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Comparing The Effectiveness of Life Skills and Communication Skills Trainings on Marital Conflicts, Conflict Resolution Styles and Psychological Well-Being in Incompatible Spouses

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this research was to assess the efficacy of life skills and communication skills trainings in addressing marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles, and psychological well-being among incompatible partners.

Methods: The study is applied in its objective and quasi-experimental in its methodology, employing a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The target population consisted of all incompatible couples seeking assistance from psychological service centers in Kermanshah in 2021. A sample of 45 individuals was selected through voluntary participation, with participants randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group based on specific criteria. Assessment tools utilized in the study included questionnaires on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles, and psychological well-being. Over the course of 13 sessions lasting 45 minutes each, life skills and communication skills interventions were delivered to the groups twice a week. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS-26 software, employing statistical tests such as analysis of covariance, and Bonferroni's post hoc test.

Results: The findings indicated a significant impact of life skills and communication skills trainings on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles, and psychological well-being of incompatible couples.

Conclusions: In total, comparison results revealed no significant distinction between the two interventions, suggesting the viability of these approaches in the context of family counseling and psychotherapeutic settings.

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Introduction

The phenomenon of marital conflicts is regarded as a significant detriment to married life. When one partner perceives inequality or a lack of equilibrium in achieving goals, it leads to conflict (Fincham, 2003). Marital conflicts are linked to various physical, psychological, and social repercussions, such as an increased risk of divorce and depression, as well as a decline in quality of life and family functioning (Fincham, 2003). The root of marital conflicts lies in the lack of synchronization between spouses regarding needs and their fulfillment, self-centeredness in differing desires, irresponsible behaviors within the marital relationship and marriage (Yang et al., 2016). Research by Mekonnen et al. (2019) revealed that 45% of marriages culminate in divorce due to conflicts between incompatible partners. Marital conflict is at the core of romantic relationships (Mekonnen et al., 2019). Intimate relationships do not demand conflict-free environments, and the presence of conflicts in marriage is deemed normal, even in successful unions (Ghazanfari et al., 2018). The ability to manage and resolve conflicts constructively can cultivate a robust bond between partners, bringing them closer to establishing an intimate relationship, thereby reducing spousal incompatibility (Scott et al., 2013).

Another factor influencing spousal incompatibility is conflict resolution styles. Lavner et al. (2016) posit that couples employing constructive conflict resolution strategies and positive interaction patterns exhibit higher marital compatibility. While conflict is ubiquitous, the manner in which couples handle conflicts varies significantly, with successful conflict resolution being linked to satisfaction, enhanced psychological well-being (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011) and increased intimacy (Schudlich et al., 2013). Conversely, unsuccessful conflict resolution is associated with elevated marital distress (Carstensen et al., 1995) and diminished mental health (Du Rocher Schudlich et al., 2004).

Therefore, in addition to conflict, the psychological well-being of the couple should be accorded serious consideration. Psychological well-being is a positive state that ranges from positive to negative on a continuum. Ryff and Singer (2006) have delineated well-being from two distinct perspectives. The first viewpoint is grounded in hedonic and views well-being as the augmentation of positive emotions over negative ones and contentment with life, termed mental well-being.

eudaimonic, another perspective, presents a holistic view of well-being, encompassing living by noble goals, developing talents, finding life's meaning, and pursuing personal growth

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continuously. Ryan and Deci (2001) argue that psychological well-being goes beyond happiness, life satisfaction, and absence of negative emotions, including self-acceptance, personal growth, mastering the environment, independence, positive relationships, and purposefulness. Riff's model of psychological well-being highlights six crucial elements: self-acceptance, fostering positive relationships, empathy and autonomy, leading a purposeful life, experiencing personal growth, and mastering the environment (Fouladchang & Marhemati, 2017). Skills training can aid in conflict resolution, reducing marital discord, and enhancing the psychological well-being of couples.

Conducting life skills workshops is a strategy that promotes positive emotions in incompatible couples. The World Health Organization (2003) defines life skills as competencies that enhance mental well-being, improve human relationships, and promote health and wellness in communities. Life skills training covers ten key skills, including problem-solving, decision-making, communication, anger management, interpersonal adaptability, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions, and handling psychological pressures. Communication skills are integral to life skills education, as enhancing effective communication can benefit couples. By enhancing communication abilities, couples can improve various aspects such as verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, trust-building, communication styles, and conflict resolution, ultimately fostering harmonious relationships (Nemati et al., 2016).

Teaching life skills enables individuals to translate their knowledge, values, and attitudes into practical abilities, allowing them to understand what needs to be done and how to do it. Life skills encompass a range of capabilities that enhance adaptability, positive behavior, and efficiency. Consequently, individuals can assume their social responsibilities without causing harm to themselves or others, effectively tackling the challenges and issues of daily life (Yoosefi, 2021). Numerous studies emphasizing marital compatibility underscore the significance of life skills in fostering satisfaction and harmony between partners. Yalcin and Karahan (2007) demonstrated that communication skills training positively impacts marital adjustment and instigates enduring behavioral changes in couples. Lundblad and Hansson (2006) indicated that such training enhances couples' relationships, equipping them with the tools to navigate challenges, and bolstering their mental well-being. Presently, life skills are recognized as a highly practical intervention for mitigating marital discord and averting divorce (Yoosefi, 2021). These interventions have been proven to reduce substance abuse, violence, symptoms of behavioral disorders, emotional harmony

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among couples, self-image, self-efficacy, social and emotional compatibility, anxiety levels, and sexual misconduct prevention in couples (Organization, 2003).

Conversely, the approach to handling conflict and discord among couples is a learned behavior that can be modified. Research findings indicate that one of the major causes of marital discord is the couple's lack of skills in managing and resolving conflicts, and interventions focused on enhancing communication skills can significantly decrease such conflicts (Amani & Letafati Beriss, 2014). Hence, by offering effective educational opportunities, couples can be guided to abandon destructive conflict resolution methods and adopt more efficient strategies. Teaching communication skills, including behavioral communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution training, is one such approach. This method emphasizes non-verbal cues, behavioral skills, and cognitive and emotional constructs (Doss et al., 2005).

Doss et al. (2005) elucidated the constructive role of communication skills in enhancing marital adjustment, emphasizing that communication skills, emotional expression, and managing negative emotions collectively contribute to conflict reduction and performance enhancement in couples. Rajabi and Aslami (2019) emphasized the substantial enhancement in psychological well-being and happiness through life skills training, advocating for its implementation to uplift elderly women's mental health. Halford et al. (2007) identified effective communication as the foremost predictor of family strength, stressing its role in nurturing relationships and reducing marital conflicts. Lundblad and Hansson (2006) indicated that communication skills training can enhance marital relations, diminish conflicts, and boost mental health. It is crucial to recognize that dissatisfaction and conflicts in one aspect of a couple's relationship can permeate other areas, underscoring the importance of interventions to alleviate conflicts and enhance overall satisfaction. Thus, this study was conducted to compare the impact of life skills training and communication skills training on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles, and psychological well-being in incompatible couples, aiming to discern whether there is a disparity in the effectiveness of these interventions on conflicts, marital dynamics, and psychological well-being of incompatible partners.

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Material and Methods

The current study constitutes an instance of applied research. Within this study, a quasi-experimental design of pre-test-post-test nature was employed, involving a control group. The division of the sample into two experimental and control groups was done randomly, alongside pre-test and post-test phases. Subsequently, the treatment method, serving as an independent variable, was applied to the first two groups (experimental groups), namely life skills training and communication skills training. Following the participants' consent by signing the company's introduction and consent form, the scales measuring marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles, and psychological well-being were administered after a detailed explanation of the research. The experimental groups will then partake in 14 sessions lasting 45 minutes each (two sessions per week), with the first group receiving life skills training and the second group receiving communication skills training. Conversely, the control group did not undergo training in life skills or communication skills; however, as per ethical standards, they received counseling post-research completion. Subsequent to the training sessions, a post-test evaluation was conducted for all three groups.

The life skills training protocol: the life skills training program (adapted from Chris El Klanike, 2003; translated by Mohammad Khani, 2016; Dehestani, 2016) is (problem solving skills, decision making skills, effective communication skills, anger management skills, adaptive interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness skills, empathizing skills with others, coping skills with emotions, and coping skills with psychological pressures) had 13 sessions, twice a week, and each session was held for 45 minutes.

Communication skills training protocol: Communication skills include the skills taught by the researcher based on the World Health Organization model to the subjects in 13 45-minute sessions (skills include verbal and non-verbal communication skills, identification of communication components, active listening, making verbal communication more efficient, establishing trust, communication processes, recognizing communication styles, friendships, barriers to effective communication, self-awareness, speaking skills and conflict management).

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Since all incompatible couples attended voluntarily, they were given explanations of the sessions and were asked to complete the questionnaires of marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being before the beginning of the training sessions and also at the end of the sessions. The research samples were assured about the confidentiality of the information, then life skills and communication skills training protocols were implemented for the two experimental groups. For data analysis, descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (statistical tests of one-way analysis of variance, multivariate analysis of covariance and Bonferroni post hoc test) in SPSS-26 software.

Instruments

Revised Marital Conflict Questionnaire: This scale developed by Sanai, Barati and Bustanipour (2018) include 54 questions that have eight dimensions (decreased cooperation, questions 4, 12, 18, 25, 34, decreased sex, questions 5, 13, 19, 35, 40; increasing child support, questions 9, 22, 38, 44; increasing personal relationship with relatives, questions 8, 15, 29, 37, 43; decreasing personal relationship with spouse and friends, questions 1 23, 32, 46, 50, 53, Separating finances, questions 2, 10, 17, 24, 33, 39, 48, reducing effective communication, questions 3, 7, 11, 16, 26, 28, 30, 41, 45, 47, 52, 54).

ROCI-II Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire: Rahim (1983) 28-item ROCI-II Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire is a mechanism for measuring five ways in which people respond to conflict. The five conflict resolution styles identified are rooted in the work of Black and Mouton (1964). The five conflict resolution styles are: integrative style (1 to 7), dominant style (8 to 13), obliging style (14 to 18), avoidant style (19 to 23) and compromising style (23 to 28). The 28 statements of this scale are based on a 5-point Likert scale and include completely disagree (score 1), disagree (score 2), have no opinion (score 3), agree (score 4) and completely agree (score - 5) scored.

Psychological well-being questionnaire: This scale developed by Ryff (2013) has 54 questions and includes 6 components of autonomy (19-25-35-40-44-52-6-11-16), control over the environment (12-7-2) -17-20-29-36-49-53), personal growth (3-18-21-26-37-41-45-50-54), positive communication with others (1-5-10-15-24) -32-34-39-47), purposefulness in life (8-13-22-27-30-33-38-42-46) and self-acceptance (4-9-14-23-28-31-43- 48-51) and based on a six-point

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Likert scale with questions such as (I don't want new ways to do my work, my life is desirable in the current way).

The reliability and validity of all three questionnaires have been substantiated in numerous studies. Furthermore, in the present study, the reliability coefficients of all three questionnaires were deemed satisfactory.

Results

Before testing the research hypotheses, the normality of the data was tested by means of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the results of which showed that the data of marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being are normal (Table 1). Also, based on the results of Levene's test, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was also confirmed.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the dependent variables of the research

Variable	Statistic	P	Result
Marital conflicts	0.138	0.163	Normal
Conflict resolution styles	0.137	0.209	Normal
Psychological well-being	0.278	0.214	normal

Table 2. Multivariate tests for the significance of the effect of life skills training

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis DF	Error DF	P
Pillai's trace	0.977	113.13	8	21	0.001
Wilks' Lambda	0.023	113.13	8	21	0.001
Hotelling's Trace	43.091	113.13	8	21	0.001
Roy's Largest Root	43.091	113.13	8	21	0.001

The results of the multivariate tests show the influence of life skills training on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being are significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Covariance analysis to investigate the effect of life skills training on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being

Variable	Effect	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Marital conflicts	Group	44698.80	1	44698.80	865.61	0.001
Conflict resolution styles	Group	3990.53	1	3990.53	142.71	0.001
Psychological well-being	Group	20750.70	1	20750.70	534.87	0.001

The hypothesis is accepted at a significance level of 95% and it can be said that life skills training has a significant effect on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being. In Table 4, the results of multivariate tests are presented for the significance of the effect of

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communication skills training on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being.

Table 4. Multivariate tests for the significance of the effect of communication skills training

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis DF	Error DF	P
Pillai's trace	0.978	115.31	8	21	0.001
Wilks' Lambda	0.022	115.31	8	21	0.001
Hotelling's Trace	43.928	115.31	8	21	0.001
Roy's Largest Root	43.928	115.31	8	21	0.001

The results of multivariate tests show the effectiveness of communication skills training on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being are significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5. Covariance analysis to investigate the effect of communication skill training on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles and psychological well-being

Variable	Effect	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Marital conflicts	Group	47521.20	1	47521.20	631.73	0.001
Conflict resolution styles	Group	4130.13	1	4130.13	128.53	0.001
Psychological well-being	Group	20908.80	1	20908.80	502.67	0.001

Based on the findings, teaching life skills and communication skills has improved marital conflicts in incompatible spouses. In order to carefully investigate which of the three groups has a difference in the variable of marital conflicts, Bonferroni's post hoc test was used, the results of which can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Bonferroni's post hoc test results to compare the average of three groups in the variable of marital conflicts

Variable	Comparison groups	Mean difference	Std. Error	P
Marital conflicts	Life skill training -Control	-77.20	2.95	0.001
	Communication skills training -control	-79.60	2.95	0.001
	Life skill training - Communication skill training	2.400	2.95	1

According to Table 6, there was no significant difference between the effect of life skills training and communication skills training on marital conflicts of incompatible spouses. Also, in order to carefully investigate the issue of which of the three groups has a difference in the variable of conflict resolution styles, Bonferroni's post hoc test was used, the results of which can be seen in Table 7.

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Table 7. Bonferroni's post hoc test results to compare the average of three groups in the variable of conflict resolution styles

Variable	Comparison groups	Mean difference	Std. Error	P
Conflict resolution styles	Life skill training -Control	23.06	1.80	0.001
	Communication skills training -control	23.46	0.80	0.001
	Life skill training - Communication skill training	-0.40	1.80	1

According to Table 7, training in life skills and communication skills led to an increase in the average conflict resolution styles in incompatible spouses. There was no significant difference between the effect of life skills training and communication skills training on conflict resolution styles of incompatible spouses (P<0.001). In addition, Bonferroni's post hoc test was used in order to carefully examine which of the three groups has a difference in the psychological well-being variable (Table 8).

Table 8. Bonferroni's post hoc test results to compare the average of three groups in the psychological well-being variable

Variable	Comparison groups	Mean difference	Std. Error	P
Psychological well-being	Life skill training -Control	52.60	2.10	0.001
	Communication skills training -control	52.80	2.10	0.001
	Life skill training - Communication skill training	-0.20	2.10	1

According to Table 8, life skills training and communication skills led to an increase in average psychological well-being in incompatible spouses. Also, there was no significant difference between the effect of life skills training and communication skills training on the psychological well-being of incompatible spouses (P<0.001).

Discussion

The results showed that life skills training has a significant effect on marital conflicts and its components. This finding is consistent with the studies of Ghazanfari et al. (2018), Nemati et al. (2016), Yoosefi (2021) and Rajabi and Aslami (2019). Teaching life skills has an effect on marital conflicts of incompatible spouses. Referring to this finding, Fouladchang and Marhemati (2017) state that by learning life skills, people know all aspects of their existence better and accept to establish a warmer and more effective relationship with themselves, their God, and others. These abilities increase their mastery over the environment and finally, the application of these skills in life leads to their personal growth; Therefore, it can reduce the number of conflicts. Therefore, teaching life skills teaches people how to communicate effectively, and this helps to improve their

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interactions with the people around them. By teaching different methods of self-awareness, problem solving, decision-making, effective communication, interpersonal relations, courageous behavior, the quality of relationship between people improves.

The results showed that life skills training has a significant effect on conflict resolution styles and its components. This finding is in agreement with the research of Amani and Letafati Beriss (2014), Rajabi and Aslami (2019) and Ghazanfari et al. (2018). Basically, having a mutually constructive communication model in couples' relationships can strengthen the foundation of relationships and families. It can be seen that couples have a lot of confusion when visiting and it takes more time to see their changes. The conflict resolution styles, which include 5 styles, all except the avoidance style, have a significant correlation with the marital intimacy of women, in which the competitive style has a negative correlation with the criterion variable; This means that women who put their own interests before other interests in their relationships and only pay attention to their own desires have less intimacy with their husbands.

The results showed that life skill training has a significant effect on psychological well-being and its components. The results obtained from the hypothesis obtained is consistent with the research of Yoosefi (2021), Nemati et al. (2016) and Rajabi and Aslami (2019). The results showed that communication skills training has a significant effect on marital conflicts and its components. The results is consistent with the findings of Yalcin and Karahan (2007), Yoosefi (2021) and Yang et al. (2016). In explaining the effectiveness of communication skills training based on the modification of initial incompatible schemas on reducing marital conflicts, it can be said that since conflict is an integral part of marital relationships and is one of the common family problems that has attracted the attention of therapists, investigating the causes of conflicts and also, strategies to reduce marital conflicts can have a significant effect on improving marital relations, so it can be concluded that communication skills training sessions are based on the modification of incompatible schemas, learning communication skills, schema modification, feedback and training.

The results showed that communication skill training has a significant effect on conflict resolution styles and its components. This finding is consistent with the studies of Asadishishegaran et al. (2016) and Amani and Letafati Beriss (2014). Teaching communication skills allows husband and wife to discuss and exchange ideas with each other and solve their problems and become aware of

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each other's needs. Couples who cannot communicate effectively with each other when faced with a problem are placed in an uncertain and ambiguous situation, and their conflict and conflict level increases. Hence, communication skills training serves as a form of readiness for couples, fostering a more precise and candid examination of their relationships while enabling discussions on their objectives, attitudes, financial matters, sexual topics, and reasons for marriage. Through this program, individuals are encouraged to scrutinize their marital motivations attentively, cultivate self-awareness, and ultimately fortify and stabilize their marital bond. This initiative aims to diminish divorce rates, enhance marital quality, and ultimately yield contentment within the marital union. The level of individual's competence and consciousness in comprehending and selecting their personality traits in conjunction with those of their partner will enhance the quality of their decision-making, thereby establishing a foundation for personal satisfaction.

The outcomes indicated that communication skills training significantly impacts psychological well-being and its constituents. These results align with the research findings of Rajabi and Aslami (2019) and Fouladchang and Marhemati (2017). Effective communication enhances the emotional intimacy within relationships. When couples communicate effectively, they not only foster productive dialogue but also strengthen emotional bonds. Moreover, heightened emotional intimacy and companionship between spouses lead to increased sensitivity towards each other, consequently elevating their emotional connection.

The current study, akin to other research endeavors, encountered certain limitations. The utilization of self-reporting by respondents led to a relative bias in the research tool. An aspect of the present study's constraints is the voluntary nature of group participation. The impact of participants' voluntary involvement and high motivation on the efficacy of these methods raises questions as many subjects were eager to engage in the treatment. While a small number of research participants ceased attending meetings during the process implementation, this issue, although not significantly affecting the overall research, can be deemed a limitation. Furthermore, the commonality of the training provider in both groups presents another constraint. Given the inability to regulate intervening variables, caution is advised in the generalization of results. Nevertheless, despite these constraints, it is recommended that the research be conducted on an individual and group basis with extended follow-up periods of six months, one year, or more. This would fortify the generalizability of treatment outcomes, particularly concerning the influence of teaching life and

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communication skills on marital conflicts, conflict resolution styles, and the psychological well-being of incompatible spouses. The study suggests that family counselors employ life and communication skills training to address marital issues. Incorporating such training in pre-marriage counseling sessions and educational workshops, and disseminating it as a public program through mass media with the guidance of experienced professionals, could enlighten society about the positive impact of these skills. It is crucial to educate all segments of society, particularly couples experiencing conflicts, about the significance and beneficial effects of life skills and communication training on various aspects of mental well-being and life contentment.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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