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The Effectiveness of an Educational Package based on an Integrative Self-analytical Approach for Couples in Codependency of Couples with Marital Conflicts

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Abstract

Abstract

Codependency is a communication pattern characterized by controlling others and intense anxiety about intimacy. Considering the negative consequences and the creation of marital conflicts due to the problems of codependency of couples, it is necessary to take steps to reduce it. This research was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the educational package of the integrative self-analytical approach for couples in the codependency of conflicted couples. In terms of objectives, this study was practical and in terms of method, it was a quasi-experimental of pretest-posttest-follow-up type with a control group. The statistical population included all conflicted couples who were referred to counseling centers in Isfahan. Thirty couples were selected through available sampling method and random selection. They were assigned randomly into two experimental and control groups according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The research instrument was Holyoke's Correlation questionnaire (Dear & Roberts, 2000). Before the sessions, a pretest was taken from both groups. The experimental group was subjected to 12 150-minute sessions of a package training on integrative self-analytical approach for couples and the control group did not receive any training. At the end of the sessions and two months after them, a posttest and a follow-up were taken from both groups. Data analysis was done through repeated measures analysis of variance using SPSS software (version 24). The results showed that the educational package of the integrative self-analytical approach for couples was effective in reducing the dimensions of couples' codependency (i.e., external focus, self-sacrifice, and reactivity) and had lasting effects in the follow-up phase (P>0.001). It seems that the integrative self-analysis training package for couples can be effective in reducing their codependency due to having an integrative perspective on couples' issues.

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Introduction

According to the family system perspective and psychology, codependency is an emotional, psychological, and behavioral coping pattern that is the result of an individual's long-term contact with a set of strict and burdensome rules. The implementation of these rules prevents the direct and open expression of personal feelings and problems. As a result, applying these rules causes a disturbance in the identity of family members. If the codependent person does not change his behaviors to improve and heal himself, the codependency takes a progressive and chronic state (Beattie, 2022), which results in low self-confidence (Marks et al., 2012), low interpersonal satisfaction (Zaidi, 2015), depression (Hawkins & Hawkins, 2014), anxiety and hostility (Askian et al., 2021), lower health, chronic mental and physical problems (Bortolon et al., 2016), difficulty in regulating emotions and love making practices (Motieian et al., 2015), low marital satisfaction (Mesghali et al., 2015), and lack of intimacy in establishing relationships (Reyome et al., 2010). Therefore, it can be stated that the unresolved forms of interdependency, whether in personal issues or communication issues, are traumatic and important to pay attention to, create many issues in the marital life of couples, and provide the ground for marital conflicts and emotional and legal divorces, which should be reduced.

Today, researchers believe that couples therapy needs to move beyond the existing treatments to explore integrative approaches and support the potential benefits of integrative approaches to couples therapy (Fraenkel, 2019). Despite the integrative approaches which have been proposed in recent years, and due to the feeling of emptiness in the maximum effectiveness of the current therapeutic approaches in individuals and couples, an emerging approach, called the integrative self-analytical approach, was invented, which considers an individual with all dimensions of existence except his physical structures (Atashpour & Salahshouri, 2018). Different research studies have indicated the effectiveness of this therapeutic approach in various psychological variables and couples' treatments. However, no research study has examined the effectiveness of this approach in the interdependency of couples. Thus, the present study focused on this issue.

Methodology

This study was a semi-experimental study with a pretest-posttest-follow-up design with a control group. The statistical population included all couples with marital conflicts referring to the counseling centers in Isfahan. To select participants through available sampling method, from the list of counseling centers, three centers were selected; 30 couples were randomly selected from the list of the couples who had been referred to the counseling centers for conflict resolution. They were randomly assigned into two groups (i.e., 15 couples in the experimental group and 15 couples in the control group). After the coordination and implementation of the pretest in both experimental and control groups, the experimental group underwent 12 150-minute sessions of training based on an integrative self-analytical approach. In the last session, a posttest was taken from them. The control group did not receive any intervention during the study; only the posttest was taken from them. In addition, after two months, a follow-up test was taken from both groups. After the follow-up, the participants in the control group were also subjected to the intervention.

The measurement instrument of this research study included Holyoake's Codependency questionnaire (Dear & Roberts, 2000). The validity and reliability of the questionnaire and the educational package were confirmed. The descriptive statistics were measures of central tendency and dispersion, and the inferential statistics were repeated measurement variance analysis and Bonferroni's post hoc test. SPSS software (version 24) was used for data analysis.

Results

The data on demographic characteristics showed that the mean age of males in the experimental group was 34.27 years, that of the females in this group was 32.07 years, and that of all participants in the experimental group was 33.17 years. Moreover, the mean age of males in the control group was 37.8 years, and that of females in this group was 34.27 years. The mean length of marriage in the experimental group couples was 8.27 years and its standard deviation was 3.95 years, while the mean length of marriage in the control group was 10.47 years and its standard deviation was 5.02 years. The results of the Kalmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the assumption of normality of the distribution of the studied variables was fulfilled. Levine's test was used to check the equality of variances; the results confirmed the equality of variances in codependency scores for both groups in all three stages. Moreover, the M box test showed that the homogeneity condition of the covariance matrix was met in the codependency scores (F = 0.885 and sig = 0.538).

The results of the Mauchly's test showed that the assumption of the sameness of the variance-covariance matrix in the codependency scores was rejected (p < 001). In addition, the results of the univariate analysis which compared the two experimental and control groups in the posttest and follow-up stages showed that the difference in the means of the dimensions of interdependency (i.e., external focus, sacrifice, and reactivity) in the two experimental and control groups in the posttest and follow-up stages was significant (p < 001). The results of the analysis of inter-subject effects in the codependency variables also showed that the codependency means in the two experimental and control groups were significantly different in general (p<0.001). The results of the groups' comparisons in the research stages are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The results of parameter estimation through codependency means in the research stages to compare the effect of the training package and the control group

Dependent variable	Effects	**B**	Std. error	t	Sig.	Effect size	Statistical power
Posttest	Pretest	.695	.052	13.29	.001	.769	1.000
	Age	.381	.175	-2.17	.034	.082	.569
	Length of marriage	-.487	.2	-2.43	.019	.1	.665
	Group	-8.25	1.59	-5.16	.001	.335	.999
	Gender	-.991	1.69	-.584	.562	.006	.088
	Group * gender	4.18	2.23	1.87	.067	.062	.452
Follow-up	Pretest	.707	.044	15.99	.001	.828	1.000
	Age	.353	.148	2.38	.021	.097	.647
	Length of marriage	-.32	.169	-1.89	.064	.063	.459
	Group	-9.48	1.34	-7.03	.001	.482	1.000
	Gender	-2.66	1.43	-1.86	.069	.061	.446
	Group * gender	5.066	1.88	2.69	.01	..12	.751

As Table 1 shows, considering the codependency, in the posttest and follow-up stages, the effect of pretest was significant (p < 0.05). The results showed that there was a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in both stages (p < 0.001) and the training package in the posttest reduced the codependency mean in the experimental group. In addition, its effect continued in the follow-up phase. In addition, the results showed that there was no difference between the scores of females and males in the experimental and control groups in the posttest stage. However, in the follow-up stage, the effect of training was greater in males. Moreover, Table 2 presents the results of pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni correction.

Table 2. Pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni correction

Group	Gender	Stage	Mean	Std. error	95% confidence interval	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
Experimental group	Male	Posttest	37.18	1.12	34.92	39.43
		Follow-up	35.89	.949	33.99	37.79
	Female	Posttest	33.99	1.16	31.66	36.32
		Follow-up	33.49	.979	31.53	35.45
Control group	Male	Posttest	41.25	1.19	38.85	43.69
		Follow-up	40.31	1.009	38.28	42.33
	Female	Posttest	42.24	1.14	39.95	44.53
		Follow-up	42.97	.964	41.04	44.91

As it is evident in Table 2, the means of the experimental and the control groups (i.e., females and males in the two stages of the research) were within the 95% confidence interval, and zero was not in this upper or lower limit. Furthermore, the confidence intervals in the posttest and follow-up stages overlapped in all groups, which showed that there was no difference between the means of the two groups in the posttest and follow-up stages.

Conclusion

This research study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the educational package of the integrative self-analytical approach for couples in the codependency of couples with marital conflicts in Isfahan. The results of the data analysis showed that the educational package based on the integrative self-analytical approach for couples significantly affected the codependency of couples with marital conflicts, and its effects remained in the follow-up phase. These results are in line with those of Sharifi et al. (2019). In explaining the findings of this research study, it can be stated that the integrative self-analytical approach takes into account both the intra-psychological and extra-psychological areas and deals with self-knowledge, self-analysis, self-acceptance, and self-worth of individuals. During the sessions, the couples realized the types of their personal, communication, and attachment needs, and the relative necessity of their fulfillment. They also learned ways to prevent turning the loss into psychological pain. They prioritized the needs of themselves, their spouses, and their relationships, and tried to meet their essential personal and communication needs.

The instructed techniques made the couples feel more intimate and less anxious in their relationships so that they did not look for codependent and controlling behaviors. Another part of the research findings showed that in the follow-up phase, the reduction of the codependency score was more in the males in the experimental group than in the females in the experimental group. This finding is consistent with those of Dear and Roberts (2000). This difference can be explained by referring to the fact that the characteristics of codependency in males, unlike females, might not be dependent on their personality, and they could regain their codependency and authority after this training and self-analytical period. Considering the effectiveness of the aforementioned training and intervention package, it is suggested that counselors consider the dimensions of the codependency of couples in pre-marriage counseling and couples therapy as well as during the pre-divorce stages to form a healthy marriage and prevent divorce.

Conflict of interest

This article is taken from the dissertation on General Psychology in Islamic Azad University of Isfahan (Khorasgan), and there is no conflict of interest by the authors.

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