



## The effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on improving marriage performance and marital intimacy of couples

Neda Zakhirehdari<sup>1</sup>, Shokoh Navabinejad<sup>2✉</sup>, Amin Koraei<sup>3</sup>

**Background and Objectives:** Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is a type of psychological service for couples whose interpersonal problems and unawareness toward appropriate problem-solving methods as well as the use of appropriate behavioral styles prevent the continuation of common life and constructive relationships and satisfaction with their common life. Accordingly, this study sought to investigate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on improving marriage function and marital intimacy of couples. **Materials and Methods:** The study is quasi-experimental. The study population consisted of couples referring to counseling centers in Zabol city. For the sample size, 16 couples (32 people) were selected using purposive sampling technique and were randomly assigned into two groups (8 couples in each group), namely, experimental group (cognitive-behavioral couple therapy) and one control group. The measurement instruments included Marital Intimacy Scale (MIS) and Marriage Performance Assessment Inventory. The data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. **Results:** The results showed that the variance of cognitive-behavioral therapy and control groups was significant at 95% confidence level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ). Based on this, it can be concluded that cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is effective in increasing marital intimacy. **Discussion and Conclusion:** Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy combines behavioral and cognitive factors in the treatment of couples with marital problems. Based on the findings of this study, the use of this therapy method is effective in improving marital function and marital intimacy.

### INTRODUCTION

The family has been introduced as a social institution or institution that results from a marriage between men and women. Family is the place where various physical, rational and emotional needs are met, and that awareness of how to satisfy such biological, psychological and cognitive needs, and equipping with appropriate techniques are indispensable necessities in this regard (1).

Marriage has always been acknowledged as the most important and excellent social formulation to meet the emotional needs of individuals. The primary reasons for marriage are mainly love and affection, having partners and companions in life, satisfying emotional-psychological needs and increasing happiness (2). Marriages based on a social context, based on love, faith, trust and mutual commitment, and based on a complex system of bilateral affiliations have predictable and desirable social consequences, and so their riskiness reduce to a great and considerable extent (3). When a real loving relationship between husband and wife begins to grow, affection, love, and intimacy begin to

grow, and both individuals find better spirits over time. In general, it can be said that other emotional aspects i.e. adequate verbal communication, eye contact, and good and sufficient physical association, can bring about a great intimacy in the marital relationship of couples. When the intimacy of the relationship between the spouses is established, marital relations can be extremely effective, enjoyable and interesting, and this requires that the spouses always strive to create intimacy (4).

The depth of intimacy that people create in their relationship depends to a great extent on their ability to communicate accurately, effectively, and responsibly with their thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires. Therefore, learning how to effectively communicate is the first step in the process of creating or enhancing intimacy in any relationship. (5). Intimacy is revealed when marriage has a good function, and the lack of intimacy suggests that marital relationships have poor performance (6). Dissatisfaction and lack of intimacy eliminates vitality and happiness and affects the quality of marriage (7). According to Dman & Gurman (2002), impairment in the fulfillment of marital needs directly and indirectly causes harmful effects on couples, families, children, and the community (8). One of the psychological approaches in this respect is behavioral-cognitive approach to the treatment of marital conflicts and marital burnout (9). Behavioral-cognitive approach to family therapy assumes that family members can be influenced by or influence each other (10, 19, 20). In a study entitled Comparison of the Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy and Couple Therapy Based on Commitment and Admission on Marital Intimacy in

<sup>1</sup>PhD student, Department of Counseling, Khuzestan Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran, Email: neda.zakhirehdari@gmail.com; / PhD student, Department of Counseling, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran; <sup>2</sup>Invited teacher, Department of Counseling, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran / Professor, Department of Counseling, College of Educational and Psychology, Kharazmi University of Tehran. Tehran. Iran, Email: navabinejad93@gmail.com; <sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran, Email: am.koraei@gmail.com

✉ **Corresponding Author:** Invited teacher, Department of Counseling, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran / Professor, Department of Counseling, College of Educational and Psychology, Kharazmi University of Tehran. Tehran. Iran, Email: navabinejad93@gmail.com

Contradictory Couples in Isfahan, the results showed that the two treatment approaches have made significant changes in marital intimacy (11).

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies in working with couples follow the goals of increasing empowerment and positive exchange, communication skills training, and modifying intellectual patterns and problem-solving methods. The realization of these goals ultimately leads to increased intimacy and improved marriage functioning (2). Given that the creation and preservation of intimate relationships, the establishment of proper marital relationship and the clear, correct and effective reception of each other's thoughts, feelings and needs is a skill and art that requires the acquisition of skills, attitudes and the fulfillment of special duties by the spouses. Therefore, it should use the best scientific methods to train intimacy skills and improve marital function and treat its related problems. Therefore, we strived to carry out a research on the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy on improving marital function and marital intimacy. The research hypotheses in this study include:

1. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy has an impact on the increased rate of marital intimacy.
2. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy affects marriage function of couples.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was a pre-test, post-test and follow-up with a control group. The study population consisted of all couples referring to counseling centers in Zabol, Iran in 2017-18. The study samples were 16 couples (32 people) who were selected through purposive sampling technique and were randomly assigned to two groups (8 couples in each group), namely, an experimental group (cognitive-behavioral couple therapy) and a control group. Inclusion criteria for the research Include three years after their marriage; Minimum degree for couples was diploma; no acute mental-psychological problems; lack of addiction to drug and alcohol; no cute and critical conflict or being on the verge of divorce. In this research, cognitive-behavioral couple therapy approach was implemented on the experimental group, whereas no intervention was performed on the control group. The measurement instruments included Marital Intimacy Scale (MIS) and Marriage Performance Assessment Inventory.

### Marriage Performance Assessment Inventory

It is a 66-item questionnaire prepared based on the study of domestic and foreign literature on the performance of marriage. The questionnaire includes 11 components of "communication, emotional expression, problem solving, decision-making, role, flexibility, parenting style, economics and finance, family and friends, values, physical and mental health, and general functioning. "

### Reliability

Given the multiple values of the responses, using the Cronbach's alpha formula, the total reliability of the test was 0.97 and in each of the components, it was determined as follows: communication: 0.87, emotional expression: 0.83, problem solving and decision-making: 0.83, role: 0.804, flexibility: 0.73, parenting style: 0.766, economics and financial issues: 0.824, family and friends: 0.779, values: 0.828, physical and psychological health: 0.707, and general functioning: 0.85, moreover, the validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using factor analysis method with main components and varimax rotation. The

construct validity of the questionnaire in 11 components explained 0.56 of the total variance of the questionnaire (12).

Questionnaire of Intimacy Needs: There are 41 questions filled in on a 10-point scale and examines intimacy needs and its dimensions (emotional, psychological, rational, sexual, physical, spiritual, aesthetic, and socio-recreational needs). In this questionnaire, for each dimension of intimacy except for the spiritual dimension, which has 6 items, 5 items are considered and is graded in the range of ten options of number 1 (at all, "this need does not exist in me) to 10 (absolutely, this need is strong in me). Scoring method: in this questionnaire, each question is scored between 1 and 10, and the maximum score is 410.

The questionnaire was translated by Etemadi (13). The accuracy of the translation was confirmed by a panel of experts. To determine its content and face validity, the questionnaire was distributed to fifteen counselors and fifteen couples. They provided their corrective comments to the questionnaire and confirmed its content validity. After final modification, the questionnaire was performed on 30 couples and the reliability coefficient of the whole questionnaire was obtained by Cronbach's alpha as 93%.

After performing the research, the data were analyzed using SPSS software and covariance analysis. In covariance analysis, post-test means are compared after moderating the pre-test scores.

### Ethical Code

The Research Council and the Committee of Ethics have allocated this Code: IR.ZBMU.REC.1397.177. After this allowance, the researcher has conducted this project.

## RESULTS

The findings showed that the highest frequency of individuals in the men group was 46% in the age range of 30-40% and in the group of women 63% were under 30 years old. In terms of education, in men, 58% had a bachelor's degree, and in the women's group, 55% had a diploma. The results showed that the mean variance of two cognitive-behavioral groups and control groups was significant at 95% confidence level. It can be concluded that cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is effective in increasing marital intimacy (Table 1). Furthermore, the findings revealed that the mean variance of two cognitive-behavioral groups and control groups was significant at 95% confidence level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) which indicated that cognitive-behavioral couple therapy was effective in promoting marriage Performance (Table 2). The results showed that, Cognitive-behavioral therapy has a significant effect on improving marital function (Figure 1). Also, Cognitive-behavioral therapy has a significant effect on marital intimacy (Figure 2).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

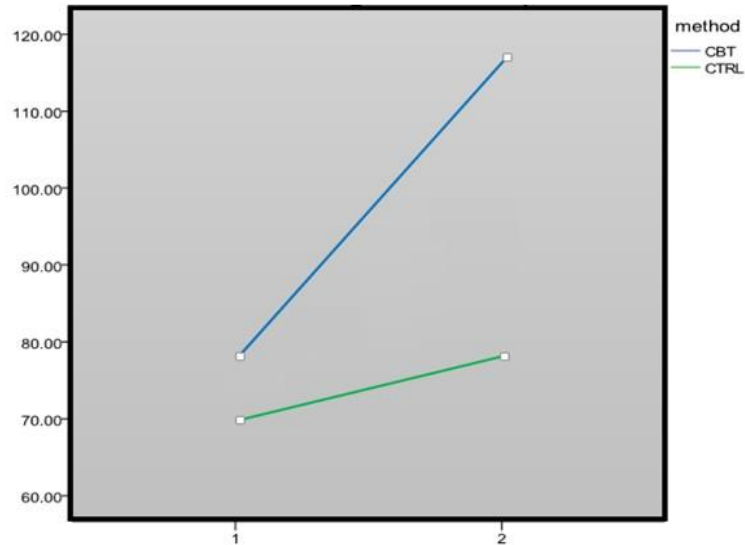
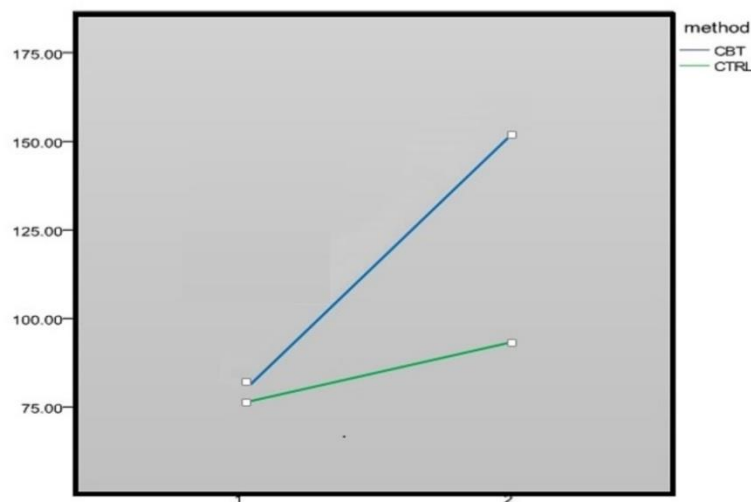
The present study suggests that cognitive-behavioral therapy changes the negative beliefs and thoughts of couples towards each other and thus provides conditions that can easily be exchanged between couples. This will increase couples' intimacy. Moreover, improvement of communication skills and problem solving will also have a significant role in increasing intimacy. The results of this research are consistent with those of the research by Zangeneh et al. (11) which shows cognitive-behavioral couple therapy has significant changes in increasing marital intimacy. It was also consistent with Karimi (14), which indicated the positive impact of communicative skills on reducing intimacy issues and enhancing compromise, kindness, honesty, the relationship was more consistent in the experimental group than in the control group, in addition The results of Jacobs (15), found in a two-year

**Table 1** Bonferroni test for comparing the mean marital intimacy in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and control group

	Mean differences	Standard error	Sig	95% confidence interval	
				Lower boundary	Upper boundary
Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy - control group	96.58	10.08	0.000	71.49	121.67

**Table 2** Bonferroni test for comparing the mean marriage Performance in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and control group

	Mean differences	Standard error	Sig	95% confidence interval	
				Lower boundary	Upper boundary
Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy - control group	29.61	5.31	0.000	16.40	42.82

**Figure 1** Estimated marginal means of marriage performance; comparison of marriage performance in pre-test and post-test scores of two groups**Figure 2** Estimated marginal means of marital intimacy; comparison of marital intimacy in pre-test and post-test scores of two groups

follow up, showed that couples who had recovered during treatment with CBT had recovered difficult. Etemadi et al. (13) conducted a research on the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on increasing the intimacy of couples referring to counseling centers. The results of the research showed that the use of problem-solving skills along with other techniques and skills based on cognitive-behavioral theory increased the total intimacy, emotional intimacy and sexual

intimacy of couples. Hansson and Bland showed that couples who had problems in interactions had a pathologic disorder characterized by abnormal symptoms and were dissatisfied with their marital life, trained communication skills and conflict resolution, and the results showed that training had a particular improvement in couple relationships and ability to cope with their mental health problems (16). Our results are consistent with the current research. The human existences need to

communication because they living in the community and they have to interact with each other. The communications have been subjected to many changes during recent decades. The communication has become faster and better in 21<sup>st</sup> century (17). The limitations of the study were a convenience sample which limits the generalization of the results and Hawthorne effect which the subjects might show a higher false level of performance.

Finally, it should be noted that the possible reasons for counseling with a cognitive-behavioral approach to increasing intimacy and marital functioning are: marital intimacy in a variety of dimensions such as establishing the appropriate and desirable communication, sharing the problems of each other, having reasonable beliefs and expectations, respecting the opinions and feelings of each other, understanding the needs of each other (emotional, sexual), sharing their positive and negative emotions and expressing and removing obstacles. Correcting cognitive errors also reduces the fear of expressing negative feelings and misconceptions, making it easier for spouses to talk about their feelings. Many researchers have shown that spiritual and religious involvements are related to the positive results of health care as well as to a more efficient use of adaptive skills, decreasing anxiety, and depression (18). Therefore, teaching cognitive-behavioral approaches has increased marital intimacy and marriage functioning.

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## Article Keywords

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