



The effectiveness of the combination of schema therapy and imago therapy on personal growth and couples' communication instability

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Abstract

Aim: Marriage can be stable or unstable according to various factors, including interpersonal problems of the couple. The aim of the research was to determine the effectiveness of the premarital counseling package training based on the integration of schema therapy and imago therapy approaches on the treatment of interpersonal problems of couples on the verge of marriage. Research method: **Method:** The research was a semi-experimental method with a pre-test, post-test and two-month follow-up plan with the control group. The statistical population consisted of boys and girls on the verge of marriage who referred to Rah Farda Counseling Center in Tehran in 2021, and twenty couples were selected by random sampling. Then they were randomly divided into two groups consisting of 10 test pairs and 10 control pairs. For both groups, pre-test, post-test and follow-up were performed. Interpersonal problems questionnaire (Hurwitz et al., 1989) was used. The counseling package was conducted in eight ninety-minute sessions twice a week only for the experimental group. Data analysis was done using repeated measures analysis of variance and LSD post hoc test in SPSS version 22 software. The significance level of statistical tests was considered 0.05. **Results:** The results showed that the main effect of time ($p = 0.006$), the main effect of group ($p = 0.001$) and the interaction effect of time and group ($p = 0.001$) were significant on the variable of interpersonal problems. In the experimental group, the average pre-test scores of the couple's interpersonal problems variable were significantly higher than the average scores of the post-test ($p = 0.015$) and follow-up ($p = 0.024$). In addition, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the mentioned variable between the post-test and follow-up stages ($p = 0.228$), which means that the effect of the intervention of trainings is lasting over time in the experimental group. **Conclusion:** Based on the results, pre-marriage counseling package based on the integration of approaches and concepts of schema therapy and imago therapy is effective in reducing the interpersonal problems of couples on the eve of marriage. **Keywords:** Pre-marital counseling package, Interpersonal problems, Couples on the verge of marriage.

Introduction

Mental health and learning interpersonal problem-solving skills are among the factors that affect a stable marriage. When a person is psychologically healthy in such a way that he understands himself and his desires, motivations, emotions and desires (self-awareness), taking into account health, he guides and guides a person to self-acceptance, healthy communication with others, removing disabilities in the field of intimacy and closeness with others, accepting responsibility for affairs and decisiveness. Interpersonal relationships play a decisive role in many areas of life.

Long-term marriage and cohabitation, the amount of interaction and friction increases due to the existence of some problems and conflicts, and people are exposed to various disturbances that may affect their quality of life and attitude. These interpersonal problems show a level of couples' inability to form a successful life, and failure to manage couples' interpersonal problems is an inability to manage the family foundation as a more important foundation in society. Interpersonal problems exist in six areas: responsibility, intimacy, obedience, people-orientedness, decisiveness, and restraint. Each of these six fields has an important role in interpersonal communication;

Attachment schemas are deep and comprehensive patterns consisting of memory, emotion and cognition and are formed in childhood and adolescence and continue in adulthood. Schemas are structures that are formed based on reality or experience and influence people's behavioral responses as mediators. The goal of the treatment is that instead of maladaptive coping styles, patients use coping styles that are more compatible with the user, so that they can satisfy their basic emotional needs. It is also important to note that the degree of differentiation of couples is related to interpersonal problems.

Bowen (1987) believes that the mental health of each person is strongly influenced by his family of origin. According to Boen, in his view, he does not negate the emphasis on thinking and emotions and acknowledges the importance of metacognition in the process of differentiation, which is the main goal of the concept of self-distinction. According to this view, a person who has reached a balanced distinct self in his family experiences a lower level of anxiety and psychological symptoms. In order to have a differentiated self, a person must have the ability to remain under the pressure of group factors, especially in the face of the strong effect of the same person's family life. Differentiation is achieved when a person can maintain his individuality and at the same time try to remain a part of the family unit; This means that a person has the ability to maintain emotional connection with others and still not lose his true integrity.

In this research, without emphasizing a specific method or approach, by combining schema therapy and imagotherapy approaches, in the training course, the concepts of schema therapy and imagotherapy were taught to couples in the experimental group. The purpose of the current research was for couples to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of marriage so that this training course can act as a driving force to improve the quality of marriage. Therefore, the present study sought to answer the following question:

Does the pre-marriage counseling package with the integrated approach of schema therapy and imagotherapy have an effect on the treatment of interpersonal problems of couples on the eve of marriage?

Method

The present study was a semi-experimental study with a pre-test, post-test and follow-up design with a control group. The statistical population of the research was made up of all the couples on the verge of marriage who referred to Rah Farda Counseling Center in Tehran in 2021. Among the volunteers referred to Rah Farda Counseling Center, the subjects were selected by available sampling method and randomly assigned to the control group and the experimental group. The sample subjects were 20 couples on the verge of marriage, the experimental group was 10 couples and the control group was 10 couples. The criteria for entering the samples into the research were: people's satisfaction with participating in this research; people on the verge of marriage; being in the pre-marriage phase; age range from 18 to 40 years; having an education level higher than a diploma; Their first marriage should be within the normal range of the society in terms of economic-social-cultural conditions; So that there is no problem for them to participate in training sessions. The exclusion criteria included absenteeism from training sessions (two consecutive sessions), not wanting to continue the treatment, not filling out the questionnaires completely, and the death of one of the couples. Regarding ethical considerations, before the start of the training course, the subjects were informed about the course process so that they would be aware of the research objectives. In general, the points related to research ethics, including trustworthiness in the use of sources, accuracy in citation, observance of ethical values in data collection, lack of bias in data analysis, and respect for the privacy of the research community were applied by the researchers.

Results

According to the demographic findings in each of the groups of this research (experimental and control), ten people were women and ten were men. Also, the mean and standard deviation of the subjects' age in the experimental group was 24.5 ± 4.77 years and in the control group it was 25.2 ± 5.92 years. Considering that Shapir and Wilk's test statistic (0.65) was not significant in the scores of couples' interpersonal problems ($p=0.52$), the assumption of normality of data distribution was confirmed. The results of the Ambox test showed that the covariance matrices observed between the groups were equal ($p > 0.05$). The results of the Lune test indicated that there was no significant difference between the variance of the interpersonal problems scores of couples on the verge of marriage ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, with intra-subject comparisons for interactive effects, the homogeneity of the error covariance matrix in the data was accepted and the results of the multivariate analysis of variance were interpretable; Therefore, to analyze the research data, it was possible to use the statistical method of analysis of variance with repeated measurements.

The average scores of the pre-test of the interpersonal problems of the couples on the eve of marriage of the experimental group and the control group were almost the same; But in the post-test stages and follow-up of interpersonal problems of couples on the eve of marriage, the average scores of the experimental group were lower than the average scores of the control group.

The main effect of time ($p=0.006$), the main effect of group ($p=0.001$) and the interaction effect of time and group ($p=0.001$) on interpersonal problems variable were statistically significant. The significance of the interaction between group and time showed the existence of a variable difference of interpersonal problems in the measurement times between the two groups ($p=0.001$). The main effect size of the group was 0.28, which indicated that 28% of the changes in the interpersonal problems variable were due to the effect of the premarital counseling package training intervention.

The results of the post-test LSD indicated that in the experimental group, the average pre-test scores of the interpersonal problems variable of couples were significantly higher than the average scores of the post-test ($p=0.015$) and follow-up ($p=0.024$). Also, no significant difference was observed between the average scores of the mentioned variable between the post-test and follow-up stages ($p=0.228$), which means that the effect of the intervention is lasting over time in the experimental group.

Conclusion

Based on the results, pre-marriage counseling package based on the integration of approaches and concepts of schema therapy and imagotherapy is effective in reducing the interpersonal problems of couples on the eve of marriage.

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