

The Effectiveness of Group-Based Solution-Focused Therapy on Communication Skills and Marital Adjustment

Ali. Babaei^{1*}, Fatemeh. Dadvand²

¹ Department of Psychology and Counselling, Farhangian University, P.O. Box 14665-889, Tehran, Iran

² PhDStudent, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: Babaeiali2060@cfu.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Babaei, A., & Dadvand, F. (2025). The Effectiveness of Group-Based Solution-Focused Therapy on Communication Skills and Marital Adjustment. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 6(6), 1-13.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.5325>



© 2025 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of group-based solution-focused brief therapy on communication skills and marital adjustment among married students at Islamic Azad University.

Methods and Materials: The present study employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest–posttest assessments and a control group. The statistical population consisted of all married students enrolled at Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz during the 2023–2024 academic year. From among students who had referred to the university counseling center within six months prior to the study, 30 participants were selected voluntarily and randomly assigned to an experimental group ($n = 15$) and a control group ($n = 15$). The experimental group received eight weekly 90-minute sessions of group-based solution-focused brief therapy, while the control group received no intervention. Data were collected using the Queendom Communication Skills Questionnaire (2004) and the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA).

Findings: The results of multivariate analysis of covariance indicated a significant overall difference between the experimental and control groups in communication skills components at posttest ($F(5,19)=4.31, p<0.05$). Univariate analyses demonstrated significant improvements in message understanding ($F=9.26, p=0.006$), insight into communication processes ($F=8.24, p=0.009$), and assertiveness ($F=8.15, p=0.009$) in the experimental group compared with the control group, whereas listening and emotion regulation did not reach statistical significance. In addition, the multivariate covariance analysis for marital adjustment components revealed a significant group effect at posttest ($F(4,21)=10.65, p<0.05$). Significant improvements were observed in marital satisfaction ($F=4.62, p=0.042$) and affectional expression ($F=6.35, p=0.019$), while marital consensus and marital cohesion were not statistically significant.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that group-based solution-focused brief therapy is an effective intervention for improving several dimensions of communication skills and marital adjustment among married students.

Keywords: *Group-Based Solution-Focused Brief Therapy; Communication Skills; Marital Adjustment; Married Students*

1. Introduction

Marital life is one of the most important interpersonal contexts in adulthood, because it simultaneously involves emotional intimacy, mutual support, role coordination, sexual and affective exchange, shared decision-making, and continuous conflict regulation. In this context, marital adjustment is not merely the absence of overt conflict; rather, it reflects the couple's ability to maintain satisfaction, cohesion, consensus, affectional expression, and adaptive interaction despite inevitable differences in expectations, needs, family background, and life stressors. When marital adjustment is weakened, couples may experience emotional distance, reduced intimacy, communication breakdown, unresolved conflict, dissatisfaction, and gradual movement toward marital disengagement or divorce-seeking tendencies. Recent comparative evidence has shown that couples seeking divorce differ from normally adjusted couples in differentiation of self, communication patterns, and conflict resolution tactics, suggesting that marital maladjustment is strongly associated with intrapersonal regulation capacities and interpersonal communication processes (Abdi, 2025). Therefore, interventions that directly target relational communication, constructive problem definition, goal formation, and solution-building may be particularly relevant for couples and married students who are experiencing relational strain.

Communication skills are among the most central psychological and relational determinants of marital functioning. Effective communication allows couples to express needs clearly, listen actively, regulate emotional responses, understand verbal and nonverbal messages, negotiate differences, and maintain respect during disagreement. In contrast, ineffective communication can intensify misunderstandings, increase defensive reactions, reduce emotional security, and transform ordinary disagreements into chronic marital conflict. The importance of communication is not limited to marital relationships; it has also been emphasized in broader interpersonal and family-related contexts, including physician–adolescent communication, where clarity, empathy, trust, and responsiveness are considered essential for building effective relationships (Ayoub, 2024). In intimate relationships, communication quality is even more consequential because partners interpret each other's messages through emotional expectations, attachment needs, and prior relational experiences. Accordingly,

communication skills such as listening, emotional control, message comprehension, insight into communication processes, and assertiveness can be considered core components of marital adjustment.

Empirical studies have consistently linked communication patterns and conflict processes with marital conflict. Bahramian and colleagues reported that conflict resolution styles, irrational beliefs, and communication patterns are meaningfully associated with marital conflicts, indicating that maladaptive cognitive and interactional patterns can maintain or intensify couple distress (Bahramian et al., 2024). Similar findings have been reported in later work emphasizing the relationship between conflict resolution styles, irrational beliefs, communication patterns, and marital conflicts, thereby reinforcing the view that marital problems should be understood as products of reciprocal cognitive, emotional, and communicative dynamics rather than as isolated individual difficulties (Bahramian et al., 2025). From this perspective, improving marital functioning requires more than advising couples to reduce conflict; it requires helping them reconstruct how they define problems, how they communicate needs, how they notice exceptions to conflict, and how they generate workable relational solutions.

Contemporary relationship research also highlights the importance of emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and relational satisfaction among intimate partners. Sathyamurthy et al. showed that interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and relational satisfaction are interconnected dimensions of intimate relationships, suggesting that communication skills operate alongside emotional awareness and regulation in shaping relationship quality (Sathyamurthy et al., 2024). This finding is particularly important for married students, who may experience simultaneous academic, economic, developmental, and family pressures. Married students often face the dual demands of educational achievement and marital role adaptation, and these demands may increase vulnerability to stress, emotional reactivity, and relational dissatisfaction. When such couples lack effective communication and conflict resolution skills, minor disagreements may become recurrent conflicts, and unresolved tensions may weaken marital cohesion and satisfaction.

Among psychological interventions designed to improve couple functioning, solution-focused brief therapy has received growing attention. Solution-focused therapy differs

from problem-saturated approaches by emphasizing clients' resources, preferred futures, exceptions to the problem, small achievable goals, and practical steps toward change. Instead of requiring extended exploration of pathology, it helps clients identify what already works, amplify successful experiences, clarify desired outcomes, and develop concrete behavioral alternatives. This orientation makes it especially suitable for group-based and short-term formats, because participants can learn to reframe difficulties, observe adaptive strategies in others, and practice future-oriented communication within a structured therapeutic context. The approach is also consistent with the needs of counseling centers, where time-limited interventions are often required and where clients may benefit from focused, practical, and strengths-based methods.

Several recent studies support the effectiveness of solution-focused interventions in marital and family domains. Pirmoradi et al. found that solution-focused brief therapy was effective in improving marital commitment and reducing marital burnout among couples with marital conflicts, indicating that this approach can strengthen relational motivation while reducing emotional exhaustion within the marital system (Pirmoradi et al., 2023). Salimi and Soudani also demonstrated that brief solution-focused couple therapy increased marital self-regulation and emotional distress tolerance among couples, suggesting that the method may improve couples' capacity to regulate themselves during relational stress and respond more constructively to conflict (Salimi & Soudani, 2023). Similarly, Rita examined transactional analysis and solution-focused brief therapy in relation to marital satisfaction, highlighting the usefulness of solution-focused principles in couples' counseling and in strengthening marital satisfaction through practical, communication-oriented therapeutic work (Rita, 2023).

Solution-focused counseling has also shown effectiveness in improving dimensions closely related to marital intimacy and relational closeness. Mirshafieian et al. reported that solution-focused brief counseling improved marital intimacy among mothers of children with Down syndrome, demonstrating the potential of this approach even in couples facing additional caregiving stressors and family demands (Mirshafieian et al., 2023). Golyan et al. compared solution-focused narrative therapy and solution-focused therapy and found beneficial effects on resilience and marital intimacy among couples in conflict, suggesting that solution-focused methods may enhance both psychological resilience and relational closeness (Golyan et al., 2025).

These findings are important because intimacy and adjustment are closely linked: when couples can identify exceptions to conflict, recognize strengths, and reconstruct preferred relational narratives, they may become more able to express affection, maintain cohesion, and experience greater satisfaction.

In addition to intimacy and satisfaction, solution-focused approaches have been examined in relation to marital cohesion, sexual satisfaction, emotional divorce, and marital disengagement. Didehban and Mohebbi Nouredinvand found that short-term solution-focused couple therapy improved sexual satisfaction and marital cohesion in couples with marital conflicts, indicating that solution-focused interventions may affect both emotional and intimate dimensions of marital life (Didehban & Mohebbi Nouredinvand, 2025). Rameshi Hadi et al. compared Bowen's emotional system family therapy and solution-focused therapy and reported effects on emotional divorce, marital disengagement, and emotional differentiation among couples seeking divorce, suggesting that solution-focused therapy may be relevant for couples experiencing severe relational distance and emotional separation (Rameshi Hadi et al., 2024). These findings imply that solution-focused interventions may help couples move from disengagement and emotional withdrawal toward clearer goals, renewed interaction, and more adaptive relational functioning.

The effectiveness of solution-focused methods has also been explored in combined and comparative therapeutic models. Rezazadeh et al. showed that combined emotion-focused and solution-focused therapy was effective on anger and marital adjustment among women with marital conflicts, indicating that solution-focused techniques can be integrated with emotion-focused strategies to address both affective dysregulation and relational adaptation (Rezazadeh et al., 2024). Gholami and Rafiei found that combined solution-focused and structural systemic couples therapy affected marital interaction, sexual performance, and marital satisfaction, highlighting the compatibility of solution-focused principles with systemic couple therapy frameworks (Gholami & Rafiei, 2024). These studies suggest that solution-focused therapy may operate through multiple mechanisms, including goal clarification, emotional reframing, interactional restructuring, and strengthening of adaptive couple behaviors.

Communication patterns are particularly relevant to the present study because the intervention is expected to improve not only marital adjustment but also communication skills. Beiramloei et al. compared

communication imagery-based couple therapy and solution-focused couple therapy and showed that solution-focused couple therapy can influence communication patterns in conflicted couples (Beiramloei et al., 2024). A similar comparative study by Biramaloui et al. also emphasized the effectiveness of imagery-based couple therapy and solution-focused couple therapy on communication patterns in conflicted couples (Biramaloui et al., 2024). These findings provide a direct empirical basis for examining solution-focused therapy in relation to communication skills. If couples learn to define problems differently, focus on exceptions, identify preferred outcomes, and communicate requests more clearly, improvements may appear in listening, message comprehension, emotional regulation, insight, and assertiveness.

Solution-focused therapy has also been compared with other couple therapy approaches in relation to conflict resolution and attitudes toward relational problems. Noshi et al. compared solution-based couple therapy with training in a couple communication program and reported effects on marital conflict resolution style, showing that solution-focused approaches can contribute to more adaptive conflict management (Noshi et al., 2023). Oharmian et al. compared solution-focused therapy and emotionally focused therapy on attitudes toward marital infidelity in married individuals, indicating that solution-focused work may influence relational attitudes and perceptions in areas that are highly sensitive for marital stability (Oharmian et al., 2023). These findings are theoretically meaningful because marital adjustment depends not only on observable behavior but also on how partners interpret problems, evaluate alternatives, and envision future relational possibilities.

Although most solution-focused research has been conducted in couple and marital contexts, the broader relevance of solution-focused skills training has also been demonstrated in other populations. Vatankhah and Bakhtiarpour reported that child-centered solution-focused skills training improved life and communication skills among children with intellectual disabilities, suggesting that solution-focused principles can strengthen adaptive skills beyond the marital domain (Vatankhah & Bakhtiarpour, 2025). This broader applicability supports the assumption that solution-focused methods target generalizable psychological mechanisms such as resource identification, goal orientation, communication improvement, and behavioral activation. Moreover, Yusuf emphasized Islamic communication as a means of reducing sexual violence, underscoring the wider social and ethical importance of

communication patterns in preventing interpersonal harm and promoting respectful relational conduct (Yusuf, 2023). Although this line of work is not limited to marital adjustment, it reinforces the centrality of communication as a protective factor in intimate and family-related relationships.

Despite growing evidence on solution-focused interventions, several gaps remain. First, many studies have examined distressed couples, divorce-seeking couples, women with marital conflicts, or specific clinical and family populations, whereas married university students have received comparatively less attention. Second, existing research has often focused on marital satisfaction, intimacy, burnout, cohesion, or conflict resolution, while fewer studies have simultaneously examined communication skills and marital adjustment as two interrelated outcomes. Third, group-based solution-focused brief therapy may offer a practical and cost-effective intervention model for university counseling centers, but its effectiveness in this context requires further empirical examination. Given that married students may face developmental, academic, economic, and relational stressors, identifying brief interventions that can improve their communication skills and marital adjustment is both theoretically and practically important.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of group-based solution-focused brief therapy on communication skills and marital adjustment among married students of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest–posttest assessments and a control group. The statistical population consisted of all married students enrolled at Islamic Azad University during the 2023–2024 academic year. The study sample included married students who had referred to the university counseling center within a six-month period prior to the commencement of the research. Initially, 50 individuals were randomly selected from among the counseling center referrals due to the possibility of participant attrition or unwillingness to continue participation in the intervention process. Subsequently, 30 participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and were randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the control group, with 15 participants in each group. Participants in the experimental

group received group-based solution-focused brief therapy for eight consecutive weeks, consisting of one 90-minute session per week, whereas the control group received no intervention during the study period. The inclusion criteria consisted of being between 20 and 40 years of age and providing informed consent for participation in the study. The exclusion criteria included the presence of a specific physical or psychological illness, any major problem affecting marital relationships during the assessment period, and absence from more than one treatment session. To ensure adherence to ethical research principles, all questionnaires were completed anonymously using coded identifiers rather than participants' names.

2.2. Measures

Communication skills were assessed using the Communication Skills Questionnaire developed by Queendom (2004). This instrument was designed to evaluate communication skills among adults and consists of 34 items describing various aspects of interpersonal communication. Participants responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), based on the extent to which each statement reflected their current condition. Items 2, 4, and 6 were reverse scored. The questionnaire measures five dimensions of communication skills, including listening skills (6 items), message sending and receiving ability (9 items), insight into the communication process (5 items), emotional control (9 items), and assertive communication (5 items). Scores on the scale range from 34 to 170, with higher scores indicating stronger communication skills. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire demonstrated acceptable reliability. Using Cronbach's alpha method, the overall reliability coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.69, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The reliability coefficients were 0.71 among university students and 0.66 among high school students. In addition, the split-half reliability coefficient of the total scale was reported as 0.71.

Marital adjustment was measured using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale developed by Graham B. Spanier in 1976. This instrument was designed to assess adjustment and relationship quality between marital partners and consists of 32 items. The scale evaluates four dimensions of marital adjustment, including dyadic satisfaction (10 items), dyadic cohesion (5 items), dyadic consensus (13 items), and affectional expression (4 items). The scoring format varies across items. The total score ranges from 0 to 150, with

lower scores indicating poorer marital adjustment and greater marital incompatibility. Spanier (1976) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.96 for the total scale score, while the internal consistency coefficients for the subscales ranged from good to excellent, including 0.94 for dyadic satisfaction, 0.81 for dyadic cohesion, 0.90 for dyadic consensus, and 0.73 for affectional expression. The instrument was translated, standardized, and validated in Iran in 1995. Test-retest reliability coefficients for husbands' and wives' scores were reported as 0.86 for the total score, 0.68 for the first subscale, 0.75 for the second subscale, 0.71 for the third subscale, and 0.61 for the fourth subscale. Moreover, the internal consistency coefficient of the instrument was reported as 0.95. The validity of the scale was initially confirmed through logical and content validity procedures. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale also demonstrated discriminant validity by successfully distinguishing between married and divorced couples and showed concurrent validity through significant correlations with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test.

2.3. Intervention

The intervention consisted of eight sessions of group-based solution-focused brief therapy conducted weekly, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. During the first session, participants and the counselor became acquainted, a brief personal and relational history was obtained, and the principles and theoretical foundations of solution-focused therapy were introduced. Participants were encouraged to define their primary marital problem concisely and discuss it within the group context. In the second session, previous assignments were reviewed, and participants were guided to transform their problems into attainable and realistic goals while expressing their expectations and desired outcomes clearly. The third session focused on detailed examination of the identified problems, discussion about future-oriented perspectives, and the use of exception techniques and miracle questions to identify positive relational experiences. In the fourth session, the "master key" technique was introduced, and participants were encouraged to recognize their personal strengths and understand their spouses' differing perspectives through comparative questioning techniques. The fifth session emphasized identifying and discussing positive exceptions in marital relationships, using scaling questions, encouraging mutual appreciation, and reducing focus on negative behaviors. In the sixth session, miracle questions

were revisited, and participants were trained to recognize how positive and negative moments emerge from their own thoughts and behaviors. The seventh session focused on the therapeutic use of the term “instead” to facilitate the experience of new emotions and adaptive responses, while also highlighting latent positive responses. Finally, the eighth session was devoted to summarizing the intervention process, reviewing the skills learned, and drawing final conclusions collaboratively with participants.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics included calculation of means and standard deviations for all study variables at the pretest and posttest stages. Inferential analyses were performed to examine the effectiveness of group-based solution-focused brief therapy on communication skills and marital adjustment. Given the quasi-experimental nature of the study and the intention to compare posttest differences between the experimental and control groups while controlling for pretest effects, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was

employed. Prior to conducting MANCOVA, the assumptions underlying the analysis, including normality, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and equality of covariance matrices, were assessed and confirmed using appropriate statistical tests. All statistical analyses were performed at a significance level of 0.05.

3. Findings and Results

In this section, the data were analyzed in order to examine the hypotheses proposed in the study. First, the descriptive findings, including the mean and standard deviation of each research variable, are reported. Considering that the variables in this study were measured on an interval scale and the design was quasi-experimental, and because the purpose was to examine the differences between the two groups at posttest while controlling for pretest effects, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed. Prior to conducting these analyses, the assumptions underlying multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) were confirmed using appropriate statistical tests.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Research Variables in the Pretest and Posttest for the Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Test	Experimental Group Mean	Experimental Group SD	Control Group Mean	Control Group SD
Communication Skills	Pretest	85.66	16.00	80.46	15.62
	Posttest	104.46	12.01	87.60	8.84
Listening	Pretest	18.00	4.15	16.40	5.43
	Posttest	25.26	3.95	21.86	4.58
Emotion Regulation	Pretest	22.26	5.84	22.20	6.02
	Posttest	26.53	5.28	24.66	2.63
Message Understanding	Pretest	22.53	5.80	21.00	5.33
	Posttest	31.06	5.84	24.20	5.29
Insight	Pretest	11.86	4.05	9.80	2.98
	Posttest	21.60	4.10	16.86	3.70
Assertiveness	Pretest	11.00	4.62	11.06	4.57
	Posttest	20.06	3.12	17.00	1.92
Marital Adjustment	Pretest	88.06	27.78	80.80	26.65
	Posttest	125.26	15.63	107.86	15.56
Marital Satisfaction	Pretest	26.20	5.80	23.46	5.33
	Posttest	31.80	5.40	26.13	6.50
Marital Cohesion	Pretest	18.66	9.48	19.73	9.96
	Posttest	30.20	5.08	27.40	4.80
Marital Consensus	Pretest	19.93	9.86	20.53	9.44
	Posttest	31.13	6.26	28.53	4.01
Affectional Expression	Pretest	23.26	9.15	17.06	7.03
	Posttest	32.13	7.16	25.80	7.67

As shown in Table 1, at the pretest stage, the mean (SD) scores of the experimental and control groups for

communication skills were 85.66 (16.00) and 80.46 (15.62), respectively. At posttest, these values increased to 104.46

(12.01) for the experimental group and 87.60 (8.84) for the control group.

Furthermore, at the pretest stage, the mean (SD) scores of the experimental and control groups for marital adjustment were 88.06 (27.78) and 80.80 (26.65), respectively. At posttest, these values were 125.26 (15.63) for the experimental group and 107.86 (15.56) for the control group.

The first research hypothesis stated that group-based solution-focused brief therapy improves the components of communication skills among married students.

To examine this hypothesis, given that the aim was to investigate the effect of one type of intervention, namely group-based solution-focused brief therapy, on five variables including the communication skills components of listening, emotion regulation, message understanding, insight, and assertiveness, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used.

Table 2

Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance for Examining Group Differences in the Posttest Scores of Communication Skills Components

Effect	Test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group Difference	Pillai's Trace	0.532	4.31	5	19	0.009	0.532
	Wilks' Lambda	0.468	4.31	5	19	0.009	0.532
	Hotelling's Trace	1.13	4.31	5	19	0.009	0.532
	Roy's Largest Root	1.13	4.31	5	19	0.009	0.532

According to Table 2, the results indicated a significant effect for the group factor. This finding demonstrates that there was a statistically significant difference between the

experimental and control groups in at least one of the communication skills components ($F(5,19)=4.31, p<0.05, \text{Roy's Largest Root}=1.13$).

Table 3

Results of Univariate Analysis of Variance Within Multivariate Analysis of Covariance for the Communication Skills Components in the Experimental and Control Groups

Source of Variation	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	Listening	44.64	1	44.64	2.40	0.134	0.095
	Emotion Regulation	3.17	1	3.17	0.158	0.695	0.049
	Message Understanding	2.49	1	2.49	0.076	0.786	0.003
	Insight	0.065	1	0.065	0.004	0.952	0.000
	Assertiveness	4.20	1	4.20	0.546	0.468	0.023
Group	Listening	66.25	1	66.25	3.57	0.071	0.135
	Emotion Regulation	29.75	1	29.75	1.47	0.236	0.060
	Message Understanding	306.21	1	306.21	9.26	0.006	0.287
	Insight	143.77	1	143.77	8.24	0.009	0.264
	Assertiveness	62.80	1	62.80	8.15	0.009	0.262
Error	Listening	426.27	23	18.53	—	—	—
	Emotion Regulation	463.09	23	20.13	—	—	—
	Message Understanding	759.87	23	33.03	—	—	—
	Insight	401.18	23	17.44	—	—	—
	Assertiveness	177.23	23	7.70	—	—	—
Total	Listening	17261	30	—	—	—	—
	Emotion Regulation	20176	30	—	—	—	—
	Message Understanding	24133	30	—	—	—	—
	Insight	11693	30	—	—	—	—
	Assertiveness	10564	30	—	—	—	—

Based on the results presented in Table 3, the F statistic obtained from multivariate ANCOVA for the listening component was 3.57, which was not statistically significant

at the 0.05 significance level. Similarly, the ANCOVA statistic for the emotion regulation component was 1.47, which was also not statistically significant at $p<0.05$.

In contrast, the F statistics for the communication skills components of message understanding, insight, and assertiveness were 9.26, 8.24, and 8.15, respectively, all of which were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the first research hypothesis stating that group-based solution-focused brief therapy improves communication skills components among married students was statistically supported.

The second research hypothesis stated that group-based solution-focused brief therapy improves the components of marital adjustment among married students.

To examine this hypothesis, because the aim was to investigate the effect of group-based solution-focused brief therapy on four variables including marital satisfaction, marital consensus, marital cohesion, and affectional expression, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was employed.

Table 4

Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance for Examining Group Differences in the Posttest Scores of Marital Adjustment Components

Effect	Test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group Difference	Pillai's Trace	0.670	10.65	4	21	0.001	0.670
	Wilks' Lambda	0.330	10.65	4	21	0.001	0.670
	Hotelling's Trace	2.02	10.65	4	21	0.001	0.670
	Roy's Largest Root	2.02	10.65	4	21	0.001	0.670

According to Table 4, the findings revealed a significant effect for the group factor. This result indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the

experimental and control groups in at least one of the marital adjustment components ($F(4,21)=10.65$, $p<0.05$, Roy's Largest Root=2.02).

Table 5

Results of Univariate Analysis of Variance Within Multivariate Analysis of Covariance for the Marital Adjustment Components in the Experimental and Control Groups

Source of Variation	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	Marital Satisfaction	10.61	1	10.61	0.261	0.614	0.011
	Marital Consensus	47.29	1	47.29	1.86	0.185	0.072
	Marital Cohesion	98.90	1	98.90	3.97	0.058	0.142
	Affectional Expression	151.38	1	151.38	2.95	0.099	0.109
Group	Marital Satisfaction	188.07	1	188.07	4.62	0.042	0.162
	Marital Consensus	2.95	1	2.95	0.116	0.736	0.005
	Marital Cohesion	26.29	1	26.29	2.50	0.127	0.094
	Affectional Expression	329.33	1	329.33	6.35	0.019	0.209
Error	Marital Satisfaction	976.47	24	40.68	—	—	—
	Marital Consensus	608.73	24	25.36	—	—	—
	Marital Cohesion	597.66	24	24.90	—	—	—
	Affectional Expression	1231.64	24	51.31	—	—	—
Total	Marital Satisfaction	26413	30	—	—	—	—
	Marital Consensus	25628	30	—	—	—	—
	Marital Cohesion	27527	30	—	—	—	—
	Affectional Expression	27015	30	—	—	—	—

Based on the results reported in Table 5, the F statistic obtained from multivariate ANCOVA for the marital consensus component was 0.116, which was not statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level. Likewise, the ANCOVA statistic for the marital cohesion component was 2.50, which was also not statistically significant at $p<0.05$.

expression were 4.62 and 6.35, respectively, both of which were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the second research hypothesis stating that group-based solution-focused brief therapy improves the components of marital adjustment among married students was statistically supported.

However, the F statistics for the marital adjustment components of marital satisfaction and affectional

4. Discussion

The present study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of group-based solution-focused brief therapy on communication skills and marital adjustment among married students at Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz. The findings demonstrated that group-based solution-focused brief therapy significantly improved several components of communication skills, particularly message understanding, insight into the communication process, and assertiveness, among participants in the experimental group compared with the control group. In addition, the intervention significantly improved important components of marital adjustment, specifically marital satisfaction and affectional expression. Overall, the results support the effectiveness of solution-focused brief therapy as a short-term, practical, and strengths-oriented intervention for enhancing relational functioning and marital adaptation among married students.

One of the major findings of the present study was the significant improvement in communication skills among participants who received the intervention. Specifically, message understanding, communication insight, and assertiveness improved significantly following treatment. This finding is theoretically consistent with the foundations of solution-focused brief therapy, which emphasize constructive dialogue, future-oriented interaction, clarification of relational goals, identification of exceptions to conflict, and increased awareness of interactional patterns. During the intervention sessions, participants were repeatedly encouraged to express their needs clearly, identify positive interactional experiences, reformulate relational problems into achievable goals, and develop more adaptive communication responses. Such processes may have contributed to greater insight into interpersonal exchanges and increased confidence in expressing emotions and needs assertively.

The findings related to communication skills are consistent with previous research emphasizing the central role of communication in relationship quality and relational satisfaction. Sathyamurthy et al. reported that interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution are strongly associated with relational satisfaction among intimate partners (Sathyamurthy et al., 2024). Similarly, Ayoub highlighted that effective communication involves empathy, clarity, responsiveness, and mutual understanding, all of which contribute to healthier interpersonal interactions (Ayoub, 2024). The present findings extend these observations into the marital domain

and suggest that solution-focused interventions may strengthen these communicative capacities in married couples.

The results are also aligned with studies examining communication patterns in conflicted couples. Bahramian et al. found that communication patterns and conflict resolution styles are closely related to marital conflicts, indicating that maladaptive communication contributes to relational dissatisfaction and instability (Bahramian et al., 2024; Bahramian et al., 2025). In the present study, the intervention appeared to help participants replace problem-focused and emotionally reactive communication with more goal-directed and constructive interactional strategies. By learning to focus on exceptions, identify strengths, and clarify desired outcomes, participants may have become more capable of understanding messages accurately and communicating more effectively within the marital relationship.

The findings regarding communication skills are further supported by the comparative studies conducted by Beiramloei et al. and Biramaloui et al., both of which demonstrated the effectiveness of solution-focused couple therapy on communication patterns among conflicted couples (Beiramloei et al., 2024; Biramaloui et al., 2024). These studies suggest that solution-focused interventions improve communication not through extensive exploration of pathology, but through helping couples reconstruct interactional meaning and develop practical communication alternatives. In the present study, participants were encouraged to discuss successful moments in their relationships, describe preferred futures, and communicate expectations transparently, which likely facilitated greater communication insight and assertiveness.

Although significant improvement was observed in message understanding, insight, and assertiveness, the intervention did not produce statistically significant changes in listening skills and emotion regulation. This finding may indicate that some communication components are more resistant to change within short-term interventions or require longer and more intensive therapeutic work. Listening and emotion regulation are often deeply rooted in personality traits, attachment patterns, emotional history, and learned relational habits. Therefore, although solution-focused brief therapy may rapidly improve cognitive and behavioral aspects of communication, emotional self-regulation and active listening may require more prolonged intervention, experiential exercises, or complementary therapeutic approaches. Nevertheless, the direction of change in these

variables remained positive, suggesting partial therapeutic influence despite the absence of statistical significance.

Another important finding of the present study was the significant improvement in marital satisfaction and affectional expression among participants in the experimental group. This result suggests that solution-focused brief therapy not only influences communication processes but also enhances emotional closeness, relational positivity, and overall marital quality. From a theoretical perspective, solution-focused interventions encourage couples to identify moments of success and relational competence rather than remaining focused on deficits and failures. Such reframing may reduce hopelessness and emotional exhaustion while increasing appreciation, positive interaction, and emotional responsiveness between spouses.

The present findings are consistent with the results reported by Gholami and Rafiei, who found that combined solution-focused and structural systemic couples therapy improved marital interaction and marital satisfaction (Gholami & Rafiei, 2024). Similarly, Rita demonstrated that solution-focused brief therapy contributes positively to marital satisfaction and can be effectively used in couple counseling contexts (Rita, 2023). In the present study, the intervention likely improved marital satisfaction by helping participants recognize positive dimensions of their relationships, set realistic relational goals, and experience greater success in communication and emotional exchange.

The findings related to affectional expression are also theoretically meaningful. Affectional expression reflects the extent to which couples openly communicate love, care, emotional closeness, and positive feelings toward one another. In solution-focused therapy, participants are encouraged to recognize positive exceptions, express appreciation, and reinforce constructive relational behaviors. These therapeutic processes may directly contribute to increased affectional expression. The present findings support this interpretation and are compatible with the results reported by Didehban and Mohebbi Nouredinvand, who found that short-term solution-focused couple therapy improved marital cohesion and sexual satisfaction among couples with marital conflicts (Didehban & Mohebbi Nouredinvand, 2025). Increased affectional expression may also strengthen emotional security and reinforce positive interaction cycles between spouses.

The findings of the present study are further aligned with the work of Mirshafieian et al., who demonstrated that solution-focused brief counseling improved marital intimacy among mothers of children with Down syndrome

(Mirshafieian et al., 2023). Similarly, Golyan et al. found that solution-focused interventions improved marital intimacy and resilience among conflicted couples (Golyan et al., 2025). Intimacy, affectional expression, and marital satisfaction are closely interconnected constructs; therefore, improvements in one domain may facilitate improvements in the others. The present intervention may have encouraged participants to shift their focus away from repetitive conflict and toward emotional connection, strengths, and future possibilities, thereby increasing emotional closeness and marital satisfaction.

The findings also support previous studies examining the role of solution-focused interventions in reducing marital distress and strengthening relational functioning. Pirmoradi et al. reported that solution-focused brief therapy improved marital commitment and reduced marital burnout among couples with marital conflicts (Pirmoradi et al., 2023). Salimi and Soudani similarly demonstrated that brief solution-focused couple therapy increased marital self-regulation and emotional distress tolerance (Salimi & Soudani, 2023). These findings are relevant because marital satisfaction and adjustment are strongly influenced by couples' ability to regulate emotions, tolerate distress, and maintain constructive interaction during conflict. The present study suggests that solution-focused brief therapy may contribute to these capacities indirectly through communication restructuring and strengths-based interaction.

The results concerning marital adjustment are also compatible with the findings reported by Rezazadeh et al., who demonstrated that combined emotion-focused and solution-focused therapy improved marital adjustment among women with marital conflicts (Rezazadeh et al., 2024). In addition, Rameshi Hadi et al. found that solution-focused therapy reduced emotional divorce and marital disengagement among divorce-seeking couples (Rameshi Hadi et al., 2024). Together, these studies suggest that solution-focused therapy can affect multiple dimensions of relational functioning, including satisfaction, emotional connection, communication quality, cohesion, and adaptive conflict management.

The therapeutic effectiveness observed in the present study may also be understood through the core mechanisms of solution-focused therapy. First, the intervention encourages clients to identify exceptions to problems, which helps couples recognize that conflict and dissatisfaction are not permanent or universal. Second, miracle questions and future-oriented discussions encourage hope, optimism, and

motivation for change. Third, scaling questions help participants monitor progress and increase awareness of small relational improvements. Fourth, emphasis on strengths and competencies may reduce defensiveness and increase self-efficacy in communication and problem-solving. Finally, the group format itself may have enhanced therapeutic outcomes through normalization, social learning, mutual support, and observational learning among participants.

5. Conclusion

The present findings have practical implications for university counseling settings. Married students often face simultaneous academic, financial, occupational, and family-related stressors that may negatively affect communication quality and marital adjustment. Because solution-focused brief therapy is time-efficient, structured, and practical, it may represent a highly useful intervention model for university counseling centers. The intervention does not require lengthy treatment processes and instead focuses on achievable goals, practical solutions, and existing relational strengths, making it especially suitable for student populations with limited time and multiple responsibilities.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite the positive findings, the absence of significant changes in some variables, including listening and emotion regulation, suggests that communication-related changes may occur unevenly across different relational domains. Some communication skills may respond rapidly to cognitive reframing and behavioral practice, whereas others may require deeper emotional processing or longer therapeutic exposure. Future interventions may benefit from integrating solution-focused techniques with emotion regulation training, mindfulness-based strategies, or experiential couple therapy methods to strengthen broader communication outcomes. One of the limitations of the present study was the relatively small sample size, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to broader populations of married couples. In addition, the participants were selected exclusively from married students at one university counseling center, limiting the cultural and demographic diversity of the sample. Another limitation was the reliance on self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by response bias, social desirability, or participants' subjective interpretations. Furthermore, the study lacked a long-term follow-up phase; therefore, it is

unclear whether the observed improvements remained stable over time. The short-term nature of the intervention may also have limited its effects on more deeply rooted emotional and communication patterns.

Future research should examine the long-term effectiveness of group-based solution-focused brief therapy through follow-up assessments conducted several months after treatment completion. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate the effectiveness of this intervention among more diverse populations, including non-student couples, newly married couples, couples with severe marital distress, and culturally diverse samples. Comparative studies evaluating solution-focused therapy alongside other evidence-based couple interventions may provide deeper understanding of its relative strengths and mechanisms of change. Future studies may also explore mediating variables such as emotional intelligence, attachment style, self-differentiation, and conflict resolution style in order to clarify how solution-focused interventions influence marital adjustment and communication skills.

From a practical perspective, the findings of the present study suggest that university counseling centers may benefit from implementing structured group-based solution-focused brief therapy programs for married students experiencing relational difficulties. Mental health professionals and couple therapists can incorporate solution-focused techniques such as miracle questions, scaling questions, exception identification, and strengths-based dialogue into counseling sessions in order to improve communication quality and marital functioning. Educational workshops focused on communication skills, assertiveness, emotional expression, and constructive problem-solving may further strengthen marital adjustment among student couples. Because the intervention is brief, cost-effective, and relatively easy to administer, it may represent a practical and accessible approach for preventive and therapeutic work in educational and counseling settings.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed 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.

References

- Abdi, S. (2025). A comparative study of differentiation of self, communication patterns, and conflict resolution tactics between divorce seeking and normal couples. *Journal of Preventive Counselling*, 6(2). https://journal.uma.ac.ir/article_3945.html?lang=en
- Ayoub, B. (2024). The Art of Effective Communication Between Family Physicians and Their Adolescent Patients: Challenges and Solutions. *Australian Journal of General Practice*, 53(11), 831-834. <https://doi.org/10.31128/ajgp-07-23-6894>
- Bahramian, A., Kazemi, S. A., Javidi, H., & Barzegar, M. (2024). Investigating the Relationship Between Conflict Resolution Styles, Irrational Beliefs, and Communication Patterns with Marital Conflicts. *Scientific Quarterly of Psychological Methods and Models*, 15(55), 1-20. <https://www.magiran.com/paper/2736243/the-relationship-between-conflict-resolution-styles-irrational-beliefs-and-communication-patterns-with-marital-conflicts?lang=en>
- Bahramian, A., Kazemi, S. A., Javidi, H. A., & Barzegar, M. (2025). Investigating the Relationship Between Conflict Resolution Styles, Irrational Beliefs, and Communication Patterns with Marital Conflicts. *Scientific Quarterly of Psychological Methods and Models*, 15(55), 1-20.
- Beiramloei, S., Monazami Tabar, F., & Safaei Rad, I. (2024). Comparison of the effectiveness of couple therapy based on communication imagery and solution-focused couple therapy on communication patterns in conflicted couples. *Advances in Cognitive Science*, 26(2), 1-15.
- Biramaloui, S., Monazzami Tabar, F., & Safaei Rad, I. (2024). Comparing the effectiveness of imagery-based couple therapy and solution-focused couple therapy on communication patterns in conflicted couples. *New Cognitive Science*, 26(2), 1-15. https://icssjournal.ir/browse.php?a_id=1695&sid=1&slc_lang=en&ftxt=0
- Didehban, R., & Mohebbi Nouredinvand, M. H. (2025). The effectiveness of short-term solution-focused couple therapy on sexual satisfaction and marital cohesion in couples with marital conflicts. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research in Nursing*, 11(3), 101-110. <https://ijrn.ir/article-1-922-en.html>
- Gholami, M., & Rafiei, F. (2024). The Effectiveness of Combined Solution-Focused and Structural Systemic Couples Therapy on Marital Interaction, Sexual Performance, and Marital Satisfaction. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Development*, 4(12). https://sanad.iau.ir/Journal/jci/Article/931712?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Golyan, G. F., Sadeghifard, M., & Yosefi, E. (2025). Comparing the Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Narrative Therapy and Solution-Focused Therapy on Resilience and Marital Intimacy of Couples in Conflict (Counseling Centers of Shirvan County). *Hn*, 3(1), 21-32. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.hn.3.1.4>
- Mirshafieian, N., Bokaie, M., & Jafari, M. S. (2023). The Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling on Marital Intimacy in Mothers of Children With Down Syndrome: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *Galen Medical Journal*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.31661/gmj.v12i.2747>
- Noshi, M. C., Arefi, M., Nia, K. A., & Amiri, H. (2023). Comparing the Effects of Solution-Based Couple Therapy and Training of Couple Communication Program on the Style of Marital Conflict Resolution. *International Journal of Health Studies*, 9(2). <https://sjms.shmu.ac.ir/index.php/ijhs/article/view/955/797>
- Oharmian, A., Sudani, M., & Gholamzadeh Jofreh, M. (2023). Comparison of the effectiveness of solution-focused therapy and emotionally focused therapy on attitudes toward marital infidelity in married individuals. *Disability Studies Journal*, 13, 19-19. https://jdisabilstud.org/browse.php?a_id=2689&sid=1&slc_lang=fa&ftxt=0
- Pirmoradi, S., Amini, N., Keykhosrovani, M., & Shafiabadi, A. (2023). Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy on Marital Commitment and Marital Burnout Among Couples with Marital Conflicts: A Randomized Trial. *Journal of Midwifery & Reproductive Health*, 11(1). https://jmrh.mums.ac.ir/article_21112.html
- Rameshi Hadi, P. A. A., Aghdasi, A. N., & Liwarjani, S. (2024). A comparative study on the effectiveness of Bowen's emotional system family therapy and solution-focused therapy on emotional divorce, marital disengagement, and emotional differentiation in couples seeking divorce. *Ruyesh Psychology Journal*, 13(8), 120-111. <https://frooyesh.ir/article-1-5428-fa.html>
- Rezazadeh, S., Tavasoloinia, S., & Azimi, D. (2024). Effectiveness of the combined emotion-focused and solution-focused therapy on anger and marital adjustment of women with marital conflicts. *Journal of Family Relations Studies*, 4(13), 48-57. https://journal.uma.ac.ir/article_2926.html?lang=en
- Rita, H. (2023). Transactional Analysis and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy on Marital Satisfaction: Implications for Christian Couples' Counselling. *East African Journal of Traditions Culture and Religion*, 6(1), 99-117. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.6.1.1514>
- Salimi, H., & Soudani, M. (2023). The effectiveness of brief solution-focused couple therapy on increasing marital self-

- regulation and emotional distress tolerance among couples. *Journal of Clinical Psychology and Counseling*, 13(1), 5-24. <https://doi.org/10.22067/tpccp.2023.76695.1287>
- Sathyamurthy, M., Nair, V., Mohamed, I. S., Ts, D., & Shreelakshmi, P. (2024). Interpersonal Communication, Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution, Relational Satisfaction Among Intimate Partners. *Public Administration and Law Review*(4(20)), 65-72. <https://doi.org/10.36690/2674-5216-2024-4-65-72>
- Vatankhah, M., & Bakhtiarpour, S. (2025). The effectiveness of the child-centered solution-focused skills training method on life and communication skills of children with intellectual disabilities. *Quarterly Journal of Psychology of Exceptional Individuals*, 13(15), 25-32. https://jpe.atu.ac.ir/article_16431.html
- Yusuf, M. A. (2023). Islamic communication a solution to reduce sexual violence. *Al-Mishbah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah dan Komunikasi*, 18(2), 237-253. https://almishbahjournal.com/article_90563.html