

The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on Marital Satisfaction and Women's Extramarital Relations

¹Fahime Ghashghaei, ²Najmieh Rostami and ³Ali-Reza Ahmadi

¹Department of Counseling, Khatam University, Tehran, Iran

²Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Karaj Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran

³Department of Family Therapy, Women Research Center, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract: Extramarital relationship is the main issue in the family which still remains a topic of interest for many researchers, particularly in the field of sociology and psychology. Objective of the present study is to investigate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on marital satisfaction and extramarital relation in married women with out of marriage relations. In this study, a quasi-experimental method (pretest and posttest with control group) was used. Therefore, 30 women with extramarital relation were given Derigotas questionnaire and marital satisfaction questionnaire (ENRICH) that were the instruments of measurement in this study. The experimental group received training for 11 sessions with cognitive-behavioral approach. In order to analyze data the multivariate analysis of covariance and Pearson correlation were used. Results showed that cognitive-behavioral therapy had a significant effect on marital satisfaction, dimensions of marital satisfaction and extramarital relation. In addition, there was a significant relationship between marital and extramarital relationship.

Key words: Cognitive-behavioral therapy, marital satisfaction, extramarital relationship, women, psychology

INTRODUCTION

Extramarital relationship is the main issue in the family which still remains a topic of interest for many researchers, particularly in the field of sociology and psychology.

Considering the changes and complexities of societies in the third millennium, these changes are inevitable and perceptible in the family. Family as a social system can provide both a bed for flourish and a ground for collapse. The marital relations between husband and wife who are the fundamental bases of the family are somehow effective on relations among members of the family. These members that enter a grater institution called society typically affect of their issues around. Therefore, researchers should pay attention to the important role of the couple's relation in family and ultimately in society.

According to Beck (Cognitive theorists), distorted thoughts and error are the factors of conflicts and worrying perception of events (Schultz and Schulz, 2006). This therapeutic approach helps clients change the way of thinking (cognition) and acting (behavior) as reasonable at the present time by challenging their upcoming negative thoughts. In general, this approach is directional, problem-oriented and in terms of time, limited and organized.

The origin of many misunderstandings is in dogmatic and irrational minds of couples. On the one hand, the foundation of family's functions is associated with the way of adjustment and marital satisfaction. If the couples have unhealthy relations in terms of cognition-behavior, the rate of marital satisfaction decreases. In this case, not only they but also their children and even the related families and finally community are influenced by these inappropriate conditions. One of the consequences of marital dissatisfaction is infidelity (disloyalty) or extramarital relations which include violation of the treaty and violating the obligation, secrecy of spouse and generally having emotional intimate relations, sexual relations or emotional-sexual relations with someone other than spouse. Several studies have mentioned that the rate of irrational thoughts in individuals with marital dissatisfaction is more than those who have marital satisfaction (Dimatio, 2008). From the cognitive perspective, mind reading, suspicion, lack of moral consensus, undesirable understanding in the emotional-affective areas, decreased sexual desire after marriage, taking revenge, lack of important communication skills and unauthorized use of virtual networks such as telegram and Imo that may be used to show virtual sexual relations, simulations of sexual activity, access to pornographic photos and chat with intimate conversations may cause the establishment of extramarital relations.

Non-monogamous attitudes are different in different societies. According to estimates, between 21-70% of women and 26-75% of men in the United States of America commit extramarital relations during the marriage, at least for once (Jeanfreau, 2009). In Iran, the community differently responds to disloyalty of men and women. When some men are disloyal to their wives, because of the limitations of society including sexual abuse look on the part of some men, economic dependence, very high interest in child (in the case of non-addiction of husband to drug and his non-criminality, the guardianship of children is given to father in Iranian civil law), the wife has to continue to common life with her husband while the disloyalty of man (husband) is more acceptable because of the lax attitudes, the acceptance of inherent nature of men for having sexual diversity and possibility of polygamy (temporary and permanent marriage) and male-dominated culture. In contrast, there are too intense formal and informal penalties for wife's disloyalty. If it is approved that a married woman has entered extramarital relation, the least punishment for her is divorce and finally in accordance with the Islamic Penal Code approved by Islamic Parliament in 01.05.2013 she will be sentenced to stone to death (killing by beating stone).

Although, some researches have been done about extramarital relations in Iran, the researches about women's disloyalty are few due to sensitivity of its prohibition, therefore, this issue encouraged the researcher to conduct the present study in line with this covert social damage which is increasing in community.

Statement of problem: Increasing divorce rate is an alarm for traditional Iranian society. According to statistics obtained from the registrar, divorce rate in 2011-2015 has increased from 142841-163765 cases. This is while the marriage rate from 874792 cases in 2011 has reached to 685352 cases in 2015 which shows a descending course (Iranian Registrar Organization). If there is no marital satisfaction and disagreements and disputes are increased among family members, many destructive consequences can be observed including physical-mental illness (especially in women), aggression, femicide/spouse-killing and spouse abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS (Smith, 2007; Jeanfreau, 2009), job problems, reduction of couple's motivation for growth and problems in children such as behavioral problems (conflicts with peers, bedwetting, nail-biting, aggression, academic failure) and physical disorder (psychosomatic disorders such as abdominal pain, nausea, insomnia), feelings of inferiority, insecurity and fear of separation, delinquency and the crisis of running away from home.

Literature review: Based on research conducted, the underlying factors of extramarital relationships including gender in the sense that men are more likely to have

extramarital relations (Atkins *et al.*, 2001) thrill-seeking and sexual orientation (Allen and Atkins, 2012; Hassanabadi *et al.*, 2011; Shirdel, 2006), numerous heterosexual friendships before marriage (Javidnia, 2013 quoted in Jeanfreau, 2009) large urban areas due to situational opportunities and anonymity jobs that require travel outside the city, a great relationship with colleagues, the high level of education (Smith, 2007; Atkins *et al.*, 2001), observing and learning from those who have entered into this relationship at an early age and liberal attitude, the intention to increase self-confidence (Jennifer, 2009; Allen and Baucom, 2004); satellite (Haji, 2013), lack of belief in religion (Javidnia, 2013; Burdette *et al.*, 2007; Atkins *et al.*, 2001), not having children (Jeanfreau, 2009), excitement of secrecy (Allen and Baucom, 2004); virtual networks (Zak *et al.*, 2002), extroverted character (Javidnia, 2013; Miller *et al.*, 2004), impulsive and risky (Campbell, 2009; Miller *et al.*, 2004), neuroticism (Javidnia, 2013), antisocial character that intends to do unfettered sex and multiple sex partners and narcissism that have low tolerance in failure high social power in men and low social power in women can be effective in creating extramarital relations. Also, about working environment, the working women in an environment that the majority of workers are men suffer from disloyalty more than the women who do not work in such environments while the reverse is true about men. In other words the rate of disloyalty of men who are working in environments that the majority are women is less than the men who do not work in such environments (Campbell, 2009).

Momeni-Javid reported the impact of couple group therapy on improving the quality of life of women affected by extramarital relations, their marital relations and verbal communication. It also seems that sexual dissatisfaction can lead to extramarital relations (Shirdel, 2006; Campbell, 2009). According to Javidnia (2013), extramarital relations is negatively associated with the rate of marital satisfaction and positively with experiencing pre-marriage relations and the degree of extramarital relations were higher among women with lower level of education.

Mohammad (2010) found that the stress-coping method could not increase the rate of satisfaction in women affected by the disloyalty of husband but it was effective to reduce ineffective attitudes and coping methods. Khoshkam (2003) and Arabzadeh *et al.*, (2010) found a significant relationship between cognitive-behavioral coping method and marital satisfaction. They also stated that gender plays an important mediating role in the prevalence of extramarital relations, so that the men who had experienced this relationship were elder and their sexual satisfaction was

higher compared to women who were faced the problem of disloyalty. In other words men more due to sexual orientation and women more due to emotional needs commit extramarital relationships (Lalasz and Weigel, 2011; Allen and Atkins, 2012; Atkins *et al.*, 2005; Allen and Baucom, 2004; Hassanabadi, 2011).

Research hypotheses:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is effective on marital satisfaction of women
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is effective on women's extramarital relations
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is effective on marital satisfaction for women
- There is a relationship between marital satisfaction and marital relations

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population, sample and research procedure: The study population consisted of married women on the verge of divorce that had been directed to Peivand counseling center (region 2) by family court and tribunals and the married women with extramarital relations who had referred to the center voluntarily that were selected using available sampling method. Since access to these women is difficult, some of the selected women in the center were asked, if possible, to introduce their friends who have this relation in order the therapy sessions are held. Therefore, some of the sample was selected using snowball sampling method. Then, 30 women with extramarital relations were identified and invited to participate. These 30 individuals were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (15 people per each group) using extramarital relation matching. To the research objectives, a pretest-posttest design with control group was used.

Measuring tool: The data were obtained using marital satisfaction questionnaire (ENRICH) and Derigotas questionnaire.

Marital satisfaction questionnaire (ENRICH): This questionnaire was developed by Olson to measure marital satisfaction. The test has 47 items which has nine subscales of personality subjects, marital relation, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relations, marriage and children, relatives and friends and religious orientation. Olsen reported the validity of this test equal to 0.92 using alpha coefficient. In our country first, Soleimani and Navabinejad calculated and

reported internal consistency of the test equal to 0.95. Also Wadsby reported the reliability of the test between 0.65 and 0.94 and its discrimination power equal to 0.90 using test-retest method.

Scoring methods: The questionnaire was set as the five-point Likert scale which each option is given from one to five points. The calculated scores are interpreted based on the norm table.

Derigotas questionnaire, the tendency to disloyalty: This questionnaire was designed by Derigotas to measure the intensity of the relationship of the individual with someone outside of marriage (extramarital). This questionnaire consists of 11 items and measures three subscales of cognitive disloyalty, emotional disloyalty and sexual disloyalty of the extramarital relations of respondents. The reliability of the test had a high stability and was reported equal to 0.93 using Cronbach's alpha. To calculate validity, the correlation between scores of subjects in disloyalty behavior scale was obtained equal to 0.88 that represents a criterion-related validity.

Scoring methods: The questionnaire was set as the seven-point Likert scale which each option is given from one to seven points. The obtained scores were analyzed using SPSS Software and structural equation modeling.

Procedure: In this study, an experimental group and a control group were used. Both groups were completed Derigotas marital satisfaction questionnaire at the same time and place twice, once before performing the independent variable and once one week after the end of counseling sessions (counseling sessions were held only for experimental group). To be morally justified after administering the second test, two sessions of counseling were held for control group members by the researcher. The resulting data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (analysis of covariance and Pearson correlation coefficient) in the environment of SPSS software.

11 sessions of 2 h based on cognitive-behavioral approach

First session: Creating a good relationship, statement of the problem and description of marital and extramarital relationship.

Second session: Explaining the cognitive-behavioral approach.

Third session: Reviewing the individual's beliefs and (rational and irrational) expectations of self and her husband in marital relation.

Fourth session: Investigating negative thoughts with raising some questions and replacing rational thoughts and evaluating extramarital relation.

Fifth session: Studying cognitive error in emotion with husband.

Sixth session: The thinking, feeling and behavioral results of extramarital relations, studying the underlying factors of extramarital relations, visualizing the position change with betrayed husband, evaluating the religious consistency with husband by logical reaction.

Seventh session: Training of assertiveness, being honest, cognitive distortions remove and the logical attitude in financial management.

Eighth session: Training the communication skills, playing a role in effective connection with spouse (husband) away from cognitive distortions.

Ninth session: Avoiding negative predictions, problem-solving technique, self-reward and self-punishment to form and stabilized corrected behavior in relation to husband and stopping relations with anyone other than husband.

Tenth session: Training the relaxation techniques such as regulation of breathing, relaxation in an unfortunate relationship with spouse, positive thinking and renewing memories of past with spouse at the present time having good times and having fun with her husband without presence of children or relatives.

Eleventh Session: Developing a maintaining plan, planning for follow-up and evaluation after treatment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown above, the highest frequency and percentage of women's age in experimental and control groups are related to age of 18-25 and the lowest frequency and percentage are related to age of 34-41. Also, the engineering job in the control group and dressing and toilet job in the experimental group had the lowest frequency and percentage. In both groups, the

Table 1: Demographic findings

Group	Experimental group		Control group	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Age (years)				
18-25	6	18.8	6	18.8
26-33	5	15.6	4	12.5
34-41	4	12.5	4	12.5
Job				
Housekeeper	7	15.6	5	46.7
Employee	6	18.8	4	26.7
Engineer	2	6.30	1	6.70
Hair dresser	2	6.30	3	20.0
Education				
Lower the diploma	2	6.30	2	6.30
Diploma	5	15.6	6	18.8
Associate	4	12.5	5	15.6
Bachelor	4	12.5	2	6.30
Duration of marriage (years)				
1-4	12	37.5	11	34.4
5-8	2	6.30	3	9.40
13-16	1	3.10	1	3.10
Number of children				
0	8	25.0	6	40.0
1	4	12.5	7	46.0
2	2	6.30	2	13.3
3	1	3.10	0	0.00

highest frequency and percentage are related to housekeeping. Diploma education level had the highest frequency and percentage in both groups. Bachelor's degree in control group and lower the diploma education level in the experimental group had the lowest frequency and percentage. Marriage duration of 1-4 year had the highest frequency and percentage and marriage duration of 13-16 year had the lowest frequency and percentage in both groups. For number of children having no child in the experimental group and one child in control group had the highest frequency and percentage and having three children had the lowest frequency and percentage in both groups.

Generally, the results in Table 1 and 2 show that the mean score of marital satisfaction in the experimental group that were under the therapeutic intervention was considerably higher in post-test than that of pre-test. The mean score of post-test for marital relation in the experimental group has significantly decreased compared to the mean score of pre-test.

To investigate the assumed results, the homogeneity of variances showed that based on the significance level of f-test that is >0.05 , the conditions are optimal to use parametric test. The results of covariance analysis for both independent variables have been calculated separately. According to the mean of the experimental group (the group receiving cognitive-behavioral therapy) and control group and since the significance level for marital satisfaction variable ($p = 0.000$) is <0.005 in response to the first hypothesis we can say that cognitive-behavioral therapy has been effective on increasing of marital satisfaction. Also, the significance

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of experimental and control groups in variables of marital satisfaction and extramarital relation

Groups		Experimental group		Control group	
Subscales	Test	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Personality issues	Pre-test	20.1	2.3	14.5	2.1
	Post-test	17.06	2.2	2.05	2.09
Marital relation	Pre-test	17.8	2.9	17.02	2.18
	Post-test	24.09	20.3	17.01	2.4
Conflict solution	Pre-test	14.0	1.2	2.4	15.3
	Post-test	19.4	2.01	15.3	2.3
Financial management	Pre-test	2.1	11.12	2.2	11.11
	Post-test	2.5	11.05	3.1	10.91
Leisure activities	Pre-test	3.2	18.2	18.1	1.4
	Post-test	23.1	1.9	12.1	3.1
Sexual relations	Pre-test	4.2	17.1	15.1	3.4
	Post-test	22	1.3	11.3	2.2
Marriage and children	Pre-test	2.1	11.12	21.6	4.06
	Post-test	15.01	1.9	2.06	31.5
Religious orientation	Pre-test	2.1	11.12	21.6	4.06
	Post-test	15.01	1.9	2.06	13.5
Extramarital relations	Pre-test	35	11.52	30.86	12.32
	Post-test	22	11.74	28.73	10.75

Table 3: Results of Levin p-test

Variables	F-value	df1	df2	Sig.
Marital satisfaction	0.657	1	28	0.425
Extramarital relation	0.583	1	28	0.451

level ($p = 0.00$) obtained which is related to the mean of the experimental group for dependent variable in extramarital relations and the control group is also <0.5 . We conclude that there is a significant difference between the mean of the two groups, so the second hypothesis is confirmed. In other words cognitive-behavioral therapy was effective in reducing extramarital relations.

The results of Table 3-6 show that the difference between the women's mean scores in subscales of marital satisfaction in post-test in both experimental and control group and the obtained p are <0.005 , so the difference is significant. Therefore, the third hypothesis is confirmed. In other words cognitive-behavioral therapy was effective in subscales of marital satisfaction.

According to above table and with emphasis on the obtained correlation coefficient ($r = -0.14$) which is significant at the level of 0.05, it can be argued that there is a significant relationship between "marital satisfaction" and "extramarital relations". Therefore, it can be said that by increasing the marital satisfaction, extramarital relations decrease and vice versa, i.e., by reducing the extramarital relations, marital satisfaction increases. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is confirmed.

This study was done to investigate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on marital satisfaction and extramarital relation in married women. According to the results, the covariance analysis was significant for the difference of the experimental and control groups in marital satisfaction at level of $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.001$). Therefore, researchers can conclude that cognitive

behavioral therapy has been effective on increasing marital satisfaction. The results obtained from testing this hypothesis are congruent with the results of researches conducted by Shahmoradi (2005) and Motamedin (2004) suggest that destructive cognitive distortions in marital relation can be corrected by cognitive-behavioral therapy which finally increases marital satisfaction. In objective and behavioral methods, these sessions had applicably focused on thoughts and behaviors that had interchanged during their conflicts and debates with their spouses.

The main framework of the training was developed so that the individuals can evaluate the upcoming negative thoughts that caused distraction of their feeling and behavior in relation with their spouses. For clearly understanding, the paper and pen tasks were used in which the person wrote down her thoughts and tried to detect her errors by assistance of the counselor. The anticipation that the marital relation always must be satisfactory, neglecting the positive points of life, showing greater the marital discrepancies were of the problematic cases which were corrected. Cognitive errors such as mind-reading, overgeneralization, dualistic thinking, grandiosity, considering problems as permanent issues and irrational expectations from spouse (husband) were challenged by raising question and conversation and finally the individual tried to find the solution of the problem, restore the thoughts and achieve rational feeling and behavior. After analyzing the covariance of marital satisfaction subscales and being significant the test result at significance level of 0.001 ($p = 0.001$), it can be said that cognitive-behavioral therapy has been effective on the fields of conflict solution, financial management, sexual relations, marriage, children and financial orientation. In line with this research, Ahmadi conducted a study entitled "Comparing the Effectiveness of the Two

Table 4: The results of covariance analysis for each of dependent variables

Variables	Sum of squares	Mean squares	df	F-values	P (significance level)	Eta-square
Marital satisfaction	767.962	767.962	1	34.09	0.000	0.57
Extramarital relation	484.274	484.274	1	35.971	0.00	0.59

Table 5: The results of covariance analysis for experimental and control group in subscales

Source of changes	Subscales	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F-values	P (significance level)	Eta-square	Test power
Post-test	Conflict solution	81.85	1	81.85	11.3	0.001	0.30	0.91
	Financial management	103.1	1	103.1	26.8	0.001	0.44	0.96
	Marital relation	80.02	1	80.02	58.01	0.001	0.48	0.99
	Marriage and children	103.4	1	103.4	19.03	0.001	0.36	0.89
	Religious orientation	42.1	1	42.1	11.22	0.001	0.28	0.82
Group	Conflict solution	60.01	1	60.01	8.9	0.005	0.32	0.85
	Financial management	64.33	1	64.33	20.05	0.001	0.44	0.99
	Marital relation	55.4	1	55.4	39.4	0.001	0/570/20	1.00
	Marriage and children	43.84	1	43.84	7.37	0.010	0.20	0.84
	Religious orientation	22.24	1	22.24	5.69	0.010	0.19	0.74
Error	Conflict solution	182.9	1	182.9				
	Financial management	111.09	1	111.09				
	Marital relation	40.76	1	40.76				
	Marriage and children	192.37	1	192.37				
	Religious orientation	113.26	1	113.26				

Table 6: The relationship between "marital satisfaction" and "extramarital relation"

Type of correlation	Degree of correlation	Direction of correlation	Sig.
Pearson	-0.14	Negative	0.05

Intervening Methods of Lifestyle Change and Family Problem Solving in Reducing Marital Maladjustment". The results showed that the use of both intervening methods were effective on decreasing marital maladjustment also, the intervening method of family problem solving reduced the conflict maladjustment was sexual relations.

Also, according to the significance level of $p = 0.00$, it is shown that this therapy has been effective on reducing extramarital relations. In this study, researchers dealt with the negative thoughts that were the underlying factors of frustration and desperation. Some of the clients stated that they were sure that their spouses (husbands) no longer have sexual attractions and thought that another woman exists in their husband's life and typically did a kind of mind reading. Consequently, they attracted the emotional relation with another man rather than their husbands or expected their husbands always love them. If the husband did not show much attention, they thought it was better a marital relation takes place. Some stated that their friends also had extramarital relations and typically by giving an excuse and showing as normative this kind of relation tried to justify their behavior. After having the relation for once, the fear of repeating it reduces, the extramarital relation is reinforced and intensified.

By visualizing, the individual changed her position with her husband and at last stage visualized her

thought, feeling and behavior toward infidelity of spouse. They were trained to reduce the extramarital relations by positive reinforcing and their self-punishment. Some women acknowledged that due to lack of assertiveness to state the suppressed expectations for their husbands or inappropriate statement of their thoughts and expectations and consequently increasing the conflicts, the marital relations decrease and the extramarital relations increase. Therefore, assertiveness and empathic communicative skills how to do reasonable negotiations free from cognitive distortions and with respect in the fields of training their children, relatives and friends, financial management and even religious orientation that are related to belief aspects to reach an agreement were trained. Thereby the fields of conflicts were reduced.

Couple's recreation (without the presence of children and relatives), especially in places that they went at early of their marriage that were renewing good memories could help reinforce marital relation and decrease extramarital relation. Also, relaxation and breathing exercises for creating tranquility among women were the effective behavioral exercises. It should be noted, during sessions the rate of improvement and satisfaction of marital relation as well as changes in extramarital relationship were assessed by doing tasks.

In line with the results of the present study researchers can refer to Mohammad (2010), Shirdel (2006), Campbell (2009), Brown *et al.* (2006) and Atkins *et al.* (2001) that found a significant association between extramarital relations and sexual dissatisfaction. According to significance level of

$p = 0.05$, a negative correlation was obtained ($r = -0.14$). In other words it was approved that with a decrease in marital satisfaction, the extramarital relations increase or vice versa, i.e., with increase in extramarital relations, the marital satisfaction decreases. Congruent with this result researchers can refer to Hassanabadi *et al.* (2011).

CONCLUSION

Notification through the media, virtual networks and holding free training workshops about commitment and improvement of marital relations, informing the results of research carried out in the field of negative outcomes of extramarital relations for women with this relation, holding prevention workshops and giving information about the importance of healthy family, marital loyalty and satisfaction for children of the families damaged from this type of relations that possibly escape away to marry and in the case of marriage will face taking revenge of partner and disloyalty. Further researches must be done with other approaches such as meta-cognitive, consciousness awareness and narrative therapy about the extramarital relations and marital satisfaction in women. Of limitations of this research were difficult access to statistical sample and sometimes the worry of some women about knowing about their referring to the clinic.

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