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The Effectiveness of Psychological Empowerment Intervention on Personal Growth Initiative and Marital Boredom in Divorce-Asking Women

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of women's psychological empowerment package on personal growth initiative and marital boredom in divorce-asking women. The research design was quasi-experimental and pre-test-post-test with a control group. The population of the present study was women applying for divorce who referred to the Dispute Resolution Council in 2020. Participants were 30 women who were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly assigned to experimental groups (psychological empowerment, 15 people) and control group (15 people). Data were collected using marital boredom and personal growth initiative questionnaires in pre-test and post-test. Participants in the experimental group received 10 sessions of psychological empowerment training intervention, while participants in the control group did not receive the training program. Multivariate analysis of covariance revealed that psychological empowerment training has increased personal growth initiative and reduced marital boredom in divorce-asking women. Accordingly, the use of this intervention is recommended to couples therapists and family therapists to reduce marital problems.

Keywords: Psychological empowerment, Personal growth initiative, Marital boredom, Divorce-asking women

Introduction

The family unit is one of the most basic units of society and shapes the personality of its members. The desirability, satisfaction, contentment, quality and optimal functioning of the family are very influential factors in the flourishing growth and development of family members (Shafiabady et al., 2012). Among the negative aspects that emerged from this social institution is the occurrence of damage called divorce (Teachman, 2002). In fact, one of the most common problems in today's families that couples therapists are interested in is divorce. Some of people see divorce as a redeemer situation (Amato & Previti, 2003). Divorce is the cause of the collapse of the most fundamental part of society, the family. Divorce destroys the emotional and mental balance of family members, and due to the severe stress it creates, it can cause many mental disorders, especially in women (Azizi et al., 2016). Research findings show that divorce has taken an upward trend and its ratio to marriage has grown alarmingly. Divorce is a complex event and the disintegration of the family brings short and long-term financial, legal, personal and social effects for children and adults (Amato, 2000). Divorce in the current time has gradually turned into a crisis that puts the center of the family under the radius, and then it creates many economic, social and psychological problems for families, especially for children (Chen et al., 2007). According to official statistics in Iran, out of every 1000 marriages, about 200 cases lead to divorce, and Iran is the fourth country in the world in terms of the ratio of divorce to

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marriage (Yousefi, 2012). Among the factors that can affect the divorce of couples and their unwillingness to continue their life together is their marital dissatisfaction. In fact, when the romantic expectations are not fulfilled, the feeling of disappointment is directly attributed to the spouse and causes the love and commitment to decline, and marital boredom replaces love (Hirschberger et al., 2009). Boredom includes a state of depression, despair, loss of motivation to continue living, physical pain, negative feelings towards spouse, which can lead to emotional divorce or even formal divorce (Pines et al., 2002). The phenomenon of burnout is a kind of physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion and exhaustion that is caused by the mismatch between expectations and reality in married life (Pines et al., 2002). What is clear is to pay attention to the fact that marital boredom is considered as one of the underlying causes of marital discord and decreased intimacy. Boredom in a marriage can mean that communication within the marriage doesn't look the same as it did in the beginning and spouses may be worried that they have fallen out of love with their partner. After marriage, because their spouses are not able to fulfill all their wishes, they suffer from depression and feelings of failure, and finally, marital boredom (Tsapelas et al., 2009). In a research titled the role of motivation in breaking the cycle of burnout, Ten Brummelhuis et al. (2011) showed that the lack of internal motivation has a positive relationship with burnout. Many therapeutic and educational approaches in the field of family, marriage and couples have been compiled, tested and implemented in western countries. In a research, Tsapelas et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between current marital dissatisfaction and future marital satisfaction. The obtained results indicated that current marital boredom is a predictor of future marital satisfaction and current boredom leads to the loss of intimacy and emotional separation of couples and even their divorce. Kış (2014) showed that fatigue over time causes a decrease in individual energy resources, including emotional fatigue, physical fatigue and cognitive helplessness.

On the other hand, one of the variables that can affect the level of intimacy of married women is personal growth and related structures. Personal growth is defined as the active, voluntary and conscious participation of a person in the process of change and transformation (Bauer & McAdams, 2004). The first growth that a person should benefit from is personal growth. Personal growth means the exploitation of all individual and personal capitals and talents in order to achieve goals (Ward, 2016). A person who has grown personally is responsible for life. He is restrained and shows appropriate behaviors by identifying the defective aspects of his life (Kashdan et al., 2004).

Personal growth includes cognitive components (such as motivation to change, knowledge about the change process and efficiency related to the change process) and behavioral process (such as general goals related to personal change and planning to achieve those goals) (Robitschek et al., 2019) and is a set of acquired skills for self-improvement in different areas of life and is a combination of four components that act jointly, not alternately, to optimize personal growth (Shigemoto & Robitschek, 2020). Studies have shown that personal growth is related to various variables such as growth style, gender role orientation, psychological well-being ((Shigemoto & Robitschek, 2020), professional explorations and occupational identity (Hirata & Kamakura, 2018), parental alcoholism, family

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functioning and psychological health (Weigold et al., 2021). Luyckx and Robitschek (2014) indicated through structural equation modeling that all 4 components of individual growth (i.e. planning, readiness for change, intentional (or purposeful) behavior, use of resources) predict different processes of commitment and exploration, and planning is the best predictor. Finally, the extent to which individuals identify with their identity commitments and the extent to which they rely on ruminative or maladaptive identity exploration mediate the relationship between personal growth and self-esteem and depressive symptoms.

A research entitled personal growth interpretation of goal achievement as a new construct related to well-being was conducted by Malik et al. (2013). The results of this research showed that the interpretation of personal growth as a type of positive cognition can predict well-being.

The high rate of marital dissatisfaction and the increase in divorce rates in Western countries have made family experts realize that before thinking about reducing the divorce rate by creating legal barriers or moral restrictions, by using all the available facilities to support life prevent couples from reaching a stage of life where they are unable to resolve marital conflicts and want divorce. According to these experts, providing counseling and training and empowering couples, especially women, is one of the easy and low-cost ways to achieve this. The meaning of psychological empowerment is to provide interventional and educational solutions based on the experiences of divorced women, which were prepared after analyzing their experiences and extracting their educational and psychological needs and were approved by other experts in the family field.

Bahrami Kerchi et al. (2021) have shown during a research that psychological empowerment programs improve couples' relationships and reduce their dissatisfaction. Considering the fact that women's psychological empowerment can be effective on women's personal growth and marital satisfaction, and considering that there have not been many researches, especially in Iran and regarding the formulation and implementation of such educational programs, the present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the psychological empowerment package on personal growth and marital boredom in divorced women.

Material and Methods

The method of the current research is semi-experimental, and during it, the effect of the psychological empowerment package training on marital burnout and personal growth of the subjects has been investigated. The statistical population was women applying for divorce who referred to the Dispute Resolution Council in 2021, from among them, 30 people were selected by purposeful sampling and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The inclusion criteria were not having a history of psychiatric disorders based on the diagnosis of a psychiatric specialist or clinical psychologist, not participating in counseling and psychotherapy courses, personal consent to participate in the research, being in the age range of 20 to 40 years, having at least a diploma education and exclusion criteria were absence of more than 2 sessions and unwillingness to participate in the continuation of the educational-therapeutic program.

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Pines et al. (2011) questionnaire was used to measure marital boredom. This questionnaire has 21 questions that measure marital boredom in three areas: emotional boredom, mental boredom, and physical boredom. Higher scores indicate more boredom and the maximum score is 147 and the minimum score is 21. The test-retest reliability coefficient of this questionnaire is 0.89 for a one-month period, 0.76 for a 2-month period, and 0.66 for a four-month period, and its Cronbach's alpha coefficient is also reported between 0.91 and 0.93. Jafari et al. (2021) reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this tool in the Iranian sample as 0.86.

Robitschek (1998) personal growth questionnaire was used to measure personal growth. This questionnaire has 16 questions and its purpose is to examine the components of action for personal growth (readiness for change, planning, use of resources and purposeful behavior). This questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The reliability of this scale has been reported by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.94 and its validity has been confirmed through content validity (Robitschek, 1998).

Treatment program for psychological empowerment of women: This program was implemented in the experimental group during ten sessions as follows:

First session: familiarization of the group members with each other, implementation of the pre-test and familiarization with the concept of empowerment

Second session: introduction of different feelings and emotions during separation, familiarization with problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping methods and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Third session: Examining the social stereotypes that annoy divorced women, how to face these stereotypes, the correct use of communication skills and building a safe and reliable social network.

Fourth session: getting to know the feeling of meaning in life, preparing a list of goals and roles in life.

Fifth session: familiarity with self-efficacy and the influence of people on the events of the world around us.

Sixth session: getting to know the types of internal and external control sources and how each of these sources affects behavior.

Seventh session: familiarity with self-determination as one of the components of the theory of personal growth.

Eighth session: providing training on physical and mental health and increasing individual well-being.

Ninth session: getting to know the concept of self-efficacy and its relationship with the components of personal growth

Tenth session: review of previous sessions and implementation of post-test

Due to the fact that the semi-experimental research design is pre-test-post-test with a control group, analysis of covariance was used to analyze the data.

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Results

Before performing the covariance analysis, the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and the normality were examined and confirmed. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of marital boredom and personal growth in the experimental and control groups. Also, the results of covariance analysis related to marital boredom and personal growth are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of marital boredom and personal growth of experimental and control groups in pre-test and post-test

Group	Variable	Pretest		Posttest	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Control	Marital bordeom	68.34	2.34	67.56	2.14
	Personal growth	51.21	2.26	53.65	2.32
Exprimental	Marital bordeom	69.11	2.71	64.53	2.76
	Personal growth	52.46	2.81	56.13	2.08

Table 2. Covariance analysis related to marital boredom in women applying for divorce

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta
Group	275.49	1	275.49	53.80	0.05	0.42
Error	143.61	28	5.12			
Total	419.10	29				

According to Table 2, after removing the effect of the pre-test, the value of F is equal to 53.80, which is significant at the 0.05 level. According to the fact that the post-test mean of scores of marital boredom in the experimental group is lower than the post-test mean of scores of the control group, the research hypothesis related to the effectiveness of the empowerment intervention on reducing marital boredom is confirmed.

Table 3. Covariance analysis related to personal growth in women seeking divorce

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta
Group	318.83	1	318.83	56.73	0.05	0.43
Error	157.53	28	5.62			
Total	476.36	30				

According to Table 3, after removing the effect of the pre-test, the value of F is equal to 56.73, which is significant at the 0.05 level. Considering that the post-test mean of scores of personal growth in the experimental group is higher than the post-test mean of scores of the control group, the hypothesis of the research related to the effectiveness of the empowerment intervention on increasing personal growth is confirmed.

Discussion

Marital relationship is a source of support, intimacy and pleasure for human beings and will cause the emergence of cooperation, sympathy, unity, interest and responsibility towards the family. The

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realization of the goals of marriage after establishing a marital relationship makes a person feel satisfied and happy, and contrary to this, it will lead to marital discord and ultimately dissatisfaction with marriage (Chen et al., 2007). Most people who get married report high levels of marital satisfaction, especially early in their life together, but in most cases, with the passage of time, there is a gradual decline in their marital satisfaction, serious problems also occur in the first weeks and months of marriage, which, if not resolved, can threaten the satisfaction and stability of the marital relationship and even eventually lead to divorce and separation between couples (Mortazavi et al., 2020). Therefore, the use of psychological intervention methods at the time of pre-marriage and couple therapy after marriage can be one of the helpful solutions with the aim of preserving the family. Taking into account the domestic cultural and localized characteristics, empowerment packages can be designed under the supervision of experts, which compare such local approaches based on cultural documents, domestic and foreign research can reduce the possibility of divorce (Azizi et al., 2016).

Marital boredom occurs due to a set of unrealistic expectations and irrational thoughts and ups and downs in life (Tsapelas et al., 2009). Contrary to popular belief, most of the clinical approaches used in couple's therapy are not due to problems in one or both of the couples. Rather, falling out of love is a gradual process and rarely occurs suddenly (Seadatee shamir et al., 2018). In psychological empowerment sessions, women are taught so that they can have a deeper understanding of their feelings and emotions. This knowledge makes them realize their emotional deficiencies and shortcomings, and after learning problem-oriented and emotion-oriented methods of dreaming, they feel more motivation and inner control (Mortazavi et al., 2020). In this case, not only do they correct their attitudes and behaviors, after which they also receive different feedback from the environment, but after improving their relationship and experiencing positive emotions such as happiness and vitality, they report less marital dissatisfaction (Halford & Snyder, 2012).

On the other hand, the research findings showed that psychological empowerment can have a positive effect on increasing the personal growth of divorced women. Individual or personal growth includes the acquisition of an expanded set of skills that include cognition, behavior, attitude and motivation in a person. Cultivating individual growth causes people to participate actively, freely and consciously in the process of change and evolution and their evolution (Heydari & Fekri, 2018). Within personal growth a person starts to perform different behaviors and actions compared to before. In other words, by increasing the power of thinking and reasoning of people, their cognitive ability is affected as a dimension of personal growth. By being aware of his flaws and shortcomings and accepting his responsibility against these flaws and how to effectively deal with them, a person can revise his behavioral priorities and various reactions to a situation or relationship and try to correct his cognition and then his behaviors and reactions (Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019).

In general, it seems that the emphasis of psychological empowerment on the understanding of feelings and emotions, optimal use of problem solving methods, greater awareness of individual abilities and efficiencies and efforts to develop them on the one hand, and training that is centered on accurate recognition of needs, choosing and accepting responsibility and commitment to these choices and

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trying to examine each choice from different aspects to find the best solution (Matsuo, 2019), are among the things that have been considered as psychological methods that have received less attention.

In general, considering the findings of the research, it is recommended that the use of methods that lead to increasing the psychological empowerment of couples, especially women applying for divorce, should be paid more attention and used by family therapists and counselors.

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