



# The effectiveness of positive psychology on self-compassion and gratitude among couples with marital conflicts

Pendar. Jahed Ataeian<sup>1</sup>  
*Hassan. Shams Esfandabad*<sup>2\*</sup>  
Abdul Hassan. Farhangi<sup>3</sup>

1. Psychology PhD Student, Zahedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran.
2. \*Corresponding author: Associate professor, Department of psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, North Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Email: hshams1333@gmail.com | Received: 08.10.2022 | Acceptance: 11.07.2023

*Journal of Applied Family Therapy*

eISSN: 2717-2430  
<http://Aftj.ir>

Vol. 4, No. 2, Pp: 367-380  
Summer 2023

## Original research article

### How to Cite This Article:

Jahed Ataeian, P., Shams Esfandabad, H., & Farhangi, A. (2023). The effectiveness of positive psychology on self-compassion and gratitude among couples with marital conflicts. *Aftj*, 4(2): 367-380.



© 2023 by the authors. Licensee Iranian Association of Women's Studies, Tehran, Iran. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

### Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of this research was the effectiveness of positive psychology on self-compassion and gratitude among couples with marital conflicts. **Method:** This research was practical in terms of purpose, and in terms of data collection, it was semi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of the research included couples with marital problems in Tehran who had referred to Tehran counseling centers (Tara Clinic Branches 1 and 2 and Behjo Clinic) in 2022 (184 couples), among them 30 couples with the condition of having the conditions of the research. and willingness to participate in the research were selected and randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group and 15 couples in each group. Rashid and Seligman's protocol including 10 sessions of 90 minutes (2013) was used for positive psychology therapeutic interventions. The research tools included the Neff Self-Deprecation Questionnaire (2003) and the McCliffe Appreciation Questionnaire (2002). The data was analyzed using analysis of covariance using SPSS-V26 software. **Results:** The findings showed that in the post-test stage, there is a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group ( $P < 0.001$ ) and the intervention method can be effective on the self-compassion ( $F = 32.14, P < 0.001$ ) and gratitude ( $F = 7.64, P < 0.001$ ) of the couples involved. **Conclusion:** According to the results of the research, it can be stated that positive psychology as an effective treatment method can be used to improve, self-compassion and gratitude and consequently reduce the marital problems of couples, and it is recommended to psychologists and couple therapy specialists to use this treatment method for Use to improve relationships between couples.

**Keywords:** *Self-Compassion, Gratitude, Positive Psychology.*

## Introduction

Marital relationship is one of the most important social relationships for most adults. More than 80% of people over the age of 25 have experienced married life for at least part of their adult life (Wang & Parker, 2014). Conflict is inevitable in intimate relationships, and family relationships have the most conditions for interpersonal conflicts (Hatami & Fadaei, 2015). The increase in marital conflicts and divorce and its negative impact on the mental health of couples, children and society have prompted researchers to seek solutions to strengthen the family institution (Mohammadi & Soleimani, 2017). Marriage is one of the deepest and most complex factors of communication among humans (Hatami & Fadaei, 2015), and the family is an environment where the intellectual, emotional and physical needs of people are met. Failure to meet these needs leads to conflict in couples; Therefore, awareness of biological and psychological needs and how to satisfy them is important (Mohammadi et al., 2020).

There are several conceptualizations of self-compassion (Riz, 2011). According to Neff and Germer (2009), self-compassion, the ability to accept oneself in times of suffering and hardship is one of the internal resources that can affect the coping process. The existing knowledge in the field of self-compassion is due to the researches of Neff and his colleagues. Self-compassion has been defined as a three-component construct including self-kindness versus self-judgment, human commonality versus isolation, and mindfulness versus extreme identification (Neff & Germer, 2013).

Qadrani is another variable that strengthens relationships between people, including relationships between couples. Most definitions of gratitude focus on the perception that a person has received something positive from a benefactor who has positive intentions. Such a definition presents gratitude as a structure that has considerations in relationships between couples. In fact, gratitude is thought to be a moral motivator that helps people form close social bonds (Algue, Heidt, & Gable, 2008). Research has shown that gratitude has many positive effects on people's mental health and stabilizes and strengthens a person's relationships with others. Feeling and expressing gratitude in couples increases the stability of the relationship and reduces conflict in marital conflicts.

Past research investigated the effectiveness of schema therapy in some psychological factors such as resilience, infidelity, intimacy among couples with marital conflicts, and also investigated the effectiveness of positive psychology on marital adjustment, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. However, a study comparing the effectiveness of positive psychology on self-compassion and gratitude among engaged couples has not been conducted so far. According to the above-mentioned contents, the purpose of this research is to compare the effectiveness of positive psychology on self-esteem and gratitude among engaged couples. The current research sought to answer the following questions:

1. Was the effectiveness of positive psychology effective on self-compassion and gratitude among engaged couples in the post-test phase?
2. Was the effectiveness of positive psychology on self-compassion and gratitude among engaged couples stable at the follow-up stage?

## Method

This research was practical in terms of purpose, and in terms of data collection, it was semi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of the research included couples with marital problems in Tehran who had referred to Tehran counseling centers (Tara Clinic Branches 1 and 2 and Behjo Clinic) in 2022 (184 couples), among them 30 couples with the condition of having the conditions of the research. and willingness to participate in the research were selected and randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group and 15 couples in each group. Rashid and Seligman's protocol including 10 sessions of 90 minutes (2013) was used for positive psychology therapeutic interventions. The research tools included the Neff Self-Deprecation Questionnaire (2003) and the McCliffe Appreciation Questionnaire (2002). The data was analyzed using analysis of covariance using SPSS-V26 software.

## Results

The results of Shapiro-Wilk and Klomogrov-Smirnov index showed that the distribution of data related to both variables in the groups is normal. Also, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was also maintained among the data of this research. The condition of homogeneity of variances was also checked using Levene's statistic and the assumption of sphericity (equal variance of the difference of all pairs of repeated measurements) by performing the Mauchly test. If the Mauchly statistic becomes significant, the adjusted degrees of freedom of Greenhouse-Geisser, and if the Mauchly statistic is not significant, the adjusted degrees of freedom of Spricity are used as the basis of the F report.

He reported the results of Levene's statistic, which indicates the non-significance of this statistic ( $P > 0.05$ ), which is a sign of confirming the condition of homogeneity of variances. The value of F for gratitude and self-pity was 32.14 and 7.64, respectively. The significance level for both cases is 0.001, which is significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, at the 99% confidence level, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the mean of gratitude and self-compassion at different times. The effect size of the test was obtained for both variables in the provided treatment, respectively, 0.53 and 0.42, which is a favorable value.

Bonferroni test is the significant difference between positive treatment group and control group. In this way, the mean difference in the positive treatment with the control group for the variables of gratitude and self-compassion had a positive coefficient (that is, the treatment by increasing the mean score improved the condition of people in these two variables).

## Conclusion

According to the results of the research, it is suggested that such psychological interventions (especially positive psychology) be used as effective methods to improve couples' relationships. It is suggested to investigate the role of various variables, whether the variables used in this research or other influencing variables in the life of couples. Therefore, it may be possible to reduce the prevalence of emotional separations and divorces, which cause problems not only to parents, but also to their children and ultimately to society. This intervention can be done by therapists and experts in the field of counseling and mental health in educational centers, organizations, health care institutions and other relevant environments.

### References

- Algoe, S B., Haidt, J., & Gable SLJE. (2008). Beyond reciprocity: *Gratitude and relationships in everyday life*. *Emotion*, 8(3),425-9.
- Amini, S., Namdari, K., & Kooshki, H. M. (2016). The effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on happiness and gratitude of female students. *International Journal of Educational and Psychological Researches*, 2(3), 163.170.
- Arabzadeh, M., Pirsaghi, F., Kausian, J., Amani, K., & Abdollahpour, Y. (2017). Investigating the structural relationship between basic psychological needs and mental well-being with mental health in the elderly. *Gerontology*, 2(2), 1-10. (In Persian)
- Asgharipoor, N., Farid, A. A., Arshadi, H., & Sahebi, A. (2012). A comparative study on the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy and group cognitive-behavioral therapy for the patients suffering from major depressive disorder. *Iranian journal of psychiatry and behavioral sciences*, 6(2), 33-43.
- Bakhsipour, B. (2020). The effectiveness of schema therapy with positive approach in social relations and marital satisfaction of couples. Master's Thesis, Payam Noor University, Mazandaran Province, Sari Branch. (In Persian)
- Delavar, A. (2017). Research method in psychology and educational sciences. Tehran: Virayesh. (In Persian)
- Dreisoerner, A., Junker, N. M., & Van Dick, R. (2021). The relationship among the components of self-compassion: A pilot study using a compassionate writing intervention to enhance self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22(1), 21-47.
- Hatami, M., & Fadaei, M. (2015). The effectiveness of schema therapy in intimacy schemas, marital conflicts and primary incompatible schemas of women applying for divorce. *international. Journal of Advanced Biological and Biomedical Research*, 3(3), 285-290. (In Persian)
- Hoseinzade Z, Ghorbanshirodi S, Khalatbari J, Rahmani M. (2021). The comparison of the effectiveness of emotionally focused couples therapy and reality therapy for couples on marital communication beliefs and marital expectations of couples. *Journal of Assessment and Research in Applied Counseling*. 3(2), 1-13. doi:[10.52547/jarcp.3.2.1](https://doi.org/10.52547/jarcp.3.2.1)
- Janbozorgi, F., Darbani, S. A., & Parsakia, K. (2020). The structural model of predicting family health based on communication patterns and self-efficacy with the mediating role of self-compassion in women. *Journal of Psychology of woman*. 1(3), 66-80.
- Karakasidou, E. & Stalikas, A. (2017) The Effectiveness of a Pilot Self-Compassion Program on Well Being Components. *Psychology*, 8, 538-549.
- Keshavarz Mohammadi, R., Agha Bozorgi, S., Shariat, S., & Hamidi, M. (2018). The effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on mental endurance, self-compassion and resilience of infertile women. *Journal of Social Behavior and Community Health*, 2(2), 235-244.
- Lashani, Z., Shoairi, M. R., & Panahi Talkhestani, S. (2014). Validity and reliability of the Persian version of gratitude scale in non-clinical samples. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Quarterly*. 3 (12): 38-52. (In Persian)
- McCullough, M. E., Tsang, J. A., & Emmons, R. A. (2004). Gratitude in intermediate affective terrain: links of grateful moods to individual differences and daily emotional experience. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 86(2), 295.

- Mohammadi, B., & Soleimani, A. A. (2017). Early maladaptive schemas and marital satisfaction as predictors of marital commitment. *International Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 11(1), 16-22. (In Persian)
- Mohammadi, S., Hafezi, F., Ehtshamzadeh, P., Eftekhar Saadi, Z., & Bakhtiarpour, S. (2020). The effect of schema therapy on the sexual self-esteem of women involved in marital conflicts. *Women's Health Bulletin*, 7(2), 49-55. (In Persian)
- Neff, K. D. (2003). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2 (3), 223-250.
- Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). A pilot study and randomized controlled trial of the mindful self-compassion program. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 69(1), 28-44.
- Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2008). The cultivation of character strengths. In *Teaching for wisdom*. Springer, 2(1), 59-77.
- Raes, F. (2011). *The Effect Of Self Compassion On The Development Of Depression Symptoms In A Nonclinical Sample*. *Mindfulness*, 11(2), 33- 36.
- Panahi, M., Jamarani, S. K., Shahrababaki, M. E., & Rostami, M. (2017). Effectiveness of integrative behavioral couple therapy on reducing marital burnout and fear in couples of intimacy. *Journal of applied psychology*, 11(3), 43.
- Rashid, T., & Seligman, M. E. (2013). *Positive psychotherapy*. In D. wedding & R. J. Corsini (Eds.), *Current Psychotherapies* (PP. 461-498). Belmont, CA: cengage
- Rostami, M., Saadati, N., & Abdi, M. (2017). Relationship between childhood abuse and self-compassion with stress- coping strategies in women. *Journal of Research and Health*; 7(4): 962 - 970.
- Seyed Brahimi, S. A., & Yazdakhasi, A. (2022). The effect of positivity group training on psychological well-being and marital satisfaction of women. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(2), 33-50. (In Persian)
- Shahbazi, M., Rajabi, Gh., Magi, E., & Jalodari, A. (2015). The confirmatory factor structure of the Persian version of the revised self-compassion rating scale in a group of prisoners. *Psychological Methods and Models Quarterly*. 6(19), 31-46. (In Persian)
- Trom, P., & Burke, J. (2022). Positive psychology intervention (PPI) coaching: An experimental application of coaching to improve the effectiveness of a gratitude intervention. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 15(1), 131–142.
- Walsh, S., Cassidy, M., & Priebe, S. (2017). The application of positive psychotherapy in mental health care: A systematic review. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 73(6), 638-651
- Wang, W., & Parker, K. (2014). *Record share of Americans have never married*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project.