

# Comparison of the Effectiveness of Dialectical Behavior Therapy and Emotion-Focused Therapy on Communication Patterns and Marital Intimacy in Marital Infidelity Among Women

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) on communication patterns and marital intimacy in cases of marital infidelity among women in the city of Isfahan.

**Methods and Materials:** The research method was quasi-experimental, utilizing a pretest-posttest design with control and experimental groups. The statistical population of this study included all women with experiences of marital infidelity who sought counseling in the city of Isfahan in 2023. The sample consisted of 45 women with experiences of marital infidelity who sought counseling services in Isfahan, selected through convenience sampling and randomly assigned to two experimental groups—DBT and EFT—and one control group. Data were collected using the Marital Infidelity Questionnaire by Yenisey and Kokdemir (2006), the Communication Patterns Questionnaire by Christensen and Salovey (1984), the Marital Intimacy Questionnaire by Bagarozzy (2001), and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire by Gross and John (2003). Data analysis was conducted using univariate and multivariate analysis of covariance.

**Findings:** The results indicated that both Emotion-Focused Therapy and Dialectical Behavior Therapy were effective in improving communication patterns and marital intimacy among women. Furthermore, the findings revealed that Emotion-Focused Couples Therapy had a greater impact than Dialectical Behavior Therapy on improving these variables.

**Conclusion:** Based on the findings, both EFT and DBT can be utilized as effective, cost-efficient, and practical approaches with wide applicability in improving and repairing couple relationships.

**Keywords:** Marital Intimacy, Communication Patterns, Emotion-Focused Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy.

## 1. Introduction

One of the main reasons for divorce is marital infidelity, which is recognized as a significant threat to trust in marital relationships (Fife et al., 2020; Fife et al., 2013). Marital infidelity refers to any sexual or emotional relationship outside the committed framework between two spouses. According to a general definition, marital infidelity is a breach of the dyadic relationship commitment, leading to degrees of emotional and physical intimacy with someone outside the relationship. Clinical observations indicate that marital infidelity, like an interpersonal trauma, damages the fundamental beliefs of the affected individual regarding themselves, their spouse, and the relationship (Ghezelsefloo et al., 2023; S. Navabinejad et al., 2024; Shaghaghi et al., 2021). Psychotherapists report that spouses who have been betrayed often experience intense emotional trauma, hopelessness, loss of self-trust, loss of identity, feelings of worthlessness, feelings of rejection and abandonment, and cognitive disturbances such as severe rumination, difficulty concentrating, and impaired daily functioning (Laquet, 2015).

One of the interpersonal factors influencing marital satisfaction and preventing marital infidelity is the communication patterns between spouses. Good communication plays a crucial role in ensuring security in a marriage. The way spouses communicate is always based on a specific pattern, referred to as marital communication patterns, which are coping strategies couples use in conflict situations (Mortezavi et al., 2022). The communication patterns between spouses can be categorized into three types: 1) Mutual Constructive Pattern: The most important feature of this pattern is that the communication between the spouses is of a win-win nature. In this pattern, couples use possible solutions to resolve conflicts, act logically, and engage in problem-solving. Additionally, in this pattern, spouses express their feelings towards each other and feel understood. 2) Demand/Withdrawal Pattern: In this pattern, one spouse attempts to engage in communication and blames the other, while the other spouse withdraws. The intensification of this pattern leads to persistent marital problems. Couples whose communication pattern is primarily demand/withdrawal lose their marital satisfaction over time and are drawn towards divorce. 3) Mutual Avoidance Pattern: In this pattern, the conflict between the spouses is intense, and they avoid communicating with each other. Their lives run parallel to each other, and their communication is minimal. In this pattern, couples do not

have a specific method for resolving their conflicts and believe that time will solve them, avoiding any particular discussion. These couples experience more dissatisfaction and are at greater risk, as they may not be able to resolve conflicts effectively in challenging situations (Abagheri Meyari et al., 2024). Overall, research shows that the happiest couples are those who do not avoid conflicts. Undoubtedly, constructive communication patterns lead to greater marital satisfaction, whereas destructive communication patterns, such as avoidance and withdrawal, decrease satisfaction levels (Amini et al., 2023; Arindra et al., 2023).

Intimacy is a crucial component of a passionate and dynamic marriage. Two family and marriage researchers, Olson and Schaefer (1981), describe achieving intimacy as a long-term process that never ends or is never fully completed. Stahmann, Young, and Grover (2004) believe that all humans have a fundamental and basic need to be intimate and close with another person, although the concept of intimacy may differ for men and women. But what exactly does intimacy mean? Since intimacy encompasses numerous elements, defining it is somewhat challenging, and there is no general consensus on a single definition. However, common elements are observed in the various definitions (Shokouh Navabinejad et al., 2024; Parsakia et al., 2023).

Experts in extramarital relationships state that treating marital infidelity differs from other marital issues and requires special attention to therapeutic strategies. Among the models proposed for treating marital infidelity, Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) can be mentioned. This therapy has been introduced as a structural-experiential approach in contemporary psychotherapy practices. The central issue in Emotion-Focused Therapy is that emotion is an essential part of an individual's structure and a key factor in self-organization. The most basic function of emotion is an adaptive and flexible form of information processing and preparation, which directs behavior and contributes to psychological well-being (Imanzadeh, 2021).

Another therapeutic approach that has garnered considerable attention from researchers in the field of increasing marital satisfaction is Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) (DeCou et al., 2019). This therapeutic approach simultaneously focuses on acceptance and change; in other words, it combines client-centered acceptance and empathy with cognitive-behavioral problem-solving and social skills training. Research has examined and confirmed the effectiveness of DBT on variables such as regulating negative emotions (depression, anxiety, stress, anger,

emotional stability) (Kleiber et al., 2017; Zamani et al., 2015). Studies indicate the significant effectiveness of therapy and emotional regulation on marital dissatisfaction, infidelity, and emotional dysfunction in couples (Barzegaran et al., 2021).

Given the increasing number of couples seeking counseling at family therapy centers due to marital discord and the rising rate of marital infidelity, the necessity of implementing interventions such as Emotion-Focused Therapy and Dialectical Behavior Therapy to reduce tension and the incidence of marital infidelity in this group becomes evident (Imanirad et al., 2021). Therefore, considering the importance of this issue, the main research question is whether Dialectical Behavior Therapy and Emotion-Focused Therapy are effective on communication patterns and marital intimacy in individuals with marital infidelity, and what differences exist between them?

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This applied research is of a quasi-experimental design, with a pretest-posttest and follow-up, along with a control group. The statistical population of this study includes all women with experiences of marital infidelity who sought counseling services in Isfahan during the three months of summer 2023. The sample consisted of 45 women with experiences of marital infidelity who were selected through convenience sampling and randomly assigned to two experimental groups (DBT and EFT) and one control group. In this study, considering the existence of two experimental groups and one control group, as well as three time points (pretest, posttest), Cohen's sample size tables based on the F ratio were used to determine the sample size and assign individuals to each group. In this study, 45 participants (15 in each group) were selected as the research sample and assigned to the experimental and control groups. The inclusion criteria were as follows: having at least a high school diploma, being within the age range of 25-40 years, having been married for at least two years, willingness of the spouses to participate in the study, and having experienced marital infidelity according to a clinical interview. The exclusion criteria included the following: having chronic psychological or physical disorders based on a clinical interview, absence from more than two sessions, withdrawal and discontinuation of therapy sessions, and simultaneous participation in other therapy sessions.

To conduct the study, participants meeting the inclusion criteria were first selected, and then the relevant questionnaires, which served as the primary tools for data collection, were administered. Before the administration, written approval from relevant authorities and an ethics code were obtained to comply with governing laws and regulations and to ensure cooperation from counseling centers in conducting therapy sessions and distributing questionnaires among participants. Participants were then randomly assigned to three groups: two experimental groups (15 participants each) and one control group (15 participants), and they completed the questionnaires. One of the experimental groups received Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) training in eight 90-minute sessions, while the other experimental group received Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) training in ten 90-minute sessions. The control group received no intervention. Afterward, members of all three groups completed the questionnaires again in the posttest phase, and one month later, they completed the questionnaires again for follow-up. This study was conducted by the researcher at a counseling center in Isfahan during the summer of 2023.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Marital Infidelity Tendency

The Marital Infidelity Questionnaire, designed by Yenisey and Kokdemir in 2006, is used to assess emotional and sexual infidelity. This questionnaire includes 24 items that measure six components: legitimacy, seduction, normalization, sexual tendencies, social context, and sensation-seeking. These components are measured through questions based on a Likert scale. For example, the item "Being in a romantic relationship where the spouse does not show affection and intimacy" assesses tendencies towards marital infidelity. The reliability of this tool was reported with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .73 to .84 in the study by Yenisey and Kokdemir (2006). In the study by Karimi et al. (2019), the reliability of this questionnaire for the Iranian population was estimated to be above .70, with the components showing coefficients ranging from .51 to .80. The validity of this questionnaire was also confirmed in terms of content, face, and criterion validity in the study by Karimi et al (Imanirad et al., 2021).

### 2.2.2. *Communication Patterns*

The Communication Patterns Questionnaire, developed by Christensen and Salovey in 1984 at the University of California, consists of 35 items that assess couples' behaviors in three stages of marital conflict: when a problem arises, during a discussion, and after it. This questionnaire includes three subscales: mutual constructive communication, mutual avoidance communication, and demand/withdrawal communication. The latter subscale is further divided into two sections: male demand/female withdrawal and female demand/male withdrawal. The internal consistency of this questionnaire was confirmed by Lee and Johansson (2018) with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .69 to .84. In Iran, Ebdatpour (2000) normalized this questionnaire, reporting correlation coefficients for the various subscales ranging from .35 to .58.

### 2.2.3. *Marital Intimacy*

The Bagarozzi Marital Intimacy Questionnaire consists of 41 items and is designed to assess eight different dimensions of marital intimacy. These dimensions include emotional, psychological, intellectual, sexual, physical, spiritual, aesthetic, and social-recreational intimacy. Each item is rated on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I do not have this need) to 10 (I strongly have this need). The questionnaire assigns a score between 1 and 10 for each dimension, with a total score ranging from 41 to 410, indicating the level of marital intimacy. Bagarozzi (2001) confirmed the convergent validity of this questionnaire with a correlation coefficient of .62 in a study of 110 couples in Atlanta, and its reliability was reported with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .94. In a study of 60 young couples in South Korea, Oh and Hwang (2018) reported a correlation of .50. In Iran, Kardan Souraki et al. (2019) confirmed the construct validity of this questionnaire and reported a reliability of .91 using Cronbach's alpha (Amini et al., 2023).

## 2.3. *Interventions*

### 2.3.1. *Dialectical Behavior Therapy*

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a structured therapeutic approach designed to help individuals develop skills to manage emotions, improve interpersonal relationships, and reduce impulsive behaviors. This intervention is divided into eight sessions, each with specific goals and activities. The sessions focus on teaching mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and

effective communication skills, aiming to enhance participants' ability to navigate challenging emotional and relational situations (DeCou et al., 2019; Kleiber et al., 2017; Mortezaei et al., 2022; Zamani et al., 2015).

#### Session 1: Introduction to Dialectics

The first session introduces the participants to the concept of dialectics, the structure of the therapy sessions, and the goals of DBT. Participants get acquainted with each other and the therapist, and the session outlines the expectations, rules, and the importance of attendance. The session also includes a discussion on the definition of dialectics and an introduction to DBT, laying the foundation for subsequent sessions.

#### Session 2: Mindfulness Skills

This session focuses on teaching mindfulness skills, which involve concentrating on the present moment and separating thoughts from emotions and physical sensations. Participants learn about the three states of mind: reasonable mind, emotional mind, and wise mind. The session also covers the difference between description and judgment, transforming judgments into conflicts, and the "what" (observe, describe, participate) and "how" (non-judgmental stance, mindfulness, effective action) skills of mindfulness.

#### Session 3: Distress Tolerance Skills - Part 1

In this session, participants are introduced to distress tolerance skills, which help them manage crises without worsening the situation. Techniques include redirecting attention, self-soothing, visualizing a safe place, practicing mindful breathing, and understanding how to stop worsening situations. The session also addresses preventing impulsive behaviors and managing harmful urges.

#### Session 4: Distress Tolerance Skills - Part 2

Building on the previous session, this session emphasizes living in the moment and developing a relaxation plan. Participants learn to cope with stress using self-encouraging thoughts and affirmations. The session reinforces the importance of staying grounded in the present and using positive coping strategies during stressful situations.

#### Session 5: Emotion Regulation Skills - Part 1

This session introduces emotion regulation skills, including recognizing and accepting emotions, reducing vulnerability to negative emotions, and balancing thoughts and feelings. Participants learn strategies to increase positive emotions, practice self-acceptance, and enhance awareness of self and others. The session also explores the role of anger in relationships and its management.

#### Session 6: Emotion Regulation Skills - Part 2

Continuing from the previous session, this session addresses overcoming barriers to healthy emotions, reducing physical vulnerability to disruptive emotions, and observing emotions without judgment. Participants learn how to confront emotions, act contrary to intense emotional urges, and further increase positive emotions, deepening their understanding and control over their emotional experiences.

#### Session 7: Effective Communication Skills - Part 1

In this session, participants learn effective communication skills, such as assertive listening, saying no, and handling resistance and conflict. The session covers techniques for validating a spouse, understanding their problems and mistakes, and using verbal and non-verbal affirmation. Participants practice clearly expressing their feelings, identifying desires, and avoiding extreme communication patterns.

#### Session 8: Effective Communication Skills - Part 2

The final session focuses on negotiation and resolving interpersonal problems. Participants learn how to use conflict positively, turning it into an opportunity for intimacy. The session includes techniques for problem management, defining issues, analyzing problems, practicing skills learned throughout the therapy, and concluding the intervention with a summary.

### 2.3.2. *Emotion-Focused Therapy*

Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) is an experiential therapy designed to help couples identify, express, and regulate emotions to enhance emotional bonding and relationship satisfaction. This intervention is divided into ten sessions, grouped into three phases: identification, change, and consolidation. EFT aims to create a secure emotional attachment between partners by exploring and addressing underlying emotional issues (Amini et al., 2023; Imanirad et al., 2021).

#### Step 1: Identification Phase

##### Session 1: Initial Assessment and Concept Introduction

The first session serves as an introduction to the couple and the therapist, assessing their motivation and expectations. The session introduces the core concepts of EFT, including marital intimacy, emotional regulation, and communication patterns. The therapist identifies problematic interactions, assesses how the couple handles conflicts, and explores barriers to attachment and emotional engagement. Homework involves focusing on pleasant (joy, happiness) and unpleasant (anger, sadness) emotions.

##### Session 2: Individual Sessions

Separate sessions are conducted with each spouse to uncover significant events and information that may not be revealed in the presence of the partner. These sessions evaluate the level of commitment to the marriage, assess extramarital relationships, explore personal attachment traumas, and gauge their fears of revealing secrets. Homework involves observing daily interaction patterns.

#### Session 3: Identifying Interaction Patterns

This session focuses on identifying established interaction patterns, including accepted emotions and uncovering attachment insecurities and fears. The therapist helps the couple become more open and self-disclosing, continuing the therapy's attachment process. Homework involves identifying specific emotions and pure feelings.

#### Step 2: Change Phase

##### Session 4: Rebuilding Bonds

In this session, the therapist clarifies key emotional responses and expands each partner's emotional experience in the relationship, introducing new elements. The couple is guided to recognize and accept their negative interaction cycle and reconsider their relationship dynamics. Homework involves expressing pure emotions and feelings without additional context.

#### Session 5: Deepening Emotional Engagement

This session aims to deepen the couple's emotional engagement by increasing awareness of attachment needs and enhancing personal connections through emotional experiences. The focus is on improving both intrapsychic and interactional conditions. Homework involves expressing pure emotions and feelings without additional context.

#### Session 6: Expanding Self-Concept in Relationships

Participants learn to broaden their self-concept in relation to others, aligning the therapist's framing with the client's experience. The session deepens the couple's emotional engagement, encouraging them to focus on self-improvement rather than other-blame. Homework includes identifying underlying fears and expressing desires and aspirations.

#### Session 7: Activation and Rebuilding

This session involves restructuring interactions and altering events to engage the couple more deeply with each other. The session clarifies the couple's desires and aspirations, focusing on rebuilding their relationship. Homework involves identifying strengths and weaknesses and practicing relational exercises.

#### Step 3: Consolidation Phase

##### Session 8: Developing New Solutions

The session focuses on finding new solutions for old problems by restructuring interactions and changing harmful spousal behaviors. The goal is to create harmony between self-perception and the relationship, overcoming barriers to positive reactions. Homework involves discovering new solutions for recurring discussions and issues.

**Session 9: Applying Therapeutic Gains in Daily Life**

This session emphasizes applying the therapeutic gains in daily life, maintaining emotional engagement, and staying aligned with the therapy's goals. The couple works on integrating new, constructive interaction patterns, fostering secure attachment, and building a positive narrative about their relationship. Homework involves practicing techniques in everyday settings.

**Session 10: Closure**

The final session facilitates the closure of therapy, focusing on maintaining the changes made during therapy and identifying differences between the initial negative interaction patterns and the current state. The session emphasizes sustaining emotional engagement to continue strengthening the bond between the couple.

**2.4. Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to examine the data and analyze the results of this study. To compare pretest and posttest scores and to test the research hypotheses, inferential statistics such as MANCOVA (multivariate analysis of covariance) and Bonferroni post hoc test were used. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26 software.

**3. Findings and Results**

The mean (standard deviation) age in the Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) group was 34.51 (4.32), in the Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) group was 32.14 (3.44), and in the control group was 33.68 (1.34). The results of the chi-square test indicate no significant differences in age distribution across the three groups. Additionally, the results of one-way ANOVA did not show any significant differences in the mean age among the three groups. Therefore, it can be stated that these three groups are nearly homogeneous in terms of education and age variables. Descriptive indices related to the research variables in the control and experimental groups were calculated, and the results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics Related to the Research Variables in Control and Experimental Groups*

Variable	Stage	Control M (SD)	Experimental M (SD)
Communication Patterns	Pre-test	142.50 (5.67)	89.10 (4.28)
	Post-test	145.69 (4.72)	128.56 (3.99)
Marital Intimacy	Pre-test	132.41 (3.30)	78.13 (15.50)
	Post-test	138.38 (2.36)	122.55 (12.38)

To examine the assumption of sphericity or the equality of variances across different levels of the research variables, Mauchly's test was used. The results showed that Mauchly's W statistic for the emotional control variable (0.767) was not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ); thus, the assumption of sphericity for this variable is met. Similarly, based on the above table's results, it can be stated that Mauchly's W statistic for the communication patterns variable (0.698) was not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ); therefore, the assumption of sphericity for this

variable is met. Additionally, Mauchly's W statistic for the marital intimacy variable (0.515) was not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ); thus, the assumption of sphericity for this variable is met. To examine the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, Box's M test was used. The results showed that according to this test, the assumption of homogeneity of covariance matrices for the variables of emotional control, communication patterns, and marital intimacy is met ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Table 2**

*Results of Repeated Measures ANOVA for Examining Group Differences Across Pre-test, Post-test, and Follow-up*

Variable	Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P	Partial Eta Squared
Communication Patterns	Time	912.24	2	456.12	15.83	0.003	0.663
	Time * Group	3349.96	2	1674.98	190.54	0.001	0.704
	Groups	2454.24	4	613.56	75.63	0.02	0.594
Marital Intimacy	Time	798.02	2	399.01	9.10	0.001	0.516
	Time * Group	2997.50	2	1498.75	168.38	0.000	0.718
	Groups	2156.304	4	539.076	81.72	0.002	0.667

Table 2 presents the results of the repeated measures ANOVA for examining the differences among the research groups across the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages for the communication patterns variable. As shown in Table 6, the interaction effect of stages and groups on communication patterns is significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). This finding indicates that the experimental and control groups significantly differ in communication patterns across the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages ( $P < 0.05$ ). Additionally, the results of the simple mixed ANOVA showed that the main effect of the within-group factor on communication patterns is significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the results indicate that communication patterns improved over time, regardless of the group. Furthermore, the main effect of the between-group factor on communication patterns is also significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). Thus, the results show that there is a difference between the studied groups regarding communication

patterns ( $P < 0.05$ ). The repeated measures ANOVA results for examining the differences among the research groups across the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages for the marital intimacy variable are also reported. The interaction effect of stages and groups on marital intimacy is significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). This finding indicates that the experimental and control groups significantly differ in marital intimacy across the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages ( $P < 0.05$ ). Additionally, the results of the simple mixed ANOVA showed that the main effect of the within-group factor on marital intimacy is significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the results indicate that marital intimacy improved over time, regardless of the group. The main effect of the between-group factor on marital intimacy is also significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). Thus, the results show that there is a difference between the studied groups regarding marital intimacy ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Table 3**

*Results of Pairwise Comparisons Based on Bonferroni Adjustment for Communication Patterns Across Three Stages by Study Groups*

Variable	Stages	DBT Mean Difference	P	EFT Mean Difference	P	Control Mean Difference	P
Communication Patterns	Pre-test to Post-test	29.11	0.000	13.52	0.001	0.57	0.99
	Follow-up	29	0.02	14	0.02	2	0.67
	Post-test to Follow-up	0.54	0.92	4.11	0.67	1.80	0.81
	Follow-up	20.41	0.003	15.64	0.003	3.12	0.99
	Post-test to Follow-up	-0.19	0.93	3.49	0.39	0.74	0.99

The results of the Bonferroni adjustment test showed that there is a significant difference in the communication patterns variable between the pre-test and post-test stages in the EFT and DBT groups. The mean scores of

communication patterns in the post-test stage significantly decreased compared to the pre-test stage, and this decrease continued until the follow-up stage.

**Table 4**

*Results of Pairwise Comparisons Based on Bonferroni Adjustment for Marital Intimacy Across Three Stages by Study Groups*

Variable	Stages	DBT Mean Difference	P	EFT Mean Difference	P	Control Mean Difference	P
Marital Intimacy	Pre-test to Post-test	32.56	0.001	17.65	0.001	0.73	0.312
	Follow-up	29	0.03	14	0.000	2	0.119
	Post-test to Follow-up	0.94	0.53	4.59	0.21	1.52	0.83
	Follow-up	34.76	0.001	15.94	0.001	4.61	0.77
	Post-test to Follow-up	-0.22	0.78	5.94	0.48	0.99	0.81

The results of the Bonferroni adjustment test showed that there is a significant difference in the marital intimacy variable between the pre-test and post-test stages in the EFT and DBT groups. The mean scores of marital intimacy in the post-test stage significantly decreased compared to the pre-test stage, and this decrease continued until the follow-up stage.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) positively impacts improving communication patterns in individuals with marital infidelity. These findings align with the results of prior studies (Amighi et al., 2023; DeCou et al., 2019; Katz & Korslund, 2020; Kleiber et al., 2017; Mortezaei et al., 2022; Nazari & Aghajani, 2021; Safa Kermanshahi et al., 2021; Sheikh Hadi et al., 2017; Wilks et al., 2016; Zamani et al., 2015). This can be explained by the fact that in DBT sessions, couples practice skills such as effective communication, expressing desires, and making simple requests, which appear to have significantly reduced communication problems among couples. Similarly, Wilkes et al. observed that DBT influenced interpersonal and social communication among women with emotional regulation disorders. In line with this, Ameri and Shafiei found a significant positive relationship between emotional divorce and ineffective communication patterns. In fact, during DBT sessions, couples practice effective communication skills, expressing desires, and making simple requests, which seems to have significantly reduced communication problems among couples.

The results also indicated that DBT significantly improves marital intimacy in individuals with marital infidelity. These findings are consistent with the results of prior researchers (Nazari & Aghajani, 2021; Safa Kermanshahi et al., 2021).

Based on research findings, it can be stated that DBT begins with evaluating marital compatibility processes, enabling participants to develop a better understanding of reshaping their relationship with their spouse. This cognitive

change is considered a significant factor in managing interpersonal conflicts and combating negative thoughts in couples' relationships. This intervention leads to changes in cognitive aspects, beliefs, and attitudes, enhancing marital intimacy (Nazari & Aghajani, 2021). DBT also teaches individuals skills that make them feel better, enabling them to manage difficult situations more effectively and overcome marital challenges. Mindfulness exercises, along with other DBT techniques, increase individuals' awareness of the present moment through techniques such as focusing on breathing and the body (Safa Kermanshahi et al., 2021). This awareness enhances resistance to interpersonal problems and stressful events. As a result, DBT improves marital intimacy in women on the brink of divorce. DBT also attempts to highlight the two poles of an action in the process of emotional divorce formation, showing couples how an emotion, thought, or behavior can either improve or destroy a relationship. Through dialectics, DBT shows these two poles along with their consequences to couples and helps them manage conflicts through mindfulness training, emotional control skills, interpersonal communication skills, and distress tolerance, thus increasing interpersonal intimacy.

The results also indicated that Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) significantly improves communication patterns in individuals with marital infidelity. These findings align with the results of prior researchers (Ardakhani & Seadate Shamir, 2022; Holmström, 2023; Hosseinzadeh et al., 2020; KeshavarzAfshar et al., 2014; Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2018).

Expressing hidden emotions plays a crucial role in the process of change in couples during EFT. The fundamental importance of this strategy lies in altering their perceptions and responses to each other. Expressing emotions, particularly verbally, seems to be the primary channel of communication in humans, and from infancy, it is a powerful tool for eliciting attachment behavior. Expressing emotions and feelings in marital relationships also holds this potential. In marital relationships, the spouse plays the role of an attachment figure. Given the above, if marital problems stem



from the inability to express emotions, feelings, and needs in the relationship, creating a positive perspective towards emotional expression can be a significant change process in EFT. Waring and Chilonne also believe that self-expression (expressing emotions and needs) is a crucial factor in determining the level of intimacy between couples. Expressing feelings and needs during therapy leads to increased intimacy and marital satisfaction, and consequently, based on the interpersonal theory of depression, it reduces depression in women. In explaining this finding, it can be said that EFT directs couples' emotions toward their needs. Couples seek a secure base to meet their needs, and this secure space is influenced by their attachment style. In fact, an individual's attachment style determines their communication pattern, and people convey their emotions through their communication pattern. Therefore, when couples experience emotions like anger, they respond to each other with a demanding or avoidant pattern because avoidance is also considered a type of anger according to EFT. A person expresses their anger through avoidance. Thus, it can be concluded that the training factor caused a change in the communication pattern of the experimental group.

EFT is also effective in improving marital intimacy in individuals with marital infidelity. These findings are consistent with the results of prior researchers (Ardakhani & Seadatee Shamir, 2022; Goudarzi et al., 2022; Javidan, 2022; Mohammadi et al., 2022; Nezamalmolki, 2023; Sheydanfar et al., 2020; Teymouri et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the effectiveness of EFT on marital intimacy can be explained by the theoretical foundations of EFT, as discussed by Moore et al. (2016). The change process in the interactive and communicative patterns of couples in EFT is identified by expressing underlying emotions and needs. Such expression leads to a positive interaction cycle characterized by increased emotional availability and responsiveness. In this therapy, deep levels of experience, accepting and bonding responses, are effective factors in the change process. Successful couples in EFT therapy exhibit a higher percentage of bonding and spontaneous responses than unsuccessful couples. Thus, EFT enhances the emotional and emotional relationship between couples, increasing bonding responses and constructive mutual communication patterns.

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

One limitation of this study is that it was conducted only on women, so caution is necessary when generalizing the results to men. Another limitation is the use of questionnaires; therefore, it is recommended that future research use other methods, such as interviews, to obtain more accurate results. Given the small sample size, it is suggested that this method be re-evaluated in larger groups to ensure greater reliability. Future studies should also use multiple follow-up periods over different intervals to better reveal the intervention's stability. Moreover, this study should be conducted on male groups, and the results should be compared with this study. It is also recommended that DBT be implemented in other groups and cities and its effectiveness compared with EFT.

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## 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.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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