




# Comparing the Effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy and Transactional Analysis Therapy on Interpersonal Problems in Conflicted Women Seeking Divorce

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy on reducing interpersonal problems in conflicted women seeking divorce.

**Methods and Materials:** This applied study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest format including a control group and a three-month follow-up period. The statistical population consisted of conflicted women seeking divorce who were referred to counseling and psychological service centers in Tehran. Using purposive sampling and based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 45 participants were selected and randomly assigned into three groups: emotion-focused therapy, transactional analysis therapy, and control (15 participants in each group). The experimental groups received eight sessions of intervention, while the control group remained on a waiting list. Data were collected using the Interpersonal Problems Questionnaire. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS-26 at both descriptive and inferential levels, including multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), repeated measures analysis of variance, and Bonferroni post hoc tests.

**Findings:** The results of analysis of covariance indicated that both emotion-focused therapy ( $F = 25.91, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.558$ ) and transactional analysis therapy ( $F = 39.62, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.595$ ) had significant effects on reducing interpersonal problems compared to the control group. Repeated measures analysis revealed a significant effect of time ( $F = 32.53, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.437$ ) and a significant interaction between time and group ( $F = 16.07, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.433$ ), indicating sustained changes over time. Bonferroni post hoc tests showed that both experimental groups significantly differed from the control group ( $p < 0.001$ ), while no significant difference was found between the two interventions ( $p = 0.452$ ).

**Conclusion:** Both emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy were effective in reducing interpersonal problems in conflicted women seeking divorce, and their effects were stable over time, with no significant difference in effectiveness between the two approaches.

**Keywords:** *Emotion-Focused Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Interpersonal Problems, Marital Conflict, Women Seeking Divorce*

## 1. Introduction

Interpersonal problems represent one of the most critical psychological and relational challenges among couples experiencing marital conflict, particularly among women seeking divorce, as these difficulties often manifest in maladaptive communication patterns, emotional dysregulation, and impaired relational functioning. Interpersonal dysfunction not only contributes to the escalation of marital conflicts but also undermines emotional intimacy, trust, and mutual understanding between partners, ultimately increasing the likelihood of marital dissolution. In recent years, the growing prevalence of divorce and marital dissatisfaction has drawn considerable attention from researchers and clinicians to identify effective therapeutic interventions targeting interpersonal problems in distressed couples. Women seeking divorce, in particular, are often exposed to heightened emotional distress, unresolved conflicts, and dysfunctional interaction cycles, making them a high-risk group for persistent interpersonal difficulties (Afrooz et al., 2023; Mobaraki & Esmkhani Akbarinejad, 2024; Mohammadi et al., 2022).

Interpersonal problems in marital relationships are closely associated with deficits in emotional awareness, ineffective communication, and maladaptive cognitive and behavioral patterns. Research has shown that difficulties in expressing emotions, interpreting partners' emotional cues, and managing emotional experiences play a central role in the development and maintenance of marital conflicts. Emotional disconnection, emotional suppression, and heightened interpersonal sensitivity further exacerbate these issues, leading to cycles of misunderstanding and conflict escalation (Artang & Izadi, 2022; Ebrahimiashirin et al., 2022). In this context, therapeutic approaches that directly target emotional processing and interpersonal dynamics have gained increasing importance in clinical practice.

One of the most prominent approaches in this domain is emotion-focused therapy (EFT), which is grounded in attachment theory and emphasizes the role of emotions in shaping interpersonal relationships. EFT aims to enhance emotional awareness, facilitate the expression of primary emotions, and restructure maladaptive interaction patterns between partners. By helping individuals access and process underlying emotional experiences, EFT promotes secure attachment, improves emotional regulation, and fosters more adaptive communication patterns. Empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of EFT in improving marital satisfaction, reducing interpersonal

sensitivity, and enhancing emotional regulation among distressed couples (Greenman & Johnson, 2022; Javidan, 2022; SalehiT & Davarani, 2025). Furthermore, studies have shown that EFT can significantly reduce divorce tendencies and strengthen family cohesion by addressing core emotional needs and attachment-related dynamics (Ghafaralahi et al., 2021; Rezapour Mir Saleh et al., 2021).

In parallel, transactional analysis (TA) therapy has emerged as another influential approach in addressing interpersonal problems within marital relationships. Developed by Eric Berne, TA focuses on the analysis of ego states, communication patterns, and life scripts that shape individuals' interactions. This approach provides a structured framework for understanding dysfunctional relational patterns and promoting healthier communication through awareness of Parent, Adult, and Child ego states. TA interventions aim to improve interpersonal functioning by modifying maladaptive scripts, enhancing responsibility, and fostering more effective communication styles. Research has demonstrated that TA-based interventions can significantly improve marital adjustment, increase intimacy, and reduce conflicts among couples (Jolayni et al., 2022; Nik-Nejad & Asgari, 2019; Sharifi et al., 2019).

Recent empirical studies have further supported the effectiveness of transactional analysis in enhancing various aspects of marital relationships, including communication patterns, emotional expression, and interpersonal functioning. For instance, TA training has been shown to improve marital intimacy and reduce conflicts by helping individuals recognize and modify dysfunctional interaction patterns (Ahmadi, 2023; Zia Jahromi, 2023). Additionally, comparative studies indicate that TA can significantly enhance distress tolerance, responsibility, and relational satisfaction among couples with marital dissatisfaction (F. Arab et al., 2025; M. R. Arab et al., 2025). These findings highlight the potential of TA as a comprehensive therapeutic approach for addressing interpersonal problems in marital contexts.

Despite the growing body of research supporting both EFT and TA, there remains a need for comparative studies that examine the relative effectiveness of these approaches, particularly among women seeking divorce. While EFT primarily focuses on emotional processing and attachment-related dynamics, TA emphasizes cognitive, behavioral, and structural aspects of interpersonal interactions. This theoretical distinction suggests that each approach may influence interpersonal problems through different mechanisms, underscoring the importance of comparative

investigations to determine their relative efficacy. Moreover, existing studies have often examined these interventions in general or clinical populations, with limited attention to women experiencing severe marital conflict and actively seeking divorce, a group characterized by complex emotional and interpersonal challenges (Javid et al., 2025; Pidad et al., 2024).

Furthermore, interpersonal problems in this population are often compounded by factors such as emotional disengagement, communication breakdown, and unresolved relational trauma, which require targeted and evidence-based interventions. Addressing these issues is not only essential for improving individual well-being but also for preventing the negative psychological and social consequences associated with divorce. Effective therapeutic interventions can play a crucial role in helping individuals develop healthier relational patterns, improve emotional regulation, and enhance interpersonal functioning, thereby reducing the likelihood of marital dissolution or mitigating its adverse effects (Henry, 2023; Rita, 2023).

Given the importance of interpersonal functioning in marital relationships and the potential benefits of both EFT and TA, it is essential to conduct rigorous studies that compare their effectiveness in reducing interpersonal problems among high-risk populations. Such research can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of change underlying each approach and inform clinical practice by identifying the most effective intervention strategies for specific populations.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to compare the effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy on interpersonal problems in conflicted women seeking divorce.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study design and Participant

This study was applied in nature and employed a quasi-experimental design using a pretest–posttest format with a control group and a three-month follow-up period. The research design included three groups: two experimental groups and one control group. Participants were randomly assigned to the groups, with the first experimental group receiving emotion-focused therapy, the second experimental group receiving transactional analysis therapy, and the control group receiving no intervention during the study period. Measurements were conducted at three stages, including pretest, posttest, and follow-up, allowing for the

assessment of both immediate and sustained effects of the interventions. The statistical population consisted of all conflicted women seeking divorce in Tehran who had been referred by family courts to counseling and psychological service clinics in District 5 between July 2024 and January 2025.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least a high school diploma, be applicants for divorce, have completed informed consent forms, refrain from receiving simultaneous individual counseling services during the intervention period, and have no diagnosed personality disorders or history of substance abuse. Exclusion criteria included finalizing divorce during the intervention process, missing more than two therapy sessions, or expressing unwillingness to continue participation.

Sample size determination was conducted using Cohen's (1981) table, assuming a significance level of 0.05, a statistical power corresponding to a beta of 0.10, and a large effect size. Based on these assumptions, the minimum sample size was calculated as 10 participants per group. However, considering the possibility of attrition and recommendations from similar studies suggesting 15 participants per group, a total of 45 participants were recruited. These participants were equally assigned to three groups, with 15 individuals in each group. Prior to the intervention, participants were informed about the research objectives, treatment procedures, and ethical considerations. After the intervention period, participants completed the relevant questionnaires, while the control group remained on a waiting list and did not receive any treatment. A follow-up assessment was conducted three months after the posttest to evaluate the stability of treatment effects

### 2.2. Measures

The primary instrument used in this study was the Interpersonal Problems Questionnaire, a self-report measure designed to assess difficulties individuals commonly experience in interpersonal relationships. The original version of this scale consisted of 32 items developed by Barkham and colleagues in 1996 as a shortened form of a longer 127-item instrument for use in clinical settings. The scale was derived through exploratory factor analysis, selecting items with the highest factor loadings within each subscale. The questionnaire evaluates multiple dimensions of interpersonal functioning, including sociability,

assertiveness, engagement with others, supportiveness, aggression, openness, consideration for others, and dependency. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). The items reflect two general categories: those indicating difficulty in performing certain interpersonal behaviors and those indicating excessive engagement in certain behaviors. Following standardization in Iran, the questionnaire was reduced from 32 to 29 items due to the removal of items with weak or overlapping factor loadings. The adapted version comprises six subscales: assertiveness and sociability, openness, consideration for others, aggression, supportiveness, and participation/dependency. The psychometric properties of the instrument have been well established, demonstrating satisfactory validity and reliability. Previous studies reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicating acceptable internal consistency across the total scale and subscales. In the present study, the reliability of the questionnaire, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was calculated as 0.86, indicating good internal consistency.

### 2.3. Interventions

The transactional analysis therapy protocol was implemented based on Eric Berne (1958) and delivered to the first experimental group across eight sessions, each lasting 120 minutes and conducted twice weekly. The intervention began with group orientation, introduction to the therapeutic framework, and administration of the pretest, followed by foundational training in ego states (Parent, Adult, and Child) and their structural analysis. Subsequent sessions focused on identifying ego states in behavior and communication, understanding parental messages and injunctions, and learning strategies to manage internalized critical parent patterns. Participants were then introduced to the concepts of contamination, communication patterns, and transactional dynamics, including complementary and crossed transactions, alongside techniques for blocking dysfunctional patterns. Mid-treatment sessions emphasized the concept of "strokes," including their types, barriers to giving and receiving them, and the development of self-stroking abilities, as well as time structuring strategies. Further sessions addressed the Karpman drama triangle and life positions, followed by exploration and enactment of common psychological games (e.g., "Yes, but..." and "Wooden Leg"), enabling participants to recognize and analyze maladaptive relational patterns. Role-playing and

experiential exercises were used to deepen understanding of interactional scripts and recurring dynamics. In later sessions, additional psychological games were introduced, and participants practiced identifying and modifying these patterns in interpersonal contexts. The final session focused on life scripts, integrating prior concepts such as games, roles, and life positions to analyze participants' personal narratives at a basic transactional analysis level. The intervention concluded with a comprehensive review of all session content to consolidate learning and promote insight into interpersonal functioning.

The emotion-focused therapy protocol was implemented based on the model developed by Sue Johnson (2007) and delivered to the second experimental group in eight weekly sessions, each lasting approximately two hours. The intervention began with participant orientation, explanation of the therapeutic structure and goals, administration of the pretest, and fostering engagement and motivation within the group, alongside an introduction to experiential approaches and the theoretical foundations of emotion-focused therapy. Early sessions emphasized emotion coaching techniques, including increasing awareness of emotional experiences, learning to step back from overwhelming emotional states, and facilitating access to core emotions. As therapy progressed, participants were guided to identify and explore key emotional experiences, particularly distressing and unresolved emotions, with an emphasis on distinguishing process from content in emotional experience. Subsequent sessions focused on identifying emotional markers, facilitating the emergence of new emotional meanings, and working through secondary emotions by validating and intensifying emotional experiences and helping participants accurately label them. The intervention then shifted toward accessing and processing primary emotions, supporting participants in deepening their emotional awareness, validating core emotional experiences, and fostering ownership of these experiences. Later sessions addressed relational patterns by examining interactional cycles and communication dynamics, with a focus on expressing attachment-related needs and emotions in adaptive ways. The final session included administration of the posttest, a comprehensive review of therapeutic concepts and techniques, collection of participant feedback, and closure of the intervention, aiming to consolidate emotional processing skills and improve interpersonal functioning.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Quantitative data were analyzed at both descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, frequency distributions, percentages, and descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and examine the distribution of research variables across groups.

At the inferential level, statistical analyses were performed based on the measurement level of variables and underlying assumptions, including normality of distribution, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of covariance matrices, and the sphericity assumption. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was employed to control for pretest differences and evaluate group effects on dependent variables. Additionally, repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine changes over time across pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages. Bonferroni post hoc tests were conducted to identify specific group differences and to test the study hypotheses more precisely. These analytical procedures enabled a comprehensive evaluation of both between-group and within-group differences over time, as well as the persistence of treatment effects.

## 3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of participants indicated that the three groups were relatively comparable across key variables, with no statistically significant differences observed. In terms of prior counseling experience, the majority of participants in all groups had no history of

counseling, with 73.3% in the emotion-focused therapy group, 60% in the transactional analysis group, and 73.3% in the control group reporting no prior refer, while the remaining participants reported having such experience; the differences between groups were not significant ( $p = 0.661$ ). Regarding employment status, most participants were employed, comprising 66.7% in the emotion-focused therapy group, 60% in the transactional analysis group, and 73.3% in the control group, with the remainder being homemakers; again, no significant group differences were found ( $p = 0.741$ ). Educational levels were similarly distributed, with the majority holding associate or bachelor's degrees (60% in both intervention groups and 53.3% in the control group), followed by diploma holders and a smaller proportion with postgraduate education, and these differences were also non-significant ( $p = 0.930$ ). Age distribution showed that most participants were within the 25–30 age range across all groups, followed by the 31–35 and 36–40 ranges, with similar patterns across groups. The mean age of participants was 31.53 years ( $SD = 7.11$ ) in the emotion-focused therapy group, 35.53 years ( $SD = 5.36$ ) in the transactional analysis group, and 34.47 years ( $SD = 7.45$ ) in the control group, with no significant difference between groups ( $p = 0.250$ ). Additionally, the mean duration of marriage was 10.34 years ( $SD = 3.87$ ) for the emotion-focused therapy group, 10.93 years ( $SD = 3.54$ ) for the transactional analysis group, and 10.61 years ( $SD = 3.18$ ) for the control group, again showing no statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.290$ ). Overall, these findings suggest that the groups were homogeneous in terms of demographic characteristics prior to the intervention.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Interpersonal Problems by Group and Time*

Variable	Time	Emotion-Focused Therapy Mean	SD	Transactional Analysis Mean	SD	Control Mean	SD
Interpersonal Problems	Pretest	105.00	21.16	103.40	23.55	108.47	26.30
	Posttest	98.67	16.81	95.07	20.17	109.80	25.70
	Follow-up	97.27	16.49	95.73	19.84	110.47	25.37

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that at the pretest stage, the mean scores of interpersonal problems were relatively similar across the three groups, with values of 105.00 ( $SD = 21.16$ ) for the emotion-focused therapy group, 103.40 ( $SD = 23.55$ ) for the transactional analysis group, and 108.47 ( $SD = 26.30$ ) for the control group. Following the interventions, both experimental groups demonstrated a noticeable reduction in interpersonal problems at the posttest stage, with the mean decreasing to

98.67 ( $SD = 16.81$ ) in the emotion-focused therapy group and to 95.07 ( $SD = 20.17$ ) in the transactional analysis group, whereas the control group showed a slight increase to 109.80 ( $SD = 25.70$ ). At the follow-up stage, the decreasing trend in interpersonal problems was maintained in both experimental groups, with mean scores of 97.27 ( $SD = 16.49$ ) for the emotion-focused therapy group and 95.73 ( $SD = 19.84$ ) for the transactional analysis group, indicating relative stability of treatment effects over time. In contrast,

the control group continued to exhibit a slight increase, with a mean score of 110.47 (SD = 25.37). Overall, these findings suggest that both therapeutic interventions were associated with reductions in interpersonal problems, while no improvement was observed in the control group.

Prior to conducting the main inferential analyses, the assumptions underlying multivariate analysis of covariance and repeated measures analysis of variance were examined and confirmed. The normality of the distribution of interpersonal problems scores at pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, and the results indicated that the data did not significantly deviate from normality ( $p > 0.05$ ). Homogeneity of variances across groups was evaluated

using Levene’s test, which showed non-significant results, supporting the assumption of equal variances. Additionally, the homogeneity of covariance matrices was assessed using Box’s M test, and the findings indicated that this assumption was met. The sphericity assumption required for repeated measures analysis was tested using Mauchly’s test, and in cases where the assumption was violated, appropriate corrections such as Greenhouse–Geisser were applied. Furthermore, linearity and the absence of multicollinearity among dependent variables were examined and confirmed. Overall, these results suggest that the data satisfied the necessary statistical assumptions, allowing for valid application of the planned inferential analyses.

**Table 2**

*Results of Analysis of Covariance for the Effectiveness of Interventions on Interpersonal Problems*

Variable	Source of Effect	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial Eta Squared
Interpersonal Problems	Emotion-Focused Therapy	874.44	2	437.22	25.91	<0.001	0.558
	Transactional Analysis Therapy	760.82	1	760.82	39.62	<0.001	0.595

The results of the analysis of covariance presented in Table 2 indicate that both emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy had a statistically significant effect on interpersonal problems after controlling for pretest scores. Specifically, emotion-focused therapy showed a significant effect ( $F = 25.91$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a large effect size (partial  $\eta^2 = 0.558$ ), indicating that a substantial

proportion of variance in interpersonal problems was explained by this intervention. Similarly, transactional analysis therapy demonstrated a significant effect ( $F = 39.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with an even larger effect size (partial  $\eta^2 = 0.595$ ), suggesting a strong impact on reducing interpersonal problems. Overall, both interventions were effective, with transactional analysis showing a slightly stronger effect.

**Table 3**

*Results of Repeated Measures Analysis for Stability of Intervention Effects on Interpersonal Problems*

Variable	Source of Effect	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial Eta Squared
Interpersonal Problems	Group	3351.22	2	1675.61	1.17	0.320	0.053
	Time	595.57	1.14	520.25	32.53	<0.001	0.437
	Time $\times$ Group	588.25	2.29	256.93	16.07	<0.001	0.433

The repeated measures analysis results in Table 3 show that the main effect of group was not statistically significant ( $F = 1.17$ ,  $p = 0.320$ ), indicating that overall differences between groups across time were not independent of time effects. However, the main effect of time was significant ( $F = 32.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a large effect size (partial  $\eta^2 = 0.437$ ), demonstrating that interpersonal problems changed

significantly across measurement points. Importantly, the interaction effect between time and group was also significant ( $F = 16.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.433$ ), indicating that the pattern of change over time differed across the groups. This finding confirms that the interventions produced differential and sustained effects on interpersonal problems over time.

**Table 4**

*Bonferroni Post Hoc Test for Between-Group Comparisons at Posttest*

Variable	Group	Adjusted Mean	SE	Reference Group	Comparison Group	Mean Difference	p
Interpersonal Problems	Emotion-Focused Therapy	79.21	1.06	Emotion-Focused Therapy	Control	-8.10	<0.001
	Transactional Analysis Therapy	77.01	1.06	Transactional Analysis Therapy	Control	-10.29	<0.001
	Control	87.31	1.06	Emotion-Focused Therapy	Transactional Analysis Therapy	2.20	0.452

The Bonferroni post hoc comparisons in Table 4 indicate that both emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy significantly reduced interpersonal problems compared to the control group at the posttest stage. The emotion-focused therapy group showed a significantly lower adjusted mean than the control group (mean difference = -8.10,  $p < 0.001$ ), and the transactional analysis group also

demonstrated a significantly lower mean compared to the control group (mean difference = -10.29,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, the difference between the two experimental groups was not statistically significant (mean difference = 2.20,  $p = 0.452$ ), suggesting that both interventions were similarly effective at posttest.

**Table 5**

*Pairwise Comparisons of Interpersonal Problems Across Time (Bonferroni Test)*

Variable	Group	Reference Time	Comparison Time	Mean Difference	p
Interpersonal Problems	Emotion-Focused Therapy	Pretest	Posttest	6.33	<0.001
		Pretest	Follow-up	7.73	<0.001
		Posttest	Follow-up	1.40	0.031
	Transactional Analysis Therapy	Pretest	Posttest	8.33	<0.001
		Pretest	Follow-up	7.67	<0.001
		Posttest	Follow-up	-0.67	0.007
	Control	Pretest	Posttest	-1.33	0.002
		Pretest	Follow-up	-2.00	<0.001
		Posttest	Follow-up	-0.67	0.076

The pairwise comparisons presented in Table 5 reveal that both intervention groups experienced significant reductions in interpersonal problems from pretest to posttest and from pretest to follow-up ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating the effectiveness of both treatments. In the emotion-focused therapy group, there was also a small but significant change between posttest and follow-up ( $p = 0.031$ ), suggesting continued improvement. In the transactional analysis group, although significant improvements were observed from pretest to later stages, a slight but significant change between posttest and follow-up ( $p = 0.007$ ) indicates minor variation over time. In contrast, the control group showed small but significant increases in interpersonal problems from pretest to posttest and follow-up, with no significant change between posttest and follow-up ( $p = 0.076$ ). These findings further support the effectiveness and relative stability of both therapeutic interventions over time.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrated that both emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy were effective in reducing interpersonal problems among conflicted women seeking divorce, with these effects remaining stable over time. The results of the analysis of covariance indicated that both interventions significantly decreased interpersonal problems compared to the control group, with large effect sizes observed for both approaches. Although transactional analysis therapy showed a slightly larger effect size than emotion-focused therapy, the Bonferroni post hoc results revealed no statistically significant difference between the two experimental groups at the posttest stage, suggesting that both interventions were comparably effective. Furthermore, the results of repeated measures analysis indicated that the changes observed over time were significant and that the interaction between time

and group was also significant, confirming that the interventions led to meaningful and sustained improvements in interpersonal functioning. Pairwise comparisons further supported these findings, showing significant reductions in interpersonal problems from pretest to posttest and follow-up in both intervention groups, while the control group exhibited no improvement and even slight worsening over time.

These findings can be interpreted in light of the theoretical foundations of emotion-focused therapy, which emphasizes the central role of emotional processing and attachment dynamics in interpersonal functioning. Emotion-focused therapy helps individuals identify, access, and transform maladaptive emotional experiences, thereby facilitating more adaptive interpersonal interactions. The observed reduction in interpersonal problems in the emotion-focused therapy group is consistent with previous research demonstrating that enhancing emotional awareness and expression leads to improved communication patterns and reduced relational distress. For instance, studies have shown that emotion-focused interventions can significantly improve emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning by restructuring maladaptive emotional responses and fostering secure attachment bonds (Artang & Izadi, 2022; Greenman & Johnson, 2022). Additionally, the effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy in reducing interpersonal sensitivity and improving relational dynamics among distressed couples has been well documented, further supporting the present findings (Mobaraki & Esmkhani Akbarinejad, 2024; SalehiT & Davarani, 2025).

Moreover, the sustained effects of emotion-focused therapy observed at follow-up can be attributed to its focus on deep emotional transformation rather than surface-level behavioral change. By addressing primary emotions and underlying attachment needs, this approach facilitates long-lasting changes in interpersonal patterns. Previous studies have similarly reported that emotion-focused therapy contributes to long-term improvements in marital satisfaction, emotional intimacy, and conflict resolution, as individuals develop more adaptive ways of engaging with their partners (Ghafaralahi et al., 2021; Rezapour Mir Saleh et al., 2021). The stability of treatment effects over time in the present study aligns with these findings, suggesting that emotion-focused therapy produces enduring changes in interpersonal functioning.

The effectiveness of transactional analysis therapy observed in this study can also be explained by its emphasis on cognitive and behavioral restructuring of interpersonal

patterns. Transactional analysis provides individuals with a clear framework for understanding their communication styles and relational dynamics through the concepts of ego states, transactions, and life scripts. By increasing awareness of dysfunctional patterns and promoting more adaptive interactions, this approach enables individuals to modify maladaptive behaviors and improve interpersonal functioning. The significant reduction in interpersonal problems in the transactional analysis group is consistent with previous studies indicating that transactional analysis interventions can enhance communication patterns, increase responsibility, and reduce conflicts in marital relationships (Jolayni et al., 2022; Nik-Nejad & Asgari, 2019; Sharifi et al., 2019).

In addition, the relatively strong effect size observed for transactional analysis therapy may reflect its structured and educational nature, which provides participants with practical tools for managing interpersonal interactions. By teaching individuals how to recognize and alter dysfunctional ego states and communication patterns, transactional analysis facilitates immediate and observable changes in behavior. Empirical evidence supports this interpretation, as studies have shown that transactional analysis training can significantly improve marital intimacy, communication, and adjustment among couples experiencing conflict (Ahmadi, 2023; Zia Jahromi, 2023). Furthermore, comparative research has demonstrated that transactional analysis is effective in enhancing distress tolerance and reducing marital dissatisfaction, highlighting its applicability in addressing complex interpersonal problems (F. Arab et al., 2025; M. R. Arab et al., 2025).

The lack of a significant difference between the two interventions at the posttest stage suggests that both emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy are equally effective in reducing interpersonal problems, despite their differing theoretical orientations. This finding highlights the possibility that both approaches may operate through complementary mechanisms. While emotion-focused therapy primarily targets emotional processing and attachment-related dynamics, transactional analysis focuses on cognitive restructuring and communication patterns. Together, these approaches address both the emotional and cognitive-behavioral dimensions of interpersonal functioning, which may explain their comparable effectiveness. Previous comparative studies have similarly reported that different therapeutic approaches can yield similar outcomes when they effectively target core relational processes (Javid et al., 2025; Pidad et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the findings of the present study underscore the importance of addressing interpersonal problems in women seeking divorce, as these difficulties are often deeply rooted in maladaptive emotional and relational patterns. Interpersonal problems not only contribute to marital conflict but also affect individuals' psychological well-being and social functioning. By demonstrating the effectiveness of both emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy, this study provides valuable evidence for the use of these interventions in clinical settings. The results are also consistent with broader research indicating that targeted therapeutic interventions can significantly improve interpersonal functioning and reduce relational distress among individuals experiencing marital conflict (Henry, 2023; Rita, 2023).

## 5. Conclusion

In sum, the findings highlight the role of emotional regulation and communication skills as key mechanisms underlying improvements in interpersonal functioning. Emotion-focused therapy enhances individuals' ability to process and express emotions effectively, while transactional analysis improves their capacity to engage in constructive communication and resolve conflicts. These complementary mechanisms may contribute to the observed reductions in interpersonal problems and suggest that integrating elements of both approaches could potentially yield even greater therapeutic benefits. Moreover, the results support the notion that interventions targeting both emotional and cognitive-behavioral aspects of interpersonal functioning are particularly effective in addressing complex relational problems among high-risk populations such as women seeking divorce (Afrooz et al., 2023; Ebrahimiashirin et al., 2022).

## 6. Limitations and Suggestions

Despite the significant findings of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to women seeking divorce in a specific geographic region, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the use of self-report measures may have introduced response bias, as participants' answers could be influenced by social desirability or subjective perceptions. Third, the study did not control for potential confounding variables such as personality traits, severity of marital conflict, or socio-economic status, which may have influenced the outcomes.

Additionally, the follow-up period was limited to three months, which may not fully capture the long-term sustainability of the intervention effects.

Future research is recommended to address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples, including participants from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Longitudinal studies with extended follow-up periods would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the durability of treatment effects. Furthermore, future studies could explore the combined or integrative use of emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis to examine whether a multimodal approach yields superior outcomes. Investigating the mediating and moderating variables underlying treatment effectiveness, such as emotional regulation, attachment style, and communication patterns, would also contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of change.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study suggest that both emotion-focused therapy and transactional analysis therapy can be effectively implemented in counseling and psychotherapy settings to address interpersonal problems among women experiencing marital conflict. Mental health professionals, family counselors, and therapists working in divorce counseling centers can benefit from incorporating these approaches into their practice. Training programs and workshops can be developed to enhance therapists' competencies in applying these interventions, and policymakers can support the integration of evidence-based therapies into family counseling services. Ultimately, the application of these therapeutic approaches has the potential to improve interpersonal functioning, enhance emotional well-being, and reduce the negative consequences associated with marital conflict and divorce.

## Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed 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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