



Comparing the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment-based therapy and reality therapy on covert communication aggression and forgiveness among women seeking divorce

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Background and Aim: Many spouses, especially women applying for divorce, may experience hidden aggression in their lives for some reason and may not be able to adapt to challenging situations. The objective was to compare the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment-based therapy and reality therapy on covert communication aggression and forgiveness among women seeking divorce in Babol city. **Methods:** The current research was a quasi-experimental type with a pre-test-post-test design of three groups. Among the women applying for divorce, a sample of 45 people was selected by non-random sampling method and they were replaced in two experimental groups (therapy based on acceptance and commitment and reality therapy) and a control group by simple randomization. (15 people in each group). After evaluating 45 women applying for divorce whose level of hidden communication violence was above the cut-off point and met the necessary conditions, they were identified and then divided into three groups of 15 people, two experimental groups and one control group. Then, 8 sessions of 90-minute therapy based on acceptance and commitment (Hayes et al., 2004) and 8 sessions of 90-minute reality therapy (Glasser, 2005) were conducted in the experimental groups in person and in compliance with health protocols. Data were collected using the covert communication aggression questionnaire and the forgiveness questionnaire. **Results:** The results of the research showed that the therapy based on acceptance and commitment and reality therapy are effective on covert communication aggression ($F=19.44$) and forgiveness ($F=15.87$) among women seeking divorce. Also, the results of post hoc test showed that therapy based on acceptance and commitment has a greater effect on hidden communication aggression and forgiveness than reality therapy ($p<0.01$). 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 forgiveness among women seeking divorce and this effect continued until the follow-up period.



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Introduction

One of the most important issues that family psychologists and couple therapists, in order to protect marriage, are concerned about is formulating a model to investigate the factors affecting aggression, bringing compatibility and understanding in couples. It has a preventive function to maintain the family structure and treat communication problems. (Khazaei, Navabinejad, Farzad, Zahrakar, 2021). Various studies have shown that violence and aggression are among the factors that affect the quality of interaction between couples (Curtis, Epstein, and Wheeler, 2015). Aggression occurs in the form of an open reaction, including physical or verbal conflict. It can occur in a hidden form, called covert relational aggression, by hiding the outward signs (Balci & Salah, 2015; Benjamin, 2016). Hidden aggression in marital relationships is a basis for the growth and expansion of uncompromising social behaviors and low understanding of interpersonal situations and, as a result, less acceptance by the spouse (Parad & Lirks, 2011). 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; Coyne et al., 2019), and some researchers consider the attention and focus on overt aggression to be insufficient. Have known (Benjamin, 2015). Researchers have shown that the aggressive behavior of covert communication, as an effective factor in marriage instability, has a significant effect (Carroll et al., 2010; Khazaei et al., 2021).

In most studies, the role of forgiveness in marital relationships is significant in reducing tension and aggression. Forgiveness is the process of psychological-emotional liberation that occurs within the offended person and frees him from the anger, rage, and fear he feels so that he no longer has the desire to take revenge and skips the right to reparation. This process occurs slowly and does not necessarily mean that the person forgets his painful memories. Forgiveness is an internal desire that inclines people to refrain from unpleasant communication responses and behave positively toward someone who has treated them negatively (Tir-Tashi & Kazemi, 2012). Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) believe that forgiveness, like love, manifests as a voluntary act. One or both parties inevitably decide that they need to stop hurting. This decision and its consequences have cognitive,

emotional, and behavioral aspects. The cognitive component of forgiveness includes a realistic assessment of the situation. The emotional component of forgiveness may include a feeling of high self-esteem, little negative emotion, a feeling of sadness for what happened, a feeling of empathy with the other person and his situation, the beginning of the process of resolving the loss and pain, and finally removing the discomfort and pain. The behavioral component of forgiveness may include verbal and non-verbal behaviors such as apologizing for the pains and injuries caused, asking for forgiveness or compensation for the wrong done through symbolic or religious actions, expressing the desire to make necessary changes in behavior and providing the basis for the restoration of the relationship.

In order to improve and improve the quality of married life of women applying for divorce, various interventions can be used. One of these interventions is group therapy based on acceptance and commitment. Acceptance and commitment therapy is rooted in a philosophical theory called functional contextualism and is based on a research program on language and cognition called the frame theory of mental relations. In therapy based on acceptance and commitment, the main goal is to create psychological flexibility; That is, creating the ability to make practical choices between different options that are more appropriate rather than simply being done or actually imposed on the individual to avoid disturbing thoughts, feelings, memories, or desires (Forman & Herbert, 2008). Acceptance and commitment therapy aims to help us live rich, valuable, meaningful, and fulfilling lives by accepting the pain that life brings with it. Acceptance and commitment therapy does this in two ways: (1) it teaches us the psychological skills to effectively tolerate painful thoughts and feelings so that they have less impact (known as mindfulness skills); (2) it helps us understand what is truly important and meaningful to us (in the sense that it clarifies our values) and uses this information to guide, inspire, and motivate us to choose goals and perform and enrich our lives (Hassanzadeh, 2020).

Another therapeutic intervention that can be effective in solving covert relational aggression and marital damage, and forgiveness is reality therapy. Glasser's choice theory is one of the

common therapeutic interventions in the field of cognitive psychology in the way of describing human beings, determining the rules of behavior, and how to achieve satisfaction, happiness, and success. This treatment method emphasizes facing reality, accepting responsibility, recognizing basic needs, making moral judgments about the rightness or wrongness of behavior, focusing on the here and now, and internal control (Alirezaee et al., 2020). Reality therapy, as an important field of emerging psychotherapies, whose research indicates its effective role on stress, anxiety disorders, depression, and other clinical conditions, has been effective in increasing the quality of married life and psychological flexibility of couples (Kahl, Winter, and Schweiger, 2012).

Method

The current research was a quasi-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 45 people was selected by a non-random sampling method. They were replaced in an experimental group (ACT) and a control group by simple random. (15 people in each group). After evaluating 45 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 therapy based on acceptance and commitment (Hayes et al., 2004) were conducted in the experimental group in person and compliance with health protocols.

Tools

1. Covert Relational Aggression Inventory (CRAVIs) (2006): It was created by Nelson and Carroll to measure emotional withdrawal and ruining social image in couple relationships. This tool 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 was obtained for social image for husbands (0.88) and their wives (0.90) reported. The confirmatory factor analysis results of this research have also

shown the construct validity of the original version of the questionnaire.

2. Family Forgiveness Scale: In order to measure forgiveness, family forgiveness measurement scale was used. This scale was developed in 1988 by Pollard and Anderson. This questionnaire has 40 questions and two parts, the first part measures forgiveness in the main families, and the second part measures the level of forgiveness in the nuclear family (spouses). Pollard et al. (1988), in a study on 229 women and 113 men, reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire as 0.93. Moreover, in order to check the validity of this questionnaire, using a sample of 342 people, they correlated it with Worthington's autonomy scale and relational ethics scale. The analysis showed that this questionnaire's subscales have favorable convergent validity. Also, the results of their research showed that the family forgiveness scale has acceptable construct validity. In this study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.91.

Results

The mean (standard deviation) age of the participants in the reality therapy group was 36.3 (10.1), the acceptance and commitment therapy group was 37.4 (10.9), and the control group was 35.2 (8.9). Also, the minimum and maximum ages in the reality therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy groups were 20 and 50 years, and in the control group, 21 and 50 years. The analysis of variance of the repeated measurement of several variables among the studied groups in the variables of hidden communicative aggression and forgiveness showed that the effect between the subjects (group) is significant. This effect means that at least one of the groups is with each other in at least one component of covert relational aggression and forgiveness are different. The within-subject effect (time) was also significant for the research variables, meaning there was a change in at least one of the average variables from the pre-test to the follow-up.

The results showed that the F-ratio in the groups' factor is significant in the dimensions of covert relational aggression and forgiveness ($p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that acceptance and commitment therapy and reality therapy improved covert relational aggression and forgiveness. In this regard, an analysis of variance with repeated measures was performed for the experimental group in three stages of therapeutic intervention. The F ratio observed in

the improvement of covert relational aggression and forgiveness was significant ($p < 0.01$).

Conclusion

The aim was to compare the effectiveness of therapy based on acceptance and commitment and reality therapy on covert relational aggression and forgiveness among women seeking a divorce in Babol city. The results showed that the average covert relational aggression in the group of acceptance and commitment therapy at the end of the post-test was lower than reality therapy group and control group. Also, the average forgiveness in the acceptance and commitment therapy group at the post-test was higher than in the reality therapy group and the control group. In other words, in terms of effectiveness, acceptance and commitment therapy had the greatest effect on covert relational aggression and forgiveness variables. In the explanation of these results, it can be said that the ACT, in women seeking divorce, has changed their thoughts. From a clinical point of view, women seeking divorce learn to think of thoughts only as thoughts, feelings as only feelings, and memories only as memories and physical symptoms. In fact, none of the internal events, when experienced, are inherently harmful to human health. Their trauma comes from seeing them as traumatic, unhealthy, bad experiences for what they claim to be, and therefore to be controlled and eliminated. In the treatment based on acceptance and commitment, the main goal is to create psychological flexibility and the ability to choose a more appropriate action among different options with six basic steps "acceptance, breaking, self as context, connection with the present, values and committed action" (Hayes et al., 2009). By relying on fault, this therapy helps women seeking divorce to distinguish between the world constructed in their thoughts and thinking as an ongoing process. His fault helps distinguish between the person who is thinking and the verbal categories people attribute to themselves by thinking. Therefore, women applying for divorce with this approach have realized they no longer cling to their thoughts. Because clinging to their thoughts prevents them from dealing with life's realities and issues, the person will not be able to respond and react appropriately in different life situations (Hayes, 2015). Therefore, the solutions presented to clients during therapy sessions help women seeking divorce recognize dysfunctional thought patterns that lead to covert relational aggression and replace them with

rational and efficient thought patterns. One of the advantages of therapy based on acceptance and commitment is teaching clients to experience their emotions and physical feelings without any avoidance fully and to take steps in the path of life-based on values to change behavior. The explicit goal of therapy based on acceptance and commitment is to reduce the effort for internal control and experiential avoidance and increase behavior control and desire to experience a range of emotions (Nikokar et al., 2019). Therefore, the women applying for divorce in the experimental group significantly reduced their sensitivities and controls with acceptance and concentration exercises. As a result, their covert relational aggression has significantly decreased, and their forgiveness has increased.

Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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