



Effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on the reduction of marital disaffection of women filing for divorce

Leila Aghdam

M.A in clinical psychology, Department of psychology, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran.

Abstract: *The main purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on the reduction of marital disaffection of women filing for divorce in Tehran. This study is a semi-experimental research with a pretest-posttest design with a control group. The statistical population of this research was comprised of all the women filing for divorce in district 1 of Tehran. Out of the previously mentioned population, 30 women were randomly selected as the research sample and these 30 women were randomly divided into two groups (an experimental group and a control group). Before the beginning of the therapy, the samples in the both groups took the marital disaffection pretest. After this stage, the samples in the experimental group participated in 8 CBT sessions, but the samples in the control group did not participate in any kind of training. After the end of the CBT sessions, the posttest was done. For this purpose, the data necessary for reviewing the research hypotheses was obtained. The research hypothesis was reviewed using descriptive statistics and a one-way analysis of covariance and the results indicated that the marital disaffection scores of women participating in the CBT sessions has been significantly lower than that of the women in the control group.*

Keywords: *cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT); marital disaffection; women; divorce*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a blessing and a holy bond through which a family is created. Marriage is a social matter which is created through communication and is also based on communication. In order to have a healthy society, it must be comprised of healthy families and presence of healthy families in a society depends on the mental health of the family members and pleasant communications between these members. Thus, improving the health of family members and their relationships will surely have positive impacts on the society (Sadock, B. J., and Sadock, 2007).

Family is an institution in which relations and interactions are deeper and more intense than in any place else. Every individual imagines family as an institution full of closeness, friendly relationships and security which make the family members feel safe and peaceful. Family is the first social organization that a person lives in and the quality of this organization affects the health of its members. Family is basically a place for helping one another, for individuals to heal and reach peace. As the smallest social unit, family plays an important and effective role both in terms its positive aspects (i.e. creating a safe and peaceful place) and its negative aspects (i.e. creating social damages). Divorce is a negative phenomenon which has emerged in this social institution. It is a mental phenomenon which affects individuals and families and it is multidimensional and has multiple factors and has numerous destructive impacts on different social dimensions and is related to so many issues in the field of health and well-being of society members and leads to many social anomalies. Therefore, recognizing factors that affect divorce, and

training and prevention of it are considered to be some of the priorities of mental health and society (Jafari Nadoshan et al., 2015).

Failing to communication is one of the most common problems that are expressed by dissatisfied spouses. The results obtained from our study show that communication difficulties are a determinative factor of the relationship between distressed spouses and it seems that it intensifies the existing problems. In fact, the issue of marital distress has been the reason behind people visiting mental health centers more than any other psychiatric diagnostic class (Weissman, M., Markowitz, J., & Klerman, 2007). In fact, when couples start to have a close relationship with one another, each of the spouses enter the relationship with a set of dreams and expectations and when these dreams and expectations are replaced with stressful experiences and punishment, the marriage or the relationship would be lost and then end as the couple becomes disaffected (Pines, 2004).

Disaffection is a sad state which is the result of a lack of proportion between the expectations and the reality and the extent of it depends on the extent to which the couple is coordinated in terms of their beliefs. Disaffection can have various dimensions and it often comes along with mental, physical and emotional exhaustion (Pines, 2004; Pines & Nunes, 2003). In addition, after the disaffection, the couple's relationship and their lives would be filled with lack of trust, humiliation, blame, indifferentness and emotional separation. In such cases, the family members would show different symptoms of depression (Tsapelas, Aron & Orbuch, 2009, Patry, 2001). However, when a couple is able to manage the existing conflicts by using positive methods and by avoiding negative interactions, an atmosphere would be created in which there would be so many opportunities for self-exposure which would lead to coming to agreements about family problems (Johansen, 2003).

CBT has been known as one of the prominent therapies used for psychological disorders and conflicts between couples (Poulsen et al., 2014). By creating positive mental states and factors, CBT can play a key role in protecting couples from various diseases and their side effects, immunizing them and preventing these kind of negative states. Currently, therapeutic strategies based on psychological and behavioral have been used as effective and efficient therapeutic strategies in the treatment of many mental and communicative disorders and diseases in many health centers in the developed and advanced countries. These methods are sometimes used as specific methods of treatment and other times, they are used as complementary methods (Yusefi & Khayamnekooyi, 2010).

CBT is often used because this treatment is based on quite different philosophical and psychological traditions. CBT traditions are based on cognitive, rational, empirical and logical positivist assumptions (Fraser, Scott, Solovey & Andrew, 2007). From a cognitive – behavioral point of view, a vicious circle of anxiety has three elements: (a) emotional reactions, (b) physical senses and (c) negative thoughts about feelings (misinterpretation) (White & Barlu, 2002; cited by Fraser et al., 2007). In CBT, when a person visiting a health center has mental problems (including rage, anxiety, guilt, conflict or incompatibility) and is struggling with getting along with daily life and/or stressful incidents, techniques turn into valuable tools for making changes in the way the patient thinks and reacts. Therefore, these tools help reduce mental distress and the level of skills and confidence for overcoming difficult and stressful incidents would be improved (Poulsen et al., 2014).

Numerous studies have focused on the effectiveness of CBT. One of them was the research conducted by Gharedaghi (2013) who showed that CBT affects the satisfaction of pregnant women. Boostanipoor, Sanayi Zaker and Kiamanes (2007), in their research called a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of

cognitive – behavioral patterns in the treatment of marital problems, come to the conclusion than 17% of women treated by cognitive – behavioral marital therapy have shown more improvement. Hafezi Kan and Ghadami (2011) concluded that CBT affects the level of marital satisfaction. The research conducted by Cho et al. (2008) showed that CBT is effective when it comes to reducing automatic negative thoughts, dissatisfaction with mutual relationships and overall marital dissatisfaction.

Given what was previously mentioned and various effects of CBT of mental and communicative disorders, the main purpose of this research is to answer this question: does CBT have an impact on the reduction of the marital disaffection of women filing for divorce?

Research methodology

This study is an applied research in terms of purpose and it is a quantitative research in terms of the type of data. In this study, a semi-experimental research method with a pretest, a posttest and a control group have been used in order to review the effect of CBT on the reduction of marital disaffection of women filing for divorce. The statistical population of this research was comprised of all of the women filing for divorce in district 1 of Tehran. Out of the previously mentioned population, 30 women were randomly selected as the research sample and these 30 women were randomly divided into two groups (an experimental group and a control group). The samples in the both groups took the marital disaffection pretest. After this stage, the samples in the experimental group participated in 8 CBT sessions (a summary of the CBT sessions has been presented in table 1), but the samples in the control group did not participate in any kind of training. After the end of the experimental intervention for the experimental group, the posttest was done for both groups in order to measure the marital disaffection of the samples. Ultimately, SPSS ver.20 software and analysis of covariance test were used in order to analyze the research data.

Table 1 - a summary of the content of CBT sessions for the samples of the experimental group

Session Number	Summary of the sessions
First	Explaining the necessity of participation in the sessions, promoting group cohesion and emphasizing mutual relationships, members’ becoming familiar with one another and taking the pretest at the end
Second	Members’ becoming familiar to specific types of thinking and differences in their moods and relations, constructive thinking versus destructive thinking, necessary thinking versus unnecessary thinking, positive thinking versus negative thinking.
Third	Informing samples about cognitive deviations and their impact on marriages
Fourth	Familiarity with the function of daily activities and how it affects one’s mood
Fifth	Enriching daily activities has been the purpose of this session, pleasant activities are mainly rewarding and bring people peace.
Sixth	In this session, the discussion was about goal-setting, clear goals versus ambiguous goals, time management, planning for the future, making Maslow’s pyramid of needs known to others
Seventh	In this session, how people communicate and their communications affect their moods was the main purpose of this session. Assertiveness and communication styles training were the main activities in this session.
Eighth	Overviewing previous sessions and consolidating the changes that have been made, the method for consolidating the changes, transferring it to daily life and ultimately doing the posttest.

Marital disaffection scale (CBM): this is a self-measurement tool which has been designed by Pines (Malach & Pines, 2005) for measuring the degree of marital disaffection among couples. This scale has 21

items which has three main components: physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion and mental exhaustion. The reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated to be equal to 0.89 for a one-month period using the retest method, 0.76 for a two-month period and 0.66 for a four-month period (Malach & Pines, 2005). Navidi used the aforementioned questionnaire on 240 samples including 120 nurses and 120 teachers. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was calculated to be equal to 0.86 using Cronbach's alpha and the reliability coefficient was calculated to be equal to 0.89, 0.76 and 0.66 for a one-month, two-month and four-month period, respectively and the retest method was used to calculate this coefficient (Navidi, Adib & Sabaghian, 2007). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha and split-half methods were used for determining the reliability of this scale which were equal to 0.83 and 0.81, respectively. This indicated that the scale had desirable reliability coefficient.

Research findings

In the present study, 30 women filing for divorce were divided into an experimental group and a control group. Table (2) shows the descriptive data about marital disaffection of the research samples with the separation of groups.

Table 2: mean and standard deviation of the marital disaffection scores of women filing for divorce in the pretest and posttest stages

Stages of the test	Statistical index	Number	Average	Standard deviation
	Group			
Pretest	Control	15	109.36	9.29
	Experimental	15	108.26	9.36
Posttest	Control	15	106.52	8.26
	Experimental	15	71.16	10.71

According to table 2, marital disaffection scores of the experimental group has been reduced in comparison to the control group; whereas, no significant change can be seen in the control group.

In this study, in order to review the research hypotheses, a univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used. This test was used because the researcher had used pretest as a control variable in order to control the effect of previous preparedness and to moderate the effect of this variable.

Before using the ANCOVA test, some of the important assumptions of this statistical test must be reviewed, because if these assumptions are not observed, the research results might be biased. Presumptions of using analysis of covariance are: normality of the distribution of data, error covariance and homogeneity of the regression lines. These three assumptions were reviewed by the researcher before the analysis of covariance. Fortunately, all of these three assumptions had been observed; which means that the analysis of covariance was fit to be used for analyzing the research data. The results obtained from the covariance test can be seem in the tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: univariate analysis of covariance in terms of the mean of marital disaffection posttest which was taken by women filing for divorce in the experimental group and the control group with pretest control

Source of Variance	Sum of squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig	Ita square
Pre test	514.36	1	514.36	11.52	0.001	0.22
Group	12926.03	1	12926.03	141.24	0.001	0.936
Error	2365.31	27	75.36			

The results of ANCOVA for the primary hypothesis have been presented in table 3. According to this table, $P < 0.001$ and $F = 141.24$ which indicate that the size of the F-test for the intergroup effect is equal to 141.24 with a degree of freedom of 1 and 27 which means that it is significant at a 1-percent alpha level. This also means that there is a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group after the moderation of the effects associated with preliminary differences (i.e. marital disaffection pretest). Given the descriptive finding, a significant reduction was seen in the mean scores of marital disaffection in the posttest stage for the experimental group relative to the control group. Thus, it can be concluded that using CBT can significantly affect reduction of marital disaffection of women filing for divorce.

Discussion and conclusion

Marriage is a requirement of presence of stability, compatibility and quality in a relationship in the views of couples and marital satisfaction plays an important role in the normal function of a family. Many couples experience so much marital incompatibility and conflict, and according to many studies, CBT is a psychological therapy that has the necessary standards for an effective treatment. Thus, the purpose of this research was to determine the effectiveness of CBT on the reduction of marital disaffection of women filing for divorce. According to the findings of this research, CBT reduces the level of marital disaffection in women. The results of this research comply with the findings of researches conducted by Gharedaghi et al. (2013), Boostanipoor, Sanayi Zaker and Kiamanesh (2007) Hafezi Kan Kat and Ghadami (2011) and Cho et al. (2010).

In explaining the findings of this research, it can be said that since these women have some kind of stress and anxiety and subsequent to this, marital compatibility and quality of life of couples would be affected and marital disaffection increases and education of stress-reduction methods through behavioral – psychological methods such as body relaxation and women’s assertiveness training have been able to significantly reduce the stress and anxiety that are mainly felt before filing for divorce and the relationship between couples improves and the marital disaffection felt by women decreases.

Women asking for divorce have reported dissatisfactions about their marriage which reduces the quality of a marriage. According to the treatment protocol of this research, individual needs and purposes have been discussed based on which Maslow’s needs, long-term, average-term and short-term purposes were managed and purposefulness of marriage was interpreted as a natural cycle of live and a process for prosperity which significantly reduces the ambiguity of negative predictions and couples’ relationship became more meaningful. According to the findings of this research, logical-emotional-behavioral therapy training in the frame of ABCD formula was able to give rise to false marital attributions which can be a factor that reduces marital disaffection.

In this research, presenting weekly homework such as behavior monitoring table, tracking positive and negative thoughts throughout the week, table of activating occurrences, beliefs and consequences, a checklist of daily activities, a table for contacting people and so on, make the couple cooperate with one another throughout the week which increased the field for mental and emotional support given by one spouse to another, and this is another causes of the reduction in marital disaffection. The cognitive – behavioral approach focuses on the different types of family interactions and it considers family relations, cognitions, emotions and behaviors as they interact with one another. Cognitive inference can evoke emotion and behavior and emotion and behavior can affect cognition in a bilateral process which is sometimes responsible for maintaining dysfunction in a family.

As an overall result of the research, it can be said that cognitive – behavioral group therapy has a positive and significant impact on the reduction of marital disaffection of women asking for divorce. In addition, this type of therapy has a positive effect on the dimensions of marital disaffection (mental, physical and emotional exhaustion) as well and reduces them.

Some of the important limitations of this research were as follows: the status and degree of marital disaffection of men (due to unavailability) has not been studied. Therefore, it is recommended to other researches in other cities who have the ability to interfere in the prevention of divorce to use CBT for reducing marital disaffection. It is also suggested to researchers to pay attention to other factors that affect couples' getting a divorce and to review marital disaffection of women in a larger sample and also compare marital disaffection in men and women. The applicable techniques and methods of the interpersonal therapy approach must be taught to counselors and educators working with families so that they would be able to use this effective therapy method and to review a wide range of marital incompatibilities.

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