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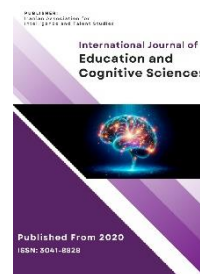
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The Effectiveness of Positive Couple Therapy on Marital Adjustment and Marital Fusion in Couples with Marital Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The present research was conducted with the aim of determine the effectiveness of positive couple therapy on marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts.

Methodology: The present research was a quasi-experimental with a pre-test and post-test design with experimental and control groups. The statistical population of this study was all couples with marital conflicts who referred to counseling centers of Ahvaz city in the autumn season of 2023 year. The samples of this research was 32 people (16 couples) who were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly assigned into two equal groups including experimental and control groups. The experimental group was trained for 10 sessions of 60 minute with positive couple therapy method, and during this time the control group did not receive any training. The data of the present research were collected with a marital adjustment scale (Spanier, 1976) and marital fusion questionnaire (Singer & Skerrett, 2014) and analyzed with tests of chi-square and multivariate analysis of covariance in SPSS-26 software.

Findings: The findings of this research showed that couples with marital conflicts in the experimental and control groups did not significantly different in terms of age, occupation, and education level ($P > 0.05$). Also, positive couple therapy significantly increased marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts ($P < 0.001$).

Conclusion: According to the results of this study, planning to use positive couple therapy intervention to increase marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts is necessary.

Keywords: *Positive Couple Therapy, Marital Adjustment, Marital Fusion, Marital Conflicts.*

1. Introduction

The family is formed based on certain norms and plays an important role in maintaining and promoting the health of society. Therefore, maintaining and promoting family relationships has a great value and importance (Wilson et al., 2024). One of the issues that threatens the family health is the issue of marital conflicts (Frye-Cox et al., 2021), which arise in parallel with love in married life and are an unavoidable issue (Dong et al., 2022). Marital conflicts has wide range from simple marital arguments to intense verbal fights and separations, and are the result of couples disagreeing about goals, motivations, values, and priorities (Singh et al., 2023). These conflicts have many negative psychological consequences, including reduced marital adjustment (Ozguc & Tanriverdi, 2018) and decreased marital fusion (Cruwys et al., 2023). Marital adjustment describes the conditions which couples feel happy, satisfied, and contented most of the time, and is a process that requires adjustment of tastes and recognition of the spouse's various characteristics (Santos et al., 2024). This type of adjustment plays an important role in maintaining and sustaining marriage and refers to the ability of couples to get along with each other and is influenced by the couples' personality, cultural and psychological factors (Kaya & Baser, 2024). The adjustment couples are couples who agree most of the time, have joint leisure time, enjoy the quality of their marital relationship, consult about financial issues and how to solve life problems, and feel satisfied with their sex life (Demirci et al., 2022).

Also, marital conflicts can lead to a decline in marital fusion (Cruwys et al., 2023). Marital fusion is a characteristic or a type of capability in marital relationships that connects the individual to the social world of the spouse and outlines how to help the spouse, and lack of marital fusion is associated with several clinical features such as anxiety, poor differentiation, insecure attachment, and maladaptive coping mechanisms (Gildersleeve et al., 2017). This construct represents the capacity that each spouse has to improve their marital relationship and reflects the emotional response of one spouse to the emotional reactions of their spouse (Sinai & Peleg, 2021). Marital fusion causes couples to be attuned to each other's emotions and feelings, to connect with each other's social world, to seek to improve their marital relationships, and to avoid harming to their marital relationships (Galdiolo et al., 2023).

One of the intervention methods to improve the marital characteristics of couples is the positive couple therapy method (Genc, 2021). Couple therapy is opposed to individual or group therapies and refers to therapies that occur in a context of mutual communication between husband and wife to improve the couple's relationship and resolve conflicts between them (Lebow & Snyder, 2021). Couples in married life face many problems and challenges, and the aim of couple therapy is to reduce marital conflicts and communication disturbances between couples and help them adapt more appropriately to marital challenges (Treter et al., 2021). Positive therapy is one of the new therapeutic methods that focuses on individuals' abilities, strengths, and

talents, such as happiness, problem solving, optimism, enjoyment, etc., instead of weaknesses, defects, disorders, shortcomings, and abnormalities (Sandholm et al., 2023). This therapeutic method emphasizes three areas or levels of experience to improve psychological characteristics: at the mental level emphasizes or focuses on positive mental states such as hope, optimism, and happiness; at the personal level emphasizes or focuses on traits and characteristics such as courage, loyalty, honesty, and wisdom; and at the social level emphasizes or focuses on progress, creativity, and social virtues (Pastore et al., 2024). Positive couple therapy includes a set of techniques that increase intimacy, empathy, trust, honesty, well-being, health, and relationship improvement in couples' lives (Genc, 2021). This therapeutic method by increasing and optimizing positive thoughts, positive emotions, positive behaviors, and satisfying basic needs such as autonomy, love, connection, belonging, etc reduces marital challenges and increases psychological well-being and marital happiness (Antoine et al., 2020).

Studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of positive couple therapy, which the most important and relevant results are reported below. The results of the study by Haghighifard et al (2023) showed that positive couple therapy reduced entitlement and bullying and increased marital adjustment in narcissistic men. Jamshidzhi et al (2022) concluded in a study that positive couple therapy increased marital adjustment in couples seeking divorce. In another study, Heydari & Saedi (2020) reported that positive couple therapy increased marital satisfaction, happiness, and love-making in couples. Also, the results of the study by Vahidi Farashan et al (2022) showed that positive couple therapy increased empathy and intimacy in infertile couples. Haroon Rashidi & Kiyaniyan Mehr (2019) concluded in a study that positive couple therapy increased marital intimacy and sexual satisfaction in female students. In another study, Zareei MahmoodAbadi (2017) reported that positive couple therapy increased devotion and trust to the life in the normal women.

Marital conflicts are a common and increasing phenomenon in families, and this phenomenon negatively affects all aspects of marital life, including marital adjustment and fusion. Therefore, it is necessary to look for solutions to improve marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts, that one of the potentially effective methods in this field which the effectiveness has been less studied is the positive couple therapy method. Given the increase in marital conflicts, the lack of research in this field, and the need for intervention to improve the characteristics of couples with marital conflicts, the present research was conducted with the aim of determine the effectiveness of positive couple therapy on marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present research was a quasi-experimental with a pre-test and post-test design with experimental and control groups. The statistical population of this study was all

couples with marital conflicts who referred to counseling centers of Ahvaz city in the autumn season of 2023 year. The samples of this research was 32 people (16 couples) who were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly with the help of lottery assigned into two equal groups including experimental and control groups. The inclusion criteria were included a score below 100 in the marital adjustment scale of [Spanier \(1976\)](#), a minimum of a high school diploma, ages 26 to 45 in each couple, willingness to cooperate and participate in couple therapy sessions, five years of cohabitation, no specific psychological disorders such as depression and obsession, no addiction or use of psychiatric medications, and no participation in intervention sessions with parallel designs. The exclusion criteria were included withdrawal from further cooperation, absence of more than two sessions in couple therapy sessions, and no willingness to continue participating in the intervention.

In this research, after sampling and explaining the importance and necessity of the research and the research's commitment to ethical considerations, the samples were divided into two groups of 16 people (each group consisting of 8 couples), including experimental and control groups. The experimental group received by positive couple therapy for 10 sessions of 60 minutes, while during this stage the control group received no training and remained on the waiting list for training. Both groups were evaluated in terms of marital adjustment and marital fusion in the pre-test and post-test stages. The experimental group underwent intervention with positive psychotherapy method of [Seligman et al \(2006\)](#) by couple therapy method for two sessions per week for five weeks by the researcher on Sundays and Tuesdays in the one of the counseling centers in Ahvaz city.

2.2. Measures

In this study, in addition to the demographic information form (age, occupation, and education level of the couples), the following tools were used.

2.2.1. Marital Adjustment Scale

The marital adjustment scale was designed by [Spanier \(1976\)](#) with 32 items. Each item of this tool is scored with

using a six-point Likert scale from zero to five, and its score is calculated by the sum of the item scores. Therefore, the minimum score is zero and the maximum score is 160, and a higher score means greater marital adjustment; so that a score equal to or greater than 100 means marital adjustment and a score lower than 100 means difficulty in marital adjustment and having marital conflicts. The creator examined and confirmed the construct validity of the tool by factor analysis and reported its reliability by Cronbach's alpha method as 0.96. In Iran, [Saadati Shamir et al \(2019\)](#) reported the reliability of the marital adjustment scale as 0.91 by Cronbach's alpha method. In the present study, the face validity of the marital adjustment scale was confirmed by 15 faculty members of the Psychology Department of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz Branch, and its reliability was obtained with using Cronbach's alpha method 0.94.

2.2.2. Marital Fusion Questionnaire

The marital fusion questionnaire was designed by [Singer & Skerrett \(2014\)](#) with 10 items. Each item of this tool is scored with using a seven-point Likert scale from one to seven, and its score is calculated by the sum of the item scores. Therefore, the minimum score is 10 and the maximum score is 70, and a higher score means greater marital fusion. The creators confirmed the convergent validity of the tool with the marital satisfaction questionnaire and reported its reliability with Cronbach's alpha for men and women 0.86 and 0.91, respectively. In Iran, no study was found that examined the psychometric indicators of this tool. In the present study, the face validity of the marital fusion questionnaire was confirmed by 15 faculty members of the Psychology Department of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz Branch, and its reliability was obtained with using Cronbach's alpha 0.88.

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Positive Couple Therapy

The experimental group was intervened by positive psychotherapy method of [Seligman et al \(2006\)](#) by couple therapy method. The purpose and content of positive couple therapy sessions are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

The purpose and content of the Positive Couple Therapy Protocol

Session	Purpose	Content
First	Familiarization to know and establishing a therapeutic relationship and explaining positive couple therapy	Familiarization and explanation of the rules of the intervention sessions, expressing the spouses' goals and expectations of each other, writing a positive self-introduction, and preparing a notebook to record the progress of the intervention sessions
Second	Identifying personal strengths and being aware of your spouse's characteristics	Recognizing own abilities and being aware of own and your spouse's characteristics and abilities, creating a positive mental attitude in yourself and using positive sentences in the present time such as "I am responsible," recording ten positive characteristics of each spouse and recording three positive common characteristics
Third	Understanding the plan of love and mutual respect in living together	Review of the previous session, identifying the spouses' love plans, using respectful words towards the spouse, recognizing the spouse's strengths, trying to have a good marital relationship, and remembering three positive and admirable characteristics in each of the couples

Fourth	Getting to know with positive emotions and events in married life	Review of the previous session, discovering and reviewing positive emotions in living together, visualizing positive and exciting events, the role of positive emotions and events in married life, and remembering three common positive events in the couple's life
Fifth	Recalling enjoyable memories	Review of the previous session, recalling and reviewing enjoyable memories, emphasizing on positive memory in order to strengthen the attachment system and success in married life, and writing three shared happy and enjoyable memories in married life
Sixth	Thank you and gratitude to your wife	Review of the previous session, practicing thanking and appreciating your spouse with positive sentences, utilizing strategies for establishing and maintaining an effective relationship with positive feedback, and writing a letter of appreciation to create a good memory
Seventh	Apologizing and finding your share in marital problems	Review of the previous session, practice apologizing and asking forgiveness from spouse, search for your own contribution in marital problems and challenges, and note one to three mistakes you have made towards your spouse
Eighth	Trying for hope and optimism	Review of the previous session, trying to be hopeful and optimistic about living together, writing a letter of forgiveness for emotional neglect and inattention, and trying to make up for it in the future
Ninth	Learning intimacy and empathy skills	Review of the previous session, trying to create a safe environment in married life through intimacy and empathy, training for improving emotional and social relationships to increase marital happiness, recording positive expectations of spouses, and planning to have a shared pastime for the weekend
Tenth	Positive response style training	Review of the previous session, identification of response styles with an emphasis on positive responses to improve couples' relationships, creation of new interactive situations, discussion about positive and negative aspects of the intervention method, and recording couples behavioral changes with pairs and individually

2.4. Data Analysis

The data of the present study were analyzed with using tests of chi-square and multivariate analysis of covariance in SPSS-26 software at a significance level of 0.05.

There was no dropout in either the experimental or control groups. According to the results of Table 2, couples with marital conflicts in the experimental and control groups did not significantly different in terms of age, occupation, and education level.

3. Findings and Results

Table 2

Results of the Chi-square test for comparing age, occupation, and education level of couples with marital conflicts in the experimental and control groups

Variable	Level	Experimental Group		Control Group		P-Value
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Husband's Age	26-34 years	6	37.50	6	37.50	>0.05
	36-45 years	10	62.50	10	62.50	
Wife's Age	26-34 years	7	43.75	8	50.00	>0.05
	36-45 years	9	56.25	8	50.00	
Husband's Occupation	Freelance	9	56.25	10	62.50	>0.05
	Government	7	43.75	6	37.50	
Wife's Occupation	Freelance	11	68.75	11	68.75	>0.05
	Government	5	31.25	5	31.25	
Husband's Education Level	Diploma	5	31.25	4	25.00	>0.05
	Bachelor	9	56.25	8	50.00	
	Master	2	12.50	4	25.00	
	Diploma	3	18.75	4	25.00	

Wife's Education Level	Bachelor	9	56.25	8	50.00
	Master	4	25.00	4	25.00

According to the results of Table 3, the scores of couples with marital conflicts in the experimental group increased more in both variables of marital adjustment and marital

fusion from the pre-test to the post-test in compared to the control group.

Table 3

Results of the mean and standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test of marital adjustment and marital fusion of couples with marital conflicts in the experimental and control groups

Variable	Stage	Experimental Group		Control Group	
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Marital Adjustment	Pre-test	78.81	4.79	79.06	4.76
	Post-test	108.75	4.18	81.63	5.30
Marital Fusion	Pre-test	28.88	2.94	28.56	2.33
	Post-test	46.13	5.90	28.50	2.28

The assumptions of multivariate analysis of covariance showed that the assumption of normality of the pre-test and post-test of marital adjustment and marital fusion of couples with marital conflicts in the experimental and control groups based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, equality of variances of the aforementioned variables based on the Levene's test, equality of variance-covariance matrices based on the Box's M test, and equality of the slope of the regression line based on the interactive effect test of the independent variable and the pre-test for the aforementioned variables was not rejected ($P < 0.05$).

Consequently, the conditions for using multivariate analysis of covariance were met.

According to the results of Table 4, the positive couple therapy method caused couples with marital conflicts in the experimental and control groups to have a significant difference in at least one of the variables of marital adjustment and marital fusion, and according to the partial eta square in the Wilks' Lambda test, 74 percent of the change in the aforementioned variables was the result of the positive couple therapy method ($P < 0.05$).

Table 4

Results of multivariate tests to determine the effectiveness of positive couple therapy on marital adjustment and marital fusion of couples with marital conflicts

Test	Value	F	P-Value	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Pillai's Trace	0.97	130.3	0.001	0.48	1.00
Wilks, Lambda	0.06	38.96	0.001	0.74	1.00
Hotelling's Trace	13.74	89.36	0.001	0.87	1.00
Roy's Largest Root	13.70	187.26	0.001	0.93	1.00

According to the results of Table 5, positive couple therapy significantly increased marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts, and according to the partial eta square, 69 percent of the change in marital adjustment

and 88 percent of the change in marital fusion was the result of positive couple therapy method ($P < 0.001$).

Table 5

Results of multivariate analysis of covariance to determine the effectiveness of positive couple therapy on marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-Value	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Marital Adjustment	Pre MA	233.40	1	233.40	11.86	0.001	0.21	0.92
	Group	1006.78	1	1006.78	51.18	0.001	0.69	1.00
	Error	589.82	30	19.66				
Marital Fusion	Pre MF	503.43	1	503.43	55.09	0.001	0.55	1.00
	Group	1524.49	1	1524.49	166.83	0.001	0.88	1.00
	Error	273.91	30	9.13				

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Given the high prevalence of marital conflicts and the need for intervention to improve the characteristics of couples suffering from them, the present study was conducted with

the aim of determine the effectiveness of positive couple therapy on marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts

The findings of the present study showed that positive couple therapy significantly increased marital adjustment in couples with marital conflicts. This finding was consistent with the researches finding of [Haghighifard et al \(2023\)](#), [Jamshidzhi et al \(2022\)](#), and [Heydari & Saedi \(2020\)](#). In explaining the effectiveness of positive couple therapy on increasing marital adjustment in couples with marital conflicts, it can be said that positive couple therapy emphasizes strengths and capabilities instead of focusing on problems. This therapeutic method by highlighting the positive aspects and successes of couples helps them to have a more optimistic view to their living together and to create more desirable and better relationships in their married life. Positive couple therapy is an effective intervention method for couples who have marital conflicts and this therapeutic method by focusing and strengthening marital relationships, resolving marital conflicts, and improving emotional relationships in their living together led to increases marital adjustment. In addition, the positive couple therapy method addresses both immediate and previous conflicts between couples and provides the way for a healthier and more satisfying relationship, and this method instead to focusing on the shortcomings in marital relationships, emphasizes on the strengths and always seeks to grow and improve various characteristics in marital life. As a result, it is logical that positive couple therapy can increase marital adjustment in couples with marital conflicts.

Also, the findings of the present study showed that positive couple therapy significantly increased marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts. No research was found in this field, but this finding in some ways was consistent with the researches finding of [Vahidi Farashan et al \(2022\)](#), [Haroon Rashidi & Kiyaniyan Mehr \(2019\)](#), and [Zareei MahmoodAbadi \(2017\)](#). In explaining the effectiveness of positive couple therapy on increasing marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts, it can be said that positive couple therapy helps couples who are seeking to improve their relationships and strengthen positive feelings and emotions to have more desirable and optimal relationships in life. This therapeutic method seeks to strengthen emotional connection and satisfaction from marital relationship among different couples, including couples with marital conflicts. In addition, the positive couple therapy method helps couples take steps to recognize their and their spouse's strengths, abilities, and positive aspects, and by correcting their attitudes provide the way for improving their and their spouse's self-esteem and establishing more favorable relationships with each other. This mentioned therapeutic method emphasizes on the positive and strengths points of each couple and the positive and strengths points of shared couple, and motivates them to make positive changes to improve their relationships. As a result, it is logical that positive couple therapy can increase marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts.

The most important limitations of the present study were include the use of non-random sampling method

(purposive), limiting the research sample to couples with marital conflicts referring to counseling centers of Ahvaz city, and the use of self-report tools to collect data. Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers use random sampling methods in their research. It is also suggested that this research be conducted on couples with other marital problems and in other cities and its results be compared with the results of this research. The last research suggestion is to compare the effectiveness of the positive couple therapy method with other couple therapy methods, including short-term dynamic couple therapy, solution-focused couple therapy, acceptance and commitment couple therapy, compassion-based couple therapy, etc.

Overall, the findings of this research showed that positive couple therapy significantly increased marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflict. These findings have practical implications for users of the results of research activities, such as counselors and therapists, and health system specialists and planners. According to the results of this study, planning to use the positive couple therapy intervention method to increase marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts is essential. As a result, counselors and therapists can use the positive couple therapy intervention method to improve marital characteristics, especially to increase marital adjustment and marital fusion in couples with marital conflicts.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

In this study, there were no conflicts of interest between the authors.

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Ethical Considerations

This research has an ethics code with the ID of IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1403.153 from the Ethics Committee in Research of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz Branch, and ethical points and considerations were observed in it.

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