

The Effectiveness of Strength-Based Intervention on Attitude Toward Marital Infidelity and Sexual Self-Concept in Women with Marital Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a strength-based intervention on altering attitudes toward marital infidelity and enhancing sexual self-concept among women experiencing marital conflict.

Methods: A randomized controlled trial design was employed with 30 women from the Mehravar Counseling Center in Tehran, divided equally into intervention and control groups. The intervention consisted of eight 75-minute sessions based on strength-based principles. Data were collected at three points using the Attitudes Towards Infidelity Scale (ATIS) and the Sexual Self-Concept Inventory (SSCI). Statistical analysis was conducted using ANOVA with repeated measurements and Bonferroni post-hoc tests, utilizing SPSS-27.

Findings: The intervention group showed significant improvements in both measured outcomes. Attitudes toward marital infidelity decreased from a pre-test mean of 42.53 (SD = 5.67) to 37.82 (SD = 5.12) at follow-up. Sexual self-concept increased from a pre-test mean of 30.88 (SD = 4.45) to 35.64 (SD = 3.72) at follow-up. The ANOVA results revealed significant time effects and time x group interactions for both variables ($p < .001$).

Conclusion: The strength-based intervention was effective in significantly improving attitudes toward marital infidelity and sexual self-concept among women with marital conflicts. These findings suggest that such interventions can be beneficial in marital counseling settings, offering a promising approach for enhancing marital satisfaction and individual well-being.

Keywords: Marital infidelity, Sexual self-concept, Strength-based intervention, Marital conflict, Women's health, Randomized controlled trial.

1. Introduction

Marital conflicts and their impacts on women's attitudes toward marital infidelity and sexual self-

concept are critical areas of investigation within the fields of marital psychology and counseling. Infidelity, recognized as a significant crisis in marital relationships, not only undermines trust but also significantly impacts the involved

individuals' psychological well-being and relationship quality (Luo & Yu, 2022). Similarly, sexual self-concept, which reflects how individuals perceive themselves sexually, is influenced by various personal and relational factors and directly affects sexual and psychological health (Hsu et al., 2014; Rostosky et al., 2008).

The intricate link between marital satisfaction and overall health has been documented extensively, highlighting that positive marital interactions correlate with better physical and psychological health (Robles et al., 2014). Conversely, marital dissatisfaction often leads to emotional distress and poorer health outcomes. Interventions aimed at improving marital relations or individual perceptions within the context of a marriage are therefore of paramount importance. Studies like those conducted by Mohammadi and Alibakhshi (2021) and Poorhejazi et al. (2021) underscore the effectiveness of various therapeutic approaches, such as self-differentiation training and unified protocols for family therapy, in enhancing marital satisfaction and reducing emotional divorce and marital boredom (Mohammadi & Alibakhshi, 2021; Poorhejazi et al., 2021).

Moreover, interventions that address sexual self-concept and attitudes toward infidelity are becoming increasingly relevant. For instance, Ghaffari et al. (2022) explored the effects of group narrative therapy on married women who experienced marital infidelity, indicating significant improvements in their feelings of inferiority and attachment styles. Such findings suggest that therapeutic interventions can profoundly impact how women handle infidelity, potentially altering their attitudes towards such incidents (Ghaffari et al., 2022).

Sexual self-concept is not only a reflection of one's sexual beliefs and self-view but also a determinant of sexual behavior, which can further influence marital quality and satisfaction (Guyon et al., 2022). Effective interventions, such as the ones studied by Hamidi et al. (2022) using social networks to support women with breast cancer, show promising results in enhancing sexual self-concept, which in turn could mitigate the negative effects of marital conflicts (Hamidi et al., 2022).

Understanding gender norms and their influence on violence and attitudes in marital settings is crucial. Flood and Pease (2009) discuss how societal norms and personal attitudes towards gender roles influence the perception of and attitudes towards violence against women, including in domestic settings (Flood & Pease, 2009). Addressing these norms is essential for interventions aiming to reduce

domestic violence and improve marital dynamics (Semahegn et al., 2019).

Narrative therapy and mindfulness have been explored as potential methods to address marital disillusionment and sexual sensation seeking, with studies such as those by Hallaji et al. (2021) demonstrating their efficacy in reducing extramarital relationships and enhancing marital satisfaction. These therapeutic approaches highlight the importance of addressing both individual psychological needs and marital interactions to foster healthier relationships (Hallaji et al., 2021).

In the digital age, interventions have also extended into the realm of technology, with mobile health applications being explored for their potential in improving sexual health outcomes among adults with chronic diseases (Karim et al., 2020). Such technological advancements offer new avenues for delivering therapeutic content and supporting individuals in managing their sexual health, which is intrinsically linked to their marital satisfaction and overall well-being.

In conclusion, this study seeks to further investigate the effectiveness of strength-based interventions in modifying attitudes toward marital infidelity and enhancing sexual self-concept among women with marital conflicts. By integrating theoretical insights and empirical evidence from the aforementioned studies, this research aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the domains of marital counseling and psychological intervention, offering new perspectives on handling one of the most pressing challenges in marital relationships: infidelity.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design and Participant

This study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to assess the effectiveness of a strength-based intervention on attitudes toward marital infidelity and sexual self-concept among women experiencing marital conflicts. The target population comprised all women seeking divorce counseling at the Mehravar Counseling Center in Tehran in 2023. A total of 30 participants were enrolled in the study through purposive sampling. They were randomly assigned to either the intervention group or the control group, with 15 participants in each group. The intervention consisted of eight weekly sessions, each lasting 75 minutes, focusing on improving participants' attitudes toward marital infidelity and enhancing their sexual self-concept. A three-month follow-up was conducted to assess the sustainability of the intervention effects.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Attitudes Towards Infidelity

The Attitudes Towards Infidelity Scale (ATIS), developed by Whatley, Knox, and Sharp in 2008, is designed to measure individual attitudes toward marital infidelity. This scale includes 12 items that participants respond to on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale is divided into three subscales: emotional infidelity, physical infidelity, and subjective infidelity, each aimed at capturing different aspects of infidelity attitudes. Scoring is computed by summing responses, with higher scores indicating a more permissive attitude towards infidelity. The ATIS has been extensively validated and has demonstrated excellent reliability in various studies, confirming its suitability for academic research in marital and relationship studies (Navabinejad et al., 2023).

2.2.2. Sexual Self-Concept

The Sexual Self-Concept Inventory, created by O'Sullivan and colleagues in 2006, assesses an individual's sexual self-concept. The inventory consists of 40 items distributed across several subscales including sexual anxiety, sexual monitoring, sexual assertiveness, and sexual esteem. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale, where participants rate statements from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The total score is derived by averaging the scores across all items, with different subscales providing insights into specific dimensions of sexual self-concept. The SSCI is widely used and has been validated in multiple studies. Its reliability and validity are well-established, making it a robust tool for examining changes in sexual self-concept among women experiencing marital conflict (Rostami et al., 2017).

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Strength-Based Intervention

This intervention protocol comprises eight 75-minute sessions, each targeting specific aspects of strength-based therapy aimed at improving participants' attitudes towards marital infidelity and enhancing their sexual self-concept. The sessions are designed to be interactive, combining discussions, exercises, and reflective practices. The program is grounded in positive psychology principles, emphasizing personal strengths, resilience, and the development of positive attitudes and self-perceptions (Darbani & Parsakia,

2022; Darbani & Parsakia, 2023; Mosadegh et al., 2023; Movahrad et al., 2023; Parsakia & Darbani, 2022; Parsakia et al., 2022; Parsakia et al., 2023; Parsakia et al., 2024).

Session 1: Introduction and Setting Expectations

The first session focuses on creating a safe and welcoming environment for the participants. The facilitator introduces the objectives of the intervention, the structure of the sessions, and the expected outcomes. Participants engage in ice-breaking activities designed to build trust and camaraderie. The session concludes with an introduction to the concept of strength-based approaches and how they can be applied to personal and relational growth.

Session 2: Understanding Marital Infidelity

In the second session, participants explore different perspectives on marital infidelity, including emotional and physical aspects. The facilitator presents various scenarios and case studies to stimulate discussion and reflection. Participants are encouraged to share their feelings and beliefs about infidelity in a controlled setting, fostering a deeper understanding of their attitudes and the factors influencing them.

Session 3: Exploring Personal Strengths

This session is dedicated to identifying and enhancing individual strengths. Participants engage in exercises to discover their personal strengths, such as strength-spotting and storytelling activities. The facilitator helps the participants understand how these strengths can be leveraged to improve relationship dynamics and personal well-being.

Session 4: Communication Skills in Relationships

Session four focuses on developing effective communication skills. Participants learn and practice techniques such as active listening, expressing needs without confrontation, and giving and receiving feedback. Role-playing exercises are used to practice these skills, emphasizing their role in reducing conflict and misunderstanding related to infidelity.

Session 5: Building Sexual Self-Concept

The fifth session addresses issues related to sexual self-concept. Participants discuss topics such as body image, sexual desires, and intimacy. Activities are designed to boost sexual esteem and assertiveness, helping participants to feel more confident and positive about their sexual identities.

Session 6: Coping with Marital Conflict

In this session, participants learn strategies for managing and resolving marital conflicts. The facilitator introduces conflict resolution techniques and encourages participants to apply these strategies to hypothetical scenarios. The focus is

on using personal strengths to navigate conflicts in a healthy and constructive manner.

Session 7: Enhancing Relationship Resilience

This session aims to enhance resilience in relationships. Participants engage in discussions and activities that highlight the importance of resilience in overcoming marital challenges. They learn how to apply their strengths to foster resilience, focusing on mutual support, forgiveness, and adaptation.

Session 8: Integration and Future Planning

The final session is dedicated to integrating the skills and insights gained throughout the intervention. Participants review their journey, discuss significant breakthroughs, and plan future steps to maintain and build on the progress made. The session ends with a closure ritual, celebrating the achievements of each participant and setting personal goals.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software, version 27. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measurements

was conducted to evaluate the changes over time within and between groups. This method allowed for an assessment of the intervention’s effect over the initial measurement (pre-test), post-test, and follow-up phases. To adjust for multiple comparisons and control the risk of Type I errors, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were used. This statistical approach provided a robust analysis of the intervention’s effectiveness over time, ensuring that observed changes could be attributed to the intervention with a high degree of confidence.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 30 female participants with a mean age of 32.7 years (SD = 4.85). Participants varied in their educational backgrounds; 6 participants (20%) held a high school diploma, 11 (36.67%) had completed a bachelor's degree, and 13 (43.33%) had postgraduate qualifications. Regarding employment status, 9 (30%) were employed full-time, 5 (16.67%) were part-time workers, and 16 (53.33%) were not employed at the time of the study.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Attitude Toward Marital Infidelity and Sexual Self-Concept

Variable	Timepoint	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Attitude Toward Marital Infidelity	Pre-test	42.53	5.67
	Post-test	38.47	5.23
	Follow-up	37.82	5.12
Sexual Self-Concept	Pre-test	30.88	4.45
	Post-test	34.76	3.89
	Follow-up	35.64	3.72

The descriptive statistics for the key variables in the study are presented in Table 1. For the variable Attitude Toward Marital Infidelity, the mean scores at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up were 42.53 (SD = 5.67), 38.47 (SD = 5.23), and 37.82 (SD = 5.12) respectively. This indicates a decreasing trend in the permissiveness towards infidelity over time. For Sexual Self-Concept, the means at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up were 30.88 (SD = 4.45), 34.76 (SD = 3.89), and 35.64 (SD = 3.72) respectively, suggesting an improvement in sexual self-concept following the intervention, which was maintained at follow-up.

Prior to conducting the main analyses, several statistical assumptions were tested and confirmed to ensure the validity of the results. The assumption of normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which confirmed that the data were

normally distributed for both dependent variables, attitudes toward marital infidelity (p = 0.08) and sexual self-concept (p = 0.06). Homogeneity of variances was established via Levene’s Test, with results showing no significant violations (p = 0.12 for attitudes toward marital infidelity and p = 0.14 for sexual self-concept). Additionally, the assumption of sphericity required for repeated measures ANOVA was assessed using Mauchly’s Test, which indicated no violations (p = 0.15). The linearity between dependent variables was confirmed through visual inspection of scatter plots, showing consistent linear relationships. These checks ensured that the statistical methods applied were appropriate, allowing for accurate interpretation of the intervention’s effects on the study outcomes.

Table 2

Full ANOVA Table for Intervention Effects on Dependent Variables

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Attitude Toward Infidelity				
Time	2	10.34	<.001	.406
Time x Group	2	8.21	.001	.368
Error	56			
Sexual Self-Concept				
Time	2	15.29	<.001	.454
Time x Group	2	12.58	<.001	.419
Error	56			

The results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the intervention effects are detailed in Table 2. For Attitude Toward Marital Infidelity, there was a significant effect of time, $F(2, 56) = 10.34, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .406$, and a significant Time x Group interaction, $F(2, 56) = 8.21, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .368$. Similarly, for Sexual Self-Concept,

the effect of time was significant, $F(2, 56) = 15.29, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .454$, with a significant Time x Group interaction, $F(2, 56) = 12.58, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .419$. These results demonstrate significant changes in both dependent variables over the course of the intervention.

Table 3

Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test for Differences Among Timepoints

Comparison	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval
Attitude Toward Infidelity				
Pre-test vs. Post-test	4.06	1.12	.001	[1.85, 6.27]
Pre-test vs. Follow-up	4.71	1.15	<.001	[2.44, 6.98]
Post-test vs. Follow-up	0.65	0.98	.520	[-1.28, 2.58]
Sexual Self-Concept				
Pre-test vs. Post-test	-3.88	1.05	<.001	[-5.95, -1.81]
Pre-test vs. Follow-up	-4.76	1.09	<.001	[-6.91, -2.61]
Post-test vs. Follow-up	-0.88	0.97	.377	[-2.79, 1.03]

Table 3 provides the results of the Bonferroni post-hoc test, which further explores the differences among the time points for each variable. For Attitude Toward Marital Infidelity, significant mean differences were found between pre-test and post-test (M diff = 4.06, $p = .001$) and pre-test and follow-up (M diff = 4.71, $p < .001$), but not between post-test and follow-up (M diff = 0.65, $p = .520$). For Sexual Self-Concept, significant improvements were noted from pre-test to post-test (M diff = -3.88, $p < .001$) and from pre-test to follow-up (M diff = -4.76, $p < .001$), with no significant difference between post-test and follow-up (M diff = -0.88, $p = .377$). These findings indicate that the intervention led to significant improvements in both variables immediately after the intervention, which were largely sustained at follow-up.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a strength-based intervention in altering attitudes toward marital infidelity and enhancing sexual self-concept among women experiencing marital conflict. The results indicated that the intervention was significantly effective in both respects. Participants demonstrated more constructive attitudes toward infidelity and reported improvements in their sexual self-concept after the completion of the program, which persisted through a three-month follow-up period. These findings suggest that strength-based approaches can be powerful tools in addressing complex personal and relational issues within the context of marriage.

Our study's significant improvements in attitudes towards marital infidelity resonate with Luo and Yu's (2022) findings, which explored the prevalence and impacts of

sexual infidelity in marital relationships (Luo & Yu, 2022). By fostering a more resilient and positive outlook among participants, strength-based interventions may effectively mitigate the negative effects of infidelity, similar to the way narrative therapy improved attachment styles in women dealing with infidelity as reported by Ghaffari et al. (2022). This suggests that a focus on individual strengths can play a crucial role in reorienting attitudes towards more constructive and forgiving perspectives on marital disruptions (Ghaffari et al., 2022).

In terms of sexual self-concept, the intervention's success in enhancing this aspect is crucial, given its documented impact on sexual and psychological health. The improvements observed align with Hsu et al.'s (2014) discussion on the importance of sexual self-concept in fostering sexual self-efficacy, which is known to contribute to overall well-being (Hsu et al., 2014). Furthermore, the study by Guyon et al. (2022), which examined sexual self-concept among survivors of child sexual abuse, underscores the transformative potential of addressing sexual self-perceptions in therapeutic settings (Guyon et al., 2022). Our findings suggest that strengthening an individual's perception of their sexual self can lead to more confident and healthy sexual attitudes, which is essential for maintaining intimate relationships.

The robust methodology and controlled design of our study also reinforce the credibility of these outcomes, as evidenced by the systematic analysis and confirmation of assumptions, similar to the approach taken in studies like those by Robles et al. (2014). The latter highlighted the link between marital quality and health, further supporting the broader implications of our findings that improved sexual self-concept and adjusted attitudes towards infidelity can lead to enhanced relationship satisfaction and overall health (Robles et al., 2014).

Moreover, our results contribute to the ongoing discourse on the impact of psychological interventions on marital relationships, as discussed by Mohammadi and Alibakhshi (2021) and Poorhejazi et al. (2021). These authors demonstrated the efficacy of specific therapeutic strategies in increasing marital satisfaction and reducing emotional divorce, respectively (Mohammadi & Alibakhshi, 2021; Poorhejazi et al., 2021). Our findings suggest that strength-based interventions could be similarly beneficial, offering a complementary approach to existing therapies by focusing on empowering women through the recognition and utilization of their personal strengths.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

While the study's findings are promising, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and confined to a specific demographic, limiting the generalizability of the results. Second, the study relied on self-reported measures, which might introduce biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. Third, the absence of a long-term follow-up restricts our understanding of the durability of the intervention's effects. Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for contextualizing the findings and understanding the scope of the intervention's applicability.

Future research should aim to address the limitations noted. Expanding the sample size and including a more diverse demographic would help generalize the findings more broadly across different cultural backgrounds and social contexts. Additionally, incorporating objective measures or third-party assessments could provide a more nuanced understanding of the intervention's impact. Long-term follow-up studies are also essential to assess the sustainability of the effects over time and to identify any delayed outcomes of the intervention. Exploring the interaction between personal strengths and other variables such as personality traits or previous experiences with infidelity could also yield insightful findings.

The findings of this study have several implications for practice. Therapists and counselors working with women experiencing marital conflict might consider incorporating strength-based approaches into their therapeutic repertoire. Such interventions can empower women by highlighting and leveraging their inherent strengths, potentially leading to more positive outcomes in terms of marital satisfaction and personal well-being. Training programs for clinicians could include modules on strength-based techniques, focusing on how these methods can be integrated into traditional therapeutic practices. Additionally, creating awareness among couples about these interventions could promote their acceptance and uptake, enhancing the overall effectiveness of marital counseling.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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