



Comparing the effectiveness of reality therapy couple therapy with imago-based couple therapy on improving the quality of life and increasing marital intimacy in women affected by marital infidelity

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ABSTRACT

Background and purpose: One of the most important factors that can disrupt the health of the family is breaking the commitment and exclusiveness of emotional and sexual relationships and creating relationships outside the family, or marital infidelity. The aim of the present study was to compare the effectiveness of reality therapy couple therapy with imago-based couple therapy on improving the quality of life and increasing intimacy in women affected by marital infidelity. **Methods:** The current research was applied research and in terms of the research method, it was a semi-experimental type of pre-test-post-test and follow-up research with a control group. The statistical population of the research was all the couples who were affected by marital infidelity who referred to the educational counseling and psychological services complex of Sabzevar city in 2018-19, out of which there were 21 couples (42 people) by sampling method. were selected as available. The data were obtained using the quality-of-life questionnaire (World Health Organization, 1996) and the marital intimacy scale (Thompson-Walker, 1993). The reality therapy couple therapy protocol (Glaser et al., 2005) was implemented in seven 90-minute sessions on the experimental group, but the control group remained on the waiting list. Analysis of variance with repeated measurements and spss software were used to analyze the data. **Results:** The results showed that there is a difference between the effectiveness of reality therapy couple therapy and imago-based couple therapy on improving quality of life ($P < 0.001$) and increasing marital intimacy ($P < 0.001$) in women affected by infidelity. There is a significant difference in marriage. **Conclusion:** It can be concluded that couple therapy based on reality therapy and couple therapy based on imago was effective in improving the quality of life and increasing marital intimacy in women affected by marital infidelity and this effect continued until the follow-up period.



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Introduction

The family is one of the most important social systems that is formed through marriage and moral and customary commitment, and its maintenance and continuity are essential (Raish & Kalanter, 2018). The stability and strength of this institution are affected by various factors in the intra-personal, interpersonal and environmental dimensions, and one of the most critical factors that can disrupt the health of the family is breaking the commitment and monopoly of emotional and sexual relationships and creating relationships outside the family, i.e., It is marital infidelity (Asadu & Egbuche, 2020). Marital infidelity is considered one of the most important damaging factors for couples and families and a common phenomenon for family and marriage therapists. Cheating includes having sexual relations with a married person of the opposite sex outside of the family framework (Isma & Ternip, 2019).

Re-experiencing personal and sexual intimacy is the most important motivation for married men and women who tend towards illicit relationships and marital infidelity (Altgelt, Reyes, French, Meltzer, & McNulty, 2018); Something they no longer experience in their life together. Studies conducted in America have shown that 21% of men and 11% of women commit adultery during their lifetime. Marital infidelity is the most important reason that leads couples, especially women, to family counseling centers for divorce (Balderrama-Durbin, Stanton, Snyder, Cigrang, Talcott, & et al., 2017).

The quality of life, in the definition given by Weaver (2001; cited by Delvin, Shah, Feng, Mulhern, & Vanhout, 2018) and accepted by many experts, is the perception of each person about one's health status and the level of satisfaction with this situation. In general, the quality of life is determined only by the individual, although the quality of life can be affected by different aspects of a person's life. Life satisfaction is determined by each person's understanding of his current situation, compared to one's expectations, desires, wishes, and ideal situation (Yonousi, Park, Henry, Ademi, & Stepanova, 2016). Rereading the many concepts of quality of life has led to the presentation of a definition by the quality of life group of the World Health Organization (2002). This definition is provided to understand the individual's position in the context of cultural and value systems and concerning their goals,

expectations, standards, and interests. In this view, quality of life is a comprehensive concept that includes physical health, personal growth, psychological states, degree of independence, social relationships, and connection with the environment, which is based on the individual's perception of these dimensions (Duarte, Pinto, Cruz, 2016). In fact, the quality of life includes objective and subjective dimensions that interact with each other. On the other hand, it should be noted that the quality of life is a dynamic concept; Because individual and social values, needs and attitudes may change over time in response to life events and experiences. Also, every quality of life dimension can significantly affect other aspects of life (Oysel et al., 2016).

Considering the complex nature of infidelity and its disastrous effects on couples' relationships, it is necessary to create effective interventions to help couples facing this problem. One of these methods is using couple therapy in the way of reality therapy. Yao, Chen, Chiang, Her, Li, & Zhang, 2017). Reality therapy is a set of theoretical and practical principles proposed in the 1950s by a psychiatrist named Glaser. Reality therapy is a type of psychotherapy that tries to help solve a person's problems by paying attention to reality, responsibility, and right and wrong things in a person's life (Shafiabadi & Nazari, 2018). According to Glaser, the lack of responsibility and satisfaction of the five basic needs (survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun), as well as the existence of the identity of failure, causes depression (Robey, Wubbolding, & Malters, 2017). Another treatment method that seems effective in improving the conditions of women affected by marital infidelity is couple therapy using imago therapy (Shidan et al., 2016). Imago is equivalent to communication imagery. This method emphasizes the unconscious mind and internalized experiences in relationships with the beloved (Bagheri et al., 2019). In imago therapy, training and treatment programs are combined to help couples improve their relationships, and the goal is to align the conscious mind of the person with his unconscious mind, and this method helps people to develop conscious, sincere, and committed relationships. and promote (Gasemzadeh et al., 2021). In general, the imago therapy method is a process that, while giving awareness and information, teaches couples to become aware of the unconscious aspects of their relationships. Instead of superficially solving

their conflicts, they investigate their roots and solve them radically (Hashmi et al., 2021). Therefore, according to the above and the importance of the topic, this research aims to compare the effectiveness of couple therapy based on reality therapy with couple therapy based on imago therapy on improving the quality of life and marital intimacy in women affected by marital infidelity.

Method

The current research was applied research, and in terms of the research method, it was a quasi-experimental type of pre-test-post-test and follow-up research with a control group. The statistical population of the research was all the couples involved with marital infidelity who were referred to the counseling and psychological services complex of Sabzevar city in 2018-2019. A statistical sample was selected from among the people affected by marital infidelity who referred to the educational counseling and psychological services complex in Sabzevar city in 2018-2019 and was selected using available sampling method. The research sample consisted of 21 couples (42 people). Seven couples (14 people) were the control group, seven couples (14 people) were the couple therapy group based on reality therapy, and seven couples (14 people) were the couple therapy group based on imago therapy.

Tools

1- Quality of Life Questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF): World Health Organization Quality of Life Questionnaire 26 questions (WHOQOL-BREF) is a 26-question questionnaire that measures a person's overall quality of life. This inventory was developed in 1996 by a group of experts from WHO by adjusting the items of the 100-question form. This questionnaire has four subscales and one overall score. These subscales include physical health, mental health, social relations, the health of the surrounding environment, and one general score. First of all, a raw score is obtained for each subscale, which

must be converted to a standard score between 0 and 100 through a formula. A higher score indicates a higher quality of life. To check the validity and reliability of this questionnaire, a survey was conducted on 1167 people from Tehran. The participants were divided into two groups with chronic and non-chronic diseases. The test-retest reliability for the subscales was obtained as follows: physical health was 0.77, mental health was 0.77, social relations was 0.75, environmental health was 0.84. Internal consistency was also calculated using Cronbach's alpha, which is shown in the table below (Najat and Hamek Aran, 1385). The reliability of this questionnaire in this research was obtained using Cronbach's alpha of 0.77.

2- Marital Intimacy Inventory (MIS-17): This scale was created by Thompson-Walker and was adjusted to measure the intimacy of couples. The said questionnaire has 17 questions, and the range of items' scores is between 1 (never) and 7 (always), where a higher score is a sign of greater intimacy. This scale has good internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of 0.91 to 0.97. The reliability of this questionnaire in this research was obtained using Cronbach's alpha of 0.79.

3- Reality therapy couple therapy: Reality therapy couple therapy protocol based on Glasser et al.'s (2005) protocol was implemented in seven 90-minute sessions weekly.

4- Imago therapy couple therapy: Imago therapy couple therapy protocol was developed based on Hendrix's (2008) protocol and was implemented in the experimental group in eight 90-minute sessions weekly.

Results

The mean (standard deviation) age of the participants in the experimental group was 39.7 (9.4), and the control group was 36.2 (7.9). Also, the minimum and maximum ages in the experimental group were 30 and 48 years, and in the control group, 31 and 50 years.

Table 1. Central indices and dispersion of research variable scores in two experimental and control groups

Variable	Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Marital Intimacy	Imago therapy	45.05	11.25	56.00	11.01	5.75	11.10
	Reality therapy	47.05	12.78	69.50	12.61	68.30	12.77
	Control	44.45	8.61	44.30	8.63	44.25	8.63
Quality of Life	Imago therapy	59.30	5.66	65.05	5.33	64.20	4.97
	Reality therapy	59.15	5.52	74.45	6.12	73.35	5.74
	Control	55.40	5.04	55.10	5.02	55.00	5.26

Analysis of variance with repeated measures was used to investigate the significance of the difference between the quality of life score and marital intimacy in the experimental and control groups. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test in the variables of the research indicated the confirmation of the normality of the data. The hypothesis of the homogeneity test of Levene variance in the experimental and control groups indicates the equality of the variances of the research variables in the groups in the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages. Also, the porous sphericity test results show that the covariance matrix between the groups is inconsistent, and this assumption is not fulfilled, so the conservative Greenhouse Geysler test should be used.

The results of the analysis of variance of the repeated measurement of several variables among the studied groups in the variables of quality of life and marital intimacy showed that the effect between the subject (group) is significant. This effect means that at least one of the groups agrees with each other in at least one of The variables of quality of life and marital intimacy is different. The within-subject effect (time) was also significant for the research variables, which means that during the time from the pre-test to the follow-up, there was a change in at least one of the average variables; The results show that the analysis of variance is significant for the within-group factor (time) and it is significant between groups. These results mean that considering the group effect, the time effect alone is significant. The interaction of group and time is also significant. Bonferroni's post hoc test was also used for the pairwise comparison of groups.

The results show that marital intimacy and quality of life in both imago therapy and reality therapy groups are higher in the post-test stage than in the pre-test stage compared to the control group ($p < 0.01$). Also, the comparison of the two experimental groups showed that the variable scores of marital intimacy and quality of life in the two groups of imago therapy and reality therapy have significant differences ($P < 0.05$). In this way, reality therapy has had a greater effect than imago therapy in increasing marital intimacy and the quality of life of couples.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of couple therapy based on reality

therapy with couple therapy based on imago therapy on improving the quality of life and increasing intimacy in women affected by marital infidelity. According to the findings, the effect of reality therapy couple therapy is more than that of imago therapy on improving the quality of life and increasing intimacy in women affected by marital infidelity. The results of this research with the results of Barzegar research (2013); Marine (1386); Farah Bakhsh and Ghanbari Hashem Abadi (2015); Mi Young, Kang (2001); Peterson, Chang, and Gulin (1998) concurred.

In explaining this finding, it can be said that the imago therapy approach based on the wounded child theory seeks healing in the treatment process. This approach seeks a sincere and committed relationship that can be achieved based on the idea of mutual healing. In this process, safe conversation and mirroring are important therapeutic exercises and tasks. On the other hand, in its structure, imago therapy deals with the incomplete and denied aspects of people's personalities, and by presenting a realistic picture of love, imago therapy reconstructs the imaginary image of people. It helps people adjust their expectations from their spouse and portray their personality's denied and hidden aspects. Communication imaging is a theory and treatment method for committed partnerships emphasizing the marital relationship (Alipour et al., 2018). Sometimes, at first, one partner does not want to enter the treatment process to be found guilty. Apart from the need for survival, all human beings face a problem in satisfying their other needs, especially the need for power. Under these needs, they apply external control in all aspects of their lives for a long time and enter into a daily campaign during the marriage. To get out of this battle, reality therapy teaches people better ways to cope and that external control is not in the unconscious or in the gene structure of people; Rather, it is a chosen behavior and not a need. In this method, couples learn to choose the choice theory instead of the external control method (Moradi et al., 2019). According to Glasser, failure in marriage results from external control over marital relations. Based on Glaser's reality therapy couple therapy method, the psychology of external control should be transformed into the psychology of internal control so that each couple separately works for their role in reducing marital problems and does not wait for their spouse to establish a good and sincere relationship. Each couple has

requests for which they basically get married, and if he cannot achieve these requests in marriage, he chooses behaviors that destroy intimate relationships and collapse the foundations of marriage. (Farhadi et al., 2020).

The limitations of the research of the statistical population are the study of a special group of the society, that is, the couples involved with marital infidelity in the city of Sabzevar, which makes it difficult to generalize the results to other populations. Participants participated in the experiment voluntarily in the initial selection, so the effect of social desirability may have influenced the results; The use of two methods of couple therapy may create an interference effect of the educational program for the researcher. Considering that this research was conducted on a community of couples involved with marital infidelity, it is also suggested to be conducted in other communities. Accordingly, it is one of the controversial and significant trends in the field of psychology and counseling that has been widely noticed today. In the field of marriage, it is suggested that family and marriage counselors and psychologists use the findings of this research. It is suggested to use imago therapy method for premarital counseling in counseling centers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article have no conflict of interest in conducting and writing it.

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