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Investigating the Problems of Women with Veteran Spouses and Examining the Effectiveness of Compassion-Focused Therapy on Their Psychological-Marital Problems

Mohammad Mohammadi¹ , **Ali Rezaeisharif^{2*}** , **Ali Sheykholeslami³** ,
Hossein Ghamari-Givi⁴ 

1. Department of Counseling, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabili, Iran. Email: mohammadipsy5@gmail.com
2. Corresponding Author, Department of counseling, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabili, Iran. Email: rezaeisharif@uma.ac.ir
3. Department of counseling, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabili, Iran. Email: sheykholeslami@uma.ac.ir
4. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabili, Iran. Email: h_ghamari@uma.ac.ir

Extended Abstract

Aim

The presence of an ill individual in a family and the family's involvement with the sick member can pose significant problems and obstacles to the family's progress, development, health, and quality of life, thereby diverting the family from its normal growth trajectory. Consequently, the illness of a family member weakens the bond between the patient and other family members, resulting in a family crisis that impacts all members (Walke et al., 2018). Given the family's pivotal role in providing physical and emotional resources to support members' health during crises, such as periods of illness (Corallo et al., 2017), any individual in crisis can exacerbate tensions within the family. Hence, many solutions used to address individual crises are also applied to family therapy, and timely interventions during crises can lead to better family adaptation and alignment (Mackova et al., 2019).

Various interventional approaches have been employed to address the psychological and marital issues faced by women with veteran spouses. One promising approach in alleviating these issues is compassion-focused therapy. A review of the research literature reveals that most studies on women with veteran spouses were either quantitative and interventional or qualitative and primarily focused on problem reporting. Consequently, the current study adopted a combined method to address the specific problems experienced by women with veteran spouses across various dimensions. This approach necessitated identifying these issues, developing appropriate tools tailored to these problems, and applying the most suitable therapeutic interventions in this context. Therefore, the present research aimed to explore the problems encountered by women with veteran spouses and examine the effectiveness of compassion-focused therapy on their psychological and marital issues.

Methodology

The research employed a mixed-method approach comprising exploratory research, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative stages. The study population consisted of all women with veteran spouses residing in the 13th district of Tehran in 2019. In the qualitative phase, 19 women with veteran spouses who had sought assistance from the 13th district municipal health center were purposively selected and interviewed. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis, revealing seven themes in the psychological-marital domain: anxiety, depression, fatigue and incapacity, irritability and aggression, loneliness, dissatisfaction with life, and marital conflict.

The quantitative section of the research consisted of two stages: a) development and validation of a questionnaire on the psychological-marital issues of women with veteran husbands; b) determining the

effectiveness of compassion-based therapy on the psychological-marital issues of women with veteran husbands in an experimental design. In this stage, the questionnaire on psychological-marital issues of women with veteran husbands was administered to 150 women with veteran husbands, who were selected through convenience sampling, alongside the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and the Marital Happiness Scale (MHS). The psychometric properties of the questionnaire were examined and confirmed.

The experimental part of this research was applied in terms of its purpose and employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test, control group, and follow-up phase. The statistical population included all women with veteran husbands in districts 13 and 14 of Tehran in 2020, who were randomly assigned to an experimental group (15 individuals) and a control group (15 individuals). The therapy sessions were held once a week for 90 minutes over a two-month period, with follow-up sessions conducted three months later. Data analysis was performed using repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests in SPSS version 22.

Findings

In the descriptive analysis, the mean age of the 19 veteran spouses was 46.10 ± 3.13 years. The results indicated that women with veteran spouses experience psychological, marital, physical, social, and economic issues. The Psychological-Marital Problems Questionnaire for Women with Veteran Spouses demonstrated favorable psychometric properties. Furthermore, compassion-focused therapy proved effective in addressing all aspects of the psychological-marital problems faced by women with veteran spouses, resulting in a reduction of these issues.

Conclusion

In the qualitative phase of this study, focus group interviews identified five main themes of problems faced by veterans' spouses: psychological, physical, marital, social, and economic issues. Specifically focusing on psychological and marital issues, the study disregarded components unrelated to these domains. Psychological problems identified included internalization, externalization, dissatisfaction with life, and loneliness, all of which were influenced by the challenges experienced by veterans themselves.

Consistent with this research, He et al. (2019) found that caregivers of disabled individuals often exhibit signs of mental health issues and depression. The experimental phase of our study demonstrated the effectiveness of compassion-focused therapy in reducing the psychological-marital problems of women with veteran spouses. Analysis showed that this treatment remained effective throughout the follow-up period. Previous studies, such as those by Cowles et al. (2020), Stuntzner (2017), and Gadampour et al., (2019), have also supported the efficacy of compassion-focused therapy, particularly among caregivers of disabled individuals. This approach encourages individuals to develop self-compassion, taking responsibility for themselves and infusing new meaning into their lives by valuing themselves.

The acquisition of self-compassion among these women is associated with increased emotional impulse control, reduced emotional disturbances, and fosters self-acceptance and acceptance of their veteran spouses. This enables them to approach their lives with a fresh and meaningful perspective (Stuntzner, 2017).

Regarding research limitations, this study focused exclusively on women, without emphasizing the role of gender. Future research could benefit from addressing and alleviating the psychological-marital problems of women with veteran spouses through counseling and psychotherapy sessions, utilizing mixed methods and developing tailored tools and treatment approaches.

Keywords: Compassion-Focused Therapy, Mixed-Method, Psychological-Marital Problems, Veterans, Women.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and strict confidentiality of participants' information was ensured throughout the study. This research received ethical approval under ID (IR.UMA.REC.1400.041) from Mohaghegh Ardabili University.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest associated with this study.

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