

Effectiveness of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy on Reduction of Marital Burnout among Referent Females to Psychological Counseling Centers

Mohammad Shahkarami¹, Mohsen Rasooli², Moslem Ghobadian³, Siroos Moradzadeh⁴, and Nahid Hadavi⁵

¹MA Student in Family Counseling Filed, Kharazmi University of Tehran, Iran

²PhD in the Field of Psychological Counseling, an Assistant Professor and Member of Faculty in Counseling, Group at Tehran University of Kharazmi, Iran

³PhD in Educational Philosophy, Assistant Professor at Islamic Azad University, Khorramabad Branch, Iran

⁴MA Educational Psychology, Advisor in Counseling and Psychological Center of Education Department at Lorestan Province, Iran

⁵MA Student in Psychology, Islamic Azad University of Science and Research of Boroujerd, Iran

Received: April 30, 2014

Accepted: June 18, 2014

ABSTRACT

The current essay is intended to study on the effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy on reduction of marital burnout among the referent females to counseling and psychological center of education department at Lorestan Province (Iran). Methodology of the following investigation is a semi-experimental research including pretest and posttest with a control group that was elected among the females who referred to psychological counseling center at Lorestan province comprising of 18 respondents in available form and then they were randomly divided into two testing and control groups. The testing group was under treatment by emotionally focused couple therapy for 10 sessions (60 min.) while control group received no therapy. Pines' Burnout Scale Questionnaire has been utilized to collect data. The given data were analyzed by ANCOVA technique. Research results indicated a significant difference among two testing and control groups after controlling effect of pretest ($p < 0.0001$). With respect to mean values of both groups derived from posttest, it may be implied that emotionally focused couple therapy has led to reduction of marital burnout among the married females in testing group. The research findings showed that emotionally focused couple therapy might cause reducing marital burnout between couples.

KEYWORDS: Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy, Marital Burnout

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important events, which occur in life span for any person, is marriage, which dated from the early history and even prehistoric age. Along with birth and death, marriage is one of three important events during the lifetime where among these three cases, only occurrence of marriage can be selected by people. Humans are able to make decision to whom and when they get married and therefore marriage plays an essential role in human's life [1]. Marriage possesses a complicated, intricate, and dynamic human relationship that enjoys specific characteristics. Paying attention to family as a focus point, a healthy and constructive climate including warmly relations and interpersonal intimate interactions may cause growth and progress in individuals are considered as some of marriage goals and requirements [2]. Most of spouses begin their joint life with love and expect the love to make their life meaningful but this group never thinks about this fact that this sacred flame and light may be extinguished. Alice states that the newly married spouses more rarely think about this point that it is possible sometimes to downplay their mythical love and this is just when burnout begins. Anyway, whereas their beloved is a human and real creature thus s/he could not be faultless if they imagine their beloved as a poetical and fantastic symbol and such romantic expectations have not been realized therefore sense of frustration and despair is directly ascribed to the spouse so this causes reduced love and commitment and burnout is substituted with love [2, 3]. Burnout has been defined as sign of emotional weariness, gradual elimination of personality, and reduction of personality characteristics and long run conclusion may occur under the conditions when spouses ask for a lot of emotional and feeling claims [4]. Burnout is the product of attrition process in which the committed and motivated persons may lose their spirit [5].

From Keizer's view [6], marital despair and burnout is gradual reduction of emotional attachment to spouse that is followed by sense of alienation, disinterest and indifference between spouses together and replacement of negative emotions instead of positive feelings.

In a marriage in which both parties are complainant and despaired rather than experiencing sense of discontinuity to the spouse and reduced interests and mutual relations, either of them and or both spouses may have noticeable worries regarding the increased undermining of relations and tend toward separation and divorce.

*Corresponding Author: Mohammad Shahkarami¹ (MA Student) Family Counseling Filed, Tehran University of Kharazmi, Iran; Email: shahkarami_mohammad@yahoo.com

Burnout occurs when they found that their relationship has not made or will not make their life meaningful despite of their efforts.

Love is gradually faded away and following this trend a sense of general fatigue governs on their bodies and in the most extreme type of this sense, burnout is the same as collapse of relationship [7].

Emotions and emotional behaviors are some of the foremost elements in relationship between spouses and type of their interactions, which mutually effective. Emotion is a complex feeling mood that is accompanied with mental, physical, and behavioral elements. The modern theories in domain of emotion have focused on positive and adaptive role of emotion [8] and they indicate that emotion may play constructive role in solving the problem and data processing [9], process of decision making, innovation and creativity [10] and increasing of learning [11].

Today, the prominent role of emotions is more and more accepted in marital conflicts [12]. The importance and employing emotions to resolve the conflicts and distance between spouses in terms of psychology and emotions as well as their marital satisfaction have been taken into consideration [13].

One of the couple therapy approaches, which have been noticed by therapists in working with referent spouses to counseling, is emotionally focused couple therapy that was introduced by Johnson and Greenberg [14] to the world. Emotionally focused approach emphasizes on adjusting emotional links and creation of secured attachment connections among spouses. When attachment in either of them is traumatic, burnout or anxiety is created in their relations. These traumas define this relationship as unsecured relation for the given individual [13]. This model may be also too heuristic on those spouses, who suffer from deficient intimacy despite of their love and they need to some changes in their communication body and it can resolve their problems at short time.

This therapy is aimed at achieving and reprocessing of certain emotional responses, which composed of the infrastructures for restrictive and uniform models of interactions and under this condition, changing interactive situations will be facilitated and it reveals the secured fundamental structures; so therapist tries to encourage spouse(s) to take step toward exploring heuristic solution and perceiving the problem with certain therapeutic alliance and establishing an effective relation with the spouses along with changing and regulation of emotions through identifying emotions in spouses and with reconstruction of main interactions, which have created the main problems and their treatment [15].

The studies indicate that Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) highly affect on proximity between spouses so this therapy is intended to reconstruct attachment infrastructural emotions so that to change interactive cycle and to build it again [16].

Findings from exploration by Gottman [12] emphasize on certain role of emotional relations in creating communicative anxieties.

The results derived from investigation by McKinnon and Greenberg (2009) showed that compared to the spouses who did not participate in these sessions, those spouses, who had attended in emotionally focused therapy sessions reported more satisfaction regarding their own.

In a study, Butler *et al.* [17] indicated that taking emotionally focused approach might be useful in treatment of communication problems.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Population, sample, and technique of sampling

The present research has been carried out in semi-experimental form and the given project was also pretest-posttest with control group for implementation. The statistical population of this study includes 23 referent females to psychological counseling center in Lorestan province of Iran from February-April 2013, where they suffered from marital burnout. The aforesaid sample comprises of 23 women, who referred to counseling center.

The Pines (Ayala, Malach Pines), Marital Burnout Scale:

In order to measure the rate of marital burnout in this investigation, Pines' Marital Burnout Scale with 21 questions has been utilized that was self-evaluation questionnaire. In this self-evaluation inventory, the respondents are asked to report regarding their own behaviors and feelings within several situations by giving answers to the questions. These paper-written tests comprise of some materials like signs, attitudes, interests, fears, and values. Testees show to what extent any phrase may express their characteristics accurately or how much they have succeeded in any article of test.

In Pines' Marital Burnout Scale, the higher scores represent more burnout while the highest and lowest scores are 147 and 21 respectively. To interpret scores, they should be converted into degrees. This figure is obtained by dividing the given scores from this questionnaire to number of questions (21). Concerning scores interpretation, degree higher than 5 denotes necessity of urgent aid, degree 5 indicates the existing crisis, degree 4 serves as misery and despair, and 2 and less degrees signify the present good relationship. The confidence coefficient in test-retest was 0.89 for one month period, 0.76 for two months career, and 0.66 for a trimester. The measured alpha coefficient was reported about 0.91-0.93. Also, Navidi [18] has reported reliability coefficient of this questionnaire as 0.86 by means of Cronbach Alpha in Iran.

Execution technique

After election of participants, they were randomly divided into two testing and control groups and due to omission of some members from these groups after research, 18 respondents remained in two groups with 9 members. Testing group participated in 10 sessions for emotionally focused couple therapy while control group received no therapy. Researcher gave information to these members that they should not participate in any other treatment plans during period of therapy and they had to be committed to their own group. Afterwards, consent letter and obligation letter forms were signed by the respondents for the constant attendance of them up to end of 10 sessions for these participants and their forms were received. This point was explained for members of control group as well that they might receive emotionally focused therapy services for free after implementation of the investigation as well. After this session (briefing session), the respondents were asked to fill out Pines' questionnaire. The members of this group received 10 sessions (60minutes) of emotionally focused couple therapy once per week. Then, a session before the end of this course, members of testing and control groups were asked to complete Pines' questionnaire once more.

3. RESULTS

The above table indicates mean, standard deviation and minimum and maximum scores relating to variable of marital burnout in testee separately based on two testing and control groups at pretest and posttest phase.

As it seen in above table, there is significant difference in variable of marital burnout among testees from testing and control group after controlling the effect of pretest ($f=502.09$; $p<0.000$). Therefore, first hypothesis of this survey is approved. With respect to mean values in both groups in posttest, it can be mentioned that emotionally focused couple therapy has led to reduced rate of marital burnout in married females from testing group.

Table 1. Descriptive parameters relating to variable of marital burnout in testees separately based on two testing and control groups at pretest and posttest steps

Groups		Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Quantity
Testing	Pretest	96.11	3.26	91	101	9
	Posttest	46.78	5.24	41	55	9
Control	Pretest	94.33	3.54	90	101	9
	Posttest	93.67	2.65	91	91	9

Table 2. The results of one-way covariance analysis (ANCOVA) in comparison of posttest for variable of marital burnout among married females from testing and control groups with controlled effect of pretest

Variance source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom (d.f)	Mean square	f-value	p-value
Pretest	0.282	1	0.282	0.015	0.903
Group	9214.10	1	9214.10	502.08	0.000
Error	275.27	15	18.35		
Total	98930.0	18			

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of study showed that emotionally focused couple therapy might cause reduction in marital burnout among married females. Since no study was found about research subject matter thus the similar findings with this research are shown. Research results are complied with the following studies:

In an investigation done by Fallahzadeh [19], he has examined and compared the impact of Emotionally Focused couple Therapy (EFT) and Integrating Systemic Therapy (IST) of couples to resolve the trauma of attachment and intimacy anxiety of couples. The findings from this survey indicated that compared to control group, emotionally focused couple therapy and integrating systemic therapy have caused solving the trauma of attachment and treatment of intimacy anxiety in spouses. Similarly, the results showed that these two methods increased reliable communication and marital adaptation in couples suffered from trauma of attachment. Likewise, this factor caused changing of attachment style between couples, who suffered from attachment trauma and intimacy anxiety.

In a survey, Hayati [20] has studied on effectiveness of emotionally focused cognitive approaches and their integrating systemic models on rate of marital satisfaction. The results of this investigation indicated that all three methods were effective while integrating systemic technique was more effective among others.

In an investigation, Sarkhosh and Rezaee [21] has explored into effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy on improvement of communication models among war veterans, who suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by war. The members of sample in this study included 48 war veterans with (PTSD) disorder and their wives, who were chosen randomly and embedded in testing and control groups. The findings of this survey reflected that emotionally focused couple therapy has caused improving in communication models.

Another study was conducted by Epstein in 2001, which suggests that strategic- based behavioral-cognitive marital therapy and insight-centered couple therapy and integrating couple therapy were better to treat couples' anxiety or burnout than without therapy. But, these 4 therapeutic approaches have not been empirically supported the same as emotionally focused approach [1]. According to Gottman [12], emotionally focused therapy has most frequently used with the maximum effect during recent decade and among couple therapy approaches [13].

In an exploration, Honarparvaran et al. [22] have studied on effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy on sexual satisfaction among spouses. The quantity of participant couples was 16 spouses in this study. The results of this investigation indicated that emotionally focused couple therapy could lead to improving couples' sexual satisfaction (especially in females). In this survey, which was conducted by Johnson and Zuccarini [23], under title of "integration of sex and attachment in emotionally focused couple therapy", they indicate that 70-73% of anxious couples enjoy significant improvement up to the end of therapy in their relations (satisfaction of intercourse). The results of this investigation also signify the stable and fixed satisfaction with couples' relations during follow-up term.

The results of research of Johnson and Greenberg [24] reflected that those couples, who had participated in emotionally focused couple therapy sessions, reported further satisfaction in their relation compared to couples in control groups at the end of therapy.

REFERENCES

1. Asadpoor, I., Nazari, AM, SanaeiZaker, B., Shaghghi, Sh. 2012. The review of effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy on rising marital intimacy among the referent couples to Counseling centers in Tehran City", Doctoral dissertation, Tehran Tarbiat Moalem university, faculty of psychology and educational sciences.
2. Bernstein, P., and Bernstein, M. 1986. Marital therapy: A behavioral-communications approach. New York: Pergamon Press.
3. Pinez, A.M. 1996. Couple burnout: courses & cures. London rout ledge, 32: 1-27.
4. Pinez, A.M and Nunes, R. 2003. The relationship between career & couple burnout. Implication for career & couple counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling*. 740 (2): 50-64.
5. Pinez, A.M. (1998). A prospective study of personality and gender differences in romantic attraction, *journal of personality and individual differences*. 25: 147-157.
6. Keizer R, Dykstra P.A. and Jansen M.D. 2007. Pathways into Childlessness: Evidence of Gendered Life Course Dynamics. *J. biosoc. Sci*, page 1 of 16, _ 2007 Cambridge University Press.
7. Mehdi Zarei, A. 2007. The relationship between attachment styles, personality characteristics, system Ahwaz Azad university public health value. Master's thesis in General Psychology, Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz.
8. Fredrickson, B. 1998. Cultivated Emotions: Parental Socialization of Positive Emotions and Self-Conscious Emotions. *Psychological Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory*. Volume 9, Issue 4.
9. Palfai, T.P., and Salovey, P. 1993. The influence of depressed and elated mood on deductive and inductive reasoning. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 13: 57- 71.
10. Greene, T. R. and Noice, H. 1988. Influence of Positive Affect Upon Creative Thinking and Problem Solving in Children. *Psychological Reports*, 63: 895-98.
11. Cahill, S.D; Smith, C.L; Gill, K.L & Johnson MC. 1998. Maternal interactive style across contexts: Relations to emotional, behavioral, and physiological regulation during toddlerhood. *Social Development*, 7: 350-369.
12. Gottman, J. 1994. What predicts divorce? The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
13. Johnson S. 2004. Emotionally focused couple therapy", trans. Hosseini, B. 2011. Tehran: Jangal Pub.
14. Johnson, S.M.; Greenberg, L.S. 1985. Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy: An Outcome Study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 11(38): 313-317.
15. Johnson, S.M. 2006. Practice emotion-focused couple therapy. Translated by F. Bahrami, Z. Azari and trust Azra, 2010. Tehran: Danzheh.
16. Johnson, S., & Denton, W. 2002. An Emotionally focused therapy. In A. Guramm & N. Jacobson (Eds.), *The clinical hand book of couple therapy* (pp. 221-250). New York: Guilford press.
17. Butler, M.H., Stout, J.A. and Gardner, B. C. 2002. Prayer as a conflict resolution ritual: Clinical implications of religious couples' report of relationship softening, healing perspective, and change responsibility. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 30: 19-37.
18. Navid, F. 2005. Study and compare the relationship between marital disenchantment with climate factors in employee education institutions and hospitals in Tehran, A Master's thesis in counseling, Shahid Beheshti University of Iran.
19. Fallahzadeh, H. 2011. The effectiveness of emotion-focused couple therapy and couple therapy combined system Reducing anxiety, intimacy couples, *Journal of Family Research*, 8: 465-484.

20. Hayati, F. G., & Mir, M. 2004. Enhancement of Technical-cum-Generic Skills Through Design Experience in Laboratories. International Conference on Information Technology Based Higher Education and Training (pp. 668-671).
21. Sarkhosh M and Rezaee AA. 2014. How Does University Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Relate To Their Self-Efficacy Beliefs? *PortaLinguarum* 21, enero 2014, 85-100
22. Honarparvar, N., Tabrizi, M., Navabi –Nejad, Sh., ShafiAbadi, A. 2010. Emotion-focused approach to training on sexual satisfaction, thought and behavior. Vol.4, No. 15: 70-59.
23. Johnson, S.M.; and Zuccarini, D. 2010. Integrating Sex and Attachment in Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 36, 4, 431–445
24. Johnson, S. & Greenberg, L. 1994. *The heart of the matter: Perspectives on emotion in marital therapy*. New York: Brunner – Mazel.