



The University of Tehran Press

Efficacy of the Couples' Relationship Enrichment Training According to Choice Theory on the Psychological Resilience and Affective Divorce of Couples with Marital Conflicts

Razieh Sodagar¹ , Alireza Maredpour^{2*} , Khosro Ramazani³ 

1. Department of General Psychology, Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, Yasouj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yasouj, Iran. Email: razieh_sodagar@yahoo.com
2. Corresponding Author, Department of General Psychology, Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, Yasouj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yasouj, Iran. Email: maredpour@iau.ir
3. Department of General Psychology, Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, Yasouj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yasouj, Iran. Email: khosro@zand.ac.ir

Extended Abstract

Aim

Marital satisfaction among couples gradually declines with the occurrence of marital conflicts (Frye et al., 2020), leading to various emotional and psychological harms. Over time, these conflicts can also affect couples' resilience (Motaheri et al., 2013). Psychological resilience refers to an individual's ability to maintain a biological-psychological balance in challenging situations. Resilient individuals are aware of their circumstances, emotions, and feelings, which enables them to identify the causes of their emotions and regulate them effectively. These individuals share common characteristics that help them navigate life's challenges and adversities (Pinar et al., 2018). With the emergence of marital conflicts and the decline in positive emotional and affective relationships, couples become more susceptible to emotional divorce, a precursor to actual divorce (Safaeerad & Varastefar, 2013). Emotional divorce occurs when the family structure is apparently maintained but loses its emotional core. Positive emotional relationships between couples are replaced by negative ones, leading to emotional disconnection (Akbari et al., 2020). One intervention designed to improve communication between couples is relationship enrichment training based on choice theory, often referred to as couple therapy based on choice theory in some studies. Both methods emphasize improving couples' relationships through the principles of choice theory (Bradley, 2014).

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of couple relationship enrichment training based on choice theory in enhancing psychological resilience and reducing emotional divorce among couples experiencing marital conflicts.

Methodology

The research employed a semi-experimental method with a pre-test-post-test design, including a control group and a two-month follow-up period.

In this study, couple relationship enrichment training based on choice theory was treated as the independent variable, while resilience and emotional divorce were the dependent variables. The research included two hypotheses:

1. Couple relationship enrichment training based on choice theory increases the psychological resilience of couples with marital conflicts and its components.
2. Couple relationship enrichment training based on choice theory reduces the emotional divorce of couples with marital conflicts.

The statistical population of this study consisted of couples experiencing marital conflicts who sought counseling at six centers in the 8th district of Shiraz during the second half of 1398. A total of

35 couples were selected using a multi-stage sampling method and randomly assigned to either the experimental group (17 couples) or the control group (18 couples).

Initially, both groups underwent a pre-test evaluation. The experimental group then participated in a relationship enrichment training program based on choice theory (Duba et al., 2009), consisting of 10 sessions over two and a half months. The control group received no intervention during this period. Upon completion of the training program, both groups were assessed through a post-test. A follow-up evaluation was conducted for both groups two months later.

The data collection instruments included the Marital Conflict Questionnaire (MCQ) (Barati & Sanaei, 1996), the Psychological Resilience Questionnaire (RQ) (Conner & Davidson, 2003), and the Emotional Divorce Scale (EDS) (Gottman, 1999).

Data were analyzed using the mixed variance analysis method with SPSS version 23 statistical software.

Findings

The findings revealed that couple relationship enrichment training based on choice theory had a significant impact on psychological resilience ($p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.54$; $F = 80.28$) and emotional divorce ($p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.47$; $F = 59.95$) among couples with marital conflicts. In terms of psychological resilience, a significant difference was observed between the experimental and control groups, confirming the effectiveness of the training in enhancing couples' resilience. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Similarly, for emotional divorce, a significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups, demonstrating the training's effect on reducing emotional divorce. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

To verify the normality of the data, the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied to the residual scores. Before conducting the normality test, univariate and multivariate outlier data were removed from the dataset.

Conclusion

Results confirmed that this training significantly enhanced psychological resilience and decreased emotional divorce, aligning with findings from prior studies (e.g., Rahmati et al., 2020; Hickmon et al., 1997; Cill, 2016). The findings of this study suggest that relationship enrichment training based on choice theory, which emphasizes recognizing needs, teaching responsible behavior, creating realistic plans, and exploring options and alternative choices, is an effective method for improving psychological resilience and reducing emotional divorce among couples with marital conflicts. Participating in relationship enrichment sessions encourages couples to focus on improving their relationships, address problems constructively, and learn effective communication skills. This proactive approach helps prevent emotional distance in marriage and fosters an understanding that a satisfying relationship requires sensitivity to each other's needs and mutual comprehension of their unique perspectives. Couples are encouraged to pay attention to the quality of the time spent together, engage in activities that fulfill both partners' needs, and avoid harmful behaviors such as blaming or arguing. Allocating time for such meaningful interactions improves the quality of their relationship, leading to a more positive and fulfilling perception of their marriage. To resolve marital issues, couples are advised to shift their focus away from controlling their partner's behavior and instead concentrate on their own actions, aiming to enhance communication and build intimacy. This shift can significantly reduce emotional divorce.

In summary, relationship enrichment training based on choice theory increases acceptance of responsibility, identifies sources of internal and external control, recognizes individual needs, fosters a sense of successful identity, enhances communication skills, and cultivates commitment. By promoting competencies such as empathy, problem-solving, and goal-oriented behavior, this training boosts self-efficacy and enables individuals to navigate life's hardships and challenges more effectively.

Limitations included the restricted sample to couples from specific counseling centers in Shiraz, cultural and financial factors, and non-random sampling. Future research is recommended across

diverse regions and populations, including divorced women, infertile couples, and those with infidelity experiences. Practical applications suggest offering this training in family counseling workshops, judiciary centers, and cultural institutes to enhance marital resilience and reduce emotional divorce in Iranian families.

Keywords: Choice Theory, Emotional Divorce, Marital Conflicts, Psychological Resilience, Relationship Enrichment.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered to in this study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and the steps involved in its implementation. They were assured that their information would remain confidential and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to express their sincere gratitude to all the couples who participated in the research, whose cooperation made this study possible.

Financial Support

This research did not receive any financial support.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research.

References

- Akbari, E., Azimi, Z., Talebi, S., & Fahimi, S. (2020). Prediction of Couples' Emotional Divorce Based on Early Maladaptive Schemas and Emotion Regulation's Components. *Clinical Psychology and Personality, 14*(2), 79-92. <https://dorl.net/dor/20.1001.1.23452188.1395.14.2.8.7> (In Persian)
- Barati, T., & Sanaei, B. (1996). *Scales for measuring family and marriage*. Tehran: Besat Publications. (In Persian)
- Bradley, E. L. (2014). Choice theory and reality therapy: An overview. *International Journal of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy, 34*(1), 6-13. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1625136609?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>
- Cill, F. K. (2016). Mindfulness-based relationship enhancement. *Behavior Therapy, 12*(1), 23-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2015.03.004>
- Conner, K. M., & Davidson, J. R.T. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The Conner–Davidson Resilience scale (CD-RISC). *Depression & Anxiety, 18*(2), 36-82. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.10113>
- Duba, J. D., Graham, M., Britzman, M., & Minatrea, N. (2009). Introducing the “basic needs genogram” in reality therapy-based marriage and family counseling. *International Journal of Reality Therapy, 28*(2), 15–19. https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/csa_fac_pub/28/
- Frye, N., Ganong, L., Jensen, T., & Coleman, M. (2020). A dyadic analysis of emotion regulation as a moderator of associations between marital conflict and marital satisfaction among first-married and remarried couples. *Journal of Family Issues, 41*(12), 2328-2355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X20935504>
- Gottman, J. M. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically-based marital therapy*. WW Norton & Company. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yhbeh.2018.07.007>
- Pinar, S. E., Yildirim, G., & Sayin, N. (2018). Investigating the psychological resilience, self-confidence and problem-solving skills of midwife candidates. *Nurse Education Today, 64*, 144-149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2018.02.014>

Hickmon, W. A., Protinsky, H. O. & Singh, K. (1997). Increasing Marital Intimacy: Lessons from Marital Enrichment. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 19, 581–589.

<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026191223476>

Motahari. Z.S., Behzadpour, S., Sohrabi, F. (2013). Explanation of Marital Conflicts Based on the Sensation Seeking and Resilience in Couples. *Women and Family Studies*, 5(20), 105-122.

<https://sanad.iau.ir/en/Journal/jwsf/Article/519777?jid=519777> (In Persian)

Rahmati, M., barabadi, H. A., & heydarnia, A. (2020). The effectiveness of marital enrichment training program based on Time for better marriage (TIME) on marital adjustment among women with early marriage. *Counseling Culture and Psychotherapy*, 11(41), 235-258.

<https://doi.org/10.22054/qccpc.2020.49064.2290> (In Persian)

Safaerad, S., & Varastefar, A. (2013). A survey on the relationship of marital conflicts with emotional divorce of referring women to the court of eastern Tehran. *Social Research*, 6(20), 85-106. <https://sid.ir/paper/164870/en> (In Persian)

Cite this article: Sodagar, R., Maredpour, A., & Ramazani, Kh. (2024). Efficacy of the Couples' Relationship Enrichment Training According to Choice Theory on the Psychological Resilience and Affective Divorce of Couples with Marital Conflicts. *Journal of Applied Psychological Research*, 15(4), 301-318. doi: 10.22059/japr.2024.337000.644160.



Publisher: University of Tehran Press

© The Author(s).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/japr.2024.337000.644160>
