

The Effectiveness of Emotion Regulation Training on Conflict Resolution Skills in Married Female Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of emotion regulation training on the level of conflict resolution skills in married students. The importance of emotion regulation as one of the psychological skills in improving quality of life and interpersonal relationships, particularly among young couples, is noteworthy. This semi-experimental study was designed using a pretest-posttest method with a control group. The statistical population included all married female students of Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, in 2023. Using a purposive sampling method, 30 female students were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (15 participants in each group). Data collection was conducted using the Rahim Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire (1983), whose validity and reliability had been previously confirmed. Emotion regulation training was implemented using a package based on Gross's model (2007). Data analysis was performed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with SPSS software. The results indicated that emotion regulation training significantly increased the level of conflict resolution skills in married students. These findings confirm that educational interventions in emotion regulation can enhance conflict resolution skills and consequently improve individuals' psychological capabilities in facing daily life challenges, especially in married individuals. These results also underscore the importance of focusing on psychological education in academic settings.

Keywords: *Emotion regulation training, conflict resolution skills, married students, women.*

1. Introduction

Conflict resolution skills are one of the five main categories of life skills. In this classification, conflict resolution skills include awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, a realistic self-image, understanding of one's rights and responsibilities, clarification of values, and motivation for self-awareness (Imani Nia, 2014). Conflict resolution skills form the foundation of successful communication and are prerequisites for effective social and interpersonal relationships. These skills play a significant role in fostering empathy and understanding with others (Abedi et al., 2024; Singh, 2006). Conflict resolution serves as an effective barrier against family-dissolving conflicts and can even aid in solving issues faced by couples. It encompasses behaviors exhibited by individuals when confronting conflict situations to overcome them (Labrague & McEnroe - Petite, 2017; Yu, 2021).

These skills include dominant, compromising, integrative, avoidant, and obliging approaches (Rahim, 2010). The avoidant approach is associated with isolation, delegating responsibility to others, blaming others, and withdrawing oneself. The integrative approach reflects efforts to reduce disagreements and focuses on similarities to meet others' expectations and address their concerns. The compromising approach strikes a balance between attention to one's own needs and the needs of others, involving the sharing of benefits between parties (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2022). The dominant approach is characterized by a threatening orientation. The obliging approach emphasizes exchanging information and examining differences to reach mutually acceptable solutions. This approach is associated with problem-solving and may lead to creative solutions in resolving issues (Lu & Wang, 2017).

Given the marital challenges faced by couples, psychologists have conducted research highlighting various therapeutic methods for addressing psychological problems. One such method is emotion regulation strategy training. Emotion regulation refers to conscious or unconscious cognitive and behavioral methods that manage and modulate emotions (Yildiz, 2017). Emotion regulation strategies involve developing thoughts and behaviors that help individuals identify the emotions they are experiencing, when these emotions occur, and how they should express them (García, 2022). Difficulty in emotion regulation is associated with negative outcomes in various life domains, as there is a direct relationship between emotion regulation

and quality of life and interpersonal relationships (Yen et al., 2017).

Perceived stress intensity and difficulties in emotion regulation can lead to significant psychological and social harm among couples (Moghadam et al., 2021; Moluk, 2023; Razavi & Salehiyan, 2022). Considering the potential effectiveness of emotion regulation training on conflict resolution skills, the hypothesis arises that it may influence the conflict resolution skills of married students. Therefore, it is essential to examine the effectiveness of emotion regulation training on conflict resolution skills in married students. Married students often face challenges in conflict resolution with their spouses due to academic responsibilities and marital commitments, resulting in reduced conflict resolution abilities. Thus, investigating these factors and components can provide valuable support to married students. A review of the literature revealed that the effectiveness of emotion regulation training on conflict resolution skills among married students has not been previously examined. Therefore, the present study aims to address the question: Does emotion regulation training impact the conflict resolution skills of married students?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research method was quasi-experimental with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. The statistical population of the study consisted of all married female students at the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, in 2023. Considering that the minimum sample size in quasi-experimental research is 30 participants, purposive sampling was employed based on the available academic fields at the university. From the willing participants, 30 individuals were purposefully selected and randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups (15 participants in each group).

Inclusion criteria included female gender, students aged 20 to 45 years, and the absence of physical or psychological disorders. Exclusion criteria included withdrawal from participation in the study and absence from more than two treatment sessions.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Conflict Resolution Skills

This standard questionnaire was developed by Rahim in 1983. It comprises 28 items aimed at assessing individuals'

conflict resolution styles in their marital relationships (integration, dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising styles). The questionnaire uses a Likert scale (1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = High, 5 = Very High). Rahim's research demonstrated positive and negative correlations among the subscales of the questionnaire, indicating adequate convergent and divergent validity. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was reported as 0.97. In Iran, Haghghi, Zarei, and Ghaderi (2012) conducted a study where the reliability of the ROCI-II questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's alpha, with subscale reliability ranging between 0.70 and 0.75. The split-half method also yielded a reliability of 0.68. Exploratory factor analysis results indicated that the ROCI-II questionnaire consists of five factors—integration, obliging, avoiding, dominating, and compromising—that together account for 70.81% of the total variance. The rotated factor loadings table showed that all items of the questionnaire had factor loadings greater than 0.50. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the five-factor model of the ROCI-II questionnaire had an adequate fit, with goodness-of-fit indices falling within acceptable ranges. Positive and negative correlations between the subscales of this instrument and the CRQ questionnaire further confirmed its convergent and divergent validity (Khezri et al., 2022; Sherabaf et al., 2022).

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Emotion Regulation Training

Emotion regulation training was conducted using an intervention based on Gross's (2007) emotion management strategies, delivered in eight 90-minute sessions (Ahmadian, 2021; Mirzaei et al., 2019).

Session 1:

In the first session, group members are introduced to each other, and the rationale, stages of the intervention, and the framework and rules for participation in the group are explained. This session aims to create a safe and structured environment for participants to engage in the intervention.

Session 2:

This session focuses on understanding emotions and the triggers that provoke them. Participants learn about the functional differences among various emotions and their short-term and long-term effects. This foundational knowledge helps participants identify and comprehend their emotional responses.

Session 3:

In the third session, participants assess their emotional vulnerabilities and emotional skills. This session aims to increase self-awareness about individual differences in emotion regulation and highlight areas for improvement.

Session 4:

The focus of this session is to create changes in the triggering components of emotions and to teach interpersonal skills such as effective communication, assertiveness, and conflict resolution. These skills are practiced to enhance participants' ability to manage emotional interactions constructively.

Session 5:

Participants learn to redirect their mental focus away from negative thoughts and worries. This session emphasizes cognitive reframing techniques to reduce the impact of maladaptive thought patterns and foster positive mental states.

Session 6:

In this session, participants work on changing cognitive appraisals by learning reappraisal strategies. These skills help participants reinterpret emotional events in a way that reduces emotional distress and fosters adaptive emotional responses.

Session 7:

This session focuses on altering behavioral and physiological responses to emotions. Participants are trained to implement techniques that regulate emotional arousal, such as relaxation strategies, mindfulness, and controlled breathing.

Session 8:

The final session involves reevaluating the progress made throughout the program and addressing barriers to applying emotion regulation skills in daily life. Participants receive feedback and create individualized action plans to sustain and generalize the skills learned.

2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. In the descriptive section, measures of central tendency, mean, and standard deviation were used. In the inferential section, data were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) after confirming the assumptions for its application. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 22.

3. Findings and Results

In the present study, 30 married students from the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, in 2023 were examined.

Their mean age was 34.43 years (SD = 7.05). This section presents the descriptive findings, including the mean and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores for conflict resolution skills in the experimental and control groups.

Table 1

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Pretest and Posttest Scores for Conflict Resolution Skills in Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Group	Pretest (M ± SD)	Posttest (M ± SD)
Integration	Experimental	32.53 ± 2.53	33.53 ± 1.45
	Control	28.93 ± 3.39	29.40 ± 3.06
Avoiding	Experimental	21.53 ± 5.55	23.13 ± 4.77
	Control	17.20 ± 2.73	17.80 ± 3.23
Dominating	Experimental	12.60 ± 3.41	17.86 ± 2.79
	Control	11.40 ± 2.72	15.66 ± 2.52
Compromising	Experimental	16.46 ± 1.99	18.40 ± 1.45
	Control	15.93 ± 1.83	16.53 ± 1.64
Obliging	Experimental	23.20 ± 3.23	23.95 ± 2.67
	Control	19.40 ± 3.39	18.93 ± 2.43

The results in Table 1 indicate that the mean posttest scores for conflict resolution skills in the experimental group increased significantly compared to the control group.

Since the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic for research variables in the pretest and posttest of both groups ranged between -1.96 and +1.96 and was not significant, the assumption of normal distribution of the statistical population can be accepted with 95% confidence. One of the assumptions for using ANCOVA is the homogeneity of variances. To examine this assumption, Levene's test was

used. If this test is not statistically significant, the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met. Based on the F-value obtained from Levene's test, no significant difference was observed at $\alpha = 0.05$ between the variances, confirming the null hypothesis of variance homogeneity. Additionally, the results showed that Box's M test for the group variable was not significant ($F = 1.40, p = 0.137$). Thus, the assumption of covariance matrix homogeneity was satisfied, enabling the use of ANCOVA to test the third hypothesis.

Table 2

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) for Group Effects

Test	Value	F-Value	Hypothesis df	Error df	Significance (sig)	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	0.66	7.48	5	19	0.001	0.66
Wilks' Lambda	0.33	7.48	5	19	0.001	0.66
Hotelling's Trace	1.97	7.48	5	19	0.001	0.66
Largest Root	1.97	7.48	5	19	0.001	0.66

According to the data in Table 2, Wilks' Lambda indicates a significant effect of the group variable on the dependent variable.

Table 3

Results of Multivariate ANCOVA for Conflict Resolution Skill Scores

Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-Value	Significance (sig)	Partial Eta Squared
Integration	11.41	1	11.41	1.72	0.002	0.33
Avoiding	18.77	1	18.77	10.14	0.004	0.30
Dominating	4.92	1	4.92	15.17	0.001	0.39
Compromising	7.34	1	7.34	7.47	0.012	0.24
Obliging	26.73	1	26.73	5.97	0.023	0.20

Based on the F-values presented in [Table 3](#), there is a significant difference in the mean posttest scores of conflict resolution skill dimensions between the experimental and control groups. Therefore, the experimental group, which received emotion regulation training, performed significantly better than the control group, which received no intervention, confirming the third hypothesis of the study.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the effect of emotion regulation training on conflict resolution skills in married students. The results indicated a significant difference in the mean posttest scores of conflict resolution subscales between the experimental and control groups. In other words, students who received emotion regulation training demonstrated significant improvements in conflict resolution skills compared to the control group, which did not receive any intervention. These findings align with previous studies such as Ahmadian (2021) and Asgari & Safarzadeh (2014), highlighting the effective role of emotion regulation training in enhancing conflict resolution skills and promoting individual mental health (Ahmadian, 2021; Asgari & Safarzadeh, 2014).

One of the key components examined in this study is emotion regulation. As a fundamental psychological skill, emotion regulation refers to the cognitive and behavioral processes that help individuals manage and modulate their emotions. This skill is especially important for individuals facing emotional challenges in marital life. According to psychological theories such as Gross's model (2007), emotion regulation involves interventions enabling individuals to manage their emotions healthily and constructively. The findings of this study suggest that emotion regulation training enhances the level of conflict resolution skills in married students. Conflict resolution skills involve recognizing and being aware of emotions, feelings, and personal thoughts, which help individuals achieve a deeper understanding of themselves. These skills include identifying strengths and weaknesses, desires, fears, and aversions. Awareness of one's emotions and thoughts enables individuals to respond better to various situations, including conflict scenarios, by avoiding unwanted emotional reactions (Ahmadian, 2021).

Theoretically, Gross (2020) emphasizes the importance of emotional awareness in his research. According to this theory, cognitive processes and emotion regulation are directly interconnected. Individuals proficient in emotion

regulation possess higher cognitive skills for understanding their emotions and can channel them constructively. Emotion regulation training based on this model helps individuals appropriately manage negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and depression during challenging circumstances. Gross's model (2020) highlights that human emotions have cognitive and behavioral dimensions, and emotion regulation involves managing these aspects simultaneously. This process aids individuals in gaining greater awareness of their thoughts and feelings and responding appropriately (Khezri et al., 2022). Therefore, individuals who acquire emotion regulation skills are not only more successful in controlling their emotions but also exhibit higher conflict resolution abilities.

Recent studies have demonstrated that emotion regulation positively impacts various aspects of mental and social health. According to Perez (2021), emotion regulation enhances conflict resolution skills and, consequently, improves an individual's ability to handle daily challenges. This is particularly significant in marital life, where interpersonal interactions are more complex. Married individuals who learn emotion regulation skills can respond to stressful situations more rationally and effectively. Marital life is an area that particularly emphasizes the need for conflict resolution and emotion regulation skills. Recent research highlights the crucial role of emotional interactions between couples in marital relationship quality (Sherabaf et al., 2022; Sohrabi et al., 2022). Couples with strong emotion regulation and conflict resolution skills are better equipped to handle daily challenges in married life. This enables them to control emotional reactions in the face of conflicts and dissatisfaction, and address issues constructively rather than resorting to destructive defense mechanisms.

New research suggests that emotion regulation and conflict resolution skills directly improve interpersonal relationships. Individuals with advanced conflict resolution skills can better analyze their emotions and thoughts, gain a deeper understanding of their partner's needs and desires, and use this understanding to improve their relationships (Khezri et al., 2022). Furthermore, emotion regulation enhances psychological flexibility, which in turn reduces conflicts and improves marital quality of life. Beyond individual benefits, emotion regulation plays a crucial role in enhancing social interactions. Research indicates that individuals with strong emotion regulation abilities are better at establishing positive social relationships. These individuals can manage their emotions effectively when interacting with others, preventing inappropriate reactions

and fostering healthier interpersonal relationships (Asgari & Safarzadeh, 2014). Emotion regulation also plays a significant role in social and educational settings. In academic environments, students with strong emotion regulation skills can better cope with academic stress and pressures, leading to improved academic performance and increased satisfaction with their educational experiences. This is particularly important during the student phase, where individuals face new challenges such as marriage, independent living, and increased responsibilities. Learning emotion regulation skills helps them navigate this challenging period successfully (Mirzaei et al., 2019).

Based on the findings of this study and previous research, it can be concluded that emotion regulation training positively impacts conflict resolution skills in married students. These results underscore the importance of psychological training in improving individual and social skills. Emotion regulation helps individuals understand their own and others' emotions, enabling them to manage emotional reactions constructively and logically. Ultimately, this leads to improved interpersonal relationships and enhanced quality of life.

The first limitation of this study was the lack of an opportunity to conduct a follow-up phase with the participants. The second limitation was the potential for participant bias in responding to the self-reported questionnaire. Future studies are recommended to conduct follow-up assessments and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention used in this study on other samples to determine its generalizability. Additionally, combining or comparing this type of intervention with other validated training methods is suggested. Utilizing observational methods and case studies for data collection is another recommendation of this study.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally 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.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical 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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