



Cultural Dynamics in Couple Therapy: Enhancing Marital Intimacy Through Tailored Interventions

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Atapour, N. & Darbani, S.A. (2024). Cultural Dynamics in Couple Therapy: Enhancing Marital Intimacy Through Tailored Interventions. *Journal of Psychosociological Research in Family and Culture*, 1(2), 4-9.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jprfc.2.1.2>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the effectiveness of culture-based couple therapy in improving marital intimacy among diverse couples. It seeks to address how cultural understanding and sensitivity integrated into therapeutic practices can impact marital relationships.

Methods and Materials: A quasi-experimental design was employed, involving 30 couples recruited from a private counseling center and divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group participated in an 8-week culture-based couple therapy program, focusing on cultural narratives, communication within a cultural context, conflict resolution with cultural considerations, and building a culturally inclusive relationship. Pre-test, post-test, and follow-up assessments were conducted to measure changes in marital intimacy.

Findings: The results indicated significant improvements in marital intimacy scores within the experimental group compared to the control group, with sustained enhancements observed at the 3-month follow-up. Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements (ANOVA-RM) confirmed the positive impact of the intervention, highlighting substantial differences in marital intimacy over time and between groups.

Conclusion: Culture-based couple therapy has been demonstrated to significantly enhance marital intimacy, emphasizing the importance of incorporating cultural dynamics into therapeutic interventions. This approach not only respects the cultural backgrounds of the participants but also uses these dynamics as a foundation for fostering deeper connections and understanding within couples.

Keywords: Culture-based therapy, Marital intimacy, Couple therapy, Cultural sensitivity, Quasi-experimental study, Marital counseling.

1 Introduction

Over the years, various studies have been conducted to explore the impact of different therapeutic

interventions on marital intimacy, with a focus on different cultural and demographic contexts. Research has shown that interventions such as couple-centered counseling by Gottman method (Hosseinpoor et al., 2022), systemic-

constructivist couple therapy (SCCT) (Noorani et al., 2021), reality therapy (Zabihi et al., 2022), emotionally-focused couples therapy (Behrang et al., 2021), and cognitive-behavioral therapy (Ebadi et al., 2018) have been associated with improvements in marital intimacy (Ebadi et al., 2018). These interventions have been found to enhance couples' awareness of proper relationship principles, address sexual satisfaction, and improve communication and conflict resolution skills, all of which are essential components of marital intimacy.

Furthermore, studies have highlighted the importance of considering socio-demographic factors, attachment styles, and religious and ethnic differences in understanding and predicting marital intimacy (Besharat et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021; Kardan-Souraki et al., 2018). For instance, the role of trust, forgiveness, and shared religious identity has been investigated in relation to marital intimacy, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of factors influencing marital closeness and satisfaction (Avanti & Setiawan, 2022; Fraser et al., 2021).

Additionally, the impact of communication skills training (Amidpour et al., 2021), intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual risk factors (Brock & Lawrence, 2014), and the influence of internet usage (Amidpour et al., 2021) on marital intimacy have been explored. These studies have shed light on the complex interplay of individual, interpersonal, and environmental factors in shaping marital intimacy and have provided valuable insights into the potential pathways for enhancing intimacy in couples.

Moreover, the longitudinal analysis of marital intimacy and the exploration of intimacy maturity and marital ideals in newly-married couples have contributed to a deeper understanding of the developmental trajectory of marital intimacy and the evolving dynamics of intimacy within marital relationships (Knobloch-Fedders & Knudson, 2009; O'Brien & Peyton, 2002; White et al., 1986).

Therefore, the effectiveness of culture-based couple therapy on marital intimacy in couples is a multifaceted and dynamic area of research, encompassing various therapeutic approaches, socio-demographic considerations, and interpersonal dynamics. This article aims to examine the effectiveness of culture-based couple therapy on marital intimacy in couples.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design to explore the effectiveness of culture-based couple therapy on marital intimacy among couples. A total of 30 couples were recruited from researcher's private counseling center, with the selection process based on convenience sampling. The couples were divided into two groups: an experimental group, which received the culture-based couple therapy, and a control group, which did not receive any intervention. This division allowed for a comparative analysis of the therapy's impact on enhancing marital intimacy.

The intervention's procedures were meticulously planned to ensure a supportive and culturally sensitive environment. Initial sessions were dedicated to building trust and establishing therapy goals. Subsequent sessions delved into specific cultural aspects influencing marital intimacy, employing a variety of therapeutic techniques to foster meaningful interactions and growth among the couples. Pre-test measurements were conducted to establish a baseline for marital intimacy, followed by post-test and follow-up assessments to gauge the therapy's effectiveness over time.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Marital Intimacy

This scale is designed to measure intimacy among couples. The questionnaire contains 17 questions with a scoring range from 1 (never) to 7 (always), where higher scores indicate greater intimacy. The overall scale reliability, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was found to be 0.96, indicating acceptable reliability. The reliability calculation, even with the removal of individual questions, showed that omitting any of the questions did not significantly affect the reliability coefficient. Moreover, this scale is being widely used and its validity and reliability are confirmed by several researchers from many countries (Teymouri et al., 2020). The reliability of this questionnaire in this study was obtained using Cronbach's alpha as 0.82.

2.3 Intervention

2.3.1 Social Skills Training

Week 1: Introduction and Cultural Assessment

In the first session, couples are introduced to the culture-based couple therapy program, its objectives, and the importance of a safe, respectful, and confidential environment. The therapist conducts a comprehensive

assessment of each couple's cultural background, exploring their beliefs, values, and how these influence their relationship. This session sets the foundation for therapy by establishing mutual goals and emphasizing the significance of cultural understanding in enhancing marital intimacy.

Week 2: Cultural Narratives and Relationship Dynamics

The second session delves into the cultural narratives that shape relationship dynamics, encouraging couples to identify and discuss the strengths and challenges these narratives present within their partnership. Through guided discussions and exercises, couples learn to acknowledge and respect their differences, using their unique cultural backgrounds as a source of strength in their relationship.

Week 3: Communication Within Cultural Context

This session focuses on enhancing communication skills with a keen awareness of cultural sensitivities. Couples engage in role-playing exercises designed to practice respectful and effective communication, emphasizing the expression of needs and desires within a cultural framework. This approach fosters a deeper understanding and connection, crucial for improving marital intimacy.

Week 4: Conflict Resolution and Cultural Considerations

Addressing conflicts with cultural considerations in mind, this session equips couples with strategies to manage and resolve disputes. Role-playing common conflicts within a cultural context helps partners develop a mutual approach to disagreements, prioritizing respect for each partner's background and fostering a harmonious living environment.

Week 5: Family Roles and Cultural Expectations

The focus shifts to exploring traditional and contemporary roles within the family, navigating the complexities of cultural expectations. Couples participate in activities to explore and negotiate roles, aiming to create a balanced and equitable partnership that respects and incorporates both partners' cultural identities.

Week 6: Intimacy and Cultural Influences

Understanding the influence of culture on intimacy, this session aims to enhance emotional and physical closeness, considering cultural norms and practices. Couples share and appreciate cultural rituals that promote intimacy, learning to integrate these practices into their relationship to strengthen their bond.

Week 7: Building a Culturally Inclusive Relationship

Couples work on building a relationship that honors both partners' cultures, creating new traditions that blend

elements from both backgrounds. This session encourages open discussions about future plans, addressing cultural differences with children or extended family, and reinforcing the commitment to a culturally inclusive partnership.

Week 8: Review, Reflection, and Future Planning

The final session is dedicated to reviewing the progress made throughout the therapy, reflecting on the integration of cultural aspects into the relationship, and planning for the future. Couples discuss strategies to sustain improvements and continue cultural integration, with guidance on seeking further support if needed. This session provides closure to the therapy program, celebrating the journey and the growth achieved by each couple.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data collected from pre-test, post-test, and follow-up assessments were analyzed using an Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements (ANOVA-RM). This analysis aimed to evaluate the changes in marital intimacy levels across the three time points and between the two groups. The statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3 Findings

The study encompassed a diverse group of 30 couples, split evenly between the experimental and control groups, ensuring a balanced comparison of the intervention's impact. Within both groups, participants varied in age from 25 to 55 years, with a median age of 35 years, reflecting a broad range of marital stages. Approximately 60% of participants held at least a bachelor's degree, highlighting a relatively high educational background among the sample. In terms of employment status, 70% were employed full-time, 20% worked part-time, and the remaining 10% were either unemployed or homemakers. The distribution of genders was equal across the groups, ensuring gender parity in the study's analysis. Culturally, the couples represented a wide spectrum, with over five different cultural backgrounds reported, underscoring the study's emphasis on cultural diversity. This demographic composition allowed for an inclusive examination of the culture-based couple therapy's effectiveness across a variety of marital contexts and stages, providing valuable insights into its applicability and potential impact on marital intimacy across diverse populations.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics findings

Variables	Group	Pre-test (Mean)	Pre-test (SD)	Post-test (Mean)	Post-test (SD)	Follow-up (Mean)	Follow-up (SD)
Marital Intimacy	Control	69.53	10.10	69.13	10.03	69.88	10.94
	Experimental	70.01	9.98	77.43	9.52	77.58	10.22

Table 1 outlines the descriptive statistics for marital intimacy scores across the control and experimental groups at three different time points: pre-test, post-test, and follow-up. For the control group, the average marital intimacy score slightly fluctuated, starting at 69.53 (SD = 10.10) at pre-test, slightly decreasing to 69.13 (SD = 10.03) at post-test, and then marginally increasing to 69.88 (SD = 10.94) at follow-up. Conversely, the experimental group showed a significant increase from an initial average score of 70.01 (SD = 9.98) at pre-test to 77.43 (SD = 9.52) at post-test, maintaining a similar level of improvement at follow-up with an average score of 77.58 (SD = 10.22). These changes indicate a notable improvement in marital intimacy within the experimental group, attributed to the culture-based couple therapy.

Before conducting the primary analyses, we meticulously checked and confirmed the assumptions necessary for the

Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements (ANOVA-RM). The normality of data distribution was verified using the Shapiro-Wilk test, confirming normal distribution across all conditions (pre-test: $W = 0.95$, $p = 0.56$; post-test: $W = 0.96$, $p = 0.62$; follow-up: $W = 0.97$, $p = 0.68$). Levene's test for equality of variances indicated no violation of the homogeneity of variances assumption ($F(2, 58) = 0.59$, $p = 0.56$), ensuring that the variance across groups was consistent. Sphericity was assessed through Mauchly's test, which suggested no violations ($\chi^2(2) = 5.42$, $p = 0.067$), thus not necessitating adjustments to the degrees of freedom for the subsequent ANOVA-RM. These preparatory checks ensured that the data met the statistical assumptions, validating the reliability and appropriateness of the ANOVA-RM for analyzing the effects of the intervention on marital intimacy among couples.

Table 2

The Results of Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements

Variables	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Eta ²
Marital Intimacy	Time	833.39	2	416.69	8.42	<0.01	0.30
	Group	823.44	1	823.44	9.91	<0.01	0.36
	Time × Group	898.35	2	494.67	8.72	<0.01	0.32

Table 2 presents the results of the Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements, highlighting significant effects across three main variables: time ($F(2, 28) = 8.42$, $p < 0.01$, $Eta^2 = 0.30$), group ($F(1, 29) = 9.91$, $p < 0.01$, $Eta^2 = 0.36$), and the interaction between time and group ($F(2, 28)$

$= 8.72$, $p < 0.01$, $Eta^2 = 0.32$). These findings underscore the significant impact of the intervention on enhancing marital intimacy over time, particularly in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Table 3

The Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test for Experimental Group

Variables	Mean Diff. (Post-test – Pre-test)	p	Mean Diff. (Follow-up – Pre-test)	p	Mean Diff. (Follow-up – Post-test)	p
Marital Intimacy	7.33	0.001	7.57	0.001	0.22	1.00

Table 3 reports the results of the Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test for the experimental group, showing significant mean differences in marital intimacy scores from pre-test to post-test (7.33, $p = 0.001$) and from pre-test to follow-up (7.57, $p = 0.001$), with a slight, non-significant increase from post-test to follow-up (0.22, $p = 1.00$). These results affirm the sustained improvement in marital intimacy among couples

who underwent the culture-based couple therapy, with the gains largely maintained at the follow-up stage.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of culture-based couple therapy on enhancing marital intimacy among couples. Through a quasi-

experimental design involving 30 couples divided into experimental and control groups, the study sought to explore how integrating cultural considerations into therapeutic interventions could influence marital intimacy levels.

The findings revealed significant improvements in marital intimacy within the experimental group, who received culture-based couple therapy, compared to the control group. These results underscore the potential of such tailored therapeutic approaches in addressing the unique cultural dynamics and challenges couples face, thereby fostering deeper emotional connections and enhancing intimacy.

The effectiveness of various therapeutic interventions in enhancing marital intimacy has been well-documented in the literature. Studies have shown that interventions such as emotionally-focused couples therapy (Behrang et al., 2021), cognitive-behavioral therapy (Ebadi et al., 2018), and reality therapy (Zabihi et al., 2022) have been associated with improvements in marital intimacy. Additionally, the effectiveness of couple counseling by the Gottman method on intimacy has been supported by research, indicating an increase in marital intimacy following the intervention (Hosseinpoor et al., 2022).

Moreover, the impact of cultural considerations in couples therapy has been highlighted in the literature (Danesh et al., 2023; Ghazizadeh et al., 2018; Rafezi & Saboori, 2022). Understanding and integrating cultural factors into therapeutic interventions can play a crucial role in addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by couples from diverse cultural backgrounds. By incorporating cultural sensitivity and awareness into couple therapy, practitioners can create a more inclusive and effective therapeutic environment that fosters trust, communication, and intimacy within the relationship.

Furthermore, research has explored the association between marital intimacy and attachment styles (Besharat et al., 2014). The results have shown that attachment styles, particularly avoidant attachment, can moderate the relationship between alexithymia and marital satisfaction, underscoring the importance of considering individual attachment patterns in interventions aimed at enhancing marital intimacy. Additionally, the role of spiritual intimacy in marital relationships has been investigated, with studies indicating a positive correlation between spiritual intimacy, marital intimacy, and overall well-being (Holland et al., 2016).

In conclusion, the study provides evidence of the efficacy of culture-based couple therapy in improving marital

intimacy, emphasizing the critical role of cultural considerations in therapeutic interventions. As couples increasingly seek support in navigating the complexities of their relationships, culture-based couple therapy offers a promising avenue for fostering deeper connections and enhancing marital satisfaction.

Despite its insights, the study's limitations warrant consideration. The convenience sampling method and the relatively small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported measures of marital intimacy could introduce bias, highlighting the need for incorporating more objective assessment tools in future research.

Future studies should aim to expand on this work by employing larger, more diverse sample sizes and randomized controlled trial designs to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could also provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of culture-based couple therapy on marital intimacy. Furthermore, exploring the integration of such therapy with other therapeutic modalities could offer a more comprehensive approach to improving marital relationships.

This study's implications are significant for practitioners in the field of marital and family therapy. It highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness in therapeutic settings, suggesting that interventions tailored to the cultural contexts of couples can effectively enhance marital intimacy. By acknowledging and integrating cultural differences, therapists can facilitate more meaningful and impactful therapeutic processes, contributing to stronger, more intimate marital relationships.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

The cooperation of all participants in the research is thanked and appreciated.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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