



## Comparing the Effects of Solution-based Couple Therapy and Training of Couple Communication Program on the Style of Marital Conflict Resolution

Mitra Cheshmeh Noshi<sup>1</sup>, Mokhtar Arefi<sup>1\*</sup>, Karim Afshari Nia<sup>1</sup>, Hassan Amiri<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology and Counseling, Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran.

Received: 19 February 2022

Accepted: 4 October 2023

### Abstract

**Background:** Marital conflicts are the result of a couple disagreeing about personal goals, motivations, values, or behavioral priorities. This study aimed to evaluate the effect of the solution-based couple therapy and training of couple communication program (TCCP) on the marital conflict resolution style of women visiting counseling centers.

**Methods:** The present study was a quasi-experimental and pre-test-post-test with a control group. The statistical population of this study included all women with conflict (N=240) who were referred to specialized counseling centers for family consolidation in the 19th district of Tehran in 2020. The research sample consisted of 60 people who were selected by the available sampling method and were randomly assigned to three groups (two experimental groups and one control group). After performing the pre-test, solution-based couple therapy and TCCP were performed on the experimental groups, but the control group did not receive any treatment. In the end, a post-test was performed on all three groups. The research instrument included a Rahim couples conflict resolution styles questionnaire and data were analyzed by analysis of variance. The significant level was set at 0.05.

**Results:** The results showed that solution-based couple therapy and TCCP are effective in the marital conflict resolution style of women referring to counseling centers. Also, there is no significant difference between the effectiveness of solution-based couple therapy and TCCP on the marital conflict resolution style of women referring to counseling centers (Pvalue=0.025).

**Conclusions:** solution-based couple therapy and training of couple communication programs can reduce the marital conflict of women referring to counseling centers to an acceptable level.

**Keywords:** Solution-based couple therapy, Training program, Marital conflict, Women.

\*Corresponding to: M Arefi, Email: m.arefi@iaauksh.ac.ir

**Please cite this paper as:** Cheshmeh Noshi M, Arefi M, Afshari Nia1 K, Amiri H. Comparing the effects of solution-based couple therapy and training of couple communication program on the style of marital conflict resolution. Int J Health Stud 2023;9(2):7-10

## Introduction

The family system is one of the most important social systems that is formed based on the marriage of two opposite sexes.<sup>1</sup> Marriage affects almost all aspects of human life. Human mental health is largely dependent on a good and successful marriage. One of the most common problems associated with couples in marital conflict.<sup>2</sup> Conflict is a critical point in the communication path. Because couples in the face of conflict may use negative behaviors such as blaming their partner and rejecting the view. In the face of conflict, some couples fall into a cycle of negative interactions. This

situation leads to marital dissatisfaction in the long run.<sup>3</sup> Marital conflicts have consequences such as anxiety disorder, depression, maladaptation and aggression, and physical ailments such as heart disease. There are different styles for resolving marital conflicts that use them appropriately. It is very important. In a comprehensive classification, couples' conflict resolution methods include avoidance style, kind style, conciliatory style, and accompanying style.<sup>4</sup> Conflict resolution styles affect marital relationships, in a way that positive and constructive styles are the preserver and maintainer of the marital bond, but controlling and competitive styles reduce the satisfaction, cohesion, and compatibility of couples.<sup>5</sup>

Proper use of gynecological conflict resolution styles is very important. In this regard, there are several methods such as solution-based couple therapy and training of couple's communication programs. Solution-oriented couple therapy focuses exclusively on solutions and positive and healthy aspects of life so that the solution-oriented therapist bases his work on the couple's resources and abilities instead of focusing on shortcomings and disabilities.<sup>6</sup> The effectiveness of this therapeutic approach has been proven in several studies, including its effectiveness on relationship satisfaction<sup>7</sup> and marital adjustment.<sup>8</sup>

Couple communication program training also emphasizes the acquisition of skills and concepts for building an intimate relationship.<sup>9</sup> The program seeks to teach couples the cycle of awareness, speaking skills, listening skills, and conflict resolution skills.<sup>10</sup> The effectiveness of this therapeutic approach has been proven in several studies, including its effects on relationship satisfaction,<sup>11</sup> and self-efficacy,<sup>12</sup> and also shows marital conflict resolution.<sup>13</sup> Studies have shown that the use of solution-based couple therapy as well as training in couple's communication programs in the treatment of marital disorders has increased and several studies have shown the positive effects of these two therapeutic approaches in the treatment of conflicts and problems of couples. However, no research has been done on the effectiveness of solution-based couple therapy and couples communication program training on marital conflict resolution style. Due to the high frequency of marital conflicts and related psychological damage, it is important to find effective treatment and effective treatment. This study aimed to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of solution-based couple therapy and training of couple's communication programs on marital conflict resolution style of women referring to counseling centers.

## Materials and Methods

This study was a quasi-experimental study conducted with a pretest-posttest design. The statistical population of the study included all women with marital conflict (n=240) who were referred to specialized counseling centers for family consolidation and sustainable marriage in the 19th district of Tehran in 2020. 107 women with marital conflict were selected by convenience sampling. Based on the criteria study, 60 individuals participated and were randomly assigned the experimental and control groups, of which the first and the second experimental groups were solution-based couple therapy and TCCP, respectively.

Inclusion criteria included at least a diploma, and at least 5 years of marriage and the couple is not in the process of separation. Excluding criteria were also leaving the absence for more than two sessions, unwillingness to continue therapeutic interventions, and use of psychiatric drugs. A pre-test was performed before treatment and a post-test after treatment. Ethical considerations included informed written consent to participate in the study, observance of the principle of confidentiality, and avoidance of any harm to participants.

To collect data, the necessary permission was obtained through the university and then, the steps and structure of the meetings were extracted based on scientific texts and relevant sources. After the training sessions were identified, the framework of these sessions was approved by several experts. Before starting the training, all participants in the 3 groups completed the pre-test. Then the meetings were held every week. TCCP during 10 sessions of 90 minutes per week, solution-based couple therapy during 7 sessions of 90 minutes per week was presented to each educational group. After completing the training, all participants in 3 groups completed the post-test one week apart. The questionnaire on Couples' conflict resolution styles was used to collect data.

Couples conflict resolution styles questionnaire: This questionnaire was designed by Rahim in 1983.<sup>13</sup> The questionnaire has 28 items and five subscales each subscale shows an interpersonal conflict resolution style. These styles are avoidance style (6 items), adaptive or mandatory style (6 items), competition or domination (5 items), cooperation or integration (7 items), and compromise or compromise (4 items). Answering the questions is in the form of a 5-point

Likert score from a strongly agree 1 to a strongly disagree 5. Studies have shown that the questionnaire has good convergence and differential validity. Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.78.<sup>14</sup> Internal consistency was also reported using Cronbach's alpha from 0.76 to 0.85.<sup>14</sup> In the present study, Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was 0.87.

**Solution-based couple therapy:** The educational framework and content of solution-oriented couple therapy was adapted from the program compiled by Shakermi et al,<sup>10</sup>. The training consisted of 7 sessions and the duration of each session was 90 minutes

**Training of couple communication program:** The course and content of the couple relationship program, based on the book "Marital communication skills: Talking and listening to each other" was designed.<sup>12,17</sup> The training consisted of 10 sessions and the duration of each session was 90 minutes. In this treatment, we tried to resolve the conflict through effective dialogue and choose an effective communication style.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software version 26, as well as descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of variance. The significant level was set at 0.05.

## Results

The mean of the demographic characteristics is shown in table 1. The mean variables of marital conflict resolution styles in experimental and control groups are shown in table 2.

Based on the results of Levene's test, the homogeneity of variance was achieved in all variables (Pvalue $\leq$ 0.05). Investigation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance and covariance matrices with the M. Box test also showed that this homogeneity has been achieved (Pvalue $<$ 0.05, F=0.96, Box's M=26.38). The results of the Bartlett test also revealed that there is a moderate and significant correlation between dependent variables and can be used for multivariate analysis (Pvalue $<$ 0.05, df=20,  $\chi^2$  =33.95).

Table 3 showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in marital conflict resolution style at the level of 0.05. This means that there was no significant difference between the effect of solution-based couple therapy and couple communication programs on conflict resolution styles.

**Table 1. Description of the demographic characteristics**

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum score	Maximum score
Age	34.40	5.96	29	43
Duration of marriage	10.13	5.08	3	21
Number of children	0.91	1.53	0	3

**Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the variable of marital conflict resolution styles in experimental and control groups**

Variable	Group	Pre-test	Post-test	
		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	
Marital conflict resolution styles	Collaborative style	SBCT	21.13±3.83	25.06±3.56
		TCCP	20.46±4.86	24.40±3.50
	Avoidance style	control group	16.46±4.12	19.73±3.83
		SBCT	29.93±3.43	26.34±3.54
	Competitive style	TCCP	19.63±4.12	26.34±3.54
		control group	15.86±3.39	17.60±5.21
	Adaptation style	SBCT	17.98±2.24	15.23±2.65
		TCCP	17.53±11.78	14.53±13.50
	Compromise style	control group	16.13±2.53	16.26±2.40
		SBCT	19.40±3.83	22.33±3.22
		TCCP	17.26±4.16	21.20±3.78
		control group	16.20±4.16	16.53±4.3
		SBCT	11.46±2.82	14.40±2.44
		TCCP	10.93±2.89	14.71±3.78
		control group	10.60±2.16	10.60±2.58

**Table 3. Bonferroni test results comparing the means of solution-based couple therapy and TCCP**

Variable	Group		Mean difference	Standard error	Pvalue
	Couple therapy based on schema therapy	TCCP			
Collaborative style	24.08	23.98	.09	0.71	1.00
Avoidance style	20.07	18.00	2.07	2.73	1.00
Competitive style	15.69	14.22	1.47	0.94	1.00
Adaptation style	21.16	20.64	.52	0.59	1.00
Compromise style	13.76	13.34	.42	0.57	1.00

## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of solution-oriented couple therapy and TCCP on women's marital conflict resolution style. The results showed that solution-oriented couple therapy and training of couple communication programs are effective in improving women's marital conflict resolution style. Also, the comparison of conflict resolution styles in the two groups indicates that the mean of conflict resolution styles in the two groups was not significantly different. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Stewart,<sup>7</sup> Russell-Martin,<sup>8</sup> Siffert and Schwarz,<sup>11</sup> Wolderslund, Kofoed,<sup>12</sup> and Karahan.<sup>13</sup> To explain the findings of this study, the commonalities of the two types of couple therapy should be emphasized. Solution-based couple therapy emphasizes finding solutions to solve problems and making small changes as an introduction to large changes.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, in this treatment, spouses practice changing their attitude and way of expressing themselves from talking about the problem to talking about solving the problem. They learn to change the way they deal with the problem and speak about the problem with an open mind and a positive expression.<sup>15</sup> In this way, they are helped to improve their problem-solving ability, and by making small changes and solving small problems successfully, their motivation and desire for big changes increase and the process of progress accelerates. In this way, feelings of hope and positive and satisfying emotions are experienced in the spouses.

Due to its structure, the couple communication program integrates joint decisions into the spouse's system and teaches spouses how to solve problems, how solve them and turn hard rules into simple and flexible rules when confronted. The

problem without conflict and avoidance try to solve the problem in a constructive way.<sup>16</sup> Spouses feel understood during the process of applying problem-solving and conflict-solving skills and easily talk about issues and conflicts.<sup>17</sup> They avoid irrational reactions. In this way, spouses come up with a new and effective way that they can use to experience more positive, cheerful, and satisfied feelings.<sup>18</sup> With this explanation, both problem-solving and finding therapies. Effective solutions, along with mutual consent and agreement, reduce education and reduce disagreement and conflict, which can lead to the same effect of both couples therapy.

This study was conducted only on women with conflict referred to specialized counseling centers for Family counseling and sustainable marriage in the 19th district of Tehran, which is one of the limitations of this study to generalize the results. It is suggested that therapists use another statistical sample to be effective in solution-based couple therapy and training of couple communication programs by teaching couples communication programs on women's marital conflict resolution style.

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be said that solution-oriented couple therapy and couple communication program training are effective in improving women's marital conflict resolution styles and can provide effective use of marital conflict resolution styles in couples and solve marital conflicts help.

## Acknowledgement

This study is taken from the doctoral dissertation with the ethical code of IR.IAU.KB.REC.1400.032. We thank all those who helped us in this research.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Trudel G, Goldfarb MR. Marital a sexual functioning and dysfunctioning,depression and anxiety. *Journal of Sexologist* 2010;19:137-42.
2. Gottman J, Gottman J. The natural principles of love. *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 2017;9:7-26.
3. Overall NC, McNulty JK. What type of communication during conflict is beneficial for intimate relationships?. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 2017;13:1-5. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.03.002
4. Sanford K. Perceived threat and perceived neglect: Couples' underlying concerns during conflict. *Psychological Assessment* 2010;22:288-97. doi:10.1037/a0018706
5. Somohano VC. Mindfulness, attachment style and conflict resolution behaviors in romantic relationships (Master's thesis, Humboldt State University) 2013.
6. Nichols Michael P, Schwartz R. Family therapy concepts and methods. Translated by Dehghan Dehghan, Ganjavi Anahita, Najarian Farzaneh and other translators. Tehran: Danjeh Publishing.
7. Stewart JW. A pilot study of solution-focused brief therapeutic intervention for couples. 2011.
8. Russell-Martin LA. Equine facilitated couples therapy and solution focused couples therapy: A comparison study: Northcentral University; 2006.
9. Markman HJ, Halford WK. International perspectives on couple relationship education. *Family Process* 2005;44:139-46. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2005.00049.x
10. Miller SH, Sherard AD. Couple communication: a system for equipping partners to talk and resolve conflicts effectively. In Berger R (Eds), preventive approaches in couple therapy: Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel 1999;125-48.
11. Siffert A, Schwarz B. Spouses' demand and withdrawal during marital conflict in relation to their subjective well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 2010;28:262-77. doi:10.1177/0265407510382061
12. Wolderslund M, Kofoed PE, Ammentorp J. The effectiveness of a person-centred communication skills training programme for the health care professionals of a large hospital in Denmark. *Patient Education and Counseling* 2021;104:1423-30. doi:10.1016/j.pec.2020.11.018
13. Karahan TF. The effects of a couple communication program on the conflict resolution skills and active conflict tendencies of Turkish couples. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 2009;35:220-9. doi:10.1080/00926230802716344
14. Henden J. Preventing Suicide: The solution focused approach. chapter 6: what is solution focused brief therapy? (pp:70-110). Published 2017 by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
15. Visser CF. The Origin of Solution-Focused Approach. *J Solution-Focused Practice* 2013;1:10-17.
16. Neumann AP, Wagner A, Remor E. Couple relationship education program "Living as Partners": evaluation of effects on marital quality and conflict. *J Psicol Reflex* 2018;31:57-76.
17. Karahan FT. The Effects of a couple communication program on the conflict resolution skills and active conflict tendencies of Turkish couples. *J Sex Marital Therapy* 2009;35:220-9
18. June Carroll S, Hill EJ, Yorgason JB, Larson JH, Sandberg JG. Couple communication as a mediator between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction. *J Contemporary Family Therapy* 2013;53:323-51.