



## A study of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction's Effectiveness on Marital Satisfaction in Women

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### Abstract

**Background:** Marital satisfaction has been defined as an individual's attitudes toward their spouse, and the spouses' relations. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy makes possible the relation among temper, thoughts and feelings at "the present moment". By changing and practicing on thinking, we hope through this method that spouses' relations will improve, and the factors leading to conflicts will be prevented. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on marital satisfaction.

**Methods:** This research is a type of semi-experiment, pre-test and post-test with a control group. The statistical society includes all women involved in marital conflict who were referred to the psychological consulting clinics in Kerman. The statistical sample consisted of 30 women in the experiment group and the control group. For collecting information, the ENRICH questionnaire on marital satisfaction was used. Covariance analysis was used to compare the subjects' scores in both groups.

**Results:** Teaching mindfulness in the level  $P < 0.05$  led to increased total marital satisfaction and contentment, relations and conflict resolution, and a decreased women idealistic distortion component.

**Conclusions:** Mindfulness conducts the individuals to attain increasing awareness, and changes their relations with thoughts and feelings. Spouses can experience more marital satisfaction through mastering these skills to find solutions to the problems.

**Keywords:** Mindfulness, Marital satisfaction, Relations, Conflict resolution, Idealistic distortion.

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and its purpose is to analyze the individual's mental attitudes (instead of scientific signs) toward the spouse, and their relations. Such a definition of marital satisfaction indicates that concept of satisfaction is a single dimension and shows the individual's general evaluation of the spouse and their relations.<sup>3</sup>

Maltby et Al. have perceived that individuals with high marital satisfaction use a more appropriate and effective coping style, experience more deep and positive feelings and emotions, and are generally healthier. Some reasons for marital dissatisfaction are<sup>4</sup> lack of mental health in one of the spouses and interactions between spouses and their interpersonal relations.

Various remedial approaches to improve or increase marital satisfaction have been proposed. In recent years, acceptance-based remedies have been growing. One of these approached is stress reduction based on the conscious mind. Reducing stress based on the conscious mind is a behavioral intervention grounded on self-attention and self-concentration. Individuals learn to develop acceptance and sympathy instead of judging their experiences, to acquire present consciousness, and to become familiar with new ways of reacting to different situations.<sup>5</sup>

A combination of behavior therapy with methods of the eastern philosophy, such as Buddhism, has led some researchers to introduce new methods, which became popularly known as mindfulness. Mindfulness means accepting whatever is in the present time, and experiencing the absolute reality without explanation.<sup>6</sup>

Mindfulness is one of the techniques in the field of body-mind therapies. This method refers to receptive, moment-to-moment and without judgment awareness.<sup>7</sup>

Instructing mindfulness entails meta-cognition learning, new behavioral strategies of concentrating on consideration, precluding intellectual rumination, and tendency to perturbing reactions. Also, it leads to developing new thoughts and reducing disagreeable emotions.<sup>8</sup>

According to Byron (2006), effective and compatible strategies of mindfulness for creating and preserving awareness are non-judgment and evaluation, patience and fortitude, mind initiator, non-engagement, being accepted or abandoned.

Mindfulness is defined as attention to the present affairs that have been significant to humans in the other respects, such as breathing, nape ache, negative thoughts, and anxiety about future affairs, and mind frequent contemplation and

## Introduction

The family is a social and natural system with a complicated emotional structure: its important properties are kindness, loyalty and continuity of membership.<sup>1</sup> The family is one of the main elements of the society. Attaining a healthy society depends on family health, and realizing a healthy family is the eventual result of mutual desirable relationships between members of society. In such a system, the individuals are connected with each other through mutual, enduring and strong emotional attachments and interests. The intensity of these attachments may lessen with time but will last throughout life, as the basis of family formation and the most important event in an individual's life, matrimony has always attracted public opinion, and the attention of scientific and academic research.<sup>2</sup> Marital satisfaction has been defined as attitudes and general feelings between spouses, and their relations; it is used when the analytical unit is the individual

concentration presently. Every thought or feeling(s) is accepted and confirmed as they are. This is a precautionary reaction to adverse and melancholic thoughts.<sup>9</sup>

Mindfulness training has been developed to reduce stress through proper workouts. In fact, mindfulness is a kind of stress reducer based on mindfulness that is effective in reducing stress, depression and anxiety.<sup>10</sup>

Many patients suffering from cardiovascular disease, cancer, HIV, chronic pain, gastric intestinal problems, and also stress, headache, hypertension, and sleep disorder, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks have profited from this method. Rahmani and Shahabizade<sup>11</sup> in their research on mothers of handicapped children showed that this therapy led to these mothers' marital satisfaction. In another research on mothers of ADHD-affected children, mindfulness led to reduced marital surfeit.<sup>12</sup>

Another research that investigated the effect of generic mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) on reducing stress and increasing marital satisfaction showed that this type of therapy is fixed over time and led to stress reduction and an increase in marital satisfaction in the experimental group.<sup>13</sup> A functional value of the family as a social system in every social system is important. A healthy family could be a factor in the increase in mental and somatic health in spouses and their children. The family health depends on the spouses' health and continuity of their relationship. Besides, the unhealthy family or the family on the verge of divorce could play a role in bringing forward or continuing any social problems they may have, and in reducing the individual's mental and physical health.<sup>14</sup>

In marriage, an individual's satisfaction shows their gratitude to the family, so there is a significant need to investigate marital satisfaction and its different dimensions and also to determine the related and effective factors, and elements affecting the improvement and increase in marital satisfaction.<sup>15</sup>

There is little research in this field, and the present research tried to find the relation between mindfulness, which is a cognitive therapy, and marital satisfaction, and if mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) could affect married women marital satisfaction.

## Materials and Methods

The research method of this semi-experimental research is pre-test and post-test with a control group. The research statistical society was 90 women affected by marital conflict who referred to Kerman Psychological Consulting Center.

First, 90 questionnaires were delivered to the center. Of these questionnaires, 30 questionnaires were returned in the pre-test phase (some questionnaires were defaced, some subjects left the experiment, and 30 women declared their willingness to participate). 15 of those willing we placed in the experiment group and 15 in the control group. Both groups

were given the questionnaires on marital satisfaction were. Next, the experiment group received 8-weeks trainings on MBSR. The information was analyzed using covariance analysis and SPSS18 software; and Levin's test was used to investigate the homogeneity of variances.

Patients consented to participate and were informed that their information and characteristics were confidential.

To measure marital satisfaction as the dependent variable, the questionnaire involved 35 items, four subscales, and five-choice answers including completely agree, agree, no idea (not agree, not disagree), disagree, completely disagree. In this questionnaire, each choice got 1–5 scores, and the scores were summed up. This 35-question form consisted of four dimensions: marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, relation, and idealistic distortion. In 2000, David Olson and Amy Olson administered the ENRICH couple-scale questionnaire on 25,501 couples. Using the questionnaire  $\alpha$  coefficient, the questionnaire validity for the subscales of marital satisfaction, relation, conflict resolution and idealistic distortion were 0.86, 0.80, 0/84, and 0.83, respectively. The questionnaire reliability and open trial validity for each subtest were respectively, 0.86, 0.81, 0.90, and 0.92. The questionnaire's  $\alpha$  coefficient for Asoude's research (2010) with a 365-couple sample was 0.68, 0.78, 0.62, and 0.77, respectively (Asoude, 2010).<sup>16</sup> Training sessions were held for MBSR, a psychological-training program developed by Kabatzin et al. in Massachusetts Medical Center. This method includes an 8–10-hour program. Each 1.30–2-hour session was held weekly. The session programs included practicing meditation skills, discussing about stress, confronting ways, and doing homework.

Long and time-consuming tests and random elimination of the clinical investigation and under-investigated samples (women with marital conflict) were some of the research limitations. So generalizations should be performed with caution.

## Results

First, the variables conditions were described, and the demographic table studied. Next, the research hypotheses were investigated using covariance analysis. Table 1 and 2 show the demographic information, and table 3 the descriptive information.

**Table 1 and 2. demographic information**

Age	Frequency	Frequency percent
20-30	0.5	50
30-40	0.33	33.33
40-50	0.16	16.66
Education	0.23	23.33
BA	0.4	40
MA	0.26	26.66
PhD	0.06	6.66

Table 3 shows the average and standard deviation of understudied samples according to the variables of pre-test and post-test in both experiment and control groups.

**Table 3. Descriptive findings related to the variables of the both groups**

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Evidence	Experiment	Evidence	Experiment
Marital satisfaction				
- Average	94/73	94/20	95/86	116/86
- Standard deviation	12/36	12/04	12/44	7/50
Contentment				
- Average	26/80	26/60	27/13	32/13
- Standard deviation	6/30	6/23	6/05	3/96
Relations				
- Average	24/80	24/53	25/26	34/93
- Standard deviation	3/18	23/80	24/46	34/06
Conflict resolution				
- Average	24/13	23/80	24/46	34/06
- Standard deviation	3/31	2/98	3/31	3/51
Idealistic distortion				
- Average	19/00	19/26	19/00	15/73
- Standard deviation	3/07	2/98	3/56	2/34

Results of the covariance analysis with level 0.05 and confidence 95% in the pre-test phase for the experiment and the control groups are related to the variables of marital satisfaction, contentment, relations, conflict resolution, and idealistic distortion. Regarding covariance analysis of every variable of marital satisfaction, contentment, relations, conflict resolution, and idealistic distortion and the computed amount less than meaningful level  $P \leq 0.05$  ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) the research hypotheses indicating marital satisfaction, contentment, relations, conflict resolution, and idealistic distortion were confirmed. MBSR increased the total marital satisfaction and conflict resolution, and decreased the idealistic distortion.

## Discussion

The family should reduce its members' stress and facilitate their growth and progress path. One of the prevalent problems that attracted the researchers' attention was marital disarray. This problem may have various types. Marital conflict and disarray are the most common reasons for taking remedies and being referred to psychological consulting centers. Olson believes that the degree of marital satisfaction decreases during the natural growth of humans, so it demands continual consideration and care. Therefore, treating the family members' relations affects the society directly. Thus, reconciling spouses, reducing their discomposure and its negative severe consequences are very important.<sup>17</sup>

Mindfulness-based stress reduction is a behavioral intervention based on self-concentration and self-attention. Individuals learn to develop acceptance and sympathy instead of judging their experiences, to acquire present consciousness, and to become familiar with the new ways of reacting to different situations.<sup>5</sup>

In the present study, the MBSR program with p level 0.05 and confidence 95% affects the total marital satisfaction that is in tandem with the results of researches performed by Rajabi and Sotude Navroudi,<sup>13</sup> Sadeghi,<sup>18</sup> Soltanizade,<sup>19</sup> Leslie et al.<sup>20</sup> Loria et al.<sup>21</sup> Barry et al.<sup>22</sup>, and Asimina et al.<sup>23</sup> The present hypothesis explains mindfulness the help of body organs, event awareness, body awareness, breathing, voice, thoughts, and their acceptance without judgment causes the change of special emotional meanings, and also the individual perceives that although the thoughts reflect the reality, they are more simple.

And negative thoughts that trigger anxiety are not necessarily correct. Mindfulness method directs the individuals to their automatic behaviors and helps them to attain increasing awareness of and consciousness about their daily activities. The awareness of thoughts and feelings causes the change of the individual's perceptions of those thoughts and feelings. In fact, instead of changing the thoughts content, mindfulness could change the individual's relations with their thoughts. When individuals attain these skills, they are able to recognize the problems and obstacles and find proper solutions,<sup>9</sup> and a conceptual concord may be produced for the spouse that enables them to evaluate their marriage and their marital problems, and attain more marital satisfaction.

Also, MBSR program effects on satisfaction with level 0.05 and confidence 95%. We should note that MBSR program is effective in improving the psychological, somatic, and emotional welfare, and ameliorates sleep quality while enjoying the life, tension and low physical signs.<sup>24</sup> Since marital satisfaction is a collection of perception, feelings, believes, attitudes, reactions, fears, and personal interest in matrimony and marital satisfaction, this program leads to the satisfaction increase. The results of this research are that the MBSR program effects the relations with level 0.05 and confidence 95%. Other results explain the present hypothesis in such a way that one of the mindfulness approach properties is living in the present moment, i.e. having mental and somatic presence in the moment and not being involved with the past and future. When the individual lives in the present moment, they could comprehend the reality with its all inner and outer aspects and reduce cognitive bias and ruminations relating to their past and future and their spouse's,<sup>8</sup> and when spending time with their spouse intimately, they should clear their mind of concerns. By living in the present moment, one can perceive properly the spouse's romantic messages, intimate touches and warm voice and therefore is satisfied more.

Also MBSR program's effects on conflict resolution with level 0.05 and confidence 95%. The hypothesis explains that couples defer controlling discord, and resolving them is one of the reasons of marital conflict leading to diluting their relation.<sup>25</sup> Mindfulness, through improving the individuals' relations, can empower them to exchange their messages clearly, and teach them to resolve their conflicts efficiently,<sup>26</sup> and thus result in increased conflict resolution.

Another result of this research was that MBSR program influences the idealistic distortion with level 0.05 and confidence 95%. The explanation for this hypothesis is that mindfulness can help the individual to release from the automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behavioral patterns, since it plays an important role in behavioral regulation and, moreover, it can generate health and welfare<sup>26</sup> by adding the clarity and revival to the experiences, and reduce the idealistic distortion, that is the spouses' goals, desires and ideals and does not proceed to the life objective and real affairs.<sup>25</sup>

Family should reduce its members stress and facilitate the growth and progress path for them. One of the prevalent problems attracted the researchers' attention is marital disarray. This problem may have various types. Marital conflict and disarray are the most common reasons of references to the

psychological consulting centers for taking remedies. The marital satisfaction degree decreases during the human natural growth, so it demands continual consideration and care. Therefore, treating the family members' relations affects the society directly. Thus, conciliate the spouses, reduce their discomposure and its negative severe consequences are very important.

In this regard, seeking matrimonial consultation can be a proper solution aimed at protecting the marital life and making it more pleasurable. So by regarding the effective factors on the marital satisfaction, one can expect that increasing the marital satisfaction leads to reduction of psychological, emotional and social problems of the families and generally the society.

Various remedial approaches to improving or increasing the marital satisfaction have been developed. In recent years, acceptance-based remedies have been grown increasingly. One of these is MBSR program. MBSR is a behavioral intervention based on self-concentration and self-attention. Individuals learn to develop the acceptance and sympathy instead of judging their experiences; to acquire present consciousness instead of automatic guidance, and to become familiar with the new ways of reacting to situations.

Mindfulness skills can be practiced in daily experiences. The clientele are persuaded to accept their background and current situations as they are exactly, and change their behaviors and environment intensively for creating a better life.

Finally, we should say that regarding to the present research results and aforementioned matters, by teaching the mindfulness we can perceive the more satisfaction and welfare in the individuals' matrimony. All means that the matrimony goal is reaching to perfection.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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