marital conflict of a group of women in Khomein city. *Bi Quarterly Journal of Cultural Psychology*, 3(1): 41-62.
- Kalantari, A., Roshan Fekr, P., & Javaheri, J. (2011). A review of three decades of research on the causes of divorce in Iran. *Quarterly Journal of the Social Cultural Council of Women and Family (Women's Leadership Studies)*, 4(53): 129-162.
- Karaei, A., Khaleghi, M., & Shahbazi, M. (2021) Identifying the causes of childless women's divorce (initial stage of marital life cycle). *Women and Society*, 2: 177-189.
- Lopez, A. G., & Cuarteros, K. G. (2020). Exploring the effects of social media on Interpersonal communication among family members. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, 12(1), 66-80.
- Matin, H., & Hayati, M. (2017). The effectiveness of imagotherapy group training on women's defense mechanisms and problem solving. *Scientific Research Quarterly of Allameh Tabatabai University*, 8(32): 87-63.
- Mehrabi, D. (2020) The position of the family in media literacy research in Iran (systematic review). *World Media Journal (Persian version)*, 14(1): 112-128.
- Moltafet, H., Shahpari, D., & Hashemi, F. (2020). Examining the dynamics of divorce in Iran in the period 2004-2014. *Family Studies*, 16(64): 568-547.
- Peleg-Koriat, I., Weimann-Saks, D., & Ben-Ari, R. (2018). The relationship between power perception and couple's conflict management strategy. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*

- Rahmani Firozeh Jah, A., Jafari Baei, M., Foroutan, Y., & Pahlavan, M. (2021) Changes in family structure from the perspective of registration statistics (case study: Khorasan Bozor). *Khorasan Social Cultural Studies*, 60: 7-46.
- Rezaei, A. M., Mirzadeh Koh Shahi, F., & Yaghoubi Toriki, E. (2017) Emotional interactions of couples and its role in emotional divorce and divorce. *Family Studies Quarterly*, 13(52): 585-604.
- Rossi, F. S., Holtzworth-Munroe, A., & Rudd, B. N. (2016). Intimate partner violence and child custody. Parenting plan evaluations: applied research for the family court.
- Sbarra, D. A., & Coan, J. A. (2017). Divorce and health: Good data in need of better theory. *Journal of Current Opinion in Psychology*, (13)2, 91-95.
- Schmidt, N.M., Glymour, M.M., Osypuk, T.L.(2017). Housing mobility and adolescent mental health: The role of substance use, social networks, and family mental health in the moving to opportunity study. *SSM - Population Health*, 3, 318-325.
- Shaffer PR. (2015). Conflict Resolution for Couples. Shaffer PR. Conflict Resolution for Couples.
- Shojaei, F., Jazayeri, R., Ahmadi, A., & Fatehizadeh, M. (2019). Investigating marital compatibility and marriage performance based on the degree of educational level difference in couples. *Allameh Tabatabai University Counseling and Psychotherapy Culture Quarterly*, (10(38): 111-134).
- Siffert A, Schwarz B. (2011). Spouses' demand and withdrawal during marital conflict in relation to their subjective well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*; 28(2): 262-277
- Tebes JM. (2015). Contextual Factors and Environmental Differences between Couples Divorce Compromised and not Compromise, University of Buenos Aires; 1:710.
- Weibe, S. a., & Johnson, S. M. (2017). creating relationships that foster resilience in emotionally
- Wilson , S.J., Jaremka, L.M., Fagundes, C.P., Andridge, R., , J., Habash, D., Belury, M.A., Kiecolt-Glaser, J.K. (2017). Shortened sleep fuels inflammatory responses to marital conflict: Emotion regulation matters. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 79, 74-83.
- Young,M.; & Long,L.(1998). Counseling and therapy for couples. New York: Brooks cole publishing company.
- Zarei, E., Mirzaei, M., & Sadeghi Fard, M. (2018). Presenting a model to explain the role of communication skills and problem solving skills in preventing psychological and social injuries by mediating family conflicts. *Quarterly Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy Culture*, 9(35):1-26.