

The effectiveness of reality therapy on aggression, loneliness and emotional divorce in married women with internet addiction

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of reality therapy on aggression, loneliness and emotional divorce in married women dependent on cyberspace.

Method: The research method was a quasi-experimental type of pre-test-post-test with a control group. The statistical population is all married women related to cyberspace who were referred to counseling centers in the east of Tehran in 2022. The sample was 36 people from the statistical population based on Morgan's table and selected by available online sampling method. They were replaced randomly in two groups of 18 people, experimental and control. In order to collect data, Young's Internet Addiction Scale, Buss and Perry's Aggression Questionnaire (1992), UCLA Loneliness Questionnaire (1980) and Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale were used. The experimental group subjects received 8 sessions of 120 minutes of reality therapy intervention with a time interval of one session per week for two months. The control group did not receive any intervention. The collected data were analyzed with spss software and analysis of covariance.

Results: The results showed that reality therapy the variable of aggressiveness, feelings of loneliness and emotional divorce in the experimental group compared to the control group had a significant effect ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The results of this research showed that reality therapy can be effective on aggression, loneliness and emotional divorce in married women dependent on virtual space.

Keywords: aggression, internet addiction, emotional divorce, loneliness, married women, reality therapy.

1 Introduction

Today, the Internet and social networks have served as important tools for interaction and entertainment for

people and have facilitated interpersonal relationships (Linares et al., 2021). With the increasing popularity of social media, dependence on it has also increased. Although social media can promote psychosocial well-being,

excessive use and dependence have caused many problems, especially for couples (Wong et al., 2022). *Internet addiction* (IA) is one of the things that has caused essential challenges in today's world and has involved many families. The family and its emotional atmosphere directly relate to IA (Baberi et al., 2022). One of the complications that IA creates in the family environment is increased coercive tactics, including threats, humiliation, and controlling the other party's behavior in social relationships. Among couples, one of the subtypes of aggressive behavior caused by dependence on virtual space can also cause people to feel lonely (Smith, Leonis, & Anandavalli, 2021). Intense and long-term loneliness can cause negative consequences in various areas of a person's life, including mental and physical health, adaptation, and academic progress in life (Käll et al., 2020). Insight into the nature of loneliness and its causes, especially among couples, is a public health imperative (Rich Madsen et al., 2021). Loneliness is a subjective experience of distress that occurs when a person's social relationships are perceived as less than desirable. Although loneliness may be related to the quantity and quality of relationships with others, research shows that lonely people often feel misunderstood, and their relationships lack meaning. Loneliness results from unmet attachment needs and social isolation (Smith, Leonis, & Anandavalli, 2021).

Another consequence of IA is *Emotional Divorce* (ED) between couples, which is closely related to feelings of loneliness and aggression (Robert et al., 2021). While in formal divorce, couples are officially separated by court proceedings and annulment of their marriage certificate, ED is defined as a situation in which the family structure seems to be preserved, while it is empty from the inside; Because a negative emotional relationship has replaced a positive relationship (Mahmoudpour et al., 2021). Couples who have experienced ED negatively interact with each other without respect and love in their relationships (Rasheed, Amr, & Fahad, 2021). This problem in the relationship causes a decrease in positive energy in the family (Ghaibi et al., 2022). This destructive relationship has somehow caused a lack of trust, respect, and love for each other. Instead of supporting each other, spouses seek to find a reason for harassment and humiliation to prove the fault and reject the other party (Poupis, Rubin, & Lteif, 2021).

Reality therapy (RT) is a set of theoretical and practical principles that were proposed in the 1950s by a psychiatrist named William Glasser. It is a type of psychotherapy that tries to help people solve their problems by paying attention to reality, responsibility, and right and wrong things in a

person's life. In this method, people who need help are helped by explaining human nature, determining behavioral rules, and planning the treatment process (Glasser, 1986, 1999, 2013; Shafiabadi & Naseri, 2022). The *choice theory*/RT approach is based on the belief that people can learn to engage in more effective behaviors, gain more control and have better self-images. When such strategies are taught to people, people will be able to increase their interpersonal skills. According to Glasser, humans are controlled by their desires to satisfy their internal needs, not external stimuli (Glasser, 1999).

In this regard, the results of Safari et al.'s research (2021) showed that RT training effectively reduces teenage girls' IA and increases the perception of family-social support. The research of Moridi et al. (2020) also showed that Iranian-Islamic RT is a suitable method for increasing the compatibility and marital satisfaction of couples. Maleki Tabar and Riahi (2016) also found that group counseling interventions based on choice theory significantly reduced students' IA (Maleki Tabar & Riahi, 2017; Moridi, Kajbaf, & Mahmoudi, 2020; Safari, Soleimanian, & Jajarmi, 2021).

Examining the literature on the effectiveness of RT shows that many studies have been done in this field; However, only some studies have been done concerning IA in married women. Therefore, in addition to paying attention to the damages caused by IA, the effectiveness of educational interventions such as RT should be examined. By using effective and efficient scientific interventions, not only the areas of harm can be reduced, but also the areas of satisfaction, peace, and intimacy in the relationship couples have been facilitated. RT can help married women to behave responsibly and by being aware of their basic needs in pursuit of healthy satisfaction of these needs in the safe environment of family, from a successful family identity by emphasizing internal control and paying attention to the wishes of individuals (Glasser, 2013). Therefore, the current research aims to determine the effectiveness of RT training on aggression, loneliness, and ED in married women dependent on virtual space.

2 Methods

2.1 Study design and Participant

The current research design was quasi-experimental and pre-test-post-test with a control group. This research's statistical population comprised all married women referred to counseling centers located in the health centers in the east of Tehran in 2022. The sampling method was such that after

obtaining the necessary permits from the respective counseling centers, the number 40 married women who were referred to this counseling center for their marital problems were selected. The sample size was calculated with 95% confidence level, 0.05 alpha error and 80% study power, 15 people for each group, and 20 people for each group considering the possibility of dropout. After selecting the sample people, they were randomly replaced in two control and experimental groups. The criteria for entering the research were female and married and dependent on cyberspace based on Young's IA Scale (1999), an overall score of 20 to 100. Consent to participate in the research, not having a major psychiatric disorder like psychosis. The criteria for withdrawing from the research were unwillingness to continue participating in the research project, having absence for more than 2 sessions. Finally, one subject of the experimental group and two of the control group dropped out due to not completing of the questionnaire or not participating in the intervention sessions, and the data of 37 people were analyzed. Finally, the experimental group underwent eight weekly sessions of 120 minutes according to the RT training protocol (Glasser, 1999) and the control group did not receive any interventions. At the beginning of the intervention period and at the end of the period, all participants completed the aggression, loneliness, and emotional divorce scales.

2.2 Measurements

Young's Internet Addiction Scale, *Buss and Perry's Aggression Questionnaire* (1992), *UCLA Loneliness Questionnaire* (1980) and *Gottman's Emotional Divorce Scale* were used to collect data.

2.2.1 Internet Addiction

Internet Addiction Test is one of the most reliable tests to measure Internet addiction, compiled by Young (1989). This scale has 20 items and its purpose is to measure the level of internet addiction in different people. Its response range is a five-item Likert. The cut-off point of the internet addiction questionnaire in response to 4 or more questions indicates the presence of internet addiction disorder in a person. The validity of the bisection method is equal to 0.72 and the value of Cronbach's alpha in the study is reported to be equal to 0.71, the value of Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be 0.65 (Young, 1998).

2.2.2 Aggression

Aggression Questionnaire is a self-report tool that includes 29 statements and four subscales, including physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Its scoring is based on a 5-point Likert scale. Buss and Parry (1992) reported test-retest coefficients (9 weeks apart) for four subscales in the range of 0.80 to 0.72 and correlations between the four subscales in the range of 0.38 to 0.49. Examining the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the subscales also showed that these coefficients for the physical aggression subscale are 0.82, verbal aggression 0.81, anger 0.83 and hostility 0.80 (Buss & Perry, 1992). Using factor analysis, 4 behavioral factors, anger, physical and verbal aggression, resentment and suspicion were extracted from it. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire is equal to 78.

2.2.3 Loneliness

UCLA loneliness scale was used to measure loneliness. It is the most well-known loneliness scale and has more psychometric validity than other scales (Hartshorne, 1993). This scale has 20 items that are set based on the Likert scale. This scale has been implemented in four groups of students, nurses, teachers and elderly people, and the alpha range has been obtained from 89 to 94 (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). In the present research, the scale's reliability is calculated using Cronbach's alpha formula and 79 was obtained.

2.2.4 Emotional Divorce

Emotional Divorce Scale Developed by Gottman in 1993. This questionnaire has 24 items with a yes or no answers. If the number of positive answers is equal to 8 and above, it means that the person's married life is subject to separation and the symptoms of his/her divorce are evident. Therefore, high scores in this scale indicate that emotional divorce is more likely. The formal and structural validity of the confirmation tool and its reliability using Cronbach's alpha method have been reported as 91%. Gottman (1993) used varimax rotation factor analysis to obtain construct validity (Gottman, 1993).

2.3 Intervention

RT was performed on the experimental group during eight 120-minute sessions over two months.

2.3.1 Reality Therapy

Table 1 presents a summary of reality therapy sessions according to the Glasser’s theory (Glasser, 1999).

Table 1

Summary of reality therapy sessions

Session	Content
1	Members getting to know each other/ The group leader introduced himself and gave an explanation about the purpose of this workshop and a brief explanation about the theory of reality therapy was given to the members and finally it was done before the exam.
2	Getting to know the concepts of reality therapy/ In this session, the members were asked to express what they had learned from the previous session, to raise the questions that may have occurred to them; The other members were also asked to be active in the group by answering or expressing their opinions, the concept of Glasser’s needs and its types (need for freedom, power, recreation, sense of belonging and survival) were explained, and the intensity and extent of the needs were also expressed and Members were helped to identify the strength profile of their needs.
3	Familiarization with the concepts of reality therapy/ The results from the previous session were presented by the group leader, and after answering the questions of the members, weekly practice, familiarization with four toxic thoughts (catastrophizing, intolerance, devaluation, expectations from others) Members with their toxic thoughts, intervention in changing the thinking wheel of the behavior machine in clients, weekly practice of toxic thoughts and training to replace toxic thoughts in the thinking wheel of the behavior machine and change these thoughts, behavior, feelings and emotions.
4	Reviewing the presentation of members' experiences regarding the topics of the previous session and reviewing the weekly practice, getting to know the seven connecting behaviors in interpersonal relationships (1. Listening, 2. Support, 3. Encouragement, 4. Respect, 5. Trust, 6. Acceptance, 7. Discussion on differences), familiarizing the members with the seven types of destructive behavior in interpersonal relationships (1. fault-finding and criticism, 2. praise and complaints, 3. blame, 4. nagging, 5. threats, 6. punishment, 7. Ransom) weekly practice of bonding and destructive behaviors. - Acquainting yourself with destructive behaviors and learning to replace constructive behaviors in order to improve relationships with your spouse.
5	Dealing with the concepts of behavior control and general behavior/ engaging in a group discussion about the concepts of behavior control, general behavior and creativity from the perspective of reality therapy and the choice theory and explanation of the general behavior machine and its components (cognition, action, emotion and physiology) and the role of people in the movements of the machine, their behavior and goals.
6	Getting to know the concept of the qualitative world / the concept of the qualitative world was fully explained to the members; Creating a sense of responsibility to satisfy the needs, using concrete examples and expressing the purpose and behavior and the responsibility of the behavior
7	Dealing with the concepts of behavior control and the qualitative world/ Considering reaching the final sessions of the group, the discussion about the previous trainings, including the concepts of behavior control and reminders, was done.
8	receiving and feedback and summarizing/the beginning was the same as the previous sessions, in this session we practiced the learnings, summarizing all the sessions and topics raised, receiving feedback from the members to each other and to the group leader and vice versa, and the end after the test.

2.4 Data Analysis

In this research, SPSS statistical software version 21 was used to analyze the data, and to check the research hypotheses, multivariate covariance analysis was used to compare the analysis scores of the research hypotheses of the experimental and control groups. In this research, the following tools were used to collect information.

3 Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the experimental and control groups, including the duration of the marriage and having children, are presented in Table 2. The results of Table 2 show that in the experimental group, 42.1% of the marriage duration of the research participants is over ten years. In the control group, 44.5% of the marriage duration of the research participants is between 5 and 10 years. Also, in the experimental and control groups, 52.6% and 61.1% of the participants in the research have children, respectively.

Table 2

Comparison of frequency and frequency percentage according to duration of marriage and having children

Index	Exp. group		Control group	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 to 5 years	ε	21.2	٦	33.3
5 to 10 years	٧	36.8	^	44.5
More than 10 years	^	41.1	ε	22.2
Total	١٩	١٠٠	١^	١٠٠
have children	١٠	52.6	١١	61.1
without children	٩	47.7	٧	38.9
Total	١٩	100	١^	١٠٠

Table 3 shows the descriptive indices of the research variables separately for the experimental and control groups. In addition, in Table 3, the results of the Kolmogorov-

Smirnov test are presented to check the normality of the distribution of dependent variables in the two groups.

Table 3

Descriptive indices and results of the normality of the distribution of the dependent variables in the two experimental and control groups

Variables	Descriptive index			K-S Results		
	Group	Mean	SD	Z	Df	Sig.
ED pre-test	Experimental	97.68	19.44	0.129	19	0.200
	Control	91.72	27.10	0.116	18	0.200
ED post-test	Experimental	90.00	21.57		19	
	Control	90.72	28.07		18	
Loneliness pre-test	Experimental	216.05	49.46	0.136	19	0.200
	Control	213.61	67.06	0.104	18	0.200
Loneliness post-test	Experimental	208.42	51.60		19	
	Control	210.16	66.80		18	
Aggression pretest	Experimental	85.84	22.12	0.145	19	0.200
	Control	84.83	29.75	0.102	18	0.200
Aggression post-test	Experimental	82.15	22.95		19	
	Control	82.77	29.84		18	

The results of Table 3 show that the mean of all three research variables in the experimental group compared to the control group has decreased from pre-test to post-test. Also, the table results show that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is insignificant for all variables in the pre-test and post-test. Therefore, their distribution is normal. To perform covariance analysis, in addition to checking the normality of the distribution of variables, the assumptions of homogeneity of variance of variables in two groups, homogeneity of regression slope, and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices were also checked. The results of Levene's test showed that this test is not significant for three dependent variables (ED: $P: 0.055 < 0.05$; loneliness: $P: 0.637 < 0.05$; aggression: $P: 0.994 < 0.05$) And therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of variances is maintained. Also, the results of the homogeneity assumption of the regression slope showed that the source of interaction between the group and the pre-test is not significant for all three variables. (ED: $P: 0.375 < 0.05$; Feeling lonely: $P: 0.079 < 0.05$; Aggression: $P: 0.071 < 0.05$). It can be concluded that this assumption has been met. Finally, the non-significance of the M-box test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices was also met ($P < 0.05$).

After ensuring the assumptions were met, the results of the multivariate covariance analysis were checked. The results of the multivariate tests for this analysis showed that all these tests, including the Pillai's trace and Wilks's lambda, are significant. Based on this, controlling the pre-test scores has significantly changed at least one of the dependent variables. Also, the effect coefficient in the multivariate test showed that 57% of the changes were related to the experimental intervention. In order to investigate the effects on the dependent variables, the results of the within-group effects test were examined. These results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive indices and results of the normality of the distribution of the dependent variables in the two experimental and control groups

Effect	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	Eta ²
ED Pre-test	19932.61	1	19932.61	828.26	0.001	0.963
group	455.90	1	455.90	18.94	0.001	0.372
Aggression pretest	0.93	1	0.93	0.22	0.642	0.007
group	24.27	1	24.27	5.72	0.023	0.152
Loneliness pre-test	0.37	1	0.37	0.01	0.895	0.001
group	148.52	1	148.54	6.94	0.013	0.178

The results of Table 4 show that by controlling the pre-test scores, the RT intervention has caused a significant reduction (see Table 2) of the mean of all three dependent variables in the experimental group compared to the control group. Also, examining the effect size in this table shows that 37% of the changes in the ED scores, 15% of the changes in the aggression scores, and 18% of the changes in the loneliness scores of the experimental group compared to the control group were caused by RT training.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of RT on feelings of loneliness, aggression, and ED in married women dependent on cyberspace. The results of the data analysis showed that the RT intervention with an effect size of 0.37 has reduced ED scores in the experimental group compared to the control group. These findings are in line with the results of many past studies (Arabpour & Hashemiyan, 2012; Deldadeh & Moaveneslami, 2020;

Elsayed & Elyas, 2016; Fattahian et al., 2017; Mahmoudpour et al., 2021).

In explaining these results, it can be said that IA can cause a family crisis. Research has proven a direct relationship between the two phenomena of IA and ED. Many family problems are rooted in these hidden realities. Unfortunately, the cause of some separations and cold relationships between family members is closely related to the phenomenon of IA and its problems (Roshanravan, 2021). In fact, many shared lives are on the verge of falling apart because of this problem. RT helps couples recognize destructive behaviors and replace them with bonding behaviors to restore their emotional relationships and effectively improve the satisfying life of couples. The results indicated that RT intervention is effective in aggression, loneliness, and ED of couples dependent on virtual space. This educational-therapeutic program has a high ability to improve relationships between couples. Considering that the statistics of ED and IA in families are increasing, it is recommended to give basic attention to the category of IA due to its consequences on the family and its close relationship with ED. Therefore, since prevention is much easier than treatment to have healthy families and, consequently, healthy communities, we must pay special attention to the preventive approach in family injuries.

Also, the results of the present study showed that the intervention of RT with an effect size of 0.17 had reduced the scores of loneliness in the experimental group compared to the control group. It is consistent with the results of some past studies (Bahadori, Jahangiri, & Bakhshipour, 2022; Besse, Whitaker, & Brannon, 2022; Roshanravan, 2021; Sade, Noferesti, & Fahimdanesh, 2022).

In explaining these results, it can also be said that although family members apparently live in a common space, they do not have emotional interaction and formations with each other. The emotional bond, one of the components of stable families, is formed due to the continuity of dialogue and exchange of opinions among its members. On the other hand, virtual networks distort and damage the emotional bonds in the family in various ways (Poupis, Rubin, & Lteif, 2021) and cause the members to move away from each other and as a result, they feel lonely. RT reduces the distance with the help of these people in identifying toxic thoughts and controlling them, and recognizing and respecting the qualitative world of the spouse. The set of methods, techniques, and tools of RT helps people move from destructive choices to constructive choices and from ineffective behaviors to effective behaviors, and conditions

are provided so that every couple does not feel forced to change their behavior and type of performance alone. Establishing respectful behaviors and positive thoughts towards the spouse increases couples' emotional and emotional intimacy. If a couple can establish the right behaviors and replace their positive thoughts with their negative thoughts, not only will they find effective communication, but the intimacy between them will also increase.

Finally, the results of the present study showed that RT intervention with an effect size of 0.15 has reduced aggression scores in the experimental group compared to the control group. It is consistent with the results of some past studies (Arabpour & Hashemiyani, 2012; Fattahian et al., 2017; Moridi, Kajbaf, & Mahmoudi, 2020; Robert et al., 2021; Sade, Noferesti, & Fahimdanesh, 2022).

In explaining this finding, dependence and addiction to virtual space causes people to replace each other in relationships and become more distant daily. Couples are no exception to the rule. When both couples show their interest and communication towards the virtual space and social networks, they constantly compare their real life with the life of demagogues on social networks, and as a result, their expectations rise. Instead of understanding the reality, they become angry and distant from each other. The emergence of the Internet and the entry of people into the virtual world has brought about changes in families, especially between couples, and has allowed people to experience a special form of social communication in which there is no real social presence (Shafiabadi & Naseri, 2022). In social networks, social values are exclusive to groups and virtual communities that are accepted as respected by social networks. This makes couples in real life not pay attention to satisfying their needs, which suppressed or neglected needs cause their aggression. One of the effects of RT training intervention is helping to meet needs effectively. RT in a group method helped couples to identify their neglected needs and try to pay more attention to them. They also learned how to control their thoughts, emotions, and behavior by learning the machine's behavior.

5 Limitations

One of the most important limitations of this study is the research community, which is limited to the east of Tehran. Therefore, caution should be observed in generalizing these results to other societies.

6 Suggestions and Applications

According to the results of the present study, it is suggested that psychologists and counselors use RT techniques to improve the damage caused by IA, especially in married women.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics principles

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

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