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Study of Effectiveness of Relationship Enhancement on Marital Happiness and Optimism in Iranian Couples

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the effect of relationship enhancement on improving optimism and marital happiness of couples in Isfahan. The design of this study is quasi-experimental with pretest, posttest and control group. The sample was 36 couples were randomly selected and assigned in an experimental group (20couples) and a control group (16 couples). The independent variable was relationship enhancement which was administrated in 8 sessions on the experimental group while there was no treatment for the control group. The instrument for this study was Marital Happiness Scale (MHS) and Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R). The data was analyzed by covariance analysis. The results showed that relationship enhancement has effectively led to improving of optimism and marital happiness of couples ($p<0.01$). The results showed significantly differences between experimental group, and control group considering the amount of marital happiness and optimism, and the efficacy of relationship enhancement has remained after a month follow up. The results showed that relationship enhancement was significantly effective on improving of optimism and marital happiness. These results may be product useful information about effectiveness of relationship enhancement on marital quality for researchers, counselors and psychotherapists.

Key words: Relationship enhancement (RE), Marital happiness, Optimism.

INTRODUCTION

The study of couples relationships can help to make clearing the structural frames in which form couple relationships. The most important components of marital relationship quality are marital happiness that shows the total level of one's happiness in diversity dimensions of the marital relationship (Dush, Taylor, Kroeger, 2008). This is a term of positive psychology and quality of life that is closely related to the meaning of marital interaction, marital issues and tendency to divorce (Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers , 2003) , friends and family network (Kearns & Leonard, 2004), the level of happiness implicitly determiner of low level conflict and behavioral characteristics (Such as adjustment level) and communication (Such as, tendency to marriage with current partner in the case of possibility of return to first days). Marital happiness is a parallel structure (but not synonym) with satisfaction, as it is included of attitude dimensions as well as emotion and positive affect that they are factor of dynamics in effective interpersonal (VanLaningham, Johnson, Amato, 2001). So, marital happiness shows the subjective dimensions of marital relationship quality (Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Pimentel 1994, 2000) and is somehow similar with well–being meaning in the positive individual psychology, but with more focus on interpersonal aspects in compare with personal aspects (Isanezhad, Ahmadi & Etemadi, 2008), and is one of the most important predictors of marital adjustment in life events (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Another one of effective factors on marital adjustment and marital life quality that has closely meaning with happiness is optimism (Brodhagen & Wise, 2008; Frain, Berven, Chan & Tchopp, 2008).

According to Scheier & Carver (2001) model, optimism and pessimism in turn are as an expectation of positive and negative generalized results, important determiners of adjustment. The optimism affects on subjective expectation of individuals when they face with problems and their behavior when they are trying to domination problems (Auerbach, Kiesler, Wartella, Rausch and *et al*, 2005).

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The optimism is a general expectation of occurring a lot of pleasure and favorite events but a few not favorite events in the future and is related to this belief that future will be following with favorite consequences, without respect to individual ability for controlling and confront with these consequences (Lyons, Stewart, Archblod & Carter, 2009; Auerbach, kiesler, Wartella, Rausch and *et al*, 2005).

The optimism, influence directly on one's coping strategies. The optimistic people are more prone to reality acceptance, living in now and they are more persevering on their goals and they show less the signs of maladjustment (Scheier & Carver, 2001). Also, there are evidence that the optimistic people have high health and subjective well–being (Scheier & Carver, 2001).

In the past, optimism has been considered as an innate trait and tendency to responsive states. But, by emerging of emotional intelligence (EI), the content of optimism is accounted as a component of EI and got more ability to be enhanced and manipulated (Sparrow & Knight, 2006). In the Bar-on model optimism has presented as a core factors of emotional intelligence (Palmer, Manocha, Gignac, Stough, 2003; Cole & Draves, 2008). One of the most important features of this perspective to optimism is the ability of manipulating and enhancing the level of optimism through by communication and emotional training (Sparrow & Knight, 2006), and is one of the important correlates of family flexibility (Frain, Berven, Chan & Tschopp, 2008). Nowadays, there are variety methods for enhancing marital life quality and marital relationship skills. One of the methods that are useful to enhance marital relationship is enrichment methods. Enrichment is a movement for growing marital relationship skills and lead to enrich the relationship through by creating goals and direction for marriage (Berger and Hannah, 1999; Guerney and Scuka, 2004). Enrichment can conduct in different styles and methods and each ones of their methods have different efficiency rates. But, according to the researches that have been done, the most efficiency and favorite rate is related to relationship enhancement(RE) method and the result in follow up have shown that validity and effectiveness of this method is significantly than others (Griffin and Guerney, 2001).

This approach is integrated of four basic psychotherapy approaches. These approaches include psychoanalysis, behavioral, humanistic and interpersonal that from each one have selected some contents and finally they have putted with together as an equal whole. The unconscious and defensive mechanism contents have been considered more from psychoanalysis theory and superiority seeking motivation from Adler and acceptance, self-concept, regard, and empathy from Rogers's humanistic theory. From learning theory the basic concept have been considered that are enriching of relationship behaviors and communication skills that could be learned in different ways. The concept of important figures and the effect of our surrounding people on our behavior quality have been derived from Sullivan theory (Accordino and Guerney, 2002, 2003).

In this approach, the skills have been trained that help to meet family basic needs like, love, affective, belonging, trust, loyalty, security and pleasure needs. The compassionately sensitive could be the most important factor in enhancing security, validating to couple relationship, creating constructive intimacy and healthy atmosphere for individual development (Griffin and Guerny, 2001). For more specialty, this approach believes that some factors are necessary for increasing of healthy and prolong relationship are comprise the ability of problem solving that is stressful for both partners, the ability of creating a supportive atmosphere in time of talking for solving problem, the ability of understanding the perspective of other and make relationship to partner, the ability of seeing self and other clearly and without distorting, the ability of managing of negative communication and anger control, the ability of behavioral models changing that person purpose change them the ability of helping partner to change favorably his/her communication models. In this way, couples have been trained nine continuously skills that are comprised: 1- assertive skills, 2- empathic skills, 3- discussion and talking skills, 4- problem and conflict solving skills, 5- being permissive and easy going skills, 6-self- changing skills, 7- helping partner to change, 8- transition and generalization skills 9- preservation and continuing skills (Cavedo and Guerney, 1999; Scuka, 2005).

Many researches had been conducted about applying marital relationship enhancement method. These researches showed that marital relationship enhancing is an effective method. Nazary (2003) conducted a research and studied the effectiveness of relationship enrichment program and solution – focused counseling on marital satisfaction. The results showed that both of approaches have significant affect on increasing the different dimensions of adjustment. But, relationship enhancement could be more effective on aggressive, time of being together and financial issues. Carson, Carson, Gil and Baucom (2004) have administrated a study about effectiveness of relationship enhancement on marital relationship dimensions. The results showed that relationship enhancement caused to increasing marital satisfactions, independency, intimacy and acceptance in couples. Also, the follow-up results showed that effectiveness of intervention could preserve after 3 months.

Murry, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes & Kusche (2002) have studied the effectiveness of RE on improving self-esteem and couple relationship dimensions. The results showed that RE could increase couple self–esteem as

well as intimacy, commitment, trust and marital adjustment. Brooks, Guerney & Mazza (2001) studied administrated group couple therapy whit RE on 38 couples and showed that this method lead to increasing in intimacy, commitment, trust and marital quality. The follow up after 6 months just had done on adjustment and showed that effectiveness of RE have preserved after 6 months.

Brooks (1997) have used a group practice program for 12 weeks in from of group couple therapy and found that the couples attained more high score in marital adjustment, trust, intimacy and the follow-up after 3 months showed the maintenance of treatment effects.

Brock and Joanning (1983) compared RE whit couples interaction training program in a sample with anxious and non anxious couples. They found that RE was more effective in improving couples interaction and satisfaction (even after 3 months follow-up). Both groups were observed in all of variables (marital adjustment, trust, solidarity, the rate of positive changes in relationship). The participants in RE program achieved higher scores in satisfaction of relationship and the ability of problem solving.

In a meta-analysis gathered and compared the data of 85 researches from RE and structural treatment the data showed that effectiveness rate of RE was 0.96. In the fact, this program was only a program that had the highest positive effectiveness rate (Giblin, Sprenkle, Sheehan, 1985). This is an evidence show that RE has an appropriate stability in long time.

Accordino, Guerney (1998) studied the RE effectiveness on marital quality of prisoners and their spouses, and results showed that RE increased their marital adjustment, general adjustment and mental health.

The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of marital relationship enhancement program on increasing marital optimism and happiness.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study is a quasi- experimental research with pre-test post-test and follow–up (one month after post-test) in two experimental and control groups.

The sample were selected from the people who referred themselves to the Isfahan counseling centers and were interested on take place in RE program. They have been informed by posters that were install in these centers and they were included of explanation about this program aims and its schedules. The participants were 36 individuals who enrolled in this program. And they were randomly assigned in two groups (experimental group n=20 & control group n=16). The characteristics of two groups are presented in 1 table.

Table 1: The characteristics of participation.

Variables	levels	Groups	
		Experimental	Control
Gender	Male	10	8
	Female	10	8
	Total	20	16
Education	Under diploma	0	1
	Diploma	5	8
	Associated	5	2
	Graduated and higher	10	5
	Total	20	16
Children No	0	8	4
	1	8	4
	2	4	6
	3	0	2
age	M	36.23	37.3
	SD	7.33	5.09
Marriage duration	M	6.33	5.11
	SD	4.21	3.08

Measures:

In this study the data gathered by using of two questionnaires that are included:

1. Marital happiness scale (MHS): this questionnaire was developed by Azrin, Naster and Jones (1973) that assesses the rate of marital satisfaction. This scale has 10 items that is from 1 to 10 likert type scale. The participators rate owns happiness between this continuum. Each item is independent and could use for specific domain of marital interaction. The happiness score is a total score by gathering of all Item scores. This scale is sensitive to change and have significant relationship with marital adjustment scale from Lock-

Wallace (Haring, Hewitt, Flett, 2003). Also, confirmative factor analysis confirmed its single factor structure with excellent fitness indexes for Iranian community (Isanezhad, 2009). The validity attained 0/90 by cronbach's alpha (Haring, Hewitt, and Flett, 2003) and 0/94 by retest (Isanezhad, Ahmadi & Etemadi, 2008).

2. Revised life orientation test (LOT-R): This test was developed by Scheier, Carver & Bridges (1995) and assesses the acceptances of life consequences. Its psychometric traits were attained in Iran by khodabakhshi (2003), and it had negative correlation with depression (0/65) and positive correlation with self esteem. The validity was attained with cronbach's coefficient alpha (0/74) and retest (0/87).

Independent variable in this study was 8 session relationship enhancement program that summarized in table (2).

Table 2: The topics of RE sessions.

Sessions	Topics
1	Introduction, early making of relationship, pretest, taking commitment, stating of rules and sessions aims
2	Training talking and discussion skills as a early basic skill, modeling of skills for participants as assigning homework
3	Reviewing of previous session's homework, training of self-closure skills, (second skill) and empathy (third skill), Modeling of skills for participants, assigning homework
4	Reviewing of previous session's homework, training of conflict solution as forth basic skill, modeling of skills for participants, assigning of homework
5	Reviewing of provirus session's homework, training of preparation and facility, modeling of skills, assigning home work
6	Reviewing of previous session's homework, training of self–change skill, spouse-change skill, modeling of skills, assigning of homework
7	Reviewing of previous session home work, reviewing of previous trained skills (7 skills), training of transference and generalization skills, assigning of homework
8	Reviewing of previous session home work, training of maintenance and continuing, ending of sessions, administering of post-test and follow-up.

Findings:

First, the descriptive findings are represented (Table 3).

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of happiness & optimism in different stages.

Stages	Variables	Groups	M	SD	N
Pretest	Happiness	Experimental	54.55	13.11	20
		Control	59.12	15.02	16
		Total	56.58	13.97	36
	Optimism	Experimental	11.25	5.94	20
		Control	13.06	6.35	16
		Total	12.05	6.11	36
Post-test	Happiness	Experimental	74.00	6.33	20
		Control	60.06	15.09	16
		Total	67.80	12.98	36
	Optimism	Experimental	18.90	5.92	20
		Control	12.81	5.93	16
		Total	16.19	6.60	36
Follow up	Happiness	Experimental	71.00	6.55	20
		Control	59.37	14.69	16
		Total	65.83	12.25	36
Optimism		Experimental	17.55	5.17	20
		Control	13.06	4.09	16
		Total	15.55	5.18	36

As the table 3 shows, the experimental group's means of scores in post-test and fallow-up phases has increased and means of control group are lower than experimental group.

Table 4: The results of the Wilk's lambda analyze with controlling pretest scores in posttest.

Source	Value	F	df 1	df 2	P	Eta^2	Observed power
Constant	1.33	20.67	2	31	0.001	0.57	1.00
Happiness	0.41	6.36	2	31	0.005	0.29	0.87
Optimism	0.90	13.90	2	31	0.001	0.47	0.98
Group	1.25	19.44	2	31	0.001	0.56	1.00

The results of the analysis of multivariate covariance (Wilk's lambda) with controlling variables of pretest's scores are given in table 5. As the table 4 shows that all of the controlled variables have a significant effect on the post-test scores ($p<0.05$).

Also the multiple effect of group membership (independent variable/RE) is significant (p<0.01). The Eta square was 0.56 and show that the effect size is desirable and the observed power of 0.924 show efficacy of sample size.

Table 5: The effect of RE on happiness and optimism in posttest.

Source	Dependent variable	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	p	Eta^2	Observed power
Group	Happiness	2118.75	1	2118.75	22.68	0.001	0.41	0.99
	Optimism	441.27	1	441.27	20.04	0.001	0.43	0.99

Table 5 shows the effects of RE on marital happiness and optimism scores in post-test phase has shown in table 6 the effect of group membership on marital happiness and optimism scores is significant (p<0.01), and there is a significant difference between experimental group and control group. As a result, the RE will lead to an increase of marital happiness and optimism.

In order to study the reliability of interfering (or to investigate the effect of time on the efficacy of interfering) both experimental and control groups were pursued after a month. The findings are given in table 6.

Table 6: The results of the Wilk's lambda analyze with controlling pretest scores in follow up.

Source	Value	F	df 1	df 2	P	Eta^2	Observed power
Constant	1.90	29.46	2	31	0.001	0.65	1.00
Happiness	0.53	8.20	2	31	0.001	0.35	0.94
Optimism	0.65	10.01	2	31	0.001	0.39	0.97
Group	1.14	17.71	2	31	0.001	0.53	1.00

The results of analyzing multivariable covariance (Wilkes's lambda) for the follow up phase by controlling the pretest scores are given in table 6. The table 6, shows that all of the controlled variables has a significant effect on post-test scores (p<0.05). The Eta square of 0.467 shows the efficacy of effectiveness.

Table 7: The effect of RE on happiness and optimism in follow up.

Source	Dependent variable	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	p	Eta^2	Observed power
Group	happiness	1588.93	1	1588.93	19.62	0.001	0.38	0.99
	Optimism	252.36	1	252.36	12.16	0.001	0.34	0.97

Table 7 shows the effect of RE on marital happiness and optimism scores in follow up phase. As it is visible here, the effect of group membership on marital happiness and optimism scores is significant (p<0.01). Also, There is a significant different between experimental group and control group. Consequently, the effect of RE on marital happiness and optimism scores continuously remain.

Conclusion:

The results showed that RE caused to increasing of marital happiness (4, 5 tables). This finding is consistence with previous results (Brooks, 1997. Accordino and Guerney 2002, 2003). We can say that RE is included of the skills that help to meet family intensive needs and likely can be useable in different culture. These needs are included of loves, compassionate, belonging, trust, loyalty, security and pleasure that are more important correlated to others (Scuka, 2005). If the participants could satisfy his/her partners needs and others family members, it can see as a social-psychology function in romantic relationship that enhance love, intimacy, self-confidence and individual psychological by providing a permanent caring atmosphere, the compassionately responses could be very important factor in enhancing security and continuing of marital bond, creating of healthy intimacy relationship and continuing to personal growth. In other hand, RE focuses on health marital relationship, ability of problem solving in a justice way. Ability of preserving from caring atmosphere during negotiation and problem solving, ability of attention to other person view, ability to make relationship with other participants, ability of clearly seeing self and others (without bias), ability of inhibiting or decreasing of negative–negative interaction cycles and angry, ability of changing in individual expectation of behavioral patterns, helping to person for reaching to expected desirable changes and help partner to reach owns expected changes are the changes that achieve through by dominating on RE skills.

As a result, we can say that this program could be effective on necessary skills training and enhancing marital happiness. Expressive skills help to participants that to be able to better understand their stress resources, needs and tendencies in the way that less likely creates defensive, anxious, hostelling, conflict responses. They more likely respond with empathic understanding, accompany and caring. They would be more

able to express their feelings and thoughts in front of others, this skill helps people to successfully solve conflicts and problems faster and with less anxious. The empathy skills prepare the participant more and faster for compassionately understanding others need in domains of emotional psychological and interpersonal and calls frankly, open, respectful, trustable, intimacy behaviors.

Discussing skills help couples to preserve positive emotional atmosphere. They learn prevent from violent responses when they are discussing about some challenging topics. The collection of these factors caused to more easily agreement between couples and this positive space lead to more marital happiness. The findings showed that RE lead to more optimism among couples. The couples after of passing RE program learn the skills that lead to changing owns behavior and their partner, and with time passing, they find the ability to create new life style (Scuka, 2005). They learn to help each other to change their undesirable behaviors by mutual help.

Since this style adopts by agreeing both of couples, they learn how by passing time change undesirable marital relationship styles and behaviors with help to each other (2000), and these abilities along with preservation and generalization skills are a good sign that by passing time, their life is going toward more favorable changes so they become more optimism to future. Also, they know their life is going to the positive changes path.

The final part of findings (6, 7 tables) showed that the efficiency of RE after a month maintained. Since translation and generalization preservation and continuing skills had trained, so we can say they used them well and caused to maintain educational affects. As result, RE could use for increasing marital skills that make marital life more functional and happiness.

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