



# Comparison of the effectiveness of emotion-oriented couple therapy and structural couple therapy on marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies in conflicting couples

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## Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of emotion-oriented couple therapy and compare it with structural couple therapy on marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies in conflicting couples. **Method:** The present study was a quasi-experimental with pre-test and post-test with a two-month control and follow-up group; The statistical population of the present study was 205 couples referring to counseling centers in Shiraz in the last six months of 1399. After screening with the Sanai Marital Conflict Questionnaire (2008), 60 couples who received more than 150 points from the cut-off point were selected by available means. They answered the Marital Justice Questionnaire and Relationship Strategies (Stafford, Dinton and Haas, 2000) and in the experimental group of emotion-focused couple therapy (10 couples), the experimental group of structural couple therapy (10 couples) and the control group (10 couples) were randomly replaced. Both experimental groups underwent Johnson (2004) emotion-focused couple therapy and Minochin (1974) structural couple therapy intervention for eight 90-minute sessions, and the control group did not receive any intervention. Data were analyzed using repeated measures mixed variance analysis. **Results:** The results showed that emotion-oriented couple therapy ( $F = 8.97$  and  $P = 0.005$ ) and structural couple therapy ( $F = 10.04$  and  $P = 0.003$ ) on increasing marital justice and emotion-oriented couple therapy ( $F = 59$  and  $P = 0.001$ ) and structural couple therapy ( $F = 19.29$  and  $P = 0.001$ ) are effective in maintaining relationship strategies in conflicting couples and this effect was stable in the follow-up phase; The results of post hoc test also showed that the difference between the two groups of emotion-oriented couple therapy and structural couple therapy in marital justice variables and strategies for maintaining the relationship is not significant. **Conclusion:** The results of the research suggest evidence that the intervention of emotion-oriented couple therapy and structural couple therapy is a suitable method for increasing marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies in spouses suffering from marital conflict. **Keywords:** Marital conflict, emotion-oriented, structural, marital justice, relationship maintenance strategies.

## Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1980s, researchers have identified relationship maintainers as one of the factors of relationship growth (Egulowski & Bowers, 2012). Relationship maintenance strategies are defined as actions and activities used to maintain the relationship (Dennis et al., 2017). The main goal of the emotion-oriented approach is to help couples to identify and express their needs and feelings and change marital conflicts to marital intimacy, and its focus is on the emotional dimension (Johnson & Denton, 2002). Emotions play a key role in couples' relationships and therefore it is necessary to pay special attention to them. Weib et al. (2017) believe that emotion-oriented couple therapy is more effective than other approaches due to its structure and having a step-by-step treatment plan for couples, and the likelihood of relapse is much lower. In the first stage, this therapy assesses the couples' communication style and after the defenses are revealed, it reveals this style to the couple and specifies its consequences; For this reason, couples gradually manage to recognize the suppressed and hidden emotions that perpetuate this negative cycle of communication. According to what was said, the emotion-oriented couple therapy approach, which is a structured and short-term approach, has a wide application in solving the emotional and emotional problems of couples.

On the other hand, in families with marital conflict and cold emotional relationships, communication has several levels. What is asked of a person openly on one level, is negated or flawed on another level, and the person is in a bottleneck or a dead end. The only way to respond to such communication is to rebuild communication structures (Moradi, 2017). In the meantime, the approach of structural family therapy seeks to create a sense of worth in individuals and families and brings about the necessary changes by making the family flexible. Reduction of family relations, triangulation in the family and imbalance in the hierarchy of power are the causes of conflict and marital dissatisfaction. Therefore, structural family therapy tries to increase balance in the family by addressing these factors and using restructuring. Various studies show that the root of many disorders should be found in the existing interactions in the family system.

Considering that according to the researcher's investigations, no research was found that compares the effectiveness of these two approaches on marital justice and strategies for maintaining marital relationship. Therefore, based on the research findings and literature and the importance of further scientific investigation, this research was conducted with the aim of determining the effectiveness of emotion-oriented couple therapy and comparing it with structural couple therapy on marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies in conflicted couples to test the following questions.

1. Is there a significant difference between the effectiveness of emotional couple therapy and structural couple therapy on marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies in conflicted couples?
2. Is emotion-oriented couple therapy effective on marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies in the post-test phase and does this effect remain stable in the follow-up phase?
3. Is structural couple therapy effective on marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies in the post-test phase and does this effect remain stable in the follow-up phase?

## Method

This study was conducted with a qualitative method and thematic analysis method. The sampling method was purposeful and up to the point of saturation, so that 20 maladjustment couples were selected based on the entry and exit criteria and were interviewed. The research tool was semi-structured in-depth interview.

## Results

The mean and standard deviation of the age of the couples participating in the experimental group of emotional couple therapy is 34.18 (2.27) years; The mean and standard deviation of the age of the couples of the participants of the structural couple therapy test group is 34.88 (2.47); The mean and standard deviation of the age of control group couples is 34.44 (2.31) years.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is not significant for all research variables in all groups; Therefore, it can be concluded that the distribution of variables is normal. The findings showed that Levene's f-statistic to check the homogeneity of the variance of the variables in the research groups for the dependent variables (marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies) is not significant. These findings show that the variance of these variables is homogeneous in the groups. M-box test was used to check the homogeneity of the covariance matrix of the dependent variables in the groups. The findings showed that the F statistic of the M. Box test in the variable of marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies is not significant ( $F=1.57$ ,  $P>0.05$ ) and ( $F=1.57$ ,  $P>0.05$ ) respectively; Therefore, it can be concluded that the covariance matrix of dependent variables is equal in three groups. Bartlett's chi-square test was used to check the assumption of sphericity or the significance of the relationship between variables. The findings showed that Bartlett's chi square statistic was also not significant; Therefore, there is a significant relationship between the research variables.

The intervention of emotion-oriented couple therapy was effective on the score of marital justice ( $P = 0.005$ ) with an effect size of 0.20 and relationship maintenance strategies ( $P = 0.001$ ) with an effect size of 0.63. Structural couple therapy intervention has been effective on marital justice score ( $P = 0.003$ ) with an effect size of 0.21 and relationship maintenance strategies ( $P = 0.001$ ) with an effect size of 0.34.

The difference in marital justice ( $P=0.001$ ) and relationship maintenance strategies ( $P=0.001$ ) in the post-test and follow-up stages compared to the pre-test is significant and this effect remained stable until the follow-up stage. While in the control group, these differences are not significant ( $P=0.54$ ).

Comparing the effect of two intervention approaches on dependent variables shows that the difference between the two groups of emotion-oriented couple therapy and structural couple therapy in the variables of marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies is not significant ( $P=0.05$ ); Therefore, there is no difference in the effect of emotion-oriented couple therapy intervention and structural couple therapy on marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies.

## Conclusion

The therapist observes the cyclical emotion in the attachment structure and clarifies and reflects on the behavior of each spouse that originates from the lack of relationship maintenance skills (such as getting angry, nagging, protesting and feeling desperate and distancing). It is suggested that the training of these treatment methods be included in the list of couple therapy and family therapy training

programs so that therapists can treat the problems of conflicted couples and families according to these approaches. Regarding the limitations of the research regarding the measurement of variables with non-native tools based on western culture, he pointed out that it can affect the results of this research; For this purpose, it is suggested to compile and standardize a questionnaire about marital justice and relationship maintenance strategies based on the culture of our country.

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