Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal
IEEPJ
University of Hormozgan
Online ISSN: 2588 - 4395
Homepage: https://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir

The Effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Family Therapy on Parents' Psychological Cohesion and Family Conflicts

Elaheh Sedqi Khalifani[1]✉, Sepideh Esmzamani Aghmiuni[2], Nili Gedavloo[3], Melika Ghaderi Barmi[4], Azam Derafshy[5]

1. BA in General Psychology, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran, elahesedqii@gmail.com
2. MA in Counseling, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran
3. MA in General Psychology, Quds City Branch, Islamic Azad University, Quds City, Iran
4. MA in Clinical Psychology, Tonekabon Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran
5. MA in General Psychology, Quds City Branch, Islamic Azad University, Quds City, Iran

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 26 Mar. 2025
Received in revised form 16 Jun. 2025
Accepted 18 Oct. 2025
Published online 01 Mar. 2026

Keywords:
Emotion-Focused Family Therapy,
Psychological coherence,
Parental family conflict

ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Family Therapy on parents' psychological coherence and family conflicts.

Methods: This research employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest structure and a control group. The statistical population included all parents of tenth-grade students in Karaj during the first three months of 2024. Thirty eligible volunteers were selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (15 participants in each). Data were collected using Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (1987) and the Parental Conflict Questionnaire by Barati and Sanaei (1995). The intervention consisted of eight 60-minute sessions of Emotion-Focused Family Therapy, while the control group received no training. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA).

Results: The findings indicated that Emotion-Focused Family Therapy significantly increased psychological coherence and reduced parental conflicts ($p < .05$). Eta-squared values further revealed that 0.342 of the variances in psychological coherence and 0.491 of the variances in family conflicts were attributable to the intervention.

Conclusions: The results support the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Family Therapy as a psychological intervention that enhances psychological coherence and reduces family conflicts among parents.

Cite this article: Sedqi Khalifani, E., Esmzamani Aghmiuni, S., Gedavloo, N., Ghaderi Barmi, M. & Derafshy, A. (2026). The effectiveness of emotion-focused family therapy on parents' psychological cohesion and family conflicts. *Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal*, 8 (1), 1-11.
DOI: https//doi.org/ 10.22034/8.1.1

© The Author(s).
Publisher: University of Hormozgan.
DOI: https// doi.org/ 10.22034/8.1.1

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

Introduction

Stable family relationships play a crucial role in the development of children and adolescents. In this regard, parents are the first, most important, and most influential individuals in every person's life. Most developmental theorists share the view that the quality of the relationship experienced between individuals and their parents has a significant impact on the formation of personality and the mental health of children. Conflict arises when couples, due to the cooperation and joint decisions they make, display varying degrees of independence and interdependence. These differences can be classified along a continuum ranging from mild to severe conflict (Moradi Chegha Marani et al., 2021). Parental interactions within the family are an important source of learning for children and adolescents, shaping how they respond to conflict and emotional challenges through behavioral modeling (Mills-Koonce et al., 2020). Therefore, the ability to manage and resolve conflicts constructively can strengthen the relationship between partners and help them establish a closer and more intimate bond (Olchukwan, 2022).

Long-term family conflicts between parents can lead to decreased well-being, reduced family cohesion, and ultimately divorce (Jahani Dowlatabadi & Eshayeri, 2022). Psychological coherence, defined as an individual's ability to manage psychological stressors, enables people to tolerate high levels of stress and psychological pressure. It also helps them maintain psychological and cognitive balance when facing life challenges (Ma et al., 2021). Schindler et al. (2019) argue that psychological coherence reflects an individual's confidence in their ability to cope with various life situations, which enhances feelings of autonomy and self-regulation and contributes to healthier behaviors and improved functioning. Accordingly, a sense of psychological coherence represents a particular way of thinking, being, and acting with inner confidence and clarity, enabling individuals to recognize and effectively utilize the resources available to them (Del-Pino-Casado et al., 2019).

One important therapeutic approach for improving adjustment and addressing conflicts in family life is Emotion-Focused Family Therapy. In this approach, individuals' emotional experiences are identified and processed, and maladaptive interaction patterns that contribute to distress in marital relationships are reorganized and improved (Linhares & Allen, 2019). By fostering constructive interactions between partners and identifying secure attachment patterns, this therapeutic approach promotes greater compatibility, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction, focusing on modifying

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

attachment-related behaviors as a means of improving distressed relationships (Beasley & Ager, 2019). Emotion-focused therapy encompasses several core concepts, including empathy, emotional processing, and healing attachment-related injuries while maintaining and rebuilding loving relationships (Vazhapilly & Rees, 2018). The ultimate goal of emotion-focused couple therapy is to help partners access underlying emotions and facilitate positive interactions, thereby increasing accessibility and trust between them (Girard & Weddle, 2017).

Given the importance of interpersonal relationships between parents and children, research in this area is inherently complex and challenging. One reason for this complexity is that parents and children belong to two different generations, which may contribute to differences in expectations, perspectives, and communication styles. Considering that conflicts between parents and children can lead to various educational and developmental consequences and may influence students' academic, social, and occupational futures, examining factors that improve family functioning is essential. Therefore, the present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Family Therapy on parents' psychological coherence and family conflicts. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the question of whether Emotion-Focused Family Therapy has a significant effect on parents' psychological coherence and family conflicts.

Material and Methods

The present study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest structure and a control group. The statistical population consisted of all parents of tenth-grade adolescent students in Karaj during the first three months of 2024. From this population, 30 eligible volunteers were selected and randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group (15 participants in each group).

The inclusion criteria were willingness to participate in the sessions and having basic literacy skills (reading and writing). The exclusion criteria included the presence of severe psychiatric disorders, unwillingness to continue cooperation, and absence from more than two treatment sessions.

Measures

Sense of Coherence Questionnaire: The 13-item Sense of Coherence (SOC) questionnaire was developed by Antonovsky (1987). It measures three components: manageability (items 3, 5, 10,

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

and 13), comprehensibility (items 2, 6, 8, 9, and 11), and meaningfulness (items 1, 4, 7, and 12). The instrument uses a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high). The total score is obtained by summing the item scores, yielding a range from 13 to 91, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of coherence. Antonovsky (1987) confirmed the construct validity of the scale and reported internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.82 to 0.95 for the subscales. In Iran, Mohammadzadeh et al. (2010) standardized the questionnaire and reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 and a test–retest reliability coefficient of 0.66 for the total scale. The construct validity of the instrument was also confirmed, and its concurrent validity with the 45-item Psychological Hardiness Questionnaire was reported as 0.54.

Parental Family Conflict Questionnaire: The Parental Family Conflict Questionnaire was developed by Barati and Sanaei (1995) and consists of 54 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Items 3, 11, 15, 26, 30, 33, 45, 47, and 54 are reverse scored. The questionnaire assesses eight dimensions: reduced cooperation, reduced sexual relationship, increased emotional reactions, increased triangulation or seeking children's support, increased personal relationships with one's own relatives, reduced relationships with the spouse's relatives and friends, separation of financial matters, and reduced effective communication. Higher scores indicate greater levels of conflict, whereas lower scores reflect better relationship quality. The total score ranges from 54 to 270. In the original study by Barati and Sanaei (1995), the content validity of the instrument was confirmed by experts, and its reliability assessed using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.71.

Intervention

Emotion-Focused Family Therapy sessions were conducted based on the therapeutic protocol developed by Johnson and Greenman (2008). The intervention was implemented by the researcher in eight sessions lasting 60 minutes each. The control group did not receive any training during the study period. A summary of the therapeutic sessions is presented in Table 1.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

Table 1. Summary of Emotion-Focused Family Therapy Sessions

Session	Content
1	Introduction, establishing rapport and therapeutic alliance, assessment of treatment motivation, explanation of the concept of emotion, attention to pleasant and unpleasant emotional states
2	Acceptance and reflection of emotional and interactional experiences, identification of problematic interaction patterns, assessment of relationship problems and attachment barriers, establishment of therapeutic agreement, continued assessment and identification of the negative interaction cycle
3	Exploration of salient attachment-related experiences, identification of fears and feelings of insecurity, acknowledgment of unexpressed core emotions
4	Clarification of key emotional responses, alignment between therapist and participants' understanding, acceptance of the interaction cycle by participants
5	Expression of emotions, increased awareness of attachment needs, acceptance of emotions, deepening engagement with emotional experiences
6	Deepening emotional engagement, improving interaction strategies, focusing on the self rather than blaming the partner, redefining attachment
7	Restructuring interactions and changing relational events, symbolizing wishes—particularly suppressed wishes—and facilitating new solutions for resolving problems
8	Consolidation of interaction restructuring, discovering new solutions for old problems, facilitating termination, and clarifying the connection between past and present interaction patterns

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the research before participation, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes. Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Additionally, after the completion of the study, the training sessions were offered to the control group to ensure fairness and ethical responsibility.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). Prior to the main analysis, statistical assumptions were examined. The normality of score distributions was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which indicated that the data followed a normal distribution. Box's M test showed that the homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices was satisfied, as the test was not significant. Furthermore, Levene's test was conducted to examine the homogeneity of variances, and the non-significant results confirmed that the assumption of equal variances for the pretest and posttest scores was met.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

Results

A chi-square test was conducted to examine whether the two groups were equivalent in terms of participants' age. The non-significant chi-square statistic indicated that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups regarding age ($\chi^2 = 0.921$, $p > .05$). Therefore, the two groups were considered comparable.

Descriptive statistics for the research variables in the pretest and posttest stages for both the experimental and control groups, along with the results of the covariance analysis controlling for pretest scores, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Indicators variables in Pretest and Posttest by Group, Along ANCOVA Results

Variable	Group	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD	F	P	Eta Squared
Sense of Coherence	Experimental	24.48	4.59	39.37	5.76	17.736	< .001	0.342
	Control	25.68	4.76	25.99	5.27			
Parental Conflict	Experimental	18.54	3.78	11.27	2.87	28.293	< .001	0.491
	Control	18.87	3.69	18.20	2.59			

Based on the results shown in Table 2, Emotion-Focused Family Therapy was effective in increasing parents' sense of coherence and reducing parental family conflicts ($p < .05$). The eta-squared values also showed that 0.342 of the variances in sense of coherence and 0.491 of the variances in parental conflicts were attributable to the Emotion-Focused Family Therapy intervention.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) on parents' psychological coherence and family conflicts. The findings indicated that EFFT significantly improved the psychological coherence of parents of high-school students. This result is consistent with previous research. For example, McLennan et al. (2021), in a study examining the effectiveness of remote family counseling based on evidence from systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and qualitative studies involving twenty investigations, concluded that remote family counseling is effective across a wide range of family conflicts, marital intimacy, and indicators of family health and functioning.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

The above finding may be explained by the fact that emotion-focused group therapy enables individuals to enhance their emotional awareness, regulate negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and unresolved past experiences, and ultimately strengthen their psychological adjustment. Emotion-focused group therapy encourages clients to challenge distressing thoughts, develop alternative self-statements, and reduce emotional rumination that leads to psychological and physical distress. Addressing such themes during EFFT sessions promotes improvements in interpersonal forgiveness—including reconnection, controlling retaliatory impulses, and tolerating resentment—thereby increasing individuals' psychological coherence.

The results also indicated that EFFT was effective in reducing parental family conflicts. This finding is also aligned with previous research. For instance, Warp and McGinn (2019), in a study examining clinical and ethical considerations for providing couple and family therapy remotely, reported that—when ethical standards are maintained—remote delivery of family and couple therapy can effectively reduce family problems and improve family functioning.

This result may be interpreted as follows: EFFT aims to help individuals identify emotional experiences and transform them into understandable and constructive messages. Emotional skills—defined as the ability to recognize and express emotions and empathize with others—enhance intimacy and emotional security, reduce defensiveness, and are essential for maintaining a successful relationship. Emotion-focused group therapy specifically targets persistent negative interaction cycles rooted in deep emotional vulnerabilities. It aims to reduce distress, depression, and resulting negative automatic thoughts by intervening at the emotional level. Overall, EFFT helps individuals explore, expand, and reorganize their emotional experiences, enabling them to modify these emotions through new interpersonal experiences. Consequently, proper emotional regulation fosters awareness-based action, deeper personal conviction, a sense of purpose, the feeling of achieving internal goals, constructive relationships with others, and ultimately, increased adjustment and reduced conflict.

The study had several limitations, including reliance on self-report measures, the absence of a follow-up period, and the inability to compare EFFT with other therapeutic interventions. Based on the observed effectiveness of EFFT in enhancing psychological coherence and reducing

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

parents' family conflicts, it is recommended that governmental and private organizations involved in family education consider implementing such therapeutic approaches as part of their programs for addressing marital and family problems. Future studies are encouraged to examine these variables in other populations and contexts, and to investigate the therapeutic effectiveness of EFFT across a broader range of marital problems with more diverse samples of couples.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

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.

Funding

The authors did (not) receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

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.

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.

References

Barati, T., & Sanaei, B. (1995). *Family and marriage assessment scales*. Be’sat Publications.

Jahani Dowlatabad, E., & Ashayeri, T. (2022). Examining the role of marital conflicts and conflict resolution styles in the tendency toward divorce (Case study: Married citizens of Ardabil). *Social and Cultural Strategies*, *11*(4), 341–376.

Moradi Chegha Marani, A., Keshavarz Afshar, H., & Gholamalilavasani, M. (2021). Comparing the effectiveness of remote family counseling and cognitive behavioral couple therapy on family conflicts and marital intimacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Contemporary Psychology Biannual Journal*, *16*(1), 109–127.

Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unraveling the mystery of health: How people manage stress and stay well*. Jossey-Bass.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

Beasley, C. C., & Ager, R. (2019). Emotionally focused couples therapy: A systematic review of its effectiveness over the past 19 years. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 16*(2), 144–159.

Del-Pino-Casado, R., Espinosa-Medina, A., López-Martínez, C., & Orgeta, V. (2019). Sense of coherence, burden, and mental health in caregiving: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 242*, 14–21.

Girard, A., & Woolley, S. R. (2017). Using emotionally focused therapy to treat sexual desire discrepancy in couples. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 43*(8), 720–735.

Johnson, S. M., & Gurman, A. (2008). Emotionally focused couple therapy. In *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (4th ed., pp. 107–137). Guilford Press.

Linhof, A. Y., & Allan, R. (2019). A narrative expansion of emotionally focused therapy with intercultural couples. *The Family Journal, 27*(1), 44–49.

Ma, Y., Chen, X., Nunez, A., Yan, M., Zhang, B., & Zhao, F. (2020). Influences of parenting on adolescents' empathy through the intervening effects of self-integrity and sense of coherence. *Children and Youth Services Review, 116*, Article 105246.

Mahammadzadeh, A., Poursharifi, H., & Alipour, A. (2010). Validation of Sense of Coherence (SOC) 13-item scale in an Iranian sample. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 5*, 1451–1455.

McLean, S. A., Booth, A. T., Schnabel, A., Wright, B. J., Painter, F. L., & McIntosh, J. E. (2021). Exploring the efficacy of telehealth for family therapy through systematic, meta-analytic, and qualitative evidence. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 24*, 244–266.

Mills-Koonce, W. R., Cao, H., Heilbron, N., & Cox, M. J. (2020). Marital relationship and early development. In *Encyclopedia of infant and early childhood development*. Elsevier.

Oluchukwu, O. P. (2021). The use of social media in resolving marital conflict. *International Journal of Research Publications, 69*(1), 544–555.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]

Schindler, L., Shaheen, M., Saar-Ashkenazy, R., Odeh, K. B., Soreq, H., Friedman, A., & Kirschbaum, C. (2019). Growing up during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The interplay of sense of coherence and the psychological and psychoendocrine consequences of traumatic stress. *Psychoneuroendocrinology, 100*, S2–S3.

Vazhappilly, J. J., & Reyes, M. E. S. (2018). Efficacy of emotion-focused couples communication program for enhancing couples' communication and marital satisfaction among distressed partners. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 48*, 79–88.

Wrape, E. R., & McGinn, M. M. (2019). Clinical and ethical considerations for delivering couple and family therapy via telehealth. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 45*(2), 296–308.

[Downloaded from ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir on 2026-11-21]