



Effectiveness of Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on Marital Beliefs and Marital Satisfaction in Women Affected by Infidelity

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) on marital beliefs and marital satisfaction in women affected by marital infidelity.

Methods and Materials: The research employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group. The sample consisted of 30 women affected by marital infidelity in Tehran, who were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n = 15) or the control group (n = 15). The experimental group received 10 sessions of REBT intervention, while the control group did not receive any intervention. The instruments used included the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI) and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Data were analyzed using Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) and related statistical tests.

Findings: The results showed that REBT significantly reduced irrational relational beliefs and increased marital satisfaction in women affected by infidelity. The experimental group demonstrated significant improvements in scores on marital beliefs and satisfaction compared to the control group after the therapeutic intervention. The findings of the multivariate analysis of covariance also confirmed the significant impact of REBT intervention on improving the studied variables.

Conclusion: These findings indicate the high effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in changing irrational beliefs and increasing marital satisfaction in women affected by marital infidelity. However, it is recommended that future research with larger sample sizes and long-term follow-ups be conducted to examine the more sustained effects of this therapy.

Keywords: Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), marital beliefs, marital satisfaction, marital infidelity, affected women.

1. Introduction

Marital infidelity is one of the most serious harms in marital relationships, which can have profound and lasting effects on the psychological well-being and relationships of couples. Infidelity is defined as a violation of trust and marital vows, typically involving lies, secrecy, and extramarital relationships. This phenomenon not only disrupts the marital relationship but also significantly impacts the mental health and emotions of the women affected by it. Research indicates that women who have been affected by infidelity often experience decreased marital satisfaction, increased stress levels, and reduced self-esteem (Ghezelseflo et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a strong need for effective therapies to reduce these harms and improve the quality of life for these individuals. One of the well-known and effective treatments in this area is Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). This approach, introduced by Albert Ellis in the 1950s, is based on the belief that the root of many psychological and behavioral problems lies in individuals' irrational and incorrect beliefs. In this therapy, efforts are made to help individuals identify and change their irrational beliefs, thereby enabling them to adopt more rational beliefs and better cope with life's challenges (Dryden & David, 2020).

Given that marital infidelity can severely affect individuals' relational beliefs, using the REBT approach to reconstruct these beliefs and improve the marital satisfaction of women affected by infidelity can yield positive results. Relational beliefs are a set of beliefs and assumptions that individuals hold about their emotional and marital relationships. These beliefs can positively or negatively affect marital satisfaction and the quality of relationships. Irrational beliefs can lead to unrealistic and unhealthy expectations from relationships, ultimately resulting in decreased marital satisfaction (Višlā et al., 2016).

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, by focusing on changing these beliefs and replacing them with more rational and constructive beliefs, can help women affected by infidelity regain psychological balance and marital satisfaction (Ellis, 1957; Ellis & Dryden, 2017). This process of change not only reduces the stress and anxiety associated with infidelity but also contributes to the overall improvement of marital relationships (Turner & Barker, 2019). Additionally, REBT, with its structured and goal-oriented framework, provides individuals with the necessary tools to analyze and reconstruct incorrect beliefs. This approach is based on the principle that our emotions and

behaviors stem from our thoughts, and if we can change our thoughts and beliefs, our emotions and behaviors will also change accordingly (David et al., 2018; Harahap et al., 2022). Therefore, women affected by infidelity can benefit from this therapy by changing their attitudes and beliefs, managing the negative emotions resulting from infidelity, and achieving recovery.

In recent years, numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of REBT in treating various psychological problems. For example, a study by Knaus (2019) showed that this approach is highly effective in reducing anxiety and depression in individuals with anxiety disorders (Knaus, 2019). Additionally, other studies have demonstrated that REBT can also play a significant role in improving emotional and marital relationships (Ellis & Dryden, 2017). These findings suggest that using REBT in treating women affected by infidelity can reduce irrational beliefs and increase their marital satisfaction.

In a related study, Višlā et al. (2016) examined the impact of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on reducing irrational beliefs and improving marital satisfaction. The results of this study showed that this therapy significantly reduced irrational beliefs and increased marital satisfaction in various groups, including women affected by infidelity. These findings indicate that changing irrational beliefs can lead to improved quality of life and marital relationships (Višlā et al., 2016). Moreover, another study conducted by Turner & Barker (2019) found that Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy can create significant improvements in marital satisfaction and reduce stress associated with infidelity. In this study, women affected by infidelity reported that after receiving REBT treatment, their negative emotions decreased, and they were able to rebuild their relationships. These results suggest that this therapy can be an effective tool for helping women cope with the challenges arising from infidelity. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy can also help women develop more effective coping skills for managing infidelity and repairing their relationships (Turner & Barker, 2019). David et al. (2018) concluded in their research that REBT, by providing appropriate tools and techniques, helps individuals address their psychological and relational problems more effectively (David et al., 2018). These tools include techniques such as identifying and challenging irrational beliefs, practicing rational thinking, and using effective coping strategies, which can help improve marital satisfaction and reduce the stress resulting from infidelity.

Ultimately, given the positive results obtained from various studies, it can be concluded that Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy can be used as an effective approach in treating women affected by infidelity. This therapy, by focusing on changing irrational beliefs and improving marital satisfaction, can help these women achieve greater psychological and relational recovery, leading to healthier emotional and marital lives. However, further research in this area is needed to examine the long-term and broader effects of this therapy on women affected by infidelity. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) on the relational beliefs and marital satisfaction of women affected by infidelity in 2020 in Tehran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group. The following sections detail the precise methodology used in this research. The statistical population of this study included all married women affected by marital infidelity in Tehran in 2020. These women sought help at counseling and psychotherapy centers to improve their psychological and marital status. A convenience sampling method was used to select the participants. Accordingly, married women who had visited counseling centers in Tehran due to facing marital infidelity during 2020 and were willing to participate in the study were selected. Inclusion criteria included: experiencing marital infidelity within the past six months, willingness to attend therapy sessions and cooperate with the researcher, having at least one year of marriage, being between the ages of 25 and 50, and not having severe psychiatric disorders such as psychotic disorders or bipolar disorder. Exclusion criteria included: non-cooperation during therapy sessions, participation in parallel psychotherapy treatments, and the occurrence of serious family or psychological crises during the study period. Ultimately, 30 women who met the inclusion criteria were randomly assigned to two groups: experimental and control. Each group consisted of 15 participants.

Before the therapeutic intervention began, all participants (in both the experimental and control groups) completed the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI) and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. This initial assessment aimed to evaluate the baseline status of relational beliefs and marital satisfaction among the women affected by infidelity. The

experimental group received the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy intervention, which included 10 therapy sessions held weekly. During this period, the control group did not receive any intervention. After the intervention concluded, both groups (experimental and control) completed the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI) and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale again to assess the effects of the intervention.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Relationship Beliefs

The Eidelson and Epstein questionnaire was initially developed in 1981 with 60 items. It was later revised to its current form in 1982, which includes 40 items and 5 subscales, designed to measure dysfunctional marital beliefs. This inventory is scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree = 5 to strongly disagree = 0. The score for each subscale is obtained by summing the scores of the relevant items, and the overall score for relational beliefs is calculated by summing the subscale scores. A high score on this questionnaire indicates a high level of irrational and dysfunctional beliefs in marital relationships. The RBI has good internal consistency reliability, ranging from .74 to .83, and test-retest reliability of .70. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales were reported as .72, .79, .82, .78, and .81, respectively. In the Persian version, the Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be .75. The scores on this questionnaire positively correlate with Jones's 1968 measure of irrational beliefs (Yousofnia Pasha et al., 2021).

2.2.2. Marital Satisfaction

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, designed by Olson, Fournier, and Druckman (1985), consists of 47 items assessing various dimensions of marital satisfaction, such as communication satisfaction, conflict resolution, sexual relationships, and empathy. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The Persian version of this questionnaire was evaluated by Asgari and colleagues (2011), and its validity and reliability were confirmed. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire scale was reported as .90, indicating very high reliability. Additionally, Kheir and colleagues (2014) examined the construct validity and reliability of this scale in the Iranian population, and the results showed that this tool has good construct validity and can effectively measure marital satisfaction (Jonidi et al., 2021).

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)

The experimental group in this study received 10 weekly sessions of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), with each session lasting 90 minutes. The sessions were conducted by an experienced psychotherapist who held an official certification in REBT. The content of the sessions was structured based on Ellis's therapeutic model (Ellis, 1957; Ellis & Dryden, 2017).

Session 1: Assessment and Orientation

In the first session, the therapist begins by conducting a thorough assessment to gather a comprehensive history of the client's issues related to marital infidelity. The session emphasizes the use of unconditional acceptance to establish a supportive and non-judgmental therapeutic environment. The therapist helps the client to articulate their problem clearly and introduces the concept of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). The session concludes with a homework assignment where the client is asked to role-play situations related to the identified problem, encouraging them to reflect on their reactions and thoughts in these scenarios.

Session 2: Introduction to REBT Strategies

The second session focuses on introducing the fundamental strategies of REBT. The therapist reviews the client's role-play exercise and provides feedback. The core of this session is the introduction of the C-B-A model (Consequences, Beliefs, Antecedents), a central framework in REBT. The therapist explains how irrational beliefs lead to emotional and behavioral consequences. The client is assigned homework to practice applying the C-B-A model to their thoughts and behaviors, with the expectation of presenting their results in the next session.

Session 3: Identifying Irrational Beliefs

In the third session, the therapist helps the client identify and understand the sources of their distressing emotions, focusing on the irrational beliefs that underlie problematic behaviors. The session includes a review of the previous session's homework and a detailed exploration of the client's irrational thoughts. The client is guided in recognizing these thoughts in various contexts. For homework, the client is instructed to continue identifying and recording their irrational beliefs in real-life situations.

Session 4: Challenging Irrational Beliefs

The fourth session is dedicated to reviewing the client's homework and engaging in a discussion about two specific irrational beliefs related to their problematic behavior. The

therapist encourages the client to critically examine these beliefs and consider their validity. The session is interactive, with the therapist helping the client to see the connection between their beliefs and their emotional responses. The homework involves creating a list of personal problems and the "should" statements associated with them, which will be addressed in subsequent sessions.

Session 5: Disputing Irrational Beliefs

During the fifth session, the therapist teaches the client how to actively dispute their irrational beliefs. This session is a pivotal point in the therapy, as it focuses on empowering the client to question the logic behind their irrational "should" statements and replace them with more rational and effective beliefs. The client is encouraged to keep a record of their problems and actively dispute the associated irrational beliefs as homework.

Session 6: Addressing Behavioral Concerns with Humor

In the sixth session, the therapist addresses the client's concerns related to their problematic behaviors and the irrational beliefs associated with them, using humor as a therapeutic tool. This technique helps the client to view their irrational thoughts in a less threatening and more manageable way. The homework assignment for this session involves using humor to challenge their flawed thinking, helping them to lighten their emotional load and reduce the intensity of their irrational beliefs.

Session 7: Rational-Emotive Imagery Training

The seventh session introduces Rational-Emotive Imagery (REI), a technique designed to help the client internalize and reinforce positive cognitive changes. The therapist guides the client through the process of visualizing scenarios where they successfully apply rational thinking to manage their emotions and behaviors. The client is tasked with practicing these visualization techniques at home, focusing on creating vivid and constructive mental images of their rational thoughts overcoming irrational beliefs.

Session 8: Review and Relaxation Training

In the final session, the therapist reviews all previous homework assignments and addresses any remaining questions or difficulties the client may have encountered. The session also includes training in relaxation techniques, emphasizing the importance of self-management in handling emotions and stress. The therapist reinforces the role of the client in maintaining their progress and encourages continued practice of the techniques learned throughout the therapy. For homework, the client is asked to practice relaxation exercises and apply the REBT techniques in managing their emotions moving forward.

2.4. Data Analysis

Various statistical methods were used to analyze the data obtained from the pretest and posttest. Initially, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the normal distribution of the data. Then, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to compare the mean scores of relational beliefs and marital satisfaction between the experimental and control groups. Additionally, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine the impact of the therapeutic intervention on each of the research variables (relational beliefs and marital satisfaction). This analysis was conducted to control for overlapping variables and to assess the pure effect of the therapeutic intervention on the posttest results.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Research Variables in the Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Group	Pre-test: M (SD)	Post-test: M (SD)
Relationship Beliefs	Experimental	125.3 (10.5)	98.6 (8.2)
	Control	123.7 (11.0)	122.8 (10.8)
Marital Satisfaction	Experimental	89.4 (12.1)	105.7 (9.4)
	Control	90.6 (11.7)	91.0 (11.5)

Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations of scores on relationship beliefs and marital satisfaction in both the experimental and control groups at the pre-test and post-test stages. As shown, following the therapeutic intervention, the scores on relationship beliefs significantly decreased, and the scores on marital satisfaction significantly increased in the experimental group.

Table 2

Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA)

Source of Variation	Dependent Variable	F Statistic	Significance Level (p-value)	Partial η^2
Group	Relationship Beliefs	32.48	0.001	0.46
	Marital Satisfaction	25.61	0.001	0.41

The results of the multivariate analysis of covariance indicated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the total scores of relationship beliefs

3. Findings and Results

In this study, 30 women affected by marital infidelity participated and were randomly assigned to two groups: the experimental group ($n = 15$) and the control group ($n = 15$). The mean age of the participants was 37.5 years with a standard deviation of 6.3 years. In terms of educational status, the majority of participants held a high school diploma (40%), while the least number held a university degree (15%). The average duration of marriage among the participants was 10.2 years with a standard deviation of 4.5 years. Regarding the number of children, 50% of the participants had one child, 30% had two children, and 20% had no children.

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the distribution of scores for both the relationship beliefs and marital satisfaction variables was normal in both groups, as the significance level for both variables was greater than 0.05. Additionally, the results of Levene's test showed that the variances of the two groups were homogeneous for both variables ($p > 0.05$).

and marital satisfaction. The effect size (Partial η^2) also suggests that group assignment had a considerable impact on these variables (Table 2).

Table 3

Results of Univariate Analysis of Covariance for Each Variable

Source of Variation	Dependent Variable	F Statistic	Significance Level (p-value)	Partial η^2
Group	Relationship Beliefs	40.22	0.001	0.51
	Marital Satisfaction	35.14	0.001	0.48

In the univariate analysis of covariance, a significant difference was observed between the experimental and control groups for each of the variables, total relationship beliefs score, and marital satisfaction. These results indicate that the therapeutic intervention significantly improved the scores on these variables (Table 3).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the impact of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) on relationship beliefs and marital satisfaction in women affected by marital infidelity. The results demonstrated that this type of therapy significantly improved relationship beliefs and increased marital satisfaction in the experimental group. These findings are well-aligned with the theoretical foundations of REBT and highlight the effectiveness of this approach in altering irrational beliefs and enhancing the quality of life for couples.

The results indicated that REBT effectively reduced irrational beliefs related to marital relationships in the experimental group. This finding is consistent with Ellis's (1957) theories regarding the impact of irrational beliefs on human behaviors and emotions. According to Ellis's theory, many psychological and behavioral issues stem from irrational beliefs that individuals develop in their daily lives. In the context of marital infidelity, these irrational beliefs may include unrealistic expectations of a partner, perfectionist thoughts, or incorrect assumptions about marital relationships (Ellis, 1957; Ellis & Dryden, 2017). Dryden and David (2020) also concluded in their studies that changing irrational beliefs through REBT can improve psychological well-being and enhance the quality of personal relationships (Dryden & David, 2020).

The findings of this study revealed that after receiving the therapeutic intervention, participants were able to identify and challenge their irrational beliefs. These changes ultimately led to improved psychological status and a reduction in the negative emotions resulting from infidelity. As Vislă et al. (2016) noted in their research, altering irrational beliefs can have positive effects on reducing stress and increasing positive emotions (Vislă et al., 2016). In particular, in the context of marital infidelity, which is associated with intense feelings of insecurity and despair, REBT can serve as an effective tool for managing these emotions and improving relationships.

Furthermore, the findings of this study showed that REBT significantly increased marital satisfaction among women

affected by infidelity. These results are consistent with previous research. Turner and Barker (2019) found in a similar study that REBT can improve emotional relationships and increase marital satisfaction in couples facing serious relational issues. This study also showed that women reported improvements in communication satisfaction, conflict resolution, and other dimensions of marital life after receiving the therapeutic intervention.

These results can be explained by the theoretical foundations of REBT. According to this theory, many marital dissatisfactions are caused by irrational beliefs and unrealistic expectations of a partner. David et al. (2018) also showed in their research that changing these beliefs and replacing them with more rational thoughts can lead to improved marital satisfaction (David et al., 2018). When individuals realize that many of their expectations and perceptions about their partner were irrational and incorrect, they can approach marital issues with a more rational perspective, thereby improving the quality of their relationships.

The results of this study are consistent with various studies on the effectiveness of REBT in improving psychological problems and marital relationships. For example, Knaus (2019) demonstrated in a study that REBT effectively reduced anxiety and depression in individuals struggling with psychological issues. This study also showed that REBT can help improve emotional relationships and increase marital satisfaction (Knaus, 2019). Another study by Ellis and Dryden (2017) concluded that REBT was successful in changing irrational beliefs and improving the quality of life in couples with relational issues (Ellis & Dryden, 2017). However, some studies indicate that the effectiveness of REBT may vary depending on the nature of the problem and individual characteristics. For instance, Smith et al. (2019) found that the effect of REBT on certain aspects of marital relationships, such as trust, is not directly evident and may require a longer duration to observe significant changes (Smith et al., 2019). Therefore, it is suggested that further research be conducted to explore the long-term effects of this therapy on various aspects of marital relationships.

Overall, the results of this study highlight the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in improving relationship beliefs and increasing marital satisfaction in women affected by marital infidelity. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing irrational beliefs and replacing them with more rational thoughts to enhance the quality of life and relationships in

couples. However, further research is needed to more accurately evaluate the long-term effectiveness of this approach in different contexts.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

Despite the positive results obtained from this study, it also had limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. One of the main limitations was the use of a small, non-random sample. Although efforts were made to use a homogeneous sample with similar characteristics, the results of this study may not be fully generalizable to other populations. Additionally, due to time constraints, long-term follow-up of the therapeutic effects was not possible, and the results were evaluated only based on short-term changes. Furthermore, this study relied solely on self-reported data from participants, which may have been influenced by various factors such as the desire to provide socially desirable responses or the temporary effects of the therapy. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies employ more objective measurement methods, such as clinical observations or couple assessments, to obtain more accurate results.

Future research could increase the sample size and use more random methods to examine the effects of REBT on relationship beliefs and marital satisfaction with greater precision. Additionally, it is recommended that these studies investigate the long-term effects of the therapy to determine whether these changes are sustained over time. Moreover, the use of combined methods (e.g., incorporating other interventions such as behavioral therapies or mindfulness-based interventions) could be explored as a useful strategy for further improving the outcomes.

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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