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## The effectiveness of treatment based on acceptance and commitment on rumination in women with a history of marital infidelity

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### Abstract

Marital infidelity is one of the most destructive problems in a relationship and one of the issues that usually leads to divorce. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy on rumination in women with a history of marital infidelity. The research method was quasi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The research's statistical population comprised all women who experienced infidelity in the city of Bojnord who went to the counseling center in 2021 to receive counseling services. Among these, 40 people were selected by available sampling and randomly assigned to two groups experimental (20 people) and control (20 people). The research tool was Nolen and Hoeksma's (1989) rumination questionnaire. The research data were analyzed by multivariate analysis of covariance using spss-24 software. The findings showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of rumination. In other words, treatment based on acceptance and commitment significantly reduced the rumination of women with a history of marital infidelity ( $p < 0.001$ ). Based on the results, it is recommended that clinical psychologists and therapists in providing psychological services use the treatment method based on acceptance and commitment along with other educational methods to improve the health of women who have seen infidelity.

**Keywords:** *Therapy based on acceptance and commitment, rumination, infidelity.*

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## Introduction

Infidelity is an issue that couple therapists regularly encounter in their clinical work and can be a painful experience for family members and ultimately lead to divorce (Garbinsky, Gladstone, Nikolova, and Olson 2020). Marital infidelity is defined as a sexual or emotional act outside the family framework (Yuan and Visser, 2019) and can be the most devastating experience of marriage.

One of the most important disturbances experienced by a spouse who has been violated is intense rumination about the event, which can be so intense and uncontrollable that it interferes with his concentration and daily functioning (Fincham and May, 2017). Rumination is a repetitive thinking process that is often uncontrollable and content-specific (Lewis & Jurman, 2018). In general, rumination is a set of passive thoughts that are repetitive and prevent adaptive problem solving and lead to an increase in negative emotions. Characteristics related to rumination include negative affect and depressive symptoms, negative oriented thinking, poor problem solving, lack of motivation and inhibition of positive behaviors, impaired concentration, and increased stress (Hosseini Lu et al., 2021).

When women discover their spouse's infidelity and extramarital affairs, they make inappropriate mental ruminations and attempts to escape from these disturbing thoughts, which are not only ineffective but cause more problems for the individual (Dehghan, Foroozandeh, and Zare, 1400 ).

Treatment based on acceptance and commitment should be used as a new approach based on principles such as acceptance, commitment, mindfulness, forgiveness, commitment in performance,

mental ideological patterns of these people (Loma et al., 2016) and as third wave cognitive therapy. It was developed by Hayes, which combines the behavioral principles of mindfulness and acceptance (Pulakanaho et al., 2019). The aim of this therapy is to help clients achieve a more valuable and satisfying life through increasing psychological flexibility and has six central processes. cognitive fault, acceptance, connection with the present, self as context, values and committed action (Yazdi, 2016). In other words, it helps a person to show more flexibility to choose the available options instead of avoiding unpleasant thoughts, emotions or memories (Hassanzadeh, Akbari, and Abolqasmi 2019).

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of the approach based on acceptance and commitment on rumination in women with a history of marital infidelity.

## Method

The method of this quasi-experimental research is pre-test-post-test with control group. The statistical population of the present study was all women with a history of marital infidelity in Bojnord city who have been referred to counseling centers in the last 2 years. Among them, 40 couples were selected as available samples and randomly assigned to two groups of 20 couples (experimental group) and 20 couples (control group). After collecting the questionnaires, the required raw data was extracted and analyzed using spss software version 24 and multivariate covariance analysis.

## Materials

**1. Rumination questionnaire.** The rumination questionnaire was designed by Nolen-Hoeksema, & Morrow (1989). which evaluates four different types of reaction to

negative mood. The rumination questionnaire consists of two scales of rumination responses and a scale of distracting responses. The rumination questionnaire has 22 items that are graded based on the Likert scale from never (1) to often (4). The range of scores of this questionnaire is variable between 22 and 88.

**2. Treatment intervention program based on commitment and acceptance:** In this research, the intervention of acceptance and commitment therapy was used for the first experimental group. In this way, the experience of attending the training workshop and the integration of several treatment protocols based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes, Straussahl and Wilson, 1999; Hayes et al., 2006) were used. These meetings were held in groups.

### Findings

Examining the average of the two groups in the pre-test and post-test stages shows that the post-test scores of the participants in the test group had a significant difference. Multivariate analysis of covariance was used to investigate the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy on rumination. The results of the homogeneity test of regression slope pre-test and post-test rumination ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $F = 1.152$ ) in the experimental and control groups showed that the regression slope was equal in both groups. The results of Levine's test to check the post-test homogeneity of the dependent variables in the groups showed that the variance of rumination ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 0.67$ ) was equal in the groups. The result of the M. Box test to examine the covariance matrix of the dependent variables between the test and control groups also showed that the covariance matrix of the dependent variables

in the two groups is equal ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 1.48$ ,  $\text{Box } M = 9.90$ ).

In the inter-group variable, the significance level is 0.001 and this value is smaller than the significance level of the criterion and also because the F value obtained is 35.15. Therefore, it can be said that treatment based on acceptance and commitment is effective in reducing rumination in women with a history of marital infidelity.

### Discussion

This research was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of commitment and acceptance approach training in reducing rumination in women with a history of marital infidelity, and the findings showed that commitment and acceptance approach training is effective in reducing rumination in women with a history of marital infidelity.

Because people affected by infidelity have catastrophic thoughts about their spouse's infidelity, this issue even makes them show a negative and selective bias towards the healing process of their relationship. These people are gradually drawn towards helplessness and inactivity, and this prevents them from many positive experiences. Isolation and inactivity also affect the perception of the individual and the combination of these factors causes the individual to transfer the feeling of inefficiency and helplessness to all his experiences and actually miss many opportunities for effective performance.

The assumption of treatment based on acceptance and commitment is that people consider many of their feelings, emotions or inner thoughts to be annoying and constantly try to change these experiences or get rid of them. These attempts to control emotions are ineffective and paradoxically intensify the feelings, emotions and thoughts that the person initially tries to avoid (Harris,

Aminzadeh, 2019). Therefore, he considers this method of avoidance as the main problem of patients. In fact, the central process of therapy based on acceptance and commitment teaches people how to stop inhibiting thoughts, how not to mix with disturbing thoughts and makes a person tolerate unpleasant emotions more. In the treatment based on acceptance and commitment, past traumas are examples of unchangeable things that should be accepted. It then requires him to accept what is out of control and commit to action that improves and enriches one's life (Hayes et al., 2013). Therefore, it can be said that education based on acceptance and commitment helps a person, in addition to accepting the past, to be more in touch with their experiences here and now. This will reduce his rumination and depression. Acceptance makes them stop struggling with themselves and focus all their energy towards their values and what they can do, and thus feel self-worth (Hossein Lu et al., 2021).

### **Ethics**

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

### **Acknowledgement**

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

### **Conflict of Interest**

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

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