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Investigating the Effectiveness of Domestic Violence–focused Couple Therapy in Domestic Violence, Rejection Sensitivity, Symptoms of Sexual Arousal, and Burnout of Couples

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Abstract

Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of domestic violence–focused couple therapy in domestic violence, rejection sensitivity, symptoms of sexual arousal, and burnout of couples. The research design was experimental and pretest-posttest with experimental and control groups. The statistical population includes all couples referring to the counseling centers in Tehran, of which 60 people (i.e., 30 couples) were selected through the convenience sampling method. They were randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups. At first, all couples filled out the Violence against Couples questionnaire (VACQ), Rejection Sensitivity questionnaire (RSQ), Sexual Desire scale (SDS) and Couple Burnout questionnaire (MBQ). Then the participants in the experimental group were exposed to the intervention of domestic violence–focused couple therapy; however, the participants in the control group did not receive any intervention. After the end of the intervention, the posttest was administered again to both groups. The data were analyzed using multivariate covariance analysis and univariate covariance analysis. The results showed that couple therapy based on domestic violence had a significant effect on reducing domestic violence, sensitivity to rejection, marital exhaustion, and improving sexual arousal symptoms of couples referring to the counseling centers ($p < 0.001$). According to the obtained results, experts in the field of couple therapy can emphasize the reduction of domestic violence, sensitivity to rejection, and marital exhaustion, and improvement of sexual arousal symptoms in couples through using couple therapy intervention based on domestic violence.

Introduction

The family is the most fundamental social institution and the dynamic element of the social structures of any society. Accordingly, achieving a healthy society depends on the family's health; the realization of family health depends on the mental health of its members and the healthy and compatible relationships between members, especially couples (Hasson-Ohayon et al., 2019). When incompatibility increases in families, conflict and violence increases (Deng et al., 2019). In recent decades, violence against women has been mentioned as the most recent social problem, beyond the cultural, social, and regional boundaries (Zmaczyńska-Witek et al., 2019).

Nowadays, various approaches of couple therapy and family therapy have been created to reduce confusion and communication conflicts, incompatibility, sexual problems, and couples' burnout. They are known as a major psychological health intervention. One of the most recent effective strategies and approaches in this field is domestic violence-focused couple therapy based on Stith's (2011) treatment protocol.

A review of literature conducted abroad shows that couple therapy based on domestic violence has a significant effect on marital violence (Haley, 2013; Stith et al., 2019), rejection sensitivity (Follingstad et al., 2012), sexual arousal (Follingstad et al., 2012), and as a result reduces marital problems. However, in our society, the gap in the use of this intervention in couple therapy research is quite noticeable. Considering the above-mentioned issues and taking into account the gap in the controlled and clinical research in this field, the present study sought to investigate the effectiveness of domestic violence–focused couple therapy in domestic violence, rejection sensitivity, symptoms of sexual arousal, and burnout of couples referring to counseling centers in Tehran.

Methodology

The design of the current research is a pretest-posttest experiment with an experimental and control group. The statistical population included all couples who were referred to counseling centers in Tehran in 2023. A sample of 60 individuals (30 couples) was selected through the purposive sampling method; they were randomly assigned to two groups (15 couples in the experimental group and 15 couples in the control group). The inclusion criteria included the age range of 20-45 years old, marital life with the spouse for at least one year, the presence of physical violence in the relationship (according to the interview), and informed consent to participate in the research. The exclusion criteria included the absence of more than two sessions during the implementation of the research study. Couples therapy sessions based on domestic violence were held in 12 sessions based on the therapy protocol of Stith et al. (2011).

To collect the data, the Violence against Couples questionnaire (VACQ), Rejection Sensitivity questionnaire (RSQ), Sexual Desire scale (SDS), and Couple Burnout questionnaire (MBQ) were used. Data analysis was performed through multivariate covariance analysis using SPSS software (version25).

Results

The sample included 30 couples in the age range of 25 to 60 years. The mean and standard deviation of the age of the experimental group were 39.04 and 5.11 and those of the control group were 38.51 and 4.87, respectively. The descriptive statistics of the current research included the mean and standard deviation of the sample in terms of the variables studied. The means and standard deviations of the research variable scores of couples in the experimental and the control groups in the pretest and posttest phases are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the research variables

Variable	Statistics	Group			
		Experimental group		Control group	
		Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Domestic Violence	Mean	69.67	42.74	70.52	69.26
	Std deviation	10.13	11.14	9.51	10.25
Rejection Sensitivity	Mean	44.81	23.75	41.49	40.28
	Std deviation	8.09	9.89	8.73	8.06
Symptoms of Sexual Arousal	Mean	39.42	67.76	39.27	41.39
	Std deviation	10.39	13.12	11.08	10.78
Burnout of Couples	Mean	107.54	72.42	109.77	108.11
	Std deviation	16.85	13.12	15.44	16.76

Multivariate covariance analysis was used to analyze the results. After controlling the effect of the pretest to compare the experimental and control groups according to the posttest scores, multivariate covariance analysis was conducted to examine the effectiveness of domestic violence–focused couple therapy in domestic violence, rejection sensitivity, symptoms of sexual arousal, and burnout of couples. The results of the posttest phase are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the results of multivariate covariance analysis comparing the mean posttest scores of the dependent variables of the experimental and control groups

Effect	Test	value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Group	Pillai's Trace	.886	40.820	4	21	.001	.886
	Wilks' Lambda	.114	40.820	4	21	.001	.886
	Hotelling's Trace	7.775	40.820	4	21	.001	.886
	Roy's Largest Root	7.775	40.820	4	21	.001	.886

As the results in Table 2 show, in the posttest phase, there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of at least one of the variables of domestic violence, sensitivity to rejection, sexual arousal symptoms, and marital burnout ($F = 40.820$ and $p > 0.001$). To investigate the point of this difference, multivariate covariance analysis was conducted, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of multivariate covariance analysis checking the posttest difference of the dependent variables in the experimental and control groups

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Domestic Violence	508.416	1	508.416	44.373	.001	.649
Rejection Sensitivity	590.092	1	590.092	56.002	.001	.700
Symptoms of Sexual Arousal	653.846	1	653.846	59.109	.001	.711
Burnout of Couples	247.395	1	247.395	53.627	.001	.691

As the results in Table 3 show, there was a difference between the experimental and the control groups in terms of domestic violence, sensitivity to rejection, sexual arousal symptoms, and burnout of couples. Therefore, domestic violence-focused couple therapy had a significant effect on reducing domestic violence, sensitivity to rejection, and burnout of couples, and improving sexual arousal symptoms in couples who were referred to the counseling centers in Tehran.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of couple therapy based on domestic violence in domestic violence, sensitivity to rejection, sexual arousal symptoms, and burnout of couples who were referred to the counseling centers in Tehran. As the results showed, domestic violence-based couple therapy was effective in reducing domestic violence in couples. This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (e.g., Stith et al., 2019). In explaining this finding, it can be stated that violence-based couple therapy seeks to "stop all types of violence in the relationship". Moreover, couple therapy based on domestic violence was effective in reducing the rejection sensitivity of couples. This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (e.g., Follingstad et al., 2012; Stith et al., 2011). In explaining this finding, it can be mentioned that rejection sensitivity causes people to behave in such a way that the possibility of maintaining a close, supportive, and satisfying relationship decreases.

As the results showed, couple therapy based on domestic violence was also effective in improving couples' sexual arousal symptoms. This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (e.g., Stith et al., 2019). In explaining this finding, it can be stated that by participating in violence-based therapy, couples with marital problems become familiar with different emotional and behavioral skills and techniques through which they can concentrate on using their strength to resolve conflicts and moving their relationship toward greater satisfaction and intimacy, including sexual intimacy. This study had no follow-up phases. It is suggested that this treatment approach be used by counselors and specialists in Couple Therapy and Family Therapy.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest in the present study.

Acknowledgment

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