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The effect of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on love schemas of married women

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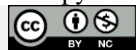
Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine the effect of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on the love schemas of married women. This quasi-experimental research was carried out with a pre-test, post-test design with a control group and a two-month follow-up. The statistical population of this research was married women aged 25-40 who referred to counseling centers in Tehran in 2018. 40 married women were selected in an available manner and randomly assigned to two experimental groups and one control group. The research tool was the Love Schema Questionnaire of Singlis et al. (1995). Shadish and Baldwin's (2005) cognitive-behavioral couple therapy. The experimental group received 10 sessions of 90 minutes. Collected data were analyzed using variance of repeated measures. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy intervention has been effective on safe love schema ($F = 5.98, P = 0.019$), attached love schema ($F = 9.20, P = 0.004$), Skittish love schema ($P = 0.004$) $F=8, P=0.006$, fickle love schema ($F=8.15, P=0.007$), casual love schema ($F=5.71, P=0.022$) and disinterested love schema ($99 F = 9, P = 0.003$). This effect was also stable in the follow-up phase. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is one of the effective interventions on women's love schemas. Therefore, these findings provide important implications in the field of education and promotion of mental health of married women.

Keywords: *Couple therapy, cognitive-behavioral, love schemas.*

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Introduction

Recently, social psychologists have paid attention to the role of schemas on people's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in the context of interpersonal relationships (Sharifi, Hajiheidari, Khorosh, and Fatehizadeh, 2012). Schemas are cognitive structures that play an effective role in interpreting information and guiding behaviors in different situations (Fiher, 2013). In this regard, Hatfield and Rapson (1996) presented the model of love schemas by combining two stage theories and attachment theory. Each person's love schema is defined in terms of his comfort level with closeness, independence and desire to establish romantic relationships (Sharifi et al., 2012). People who are interested in romantic relationships often fall into one of the four love schema categories: secure, clingy, skittish, and fickle. People with a secure love schema are those who are comfortable with both closeness and independence from others. People with a clingy love schema desire a lot of closeness, but fear independence. The Skittish love schema includes people who are very close, but have no problem with independence. Fickle's love schema also expresses people's discomfort with both closeness and independence. People who are reluctant to have a relationship with others fall into the two classes of casual love schema (those who enter into a relationship only when there is no problem) and disinterested love schema (those who are not interested in a relationship at all) (Hatfield & Robson, 1996). The three love schemas, secure, clingy, and skittish, respectively, are compatible with the three attachment styles of secure, anxious, ambivalent, and avoidant in the general population (Singles, Chu, & Hatfield, 1995).

Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy emerged from the gradual expansion of behavioral couple therapy and its therapeutic strategies and adding and emphasizing cognitive factors in the treatment of marital disturbances (Shadish & Baldwin, 2005; quoted by Mohammadi et al., 2016). This approach considers marital problems as the result of spouses' ineffective communication skills, inability to effectively solve problems and conflicts, irrational expectations and beliefs, and negative behavioral exchanges. Cognitive behavioral approaches assume that when people change the way they process information and their cognitions, positive changes in emotions and behaviors will also occur (Epstein & Zheng, 2017). In general, cognitive-behavioral couple therapy has been created with the aim of reducing conflicts and communication confusion between couples. The aim of this approach is to help couples adapt to current problems and learn more effective communication methods (Davernia et al., 2015).

This research is important and aims to answer these questions:

1. Is cognitive-behavioral couple therapy intervention effective on married women's love schemas in the post-test phase?
2. Is cognitive-behavioral couple therapy intervention effective on married women's love schemas in the stable follow-up phase?

Method

The method of this research is quasi-experimental with multi-group pre-test and post-test design and two-month follow-up. In this research, treatment methods are considered as independent variables in two levels of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and non-intervention (control group) and love schemas are considered as dependent variables. The statistical population of this research consisted of all married women

aged 25-40 who referred to counseling centers in Tehran in 2018. The sampling volume of this research was done in two stages. In this way, it was first selected through available sampling from three counseling centers: Sarv Psychological Services and Counseling Center, Imam Reza Family Counseling and Consolidation Center in Tehran's 6th District, and the Nedaye Aramesh Ravan Counseling Clinic in Tehran's 5th District. Then, considering the possibility of dropping out, 40 married women who had referred to these centers for marital problems were randomly assigned to experimental groups (20 women) and control group (20 women).

Materials

1. Love schema scale. The love schema scale is a 6-item self-report instrument designed by Singlis et al. (1995) to measure the types of love schemas. This scale evaluates people's perceived desire to engage in romantic relationships according to the two domains of independence and closeness (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). In each of the items of this scale, feelings and experiences related to one of the types of love schemas are described. Using a six-point scale from 1 to 6, the respondent specifies his level of agreement with each item. The subscales of love schemas are secure, clingy, skittish, fickle, casual and disinterested love schema.

2. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy. The cognitive-behavioral couple therapy protocol was presented in ten sessions and in a group setting.

Findings

The results of the descriptive indices of love schemas show the difference in scores in the test group in love schemas in the pre-test stages compared to the post-test and follow-up stages compared to the scores of the control group.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicates the establishment of the condition of normal distribution of scores and the result of Levin's test also indicates the establishment of the condition of homogeneity of variances in the research variables (schemas of love). Also, Mauchly's W statistic for research variables is not significant at the 0.05 level; Therefore, the findings show that the variance of the differences between the levels of the dependent variable is not significant and the assumption of sphericity is maintained. Therefore, in the following, this statistic was used to interpret the results of the within-subjects effects test.

The intervention of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy has been effective on the score of secure love schema ($F=5.98$, $P=0.019$) with an effect size of 0.13, clingy love schema ($F=9.20$, $P=0.004$) With an effect size of 0.19, Skittish love schema ($F = 8.55$, $P = 0.006$) with an effect size of 0.18, Fickle love schema ($F = 8.15$, $P = 0.007$) with an effect size of 0.17, casual love schema ($F = 5.71$, $P = 0.022$) with an effect size of 0.13 and disinterested love schema ($F = 9.99$, $P = 0.003$) with an effect size of 0.20.

The comparison of the three stages in the experimental groups of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and the control group shows that the difference in love schemas in the post-test and follow-up stages is significant in comparison with the pre-test, and this effect remains stable until the follow-up stage. At the same time, these differences are not significant in the control group ($P<0.05$).

Discussion

The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on the love schemas of married women in Tehran. The results of repeated measures variance analysis showed that cognitive-behavioral couple therapy was

effective on love schemas, and this effect was reported to be stable in the follow-up phase.

First of all, it is important to point out that the unsatisfied needs of attachment and intimacy and frustration from primary emotional relationships create incompatible schemas related to intimate and attachment relationships. These beliefs and schemas related to interpersonal relationships are manifested in adult life in choosing a spouse and during marriage in marital relationships and have a destructive effect on them (Yang, 2003). In addition, cognitive skills examine and correct unrealistic expectations and thoughts of couples. These beliefs, expectations, perceptions and destructive and illogical documents overshadow marital relations. Therefore, cognitive training corrects the husband and wife's wrong perceptions and documents about each other's behavior and causes misunderstandings, reducing resentment and anger and paying attention to the positive aspects of each other's behavior. The less these marital resentments decrease, the higher the feeling of security in the relationship, and over time, it improves the damaged attachment styles in the relationship.

The possible logic of the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on reducing clingy, skittish, fickle, casual and disinterested love schemas is that the quality of everyone's marital relationship is the result of their beliefs, thoughts, behavior and actions and is related to their past decisions and performance. The absence of happy, positive and favorable relationships between couples causes fatigue and increases conflicts and decreases the attachment and security of the relationship. This approach helps the person to have more hope and

vitality in their relationship and to start rebuilding their past relationship with their spouse with more will. This improves incompatible love schemas and reduces the fear of closeness, reduces people's discomfort with being close to each other and independence, and reduces reluctance to relate to others. After the first months of life, some couples actually help to reduce reinforcers due to being involved in life issues and problems or not believing in the necessity and effect of behavioral skills. On the other hand, the occurrence of conflicts and resentments and their non-resolution causes an increase in annoyance and negative feelings, and as a result, a reluctance to perform pleasant behaviors and an increase in negative behaviors such as neglect, blame, and humiliation (Parse et al., 2015). For this purpose, cognitive-behavioral couple therapy, by improving the behavioral skills of couples, leads to the exchange of positive and pleasant behaviors and the reduction of negative behaviors and punishment. Also, the change in the couple's feelings and behavior leads to a change in attitude and has a positive effect on the cost-reward rate. These changes ultimately lead to an increase in intimacy, marital satisfaction, and a decrease in couples' emotional exhaustion. Therefore, cognitive-behavioral couple therapy by using different treatment techniques and methods reduces marital conflicts and increases secure attachment in couples.

Ethics

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of Interest

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

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