






The Effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on Marital Inhibition and Emotional Intimacy among Women in Second Marriages

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Abedi Firouzjaei, F., Abdollahizade, M. S., Armoon, A., Karimi, S., & Ahmadimoghadam, M. (2026). The Effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on Marital Inhibition and Emotional Intimacy among Women in Second Marriages. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 7(4), 1-10.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.afjt.5358>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on marital inhibition and emotional intimacy among women in second marriages.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a quasi-experimental method using a pretest-posttest design with a control group. The statistical population consisted of women in second marriages who referred to counseling centers in Tehran in 2026. Using convenience sampling, 28 participants were selected and randomly assigned into experimental (n = 14) and control (n = 14) groups. Data were collected using the Marital Inhibition Questionnaire and the Emotional Intimacy Questionnaire. The experimental group participated in eight weekly 90-minute sessions of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, whereas the control group received no intervention. Data were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 at a significance level of 0.05.

Findings: The findings indicated that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy significantly reduced marital inhibition and increased emotional intimacy among women in second marriages. The results of covariance analysis for marital inhibition demonstrated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the posttest phase ($F = 9.412$, effect size = 0.148). In addition, the covariance analysis results for emotional intimacy revealed a significant difference between the two groups following the intervention ($F = 13.845$, effect size = 0.193). The posttest mean scores showed that marital inhibition decreased and emotional intimacy increased in the experimental group compared with the control group.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy was effective in improving emotional intimacy and reducing marital inhibition among women in second marriages. By increasing psychological flexibility, emotional acceptance, and adaptive interpersonal functioning, ACT may help remarried women establish healthier emotional relationships and reduce maladaptive controlling behaviors within marital interactions.

Keywords: *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, marital inhibition, emotional intimacy, second marriage.*

1. Introduction

Marriage is considered one of the most important interpersonal and social institutions and plays a central role in individuals' psychological well-being, emotional stability, and social functioning. The quality of marital relationships substantially influences mental health, emotional security, life satisfaction, and interpersonal adjustment among couples. In recent decades, rapid social, economic, and cultural transformations have altered the structure and expectations of marital relationships, leading to increasing rates of divorce and remarriage across many societies (Güngör, 2025; Hernández et al., 2023). Second marriage represents a unique relational context characterized by distinct emotional, psychological, and social challenges that differ substantially from first marriages. Individuals entering remarriage often carry unresolved emotional experiences, relational fears, maladaptive interactional patterns, and cognitive schemas derived from previous marital failures, all of which may negatively affect the quality and stability of subsequent relationships (Güngör, 2025; Nyarko, 2023). Women in second marriages may experience heightened emotional vulnerability, fear of rejection, mistrust, and concerns regarding emotional closeness, which can contribute to difficulties in emotional intimacy and adaptive marital functioning (Abaie & Bagheri, 2024; Jackson et al., 2023).

Emotional intimacy is one of the most essential dimensions of marital quality and refers to the ability of partners to share emotions, thoughts, needs, and vulnerabilities in a secure and accepting relational environment. Emotional intimacy contributes to mutual understanding, trust, emotional security, and relational satisfaction among couples. When emotional intimacy is impaired, couples often experience emotional distancing, dissatisfaction, misunderstanding, and relational instability (Tavaloli et al., 2022; Vakilian et al., 2024). Research has demonstrated that emotional intimacy is significantly associated with marital commitment, psychological adjustment, forgiveness, and emotional well-being among couples (Masaeli et al., 2024; Torani & Fard, 2024). In remarried couples, emotional intimacy may become particularly vulnerable because previous marital experiences may create emotional defensiveness and inhibit emotional openness. Individuals who have experienced divorce often develop protective emotional mechanisms intended to prevent future emotional pain, which may inadvertently reduce vulnerability, openness, and emotional connection in

subsequent relationships (Jackson et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2023). Consequently, emotional intimacy among women in second marriages requires considerable psychological adjustment and relational flexibility.

Another important factor influencing the quality of marital relationships is marital inhibition. Marital inhibition refers to controlling, suppressive, restrictive, or emotionally constraining behaviors within marital interactions that limit emotional expression, autonomy, and relational openness between spouses. Marital inhibition may involve criticism, emotional suppression, intimidation, isolation, or manipulative control strategies that undermine healthy relational functioning. Such behaviors are often associated with unresolved emotional conflicts, maladaptive coping mechanisms, insecurity, and fear of vulnerability within intimate relationships (Kumar et al., 2022; Lakshmanan et al., 2023). Women who have experienced marital failure may be particularly susceptible to engaging in or tolerating controlling relational patterns because of fears related to abandonment, betrayal, or relational instability. Persistent marital inhibition can negatively influence emotional intimacy, psychological security, and overall marital satisfaction (Poorhejazi et al., 2021; Tavaloli et al., 2022). Moreover, excessive controlling behaviors within marital relationships are linked to increased emotional distress, relational dissatisfaction, and psychological maladjustment among women (Abid & Stanikzai, 2024; Kumar et al., 2022).

Second marriages frequently involve complex relational dynamics due to the integration of prior emotional experiences, family roles, and unresolved interpersonal conflicts. Research indicates that remarried couples often encounter increased relational stressors, including financial strain, emotional insecurity, role ambiguity, and difficulties in establishing trust and intimacy (Jackson et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2023). Economic stress and emotional insecurity may intensify interpersonal conflicts and weaken emotional closeness among remarried couples. Turner et al. demonstrated that economic distress negatively affects perceptions of sexual and emotional intimacy within remarriage relationships (Turner et al., 2023). Similarly, Jackson et al. found that financial conflict indirectly influences marital outcomes through increased economic strain among remarried couples (Jackson et al., 2023). These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of marital functioning in second marriages and emphasize the importance of psychological interventions targeting

emotional regulation, intimacy enhancement, and adaptive interpersonal functioning.

Psychological distress associated with prior relational trauma, infidelity, and marital dissolution may significantly impair women's capacity to establish healthy emotional connections in remarriage. Women with histories of relational betrayal often exhibit fear of intimacy, emotional withdrawal, impulsivity, or maladaptive emotional regulation strategies (Karimi et al., 2023; Nezamalmolki et al., 2023). Emotional avoidance and cognitive rigidity can prevent individuals from developing secure and authentic emotional bonds with their partners. Studies have shown that women affected by marital infidelity experience lower levels of marital intimacy, emotional security, and psychological adjustment (Najibzadegan et al., 2024; Nezamalmolki et al., 2024). Furthermore, emotional dysregulation and irrational beliefs may negatively influence marital commitment, emotional intimacy, and interpersonal functioning in remarried women (Abaie & Bagheri, 2024; Vakilian et al., 2024). Consequently, therapeutic interventions that promote emotional acceptance, psychological flexibility, and adaptive relational functioning may be particularly beneficial for women in second marriages.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is considered one of the third-wave cognitive-behavioral therapies emphasizing psychological flexibility, mindfulness, emotional acceptance, cognitive defusion, and value-oriented behavior. ACT aims to reduce experiential avoidance and enhance individuals' capacity to engage in meaningful and adaptive behaviors despite unpleasant thoughts and emotions. Instead of attempting to eliminate distressing emotions, ACT encourages individuals to develop acceptance toward internal experiences while committing to behaviors aligned with personal values and relational goals (Sobhani et al., 2021; Yousefpouri et al., 2024). Psychological flexibility, which represents the central therapeutic mechanism of ACT, enables individuals to respond adaptively to emotional challenges and interpersonal stressors. Within marital relationships, increased psychological flexibility may facilitate emotional openness, empathy, constructive communication, and emotional intimacy between spouses.

Several studies have supported the effectiveness of ACT in improving various dimensions of marital functioning and psychological well-being among couples. Sobhani et al. reported that ACT significantly improved forgiveness and reduced fear of intimacy among couples experiencing marital conflict (Sobhani et al., 2021). Similarly, Karimi et

al. found that ACT reduced alexithymia among women affected by infidelity, suggesting that ACT may improve emotional awareness and emotional expression in distressed relational contexts (Karimi et al., 2023). Yousefpouri et al. also demonstrated that acceptance and commitment-based couples therapy significantly improved emotional regulation and reduced favorable attitudes toward marital infidelity among married women (Yousefpouri et al., 2024). These findings suggest that ACT may strengthen adaptive emotional processing and relational functioning in women experiencing interpersonal difficulties.

Research examining interventions targeting intimacy and relational functioning has also demonstrated promising outcomes for emotion-focused and integrative therapeutic approaches. Torani and Fard showed that emotion-focused couple therapy improved intimacy, marital adjustment, and forgiveness among couples with histories of extramarital affairs (Torani & Fard, 2024). Likewise, Nezamalmolki et al. reported that both emotion-focused couple therapy and integrative couple therapy significantly improved marital intimacy and sexual functioning among women affected by marital infidelity (Nezamalmolki et al., 2023, 2024). Najibzadegan et al. further demonstrated that ACT improved intimacy and marital forgiveness while reducing marital burnout among women affected by extramarital relationships (Najibzadegan et al., 2024). These studies collectively emphasize the importance of therapeutic interventions aimed at increasing emotional acceptance, empathy, forgiveness, and relational flexibility in couples experiencing emotional distress and relational instability.

The significance of emotional intimacy extends beyond marital satisfaction and includes broader dimensions of psychological and emotional health. Studies have shown that intimacy and supportive relational functioning are associated with improved emotional resilience, reduced stress, and better psychological adaptation during life crises and health-related challenges (Heath et al., 2025). In addition, psychological security and emotional intimacy among women have been linked to improved marital commitment and relational stability (Tavaloli et al., 2022; Vakilian et al., 2024). Emotional closeness within intimate relationships may also reduce fears associated with abandonment, loneliness, and relational uncertainty, which are particularly salient among individuals entering second marriages after divorce or relational trauma (Nyarko, 2023; Ossai & Chujor, 2023). Therefore, enhancing emotional intimacy may represent a protective factor promoting

relational adjustment and psychological well-being among remarried women.

Although previous studies have examined the effectiveness of various therapeutic interventions on marital intimacy, forgiveness, emotional regulation, and relational functioning, limited research has specifically focused on women in second marriages. Women entering remarriage often face distinct emotional and interpersonal challenges that may not be adequately addressed through general marital interventions. Furthermore, cultural expectations, irrational beliefs, gender-related norms, and unresolved emotional experiences may contribute to increased vulnerability to marital inhibition and emotional disconnection among remarried women (Abaie & Bagheri, 2024; Lakshmanan et al., 2023). Despite growing evidence regarding the effectiveness of ACT in improving relational functioning, insufficient attention has been devoted to its effects on marital inhibition and emotional intimacy specifically among women in second marriages. Given the increasing prevalence of remarriage and the importance of promoting healthy relational functioning in this population, further investigation in this area appears necessary.

Additionally, previous literature has highlighted the role of maladaptive emotional coping strategies, experiential avoidance, and cognitive rigidity in the maintenance of marital dysfunction and emotional distancing among couples (Poorhejazi et al., 2021; Sobhani et al., 2021). ACT may provide an effective framework for addressing these maladaptive processes through mindfulness-based awareness, emotional acceptance, values clarification, and committed action. By increasing emotional awareness and reducing defensive interpersonal patterns, ACT may facilitate healthier communication patterns and greater emotional intimacy among women in second marriages. Moreover, improving psychological flexibility may help reduce controlling and restrictive marital behaviors that interfere with relational satisfaction and emotional closeness.

Considering the psychological vulnerabilities associated with remarriage, the importance of emotional intimacy in marital stability, and the therapeutic potential of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in improving interpersonal functioning, the present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on marital inhibition and emotional intimacy among women in second marriages.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a quasi-experimental research design using a pretest-posttest format with a control group. The statistical population of the study consisted of women in second marriages who referred to counseling centers in Tehran in 2026. The sampling method was convenience sampling, and through this method, 28 participants were selected from the statistical population as the study sample and were randomly assigned to the experimental group (14 participants) and the control group (14 participants). Data were collected using the Marital Inhibition Questionnaire and the Emotional Intimacy Questionnaire. Subsequently, participants in the experimental group received Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for 8 weeks in weekly 90-minute treatment sessions, whereas the control group did not receive any specific intervention.

2.2. Measures

The Spouse Controlling Behaviors Scale was developed by Graham-Kevan and Archer (2005) to assess controlling behaviors within marital relationships. This instrument consists of 24 items examining spouses' controlling behaviors in marital life and is designed in such a way that individuals can report both their own controlling behaviors and those of their spouses. In this scale, respondents indicate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4 the extent to which they and their spouses engage in each of the specified behaviors. The scale includes five components (or six components when child-related items are considered), including critical control, threatening control, intimidation-based control, emotional control, and isolation-based control. Higher scores on this scale indicate greater use of controlling behaviors, whereas lower scores indicate less use of such behaviors. The reliability coefficients of the test were reported as 0.66, 0.59, and 0.70, and the overall internal consistency was also reported to be satisfactory (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005). In Iran, the reliability coefficients obtained through split-half and Cronbach's alpha methods were reported as 0.65 and 0.66, respectively (Moshak, 2006). Internal consistency has also been reported as satisfactory (Abbasi Asil, 2004).

The Personal Assessment of Intimacy Questionnaire was developed by Schaefer and Olson (1981). This questionnaire is a 36-item instrument that measures intimacy across six

dimensions: conventional, social, intellectual, emotional, sexual, and recreational intimacy, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). In the present study, the emotional intimacy subscale was used. Higher scores on this questionnaire indicate greater intimacy. Schaefer and Olson (1981) estimated the reliability of the questionnaire subscales using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.77. Walker and Thompson (1983) also reported reliability coefficients ranging from 0.91 to 0.97 using Cronbach’s alpha. Furthermore, (Thanai, 2000) reported a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.86 for this measure.

2.3. Interventions

The intervention was conducted based on the principles and techniques of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) over eight weekly sessions, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. The therapeutic process began with establishing therapeutic rapport, introducing group rules, and familiarizing participants with the concepts of psychological flexibility, experiential avoidance, and emotional acceptance within marital relationships. In the initial sessions, participants were encouraged to identify ineffective coping strategies, controlling behaviors, and emotional suppression patterns that contributed to marital inhibition and reduced emotional intimacy in their second marriages. Through mindfulness exercises and present-moment awareness techniques, participants learned to observe their thoughts and emotions without judgment and to reduce automatic reactive responses in interpersonal interactions. Cognitive defusion strategies were implemented to help participants separate themselves from maladaptive cognitions, negative self-evaluations, and dysfunctional beliefs regarding intimacy, trust, and emotional vulnerability. In subsequent sessions, emphasis was placed on acceptance-based emotional regulation,

helping participants tolerate distressing emotions associated with prior marital experiences, fear of rejection, insecurity, and relational conflicts without engaging in avoidance or controlling behaviors. Values clarification exercises enabled participants to identify core personal and relational values related to intimacy, mutual respect, emotional expression, and commitment within marital life. Behavioral commitment techniques were then utilized to encourage participants to engage in value-consistent interpersonal behaviors, including open emotional communication, empathic listening, emotional disclosure, and constructive conflict management. Throughout the intervention, experiential exercises, metaphor-based discussions, mindfulness practices, role-playing activities, and homework assignments were incorporated to strengthen psychological flexibility and facilitate the application of therapeutic skills in daily marital interactions. The final sessions focused on consolidating learned skills, preventing relapse into maladaptive behavioral patterns, reinforcing acceptance-oriented coping strategies, and developing individualized plans for maintaining emotional intimacy and reducing marital inhibition following completion of the treatment program.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics through analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27, and the significance level was set at 0.05.

3. Findings and Results

According to Table 1, the mean scores of the marital inhibition and emotional intimacy variables indicate that posttest scores changed compared with pretest scores in the experimental group.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Marital Inhibition and Emotional Intimacy Variables

Variable	N	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD
Marital Inhibition (Experimental)	28	33.42	5.45	20.41	3.32
Marital Inhibition (Control)	28	35.78	5.68	32.67	4.37
Emotional Intimacy (Experimental)	28	61.35	7.78	78.74	8.79
Emotional Intimacy (Control)	28	63.78	7.52	62.37	7.65

The normality test indicated that in all cases, the significance values obtained were greater than 0.05.

Therefore, there was no reason to reject the null hypothesis regarding the normal distribution of the data. In other words,

the distribution of the research data was normal, and parametric tests could therefore be conducted.

Table 2

Results of Analysis of Covariance for the Marital Inhibition Variable

Source	Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Group	Marital Inhibition	863.68	1	863.68	9.412	0.061	0.148

Based on the findings presented in Table 2 and the calculated significance value, the mean scores of respondents in the two groups differed, and with 95%

confidence, it can be concluded that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy had a significant effect on marital inhibition among women in second marriages.

Table 3

Results of Analysis of Covariance for the Emotional Intimacy Variable

Source	Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Group	Emotional Intimacy	424.697	1	424.697	13.845	0.068	0.193

Based on the findings presented in Table 3 and the calculated significance value, the mean scores of respondents in the two groups differed, and with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy had a significant effect on emotional intimacy among women in second marriages.

emotional insecurity, and defensive interpersonal patterns developed during prior marital experiences. These emotional experiences may manifest through controlling, suppressive, or emotionally restrictive behaviors intended to protect individuals from perceived emotional threats. ACT encourages individuals to accept unpleasant emotional experiences rather than avoiding or controlling them, thereby reducing maladaptive defensive responses within intimate relationships. Through mindfulness and cognitive defusion techniques, participants likely became more capable of observing distressing thoughts and emotions without automatically reacting through controlling or restrictive behaviors. This process may have contributed to the significant decline in marital inhibition identified in the posttest phase.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on marital inhibition and emotional intimacy among women in second marriages. The findings demonstrated that ACT significantly reduced marital inhibition and increased emotional intimacy in the experimental group compared with the control group. These findings indicate that ACT can effectively improve interpersonal functioning, emotional openness, and adaptive relational patterns among women who have experienced remarriage. The observed changes suggest that psychological flexibility, emotional acceptance, mindfulness, and value-oriented behavioral commitment, which constitute the core components of ACT, may play an important role in reducing restrictive marital behaviors and strengthening emotional closeness within remarital relationships.

The findings related to marital inhibition are consistent with previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of ACT in improving maladaptive interpersonal and emotional processes among couples experiencing relational distress. Sobhani et al. reported that ACT significantly reduced fear of intimacy and improved forgiveness among couples with marital conflict (Sobhani et al., 2021). Fear of intimacy and marital inhibition share common psychological mechanisms, including emotional defensiveness, avoidance of vulnerability, and interpersonal rigidity. Therefore, the reduction of experiential avoidance through ACT may explain improvements in both domains. Similarly, Karimi et al. demonstrated that ACT effectively reduced alexithymia among women affected by infidelity (Karimi et al., 2023). Since alexithymia involves difficulty identifying and

The reduction in marital inhibition observed in the present study may be explained through the central mechanisms of ACT, particularly the reduction of experiential avoidance and cognitive fusion. Women in second marriages frequently enter subsequent relationships carrying unresolved emotional wounds, fears of betrayal,

expressing emotions, improvements in emotional awareness and emotional processing through ACT may reduce the need for restrictive or controlling relational behaviors. The findings of Yousefpouri et al. further support the present results, as they found that acceptance and commitment-based couples therapy improved emotional regulation among married women (Yousefpouri et al., 2024). Improved emotional regulation may reduce impulsive and defensive interpersonal reactions, thereby decreasing marital inhibition.

Another explanation for the reduction in marital inhibition involves the role of ACT in increasing psychological flexibility and promoting adaptive value-oriented behaviors. Women in second marriages may develop rigid cognitive schemas related to mistrust, rejection, abandonment, or emotional vulnerability following prior relational failures. These rigid schemas can lead to controlling interpersonal behaviors aimed at minimizing uncertainty and emotional risk. ACT helps individuals recognize these thoughts as transient internal experiences rather than objective truths requiring behavioral control. By encouraging commitment to relational values such as intimacy, empathy, respect, and emotional authenticity, ACT may facilitate healthier interactional patterns and reduce maladaptive controlling behaviors. This interpretation aligns with findings by Najibzadegan et al., who reported that ACT improved marital intimacy and forgiveness while reducing marital burnout among women affected by extramarital relationships (Najibzadegan et al., 2024). Increased psychological flexibility likely allowed participants in the present study to replace restrictive marital behaviors with more adaptive and emotionally supportive relational responses.

The present findings also demonstrated that ACT significantly increased emotional intimacy among women in second marriages. Emotional intimacy is one of the most important indicators of marital quality and relational satisfaction because it involves emotional disclosure, mutual trust, empathy, emotional support, and psychological security between spouses. Women entering second marriages often experience fear of emotional vulnerability due to previous relational disappointments and emotional trauma. Consequently, they may avoid emotional openness and emotional dependence in an effort to protect themselves from further emotional pain. ACT appears to facilitate emotional intimacy by helping individuals develop greater acceptance of emotional vulnerability and by encouraging mindful engagement within intimate relationships. By

reducing experiential avoidance and increasing present-moment awareness, participants likely became more emotionally available and capable of authentic emotional communication with their spouses.

The findings regarding emotional intimacy are consistent with several previous studies examining therapeutic interventions targeting relational functioning. Torani and Fard found that emotion-focused couple therapy significantly improved intimacy and marital adjustment among couples with histories of extramarital affairs (Torani & Fard, 2024). Similarly, Nezamalmolki et al. reported that both emotion-focused and integrative couple therapies improved marital intimacy among women affected by marital infidelity (Nezamalmolki et al., 2023, 2024). These findings collectively suggest that interventions promoting emotional awareness, acceptance, and adaptive emotional expression can effectively strengthen intimacy within distressed marital relationships. Although the theoretical orientation of ACT differs from emotion-focused approaches, both interventions emphasize emotional processing, emotional acceptance, and authentic interpersonal engagement, which likely contributed to similar therapeutic outcomes.

The present findings are also supported by studies emphasizing the role of emotional intimacy in marital commitment and relational well-being. Vakilian et al. demonstrated that emotional intimacy significantly predicts marital commitment among married women (Vakilian et al., 2024). Similarly, Tavaloli et al. found that marriage enrichment training improved marital intimacy and psychological security among women (Tavaloli et al., 2022). These studies suggest that emotional intimacy functions as a foundational component of relational stability and emotional well-being. ACT may improve emotional intimacy by increasing participants' willingness to experience emotional closeness despite fears associated with rejection or emotional dependence. Through mindfulness exercises and values clarification, participants may have learned to engage more authentically and compassionately within their marital relationships, thereby strengthening emotional connection and mutual understanding.

The effectiveness of ACT in improving emotional intimacy may also be explained through its influence on emotional regulation and communication processes. Emotional intimacy requires the capacity to identify, express, and regulate emotions constructively within interpersonal relationships. Women in second marriages may struggle with emotional suppression or emotional

dysregulation because of unresolved emotional experiences from previous relationships. ACT interventions encourage nonjudgmental emotional awareness and acceptance, which may enhance emotional communication and reduce defensive interpersonal reactions. This explanation is supported by the findings of Yousefpouri et al., who observed improvements in emotional regulation following acceptance and commitment-based couples therapy (Yousefpouri et al., 2024). Enhanced emotional regulation may facilitate greater empathy, emotional responsiveness, and relational openness, thereby improving emotional intimacy.

In addition, the present findings may be interpreted within the broader context of relational stress and remarriage dynamics. Previous studies have shown that remarried couples frequently experience emotional and economic stressors that negatively affect intimacy and marital functioning (Jackson et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2023). Emotional insecurity, unresolved relational trauma, and fears of relational instability may interfere with emotional closeness in second marriages. ACT may reduce the psychological impact of these stressors by increasing individuals' resilience, emotional flexibility, and ability to engage in value-consistent relational behaviors despite ongoing challenges. The findings of Heath et al. regarding changes in relationship dynamics during stressful life conditions further support the importance of adaptive emotional coping within intimate relationships (Heath et al., 2025). Psychological flexibility cultivated through ACT may therefore function as a protective factor enhancing relational adjustment in remarried women.

The findings of the present study also support theoretical perspectives emphasizing the role of irrational beliefs and maladaptive cognitive schemas in relational dysfunction. Abaie and Bagheri reported that irrational beliefs influence remarriage-related attitudes and interpersonal functioning among divorced individuals (Abaie & Bagheri, 2024). ACT does not directly attempt to eliminate irrational thoughts; rather, it changes individuals' relationships with their thoughts through cognitive defusion and acceptance. Consequently, participants may have become less behaviorally influenced by maladaptive beliefs regarding mistrust, vulnerability, or relational insecurity, thereby improving both emotional intimacy and marital functioning. Furthermore, social and cultural expectations related to gender roles and marital dynamics may contribute to submissive or controlling behaviors within marriages (Kumar et al., 2022; Lakshmanan et al., 2023). ACT may

help women respond more flexibly to these pressures by promoting self-awareness, value-based action, and emotional authenticity.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the present findings indicate that ACT represents an effective psychological intervention for improving emotional intimacy and reducing marital inhibition among women in second marriages. The intervention appears to operate through multiple interconnected mechanisms, including increased psychological flexibility, reduced experiential avoidance, enhanced emotional regulation, improved emotional awareness, and greater commitment to relational values. These therapeutic processes may help remarried women overcome defensive interpersonal patterns, establish healthier emotional communication, and develop more satisfying and emotionally secure marital relationships.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

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 remarried women. In addition, the participants were selected using convenience sampling from counseling centers in Tehran, which may limit the representativeness of the sample. Another limitation was the reliance on self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and subjective perceptions. Furthermore, the absence of a follow-up phase prevented the examination of the long-term stability of the therapeutic outcomes. Differences in cultural background, duration of remarriage, previous marital experiences, and socioeconomic conditions were also not controlled in the present study and may have influenced the findings.

Future studies are recommended to examine the long-term effectiveness of ACT on marital functioning through longitudinal follow-up assessments. Researchers may also compare ACT with other therapeutic approaches such as emotion-focused therapy, schema therapy, and integrative couple therapy among remarried populations. Investigating the moderating role of variables such as attachment style, psychological resilience, personality traits, duration of remarriage, and history of marital trauma may provide a deeper understanding of therapeutic outcomes. Future research could also include larger and more culturally diverse samples and examine both spouses simultaneously

to evaluate mutual interpersonal changes within remarital relationships.

The findings of the present study suggest that ACT-based interventions may be practically useful in counseling centers, family therapy clinics, and remarriage support programs. Mental health professionals working with remarried women may incorporate ACT techniques to improve emotional intimacy, reduce controlling interpersonal behaviors, and strengthen adaptive relational functioning. Educational workshops focusing on mindfulness, emotional acceptance, communication skills, and psychological flexibility may also help remarried couples establish healthier and more emotionally supportive relationships. In addition, premarital and remarital counseling programs may benefit from integrating ACT principles to help individuals address unresolved emotional experiences and develop more adaptive coping strategies within intimate relationships.

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.

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