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Comparing the Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy and Gottman Couple Therapy on Marital Satisfaction and Problem Solving Styles in Couples Referring to Counseling Centers in Lamard and Mohr City

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral couple therapy and Gottman couple therapy on marital satisfaction and problem solving styles of couples.

Methods: The statistical population is all the referrals to the counseling and psychological services center in Mohr and Lamard cities in Fars province, Iran. Participants were 45 people that randomly selected and randomly assigned to cognitive-behavioral couple therapy group (15 people), Gottman couple therapy group (15 people) and control group (15 people). The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale was used to measure marital satisfaction and Cassidy and Long (1996) Problem-solving style questionnaire was used to measure problem solving styles. In order to analyze data, the mean and standard deviation were calculated in the descriptive statistics part and multivariate covariance analysis method was used in the inferential statistics part.

Results: According to the results, cognitive behavioral couple therapy had a significant effect on marital satisfaction and problem solving styles. Also, results indicated that Gottman couple therapy had a significant effect on marital satisfaction and problem solving styles.

Conclusions: According to the results there is a significant difference between two interventions in problem solving styles but there is no significant difference between two approaches.

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Introduction

Family is a social and natural system with a complex emotional structure, whose important features are affection, loyalty and continued membership (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2012). If the intimate relationship between husband and wife is damaged, destructive and negative consequences will be created in the mental health of the family and children (Li et al., 2020). In the early stages of a marital relationship, accepting and tolerating differences is easy for most couples. In fact, many couples mention these differences as the source of their attraction, but after the passage of time, the desire of some couples to accept, tolerate and compromise with their differences decreases and finally they will start to change each other (Jacobson et al., 2000).

Couple therapy (Beck and Gottman) is an intervention for improving couples' relationships and its purpose is to help couples to become aware of themselves and their spouses, explore their spouse's feelings and thoughts, develop empathy and intimacy, develop effective communication and problem solving skills.

Marital satisfaction and compatibility is one of the broadest concepts to determine and show the level of happiness and stability of the marital relationship. Marital satisfaction can be defined as the attitude an individual has toward his or her own marital relationship (Dobrowolska et al., 2020). Humiliation is the most annoying rider of fate and is defined as "any verbal or non-verbal behavior that one spouse uses to hurt the feelings of the other." These behaviors include profanity, hostile jokes, mockery, belligerence and body language. Gottman called blame psychological abuse and stated that it should be terminated immediately through therapy (Gottman et al., 2020). Silence, the final rider of fate, occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction by ignoring the speaker or leaving the room. The appearance of the stone wall of silence does not mean the end of the relationship, but it can put the relationship at risk of separation. According to what Gottman stated, it can be said that the couples who enter the life of 4 riders of fate lose their satisfaction in the relationship and gradually suffer marital exhaustion and dissatisfaction.

In conducting this research, Gottman's educational method was used in satisfaction, compatibility and interaction to strengthen marriage. Epstein et al. (1993) found that the level of irrational and unrealistic beliefs about marital relationship is a strong predictor of marital distress and negative expectations of treatment. As a result, they suggest that treatment programs to fix relationship dysfunction should be based on the cognitive reconstruction of spouses. Since the 1970s, a

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concerted effort has been made to apply the theory of cognitive-behavioral methods to couples (McAdams et al., 2016). Thus, the present study was conducted to investigate whether there is a difference between the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and Gottman couple therapy on marital satisfaction and problem-solving styles of couples.

Considering the current conditions of the society, the increase in the level of expectations and the specific complexity of relationships, the expansion of communication, etc., unfortunately, we are witnessing an increasing number of families and couples who suffer from incompatibility and marital disputes due to various reasons and problems. Therefore, considering the importance of keeping the family center warm and then keeping the society healthy, conducting researches based on couple therapy can seem necessary, especially the treatment based on Gottmann's method of therapy, which has been less used in similar researches.

The main importance of this research is that, on the one hand, it emphasizes reducing harm through efficient problem solving styles in couples. On the other hand, it deals with the factor of emotional self-efficacy as a positive construct that can be expected after the restoration of relationships, and also emphasizes the factor of satisfaction as an indicator of a healthy relationship between couples in the future. Couples need to learn how to calm the atmosphere, regain their composure, and refocus their attention. They need to find out how to regulate and moderate intense and different emotions (Hicks et al., 2004).

The main goal of this research is to determine the difference in the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and Gottman couple therapy on marital satisfaction and problem solving styles of couples who refer to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities.

The partial objectives of the research are:

1- The effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on marital satisfaction of couples referring to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities

2- The effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy on the problem-solving styles of couples referring to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities

3- The effectiveness of Gottman's couple therapy on the marital satisfaction of couples referring to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities

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4- The effectiveness of Gottman's couple therapy on the problem solving styles of couples who refer to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities

5- Comparing the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and Gottman couple therapy on marital satisfaction of people who refer to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities

6- Comparison of the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and Gottman couple therapy on problem solving styles of couples referring to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr city.

The hypotheses of the study are:

1. There is a difference between the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and Gottman couple therapy on the marital satisfaction of people who refer to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr

2. There is a difference between the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and Gottman couple therapy on the problem-solving styles of couples referring to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities

3. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is effective on the marital satisfaction of couples referring to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr.

4. Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is effective on problem solving styles (constructive and non-constructive) of couples referring to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr city.

5. Gottman's couple therapy is effective on the marital satisfaction of couples who refer to counseling centers in Lamerd and Mohr cities

6- Gottman couple therapy is effective on problem solving styles (constructive and non-constructive) of couples referring to the counseling centers of Lamerd and Mohr cities

Material and Methods

The statistical population in this research is all the referrals to the counseling and psychological services center in Mohr and Lamerd cities in Fars province, Iran, 300 people, 45 of which were randomly selected from among the referrals. 15 people were selected for cognitive-behavioral couple therapy, 15 people were selected for Gottman couple therapy group and 15 people were

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selected for the control group. In order to carry out the research, Gottman's educational method was used to strengthen marital relations, which is as follows.

Table 1. Gottman's educational method summary

First	**Acquaintance and initial assessment**	**Getting to know the group members with each other, stating the rules and regulations of the group, assessing the needs of the couple, each spouse's commitment to marriage, the expectations of the couple from each other and from the treatment.**
Second	Processing conflicts and increasing marital friendship	Change in interactive patterns along with decreasing negative behavioral exchanges and increasing positive behavioral exchanges
Third	Reduce the four horsemen of fate	Helping the couple to identify the four riders of fate (criticism, blame, confrontation, and silence) and their destructive effects on the couple's relationship.
Fourth	Teaching conflict resolution, persuasion and compromise skills	Teaching couples to realize that conflict is necessary for a successful marriage and to learn how to accept each other's differences and deal with them.
Fifth	Teaching how to deal with permanent unsolvable conflicts	Teaching couples the correct styles of conflict resolution and compromise with them
Sixth	Creating positive emotions during conflicts	Preventing the spread of conflicts and apologizing to each other
Seventh	Creating positive emotions during conflict-free times	Rebuilding the sense of respect and acceptance of the spouse despite the differences between them, admiring and encouraging each other
Eighth	Fixing meta emotion disharmony	Helping to increase couples' knowledge of each other's world in order to cope with stressful events and conflicts
Ninth	Creating and strengthening a common semantic system	Teaching couples to understand each other's dreams and wishes and try to support each other in order to realize them
Tenth	termination	Reviewing past sessions and performing post-tests

Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was used to measure marital satisfaction and Cassidy and Long (1996) 24-item questionnaire was used to measure problem solving styles.

Data analysis methods (statistical methods): In order to analyze the data related to this research, in the descriptive statistics part, tables and graphs, as well as the mean and standard deviation of the data will be used, and in the inferential statistics part, the multivariate covariance analysis method will be used.

Before starting the field part of the research, full and written consent was obtained from all the participants and beneficiaries.

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Results

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis of covariance on the average post-test scores of the Gottman, cognitive-behavioral and control groups in the marital satisfaction score. The results of this test show that by controlling the relationship of 89% of marital satisfaction pre-test scores ($p<0.001$) and based on the calculated F coefficient (337.5), there is a significant difference between the estimated average marital satisfaction scores of the subjects of Gottman, cognitive-behavioral and control groups. In other words, the difference between the average marital satisfaction after controlling the pre-test variable in the three Gottman, cognitive-behavioral and control groups is significant. The amount of differences indicates that receiving 46% of the covariance of the post-test scores was caused by training. That is, 46% of the difference in the average marital satisfaction scores of the three groups in the post-test stage is caused by the education factor.

Table 2. The results of the covariance analysis test on the average post-test scores of the Gottman method, cognitive-behavioral method and control groups in the marital satisfaction score

Variable	Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta	Power
Marital satisfaction	Pretest	1759	1	1759	337.5	0.001	0.899	1
	Group	1699	2	849	16.3	0.001	0.462	0.999
	Error	1978	38	52				
	Total	343661	42					

Table 3. The results of the covariance analysis test on the average post-test scores of the Gottman, cognitive-behavioral and control groups in the problem solving score

Variable	Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta	Power
Problem solving	Pretest	671	1	671	335.4	0.001	0.989	1
	Group	137	2	68.8	34.3	0.001	0.664	1
	Error	76	38	2				
	Total	10232	42					

Table 3 shows the results of covariance analysis on the average post-test scores of Gottman, cognitive-behavioral and control groups in the problem solving score. The results of this test show that by controlling the relationship of 98% of the problem solving pretest scores ($p<0.001$) and based on the calculated F coefficient (335.4), there is a significant difference between the estimated average problem solving scores of the subjects of the Gottman, cognitive-behavioral and control groups. In other words, the difference between the mean of emotional self-efficacy, after

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controlling the pre-test variable in the three Gottman, cognitive-behavioral and control groups, is significant. The number of differences indicates that receiving 64% of the covariance of the post-test scores was caused by training. That is, 64% of the difference in the average problem solving scores of the three groups in the post-test phase is caused by the education factor.

Table 4. Marital satisfaction difference test in pre-test, post-test and follow-up of Gottman couple therapy

Variable	Mean	SD	N	T value	p
Pretest	74.7	20.1	14	-6.21	**0.001**
Posttest	91.7	27.5			
Posttest	91.7	27.5	14	1.557	**0.144**
Follow-up	**90.9**	**27.6**			

Table 4 shows the results of examining the difference in mean marital satisfaction in the pre-test, post-test and follow-up of Gottman couple therapy. The comparison of pre-test and post-test marital satisfaction averages indicates that the average marital satisfaction after participating in Gottman couple therapy is higher than the average before participating in it. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T test with a value of -6.021 and a significance level of 0.001 indicates that with 99% confidence, marital satisfaction has increased after participating in Gottman couple therapy. But the comparison of post-test and follow-up shows that there is not much difference between the averages of these two stages. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T-test with a value of 1.557 and a significance level of 0.144 indicates that there is no significant difference between marital satisfaction posttest and the follow-up. Therefore, we can talk about the stability of marital satisfaction after participating in Gottman couple therapy.

Table 5. Problem solving difference test in pre-test, post-test and follow-up of Gottman couple therapy

Variable	Mean	SD	N	T value	p
Pretest	12.2	4.7	14	-8.62	**0.001**
Posttest	17.1	4.3			
Posttest	17.1	4.3	14	0.186	**0.856**
Follow-up	**17.1**	**3.8**			

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Table 5 shows the results of examining the difference in the mean of problem solving in the pre-test, post-test and follow-up of Gottman couple therapy. Comparison of pre-test and post-test problem solving averages shows that the problem solving average after participating in Gottman couple therapy is higher than the average before participating in it. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T-test with a value of -8.662 and a significance level of 0.001 indicates that with 99% confidence, problem solving has increased after participating in Gottman couple therapy. But the comparison of post-test and follow-up shows that there is not much difference between the averages of these two stages. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T-test with a value of 0.186 and a significance level of 0.856 indicates that there is no significant difference between post-test and follow-up problem solving. Therefore, we can talk about the stability of problem solving after participating in Gottman's couple therapy method.

Table 6. Marital satisfaction difference test in pre-test, post-test and follow-up of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy

Variable	Mean	SD	N	T value	p
Pretest	77.2	18.5	14	-7.12	**0.001**
Posttest	89.7	20.4			
Posttest	89.7	20.4	14	-1.59	**0.309**
Follow-up	**90.5**	**21.9**			

Table 6 shows the results of examining the difference in mean marital satisfaction in the pre-test, post-test and follow-up of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy. The comparison of pre-test and post-test marital satisfaction averages indicates that the average marital satisfaction after participating in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is higher than the average before participating in it. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T test with a value of -7.120 and a significance level of 0.001 indicates that with 99% confidence, marital satisfaction has increased after participating in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy. But the comparison of post-test and follow-up shows that there is not much difference between the averages of these two stages. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T-test with a value of -1.059 and a significance level of 0.309 indicates that there is no significant difference between

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marital satisfaction between posttest and follow-up. Therefore, we can talk about the stability of marital satisfaction after participating in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy.

Table 7. Problem solving difference test in pre-test, post-test and follow-up of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy

Variable	Mean	SD	N	T value	p
Pretest	13.1	3.8	14	-7.38	**0.001**
Posttest	15.1	4.1			
Posttest	15.1	4.1	14	-0.508	**0.62**
Follow-up	**15.2**	**4.2**			

Table 7 shows the results of examining the difference in the mean of problem solving in pre-test, post-test and follow-up of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy. The comparison of pre-test and post-test problem solving averages shows that the problem solving average after participating in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy is higher than the average before participating in it. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T-test with a value of -7.380 and a significance level of 0.001 indicates that with 99% confidence, problem solving has increased after participating in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy. But the comparison of post-test and follow-up shows that there is not much difference between the averages of these two stages. The observed difference between the two averages based on the T-test with a value of -0.508 and a significance level of 0.620 indicates that there is no significant difference between post-test and follow-up problem solving. Therefore, we can talk about the stability of problem solving after participating in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy.

Table 8. Difference test of pre-test and post-test marital satisfaction according to the type of education

Variable	Mean	SD	N	T value	p
Gottman	14	15.8	9.4	1.44	**0.16**
CBT	**14**	**11.5**	**5.7**		

Table 8 shows the results of the pre-test and post-test differences in marital satisfaction according to the type of education. The average scores show that the average scores of Gottman's couple therapy method are higher. However, the observed difference between the two averages based on the T test with a value of 1.448 and a significance level of Sig = 0.160 indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean score of the pre-test and post-test differences of Gottman and cognitive behavioral methods in marital satisfaction. Therefore, the above hypothesis is not confirmed.

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Table 9. Test of the difference between pre-test and post-test of problem solving according to the type of training

Variable	Mean	SD	N	T value	p
Gottman	14	4.9	2.1	4.79	**0.001**
CBT	**14**	**1.9**	**0.9**		

Table 9 shows the results of the pre-test and post-test differences in problem solving according to the type of training. The average scores show that the average scores of Gottman's couple therapy method are higher. Also, the observed difference between the two averages based on the T test with a value of 4.791 and a significance level of 0.001 indicates that there is a significant difference between the mean score of the pre-test and post-test differences of Gottman and cognitive behavioral methods in problem solving. Therefore, the above hypothesis is confirmed

Discussion

First hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between cognitive behavioral therapy and marital satisfaction. According to the analysis of the collected data, it was observed that this hypothesis was confirmed in the sense that cognitive behavioral couple therapy had an effect on marital satisfaction. The result of the mentioned hypothesis has similarities with some results in the researches of other researchers. As an example, Beasley and Ager (2019), Carr (2019) and Shokhmgar et al. (2020) in their research achieved results consistent with the present study in relation to the effect of therapeutic training on marital satisfaction. .

In explaining this research finding, it can be said that when irrational beliefs and knowledge are challenged and then positive beliefs and actions are replaced by practice, the level of marital satisfaction will increase. In other words, this approach has made the couple's awareness and sensitivity to their irrational beliefs and behaviors to be higher and as a result to correct their relationships and communication interactions.

Third hypothesis: There is a significant statistical relationship between cognitive behavioral couple therapy and couples' problem solving.

Observations showed that this relationship was statistically significant and this hypothesis was also confirmed. In confirmation of this finding with other researchers' results, we can refer to the studies of Bélanger et al. (2015) and Fischer et al. (2016). In the explanation of the mentioned finding, it can be said that when through practice, positive beliefs and actions replace previous behaviors, problem solving skills improve. It can also be claimed that after participating in the

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therapeutic-educational sessions using the cognitive-behavioral method, the couples learned to renegotiate their obligations and responsibilities, communicate effectively with each other, and talk to each other about the challenging issues of this relationship.

Fourth hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between Gottman couple therapy and marital satisfaction of couples. The findings showed that couple therapy with Gottman's approach also had an effect on marital satisfaction and this relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was also accepted. In relation to the effectiveness of couple therapy or training based on Gottman on marital satisfaction, there have been few studies that confirm the results of the present research and have witnessed the effectiveness of Gottman training on increasing marital satisfaction (directly or indirectly). For example, Davoodvandi et al. (2018) in their research has seen the effectiveness of group couple therapy using the Gottman method on reducing marital exhaustion and increasing couples' satisfaction. This result is similar to the research results of EbadiRad and Kariminejad (2017), (Saadati Shamir et al., 2019) and Havassi et al. (2017) and they confirm and strengthen each other.

Sixth hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between Gottman's couple therapy and couples' problem solving.

The test of the desired hypothesis indicated the relationship between these two variables, so that couples therapy in this style has improved problem solving among the couples under investigation. In confirmation of this finding, Havassi et al. (2017) also investigated the effectiveness of Gottman-based training on conflict resolution styles and the findings showed a different statistical relationship between the pre-test and post-test and it was observed that the subjects studied after the training in styles conflict resolution has improved significantly.

It should be mentioned that all the results related to both approaches (cognitive-behavioral and Gottman) have been preserved in the follow-up phase and the previous findings have been repeated. Also, one of the other important points in the study is that the cognitive-behavioral approach and Gottman's approach are both almost equally effective in the dependent variables studied (marital satisfaction, emotional self-efficacy and problem solving), and in other words, it can be said that no significant statistical difference has been observed between these two

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approaches. Finally, in the end, it can be said that the results of the current research have answered all the hypothesized relationships.

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. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

S.M.M.,P.E., B.M, R.P and S.B 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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