



## The effectiveness of reality therapy on covert communication aggression and marital tension among women seeking divorce

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION

#### Article type

Original research

Pages: 87-91

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#### Article history:

Received: 2022/05/31

Revised: 2022/09/01

Accepted: 2022/09/15

Published online: 2022/10/02

#### Keywords:

covert communication aggression, covert communication aggression, marital tension, women, divorce.

### ABSTRACT

**Background and Aim:** family is the first and most important social institution and a healthy society depends on having a healthy couple who strive to achieve their goals with a suitable level of marital satisfaction. The purpose of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of reality therapy on hidden communication aggression and marital tension among women applying for divorce in Babol city. **Methods:** The current research was a semi-experimental type with a pre-test-post-test design and follow-up with a control group. Among the women applying for divorce, a sample of 30 people was selected by non-random sampling method and they were replaced in an experimental group (therapy based on acceptance and commitment) and a control group in a simple random manner. (15 people in each group). After evaluating 30 women applying for divorce whose level of hidden communication violence was higher than the cut-off point and who met the necessary conditions, they were identified and then divided into two groups of 15 people, the test and the test. Then, 8 sessions of 90-minute reality therapy (Glaser, 2005) were conducted in the experimental group in person and in compliance with health protocols. Data were collected using Nelson and Carroll's covert communication aggression questionnaire (2006) and the Stockholm marital tension scale of Orth Gomer et al. (2000). Data analysis was done using the statistical test of analysis of variance with repeated measurements and Spss.22 software. **Results:** The results of the research showed that reality therapy is effective on hidden communication aggression ( $P<0.001$ ) and marital tension ( $P<0.001$ ) among women seeking divorce. Also, the results of the follow-up test showed that the effect of reality therapy continued until the follow-up period. **Conclusion:** It can be concluded that reality therapy was effective on covert communication aggression and marital tension among women seeking divorce and this effect continued until the follow-up period.



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#### How to Cite This Article:

Zakariazadeh Khatir, Z. Kh., Fakhiri, M., K., & Heydari, Sh. (2022). The effectiveness of reality therapy on covert communication aggression and marital tension among women seeking divorce. *jayps*, 3(1): 87-91

## Introduction

What is important in marriage is satisfaction from marriage and marital compatibility (Kirimi & Ismaili, 2019). On the other hand, aggressiveness and marital tension can be mentioned as factors affecting family health. Considering the important role of the family and its health, aggression has increased in the last few decades, and many experimental pieces of evidence have shown the destructive effects of anger in human relationships (Verily et al., 2009). What has attracted the attention of researchers to aggressive behavior is its adverse effect on interpersonal behavior and its unpleasant effect on a person's internal and psychological states (Fiorillo et al., 2016). Anger can appear in other forms, such as weakness, unwillingness, and submission. Leaving feelings and life like a walking dead will be equally dangerous for a person, and in a word, it will kill interpersonal relationships; Therefore, according to what was said, the negative social, emotional, and physical results for the victims of violence and those who commit aggressive behavior are very destructive in the behavioral and psychological fields (Hossami, Shahini and Marvouti, 2015). From a psychological point of view, aggression is defined as behavior aimed at hurting, annoying, or harming another person (Hart & Stroh, 2013). In the context of studies related to aggression in couple relationships, in recent years, covert communication aggression has been of interest to researchers (Carroll et al., 2010; Cain et al., 2019), and some researchers have considered insufficient attention and focus on overt aggression. (Benjamin, 2015). Researchers have shown that the aggressive behavior of covert communication, as an influential factor in marriage instability, has a significant effect (Carroll et al., 2010; Khazaei et al., 2017). People often feel significant emotional and emotional experiences due to biological, psychological, emotional, and cognitive conditions and facing a wider social network; one of these common emotional states among them is anger (Ashuri & Jalil Abkanar, 2016). Aggression, which is the external manifestation of anger, is one of the behavioral disorders and problems that may be caused by the unfavorable and unhealthy relationships of individuals or couples and may even continue in their behavior. The consequences of such behaviors have made researchers pay attention to aggression (Halahan, Kaufman, & Pollen, 2015; Malekzadeh et al.,

2016). In family relationships, the existence of conflict or heartache is inevitable. This resentment affects the quality of the relationship, and since the quality of the relationship is a strong predictive factor in marital satisfaction, solving this resentment can effectively improve the quality of the relationship. Forgiveness can be used as a strong and powerful way to end a troubled or painful relationship and provide the conditions for reconciliation with the wronged person; Therefore, it can increase marital satisfaction and reduce conflicts with the departure of one of the parties (Melkzadeh et al., 2016). It is necessary to pay attention to this point from the negative interaction circle that correcting the relationship requires mutual investment, so both parties must make a consistent and specific effort to reach a desirable result. In order to move and achieve correction, each party must have a specific behavior and be stable over a while. The parties should re-examine the rules governing their relationship, resolve and revise the controversial views that led to the violation, clarify the concepts of forgiveness and behavior modification, or specify the consequences of future violations (McCullough, 2001; Fincham et al., 2007). According to the said contents and the effects and consequences that the phenomenon of divorce can have for societies, and also taking into account its increasing trend in our country, it seems necessary to prevent this phenomenon, which can only be done in the shadow of identifying the underlying factors. This phenomenon is possible. The applications of this research for counselors and couple therapists, as well as psychologists in the research field, can use the findings of this research in related populations and variables, and on the other hand, benefit from these therapies in their individual and group therapies and educational interventions.

## Method

The current research was quasi-experimental, with a pre-test-post-test design and follow-up with a control group. Among the women applying for divorce, a sample of 30 people was selected by non-random sampling method and replaced in the experimental and control groups by simple random (15 people in each group). After evaluating 30 women applying for divorce whose level of hidden communication violence was higher than the cut-off point and who met the

necessary conditions, they were identified and then divided into two groups of 15 people, the experimental group and the control group. Then, eight sessions of 90-minute reality therapy (Glasser, 2010) were conducted in the experimental group in person and compliance with health protocols. The entry criteria were couples applying for divorce referring to counseling centers; Diploma and higher education degree; having at least one year of cohabitation; Age between 20 and 50 years; Completing the informed consent agreement to participate in the research project. The exclusion criteria were unwillingness to participate in treatment sessions, suffering from diseases that made it difficult for the subject to attend the meetings, and not receiving psychological treatments at the same time or three months before

### Tools

**1. Covert Relational Aggression Questionnaire (CRAVIs) (2006):** The Covert Relational Aggression Scale was developed by Nelson and Carroll to measure emotional withdrawal and ruined social image in couple relationships. The covert communication aggression scale has 12 questions (each subscale has six items). The Emotional Withdrawal subscale includes questions 1 to 6, and the Social Image Destruction subscale includes questions 7 to 12. This scale is graded by the Likert method according to 1 to 7-grade answers (from very little = 1 to very much = 7). Carroll et al. (2010) Cronbach's alpha coefficient for emotional withdrawal scores for husbands (0.90) and their

wives (0.86) and also Cronbach's alpha for social image for husbands (0.88) and their wives (0.90) reported. Meng (2013) also reported similar results for validating the covert communicative aggression scale. The confirmatory factor analysis results of this research have also shown the construct validity of the original version of the questionnaire.

**2. Stockholm Marital Stress Scale (SMSS):** It was created by Orth Gomer et al. (2000) to measure marital stress. The main scale has 17 questions that are scored as zero and one. The Likert scale is used in the Iranian version. Finally, a 16-question scale form was prepared and scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in the form of five options (very high, high, medium, low, and very low). The score of each subject is determined from 24 (minimum) to 120 maximum. The correlation coefficient of the Stockholm-Tehran marital scale was calculated as 0.78, which was significant at the  $P=0.001$  level. This coefficient is a sign of good test-retest reliability of the marital stress scale. The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained for the Tehran marital scale was 0.91, which indicates the high internal consistency of this test (Shamsipour et al., 1996).

### Results

The mean (standard deviation) age of the experimental group participants was 36.3 (10.1) and the control group was 35.2 (8.9). Also, the minimum and maximum ages in the experimental group were 20 and 50 years, and in the control group, 21 and 50 years.

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

Variable	Control	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Covert communicative aggression	Experimental	40.00	13.03	35.46	11.67	36.40	12.57
	Control	39.26	11.96	39.93	11.39	39.50	12.02
Marital tension	Experimental	18.06	4.43	14.80	3.31	15.13	3.42
	Control	2.60	4.13	21.26	4.00	21.46	3.96

The results of the above table showed that the scores of covert communication aggression and marital tension in the post-test and follow-up stages are significantly different from the pre-test scores; In the following, analysis of variance with repeated measurements was used to investigate the significance of the difference between the score of marital tension and latent communication aggression in the two experimental groups and the control group. The

results of the analysis of variance of the repeated measurement of multiple variables among the studied groups in the variables of hidden communication aggression and marital tension showed that the effect between the subject (group) is significant, and this effectively means that at least one of the groups is related to each other in at least one of the variables of communication aggression. Concealment and marital tension are different. The within-subject

effect (time) was also significant for the research variables, which means that there was a change in at least one of the average variables from the pre-test to the follow-up. The results show that the analysis of variance is significant for the within-group factor (time) and the between-group factor. These results mean that considering the group effect, the effect of time alone is significant; Also, the interaction of group and time is significant.

### Conclusion

The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of reality therapy on hidden communication aggression and marital tension among women applying for divorce in Babol city. According to the findings, it can be seen that reality therapy was effective in hidden communication aggression and marital tension among women seeking a divorce. The above research results align with the findings of Ahmadi-Tabar et al. (2019), Firoozi et al. (2019), and Wegner et al.

In explaining the findings, it can be stated that reality therapy has been effective in reducing the hidden communication aggression of women applying for a divorce. In fact, in reality therapy, people are helped to identify their neglected needs and try to correct and satisfy their neglected needs through the process of self-evaluation, and to satisfy their needs, instead of destructive behaviors such as aggression, exerting targeted influence, and damaging the relationship behaviors replace constructive and desirable. In fact, in reality therapy, the experimental group confronts themselves and compares their desires with their behavior, in the sense that they evaluate whether what I am doing is getting them what they want or not. In fact, the ability to make a person evaluate his behavior is the most significant advantage of reality therapy. Also, since one of the dimensions of work in reality therapy is focusing on the responsibility dimension; Therefore, reality therapy can also be effective in learning responsible behaviors and, as a result, prevent the occurrence of hidden communication aggression in a person (Ahmadi Tabar et al., 2019).

Also, in explaining the results of the findings, it can be stated that the quality of couples' interactions and benefiting from social capital significantly improves the relationships of spouses and resolves conflicts and marital problems. Couples who have a good emotional

relationship with each other and use better conflict resolution strategies, can manage marital disputes. In fact, in reality therapy, women seeking divorce are helped to design behaviors that reduce marital tension and strengthen the principle of marriage through review, judgment, and redesign. People learn to take responsibility for their choices to reduce the feeling of despair and frustration and create a positive attitude by reducing the distance between what they expect and what is reality. Therefore, marital tension is reduced (Rizvani Abdul Abad, & Manzari Tavakoli, 2021). Glaser's emphasis on accepting responsibility for each person's behavior helps women applying for divorce to examine their behavior instead of focusing on their spouse's behavior and evaluate their role in marital problems and thus improve their relationships. Limitations of the research considering that this research was only conducted among women applying for divorce; Therefore, it is necessary to act cautiously in generalizing the results. Because different results may be presented in another society, using two treatment methods may interfere with the educational program for the researcher. The age range between 20 and 50 years is one of the factors that may make a big difference in the results; Therefore, it is necessary to separate the age groups more carefully. Failure to pay attention to the education factor of individuals can also be considered in future research. As the research was conducted on the women of society applying for divorce, it is suggested to be conducted in other societies and compare the results with the results of this research. Considering that the current research is quantitative research, it is suggested to conduct qualitative research (grounded theory based on semi-structured interviews and using a qualitative questionnaire and asking experts' opinions) in the next research.

### Conflicts of Interest

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

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