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The Effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Matrix on Communication Patterns of Married Women with Avoidance and Anxiety Attachment Style

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Extended Abstract

Aim

Couple relationships are among the most complex human interactions. Almost all couples' needs are met through communication (Frey & Wilhite, 2005). One method to examine family structure is by analyzing the communication patterns of couples. Christensen and Shenk (1991) describe couples' communication patterns as coping strategies used during conflicts in married life. Constructive communication patterns undoubtedly lead to greater marital satisfaction, while destructive patterns reduce satisfaction levels. It appears that communication patterns are strongly influenced by the couple's attachment style (Senchak & Leonard, 1992). Communication patterns reflect, reinforce, and promote various attachment styles, and can help individuals examine and change both their own and others' patterns that underlie insecure attachment (Braithwaite and Schrodt, 2021). Considering the relationship between dysfunctional communication patterns and insecure attachment styles, this study focuses on individuals with insecure attachment styles. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Matrix training on the communication patterns of married women with avoidant and anxious attachment styles.

Methodology

This study was experimental research employing a pretest–posttest 2×2 factorial design; it was also applied research. The independent variables were ACT Matrix training and attachment styles, while the dependent variable was communication patterns. The study population consisted of all female students at the University of Bojnord. The sample included 40 subjects who met the inclusion criteria and were randomly assigned to two experimental groups and two control groups. The criteria for participant recruitment included: living together for a minimum of one year and a maximum of five years, and having an avoidant or anxious attachment style based on a diagnosis from an attachment interview. Exclusion criteria were: taking any psychiatric medication, participating in another psychological intervention simultaneously, missing more than two sessions, and unwillingness to continue participation.

The instrument used was Christensen and Sullaway's Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ)(1984), which participants completed before and after the intervention. The intervention, based on the ACT Matrix approach by Polk et al. (2016), was conducted over 8 sessions, each lasting 120 minutes in a group setting. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance.

Findings

The findings indicated that the ACT Matrix significantly affected communication patterns by increasing mutual constructive communication ($P < 0.001$) and decreasing mutual avoidance and

demand/withdraw patterns ($P < 0.001$). However, attachment style did not show a significant effect on communication patterns, either alone or in interaction with the intervention ($P > 0.05$).

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the ACT Matrix effectively improves the communication patterns of married women with avoidant and anxious attachment styles. This improvement can be attributed to the psychological flexibility fostered by this intervention. The new perspective provided by the ACT Matrix helped women clarify and prioritize their life values, particularly their shared communication values. As Polk et al. (2016) have noted, when individuals examine their withdrawing actions through the Matrix, they feel more empathy toward their spouse and are less likely to believe that the problem is solely due to their partner's behavior. By adopting this perspective, participants recognized that both partners contribute to inefficient communication patterns and, motivated by their values, they were able to initiate changes.

The ACT Matrix is recommended as it is an objective, simple, understandable, and engaging model. Its training can be completed in a limited number of sessions, making it an effective and cost-efficient intervention for couples, particularly young couples, for prevention, relationship enrichment, or therapeutic purposes. Given the increasing use of mobile phones, this model has the potential to be developed into an application for mobile phone users or virtual spaces. It is suggested that future researchers explore this possibility through interdisciplinary collaboration.

Keywords: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Matrix, Attachment Style, Communication Patterns, Married Women.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this research included ensuring the confidentiality of participants' information and respecting their privacy. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they were unwilling to continue.

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Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest associated with this article.

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