

# Effectiveness of group counseling based on choice theory on increasing intimacy and marital satisfaction and reducing marital conflicts in married women

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## Original Article

### Abstract

**Introduction:** Marriage is described as the most important and the most basic human relationship. Increasing intimacy and marital satisfaction and reducing marital conflicts are among the most important components of a stable marriage. Counselling and therapies based on choice theory have been used as one of the effective methods on improving stable marriage components. This study was performed to determine the effect of group counselling based on choice theory on increasing intimacy and marital satisfaction and reducing marital conflicts in married women in the city of Bandar Abbas.

**Methods:** This research was semi-experimental, with pre-test and post-test design with control group. The statistical population included married women referred to consulting centers in Bandar Abbas and volunteered to participate in group counselling. So, 45 of these individuals, after personal interviews, were selected, and randomly placed in the experimental and the control groups. The two groups were subjected to research questionnaires (including marital intimacy, marital satisfaction, and marital conflicts questionnaires), before the experiment. Group counselling based on choice theory sessions were held, and after eight weeks, the questionnaires were filled by both groups again. Data was analyzed using single - and multi-variable covariance analysis test and the Tukey post hoc test.

**Results:** Findings showed that group counselling based on Choice Theory caused an increase in intimacy and marital satisfaction, and a decrease in marital conflicts in married women in the experimental group compared to the control group ( $P < 0.01$  and  $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** According to the results, it can be said that group counselling based on Choice Theory has a considerable effect on the improvement of marital relations between couples.

**Key words:** Choice Theory, Marital, Intimacy, Conflict

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## Introduction:

Marriage is described as the most important and the most basic human relationship, because it provides an initial structure for establishing family relationships and educating the future generations, and marital satisfaction is one of the most important indicators of a healthy family (1).

According to the definition, marital satisfaction refers to the situation where the couple feels happy and content about their marriage and about being together (2). Ellis states that marital satisfaction is actual feeling of contentment, satisfaction, and pleasure, experienced by the husband or the wife when they consider all aspects of their marriage (3).

Marital satisfaction is an overall evaluation of the status of marital relationship (4,5) and is considered a crucial aspect of the marital system (6), and has a large share in advancement and attaining life goals (7). Ever since the first days of the marital relationship, serious and repeated disagreements occur, that can threaten marital satisfaction and stability seriously, if not resolved (8). Marital satisfaction is a condition in which the wife and the husband feel happiness and are satisfied with one another, which is generated by mutual interest, caring for one another, acceptance, understanding, and satisfying each other's needs (including sexual needs) (9). Marital satisfaction is a multi-dimensional variable, whose level is determined by a combination of Ideal Cognitive Distortion variables (including marital satisfaction, personality issues, relationships, conflict resolutions, financial managements, leisure activities, sexual intercourse, raising children, family and friends, and religious orientations) (10).

In general, intimacy is considered a necessary part of a relationship. Contractual definitions of intimacy include factors relating to intercourse, talking with no reservations, division of tasks, sexual desires, and affection (11). Based on the definition by Bagarozzi, intimacy is closeness, similarity, and a romantic personal relationship with another individual that requires cognition and deep understanding of the other individual, in order to express the feelings and thoughts that are used as the source of similarity and closeness (12).

Conflict is discord and disagreement of two individuals, disharmony of views and objectives, behavior that takes place in order to show

disagreement with the other, and the quarrel between individuals due to uneven interests, varying objectives and beliefs (13). Monte Gomer defines marital conflict as an interaction in which one or both spouses feel discomfort regarding certain aspects of their relationship and try to resolve it (14).

Marital conflict is a constant and meaningful discord between the spouses that is usually reported by one of them. Being meaningful means affecting the functions of the spouses, and being constant indicates disagreements that are not eliminated over time (15). Greeff and Bruyne believe that conflicts arise when one of the parties realizes that the other has suppressed some of the issues of interest (16). According to Glasser, marital conflict results from disharmony between the wife and the husband regarding type of needs and their resolutions, self-centered-ness, difference in desires, behavioral patterns, and irresponsible behavior toward the marital relationship (17).

Bradbury, Rogge, and Lawrence express that most of the duties assigned to couples regarding marriage in the past 20 years, are, directly or indirectly, aimed at resolving problems and conflicts, and that conflict resolution in couples has an important interfering objective, which shows that conflicts have special positions in marriage. Even in societies, with serious and apparent conflicts and the aim of conflict resolution is to prevent unfortunate outcomes, conflict management is considered an important part of the changing process (17).

There are many theoretical views, with different approaches, aimed at clearing couples' problems, increasing their intimacy and marital satisfaction, and reducing marital conflicts; Glasser's Choice Theory is one of these views (18). This theory considers a loving and intimate relation necessary for healthy life, and provides basic information for therapists for improving the lives of clients (19). Glasser maintains that behavior includes the four components of functioning, thinking, feeling, and physiology; most people control the components of functioning and thinking, directly, and the components of feeling and physiology indirectly. The main emphasis of the Choice Theory is on the two components of functioning and thinking (17). The

psychological concept of outer control is another concept of this theory. Outer control is that spouses try to control the other party by using the seven destructive controlling habits. These seven habits are: 1) Criticisms or finding faults; 2) Blaming; 3) Complaining; 4) Whining; 5) Threatening; 6) Punishing; and 7) Bribing in order to control the other (20). Glasser also claims that if couples abandon these habits, and assume the seven loving habits of (1- Listening; 2- Supporting; 3- Encouraging; 4- Respecting; 5- Depending; 6- Accepting; and 7- Constantly discussing disagreements), instead, their difficulties will be reduced (21).

Many different studies have reported the effectiveness of Glasser's Choice Theory on general health (22), identity crisis (23), improvement of relational patterns (24), and couples' intimacy (25).

Considering the results of studies performed, this research aims to find an answer to the basic question: "Does group counseling based on Choice Theory affect the increase in intimacy and marital satisfaction and the decrease in marital conflicts?" In other words, in addition to determining the effect of group counseling based on Choice Theory on increasing intimacy and marital satisfaction and reducing marital conflicts, this study compares the effectiveness of group counseling based on Choice Theory on the three variables of marital intimacy, marital satisfaction, and marital conflicts.

## Methods:

This research was an applied research on the basis of purpose and a semi-experimental research on the basis of method that was run with pre-test and post-test design with control group. The statistical population included married women visiting the Mehr-e Jonoub counselling and psychological Service Center in the city of Bandar Abbas in 2016, who had visited the center in order to resolve marital problems. The statistical sample included 45 married women, who according to inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected from the initial 70 subjects. Inclusion criteria included married women that had been married for more than five years. Exclusion criteria included women

who had been divorced, had been in the verge of divorce and had used the psychiatric drugs. The members of the selected sample were placed randomly in the experimental and control groups. Thus, there were 15 individuals in each group.

The tools used in the research were three questionnaires: the marital intimacy questionnaire by Walker and Thompson; the marital satisfaction questionnaire by Enrich; and the marital conflicts questionnaire by Walker and Thompson. Sanaie, Boostanipour, and Barati reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the marital intimacy questionnaire to be 0.91 to 0.97. Sanaie has obtained the reliability of this tool to be a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.95 (26,10,27). In this study, for determining the reliability of research tools, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. The coefficient for the marital intimacy questionnaire was 0.98, for the marital satisfaction questionnaire, it was 0.83, and for the marital conflicts questionnaire was 0.89.

For determining the validity of the questionnaire, Confirmatory Factor Analysis with Lisrel software was used. Results show that all items affect the factor weight above 0.30 and as a result, the factor structure of the questionnaire was confirmed.

After performing the questionnaires in the pre-testing stage, group counseling based on Choice Theory was held for 8 sessions of 2 hours. The content of the sessions are as follows:

**Session one:** Introducing members, Objectives, Introducing group counseling and its benefits, introducing Choice Theory, emphasizing the ten basic principles of the Choice Theory, describing of the process of holding group counseling sessions, discussing member expectations, and responding to questions.

**Session two:** Identifying marital problems based on Choice Theory and describing the causes of marital dissatisfaction, reduced marital intimacy, and increased marital conflicts in the relationships between couples, and describing each of these variables, and expressing the views and experiences of each of the members regarding the variables of marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, and marital conflicts.

**Session three:** Identifying outer/inner controls, the seven destructive controlling habits, and their

consequences in the marital relationship, and discussing experiences of members in using the seven destructive controlling habits (that include Criticisms or finding faults; Blaming; Complaining; Whining; Threatening; Punishing; and Bribing in order to control the other) and their consequences.

**Fourth session:** Discussion regarding abandoning the seven controlling habits, and replacing them

**Fifth session:** Analyzing the desired world of the spouses of group members, and discussing entering their world.

**Sixth session:** Discussing experiences of members regarding discussion about the desired world, and mentioning the five marital needs.

**Seventh session:** Analyzing the five marital needs, and expressing the experiences of members regarding the five marital needs, and mentioning the subject of general behavior and its components.

**Eighth session:** Compiling a program for improving the quality of relation with husband, emphasizing reducing conflicts, increasing intimacy and marital satisfaction.

## Results:

Before the analysis of the hypotheses and applying the covariance analysis test, for ensuring the homogeneity of research variables, the Levin test, and for analyzing the normal distribution of research variables, the Shapiro and Wilk test was used.

According to the results in table 1, the values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test probability show that the distribution of research variables is normal, hence for analysis of the research results, parametric tests can be used. The Levin test was used for ensuring the homogeneity of the variances of the research variables.

As we can see in table 2, the null hypothesis for the equality of the variances of the scores of the two groups in the research variables is confirmed. In other words, the equality assumption of the variances of scores in the experimental and control groups was confirmed.

As the results on table 3 show, the value of F between the diffraction and independent variables is 2.121, 2.047, and 0.352, which are not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the assumption of non-homogeneity in the regression slopes is rejected, and the regression slopes of the three variables are homogeneous. Thus, the conditions for using statistical covariance analysis tests are met, and it is possible to test the research hypotheses.

The main research hypothesis is that group counseling based on Choice Theory is effective on increasing intimacy and marital satisfaction and reducing marital conflicts in married women. To this end, the average scores of the marital intimacy, marital satisfaction, and marital conflicts, in the experimental and the control groups, were compared using the Multi-variable covariance analysis (MANCOVA), after controlling the effect of the pre-test.

As we can see in table 4, significance levels of all tests indicate that there is a significant difference between at least one of the dependent variables (marital intimacy, marital satisfaction, and marital conflicts) in the groups studied. Therefore, the hypothesis that: "group counseling based on Choice Theory is effective on increasing intimacy and marital satisfaction and reducing marital conflicts", was confirmed.

As the results in table 5 show, there is a significant difference between the average scores of the post-test of marital intimacy ( $F(25 \text{ and } 1) = 51.14, p < 0.01, \eta = 0.672$ ), marital satisfaction ( $F(25 \text{ and } 1) = 13.831, p < 0.01, \eta = 0.356$ ), and marital conflicts ( $F(25 \text{ and } 1) = 3.82, p < 0.05, \eta = 0.184$ ), after eliminating the effect of the pre-test, in the groups tested. Such that the average post-test scores of the experimental group were significantly higher than the control group in marital intimacy and marital satisfaction and significantly lower than the control group in marital conflicts. In other words, group counseling based on Choice Theory caused an increase in marital intimacy and satisfaction, and a decrease in marital conflicts in married women, in the post-test compared to the control group.

**Table 1. Analyzing the normal distribution of research variables**

Variables		Marital intimacy		Marital satisfaction		Marital conflicts	
		Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Shapiro and Wilk	Z=	0.947	0.956	0.965	0.959	0.98	0.981
	Sig=	0.039	0.085	0.196	0.107	0.613	0.649

P&lt;0.05 &amp; Sig. P&lt;0.01

**Table 2. Results of the Levin test regarding the equality assumption of the variances of research variables in the two groups**

Variable	F	1 <sup>st</sup> degree of freedom	2 <sup>nd</sup> degree of freedom	Significance
Marital intimacy	3.276	2	42	0.058
Marital satisfaction	.091	2	42	0.136
Marital conflicts	0.525	2	42	0.596

**Table 3. Results of homogeneity analysis of the slope of variable regressions**

Variable	Average Squares	Degree of freedom	F	Significance
Marital intimacy * groups	2999.86	2 and 33	2.121	0.136
Marital satisfaction * groups	1640.03	2 and 33	2.047	0.145
Marital conflicts * groups	497.206	2 and 33	0.352	0.706

**Table 4. Results of Multi-variable covariance analysis for comparing the averages of marital intimacy, marital satisfaction, and marital conflicts, in the experimental selection group and the control group**

Variables	Name of test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Significance	Square
Groups	Pilice effect	0.729	20.59	3	23	0.0001	0.729
	Wilkes lambda	0.271	20.59	3	23	0.0001	0.729
		2.686	20.59	3	23	0.0001	0.729

P&lt;0.05 &amp; Sig. P&lt;0.01

**Table 5. Results of covariance analysis for comparing the average post-test scores (of marital intimacy, marital satisfaction, and marital conflicts) in the experimental and the control groups**

Variable	Change sources	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Average square	F	Significance level	Squares
Marital intimacy	Pre-test	25.94	1	25.94	0.284	0.599	0.011
	Group	4667.57	1	4667.57	51.14	0.0001	0.672
	Error	2281.7	25	91.26			
Marital satisfaction	Pre-test	772.69	1	772.69	1.65	0.211	0.062
	Group	6479.95	1	6479.95	13.83	0.001	0.356
	Error	11710.1	25	468.4			
Marital conflicts	Pre-test	585.68	1	585.68	0.713	0.406	0.028
	Group	4633.05	1	4633.05	5.64	0.025	0.184
	Error	20522.72	25	820.9			
Total	Marital intimacy	76647	30				
	Marital satisfaction	533270	30				
	Marital conflicts	593607	30				

P&lt;0.05 &amp; Sig. P&lt;0.01

**Table 6. Results of covariance analysis for comparing the average post-test scores in marital intimacy in the two groups**

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Average squares	F	Significance level	Squares
Pre-test	30.94	1	30.94	0.313	0.581	0.011
Group	5691.49	1	5691.49	57.51	0.0001	0.681
Error	2671.71	27	98.95			
Total	76647	30				

P&lt;0.05 &amp; Sig. P&lt;0.01

**Table 7. Results of covariance analysis for comparing the average post-test scores in marital satisfaction in the two groups**

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Average squares	F	Significance level	Squares
Pre-test	666.59	1	666.59	1.423	0.243	0.05
Group	6638.48	1	6638.48	14.17	0.001	0.344
Error	12645.8	27	468.36			
Total	533270	30				

P<0.05 & Sig. P<0.01

**Table 8. Results of covariance analysis for comparing the average post-test scores in marital conflicts in the two groups**

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Average squares	F	Significance level	Squares
Pre-test	1025.45	1	1025.45	1.25	0.273	0.044
Group	4641.93	1	4641.93	5.65	0.025	0.173
Error	22153.21	27	820.48			
Total	5936.7	30				

P<0.05 & Sig. P<0.01

In order to compare the average post-test scores in marital intimacy in the two groups, after controlling the effect of the pre-test, covariance analysis (ANCOVA) was used.

As the results in table 6 show, there is a significant difference between the post-test scores of marital intimacy, after eliminating the effect of the pre-test ( $F(27 \text{ and } 1)=57.51$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $\eta=0.681$ ).

Such that the average score of the post-test is significantly higher than the control group. In other words, group counseling based on Choice Theory caused an increase in marital intimacy in the experimental group in the post-test, compared to the control group; therefore, the hypothesis that "There is a significant difference in marital intimacy between married women who participated in group counseling based on Choice Theory and the control group" was confirmed.

In order to compare the average post-test scores in marital satisfaction in the two groups, after controlling the effect of the pre-test, covariance analysis (ANCOVA) was used.

As the results in table 7 show, there is a significant difference between the post-test scores of marital satisfaction, after eliminating the effect of the pre-test ( $F(27 \text{ and } 1)=14.17$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $\eta=0.344$ ). Such that the average score of the post-test is significantly higher than the control group. In other words, group counseling based on Choice Theory caused an increase in marital satisfaction in the experimental group in the post-test, compared to the control group; therefore, the hypothesis that

"There is a significant difference in marital satisfaction between married women who participated in group counseling based on Choice Theory and the control group" was confirmed.

In order to compare the average post-test scores in marital conflicts in the two groups, after controlling the effect of the pre-test, covariance analysis (ANCOVA) was used.

As the results in table 8 show, there is a significant difference between the post-test scores of marital conflicts, after eliminating the effect of the pre-test ( $F(27 \text{ and } 1)=5.65$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $\eta=0.173$ ).

Such that the average score of the post-test is significantly higher than the control group. In other words, group counseling based on Choice Theory caused an increase in marital conflicts in the experimental group in the post-test, compared to the control group; therefore, the hypothesis that "There is a significant difference in marital conflicts between married women who participated in group counseling based on Choice Theory and the control group" was confirmed.

### Conclusion:

In explaining the effectiveness of group counseling based on Choice Theory on increasing marital intimacy and satisfaction, and reducing marital conflicts, researchers have reported the effect of Reality Therapy (based on Choice Theory) on improving intimate relations between couples, relational patterns of couples, reducing identity

crisis in students, reducing stress and increasing intimate relations after the shock caused by spouse infidelity, treating alcohol dependence, and improving adults psychologically, which match the results of this research (23-25, 28-30).

Discussions about marital issues, including issues based on Choice Theory, help improve marital relationships, which is directly related to the satisfactory adaptation of the individual with main situations in life, and the satisfaction of all basic needs. Needs and their satisfaction depend on the understanding of individuals, which change according to the age, sex, heritage, culture, social class, occupation, geographic location, education, experiences, and life changes of others in the environment (31).

In explaining the effectiveness of approaches based on Choice Theory, it should be mentioned that research show that intimacy between married couples is an important factor in creating stable marriages. In addition, avoiding intimate relations, is a factor that leads to failure of family life; often theories of marital satisfaction include the amount of intimacy experienced by the couple (32-34). A natural and logical conclusion is that more satisfied couples, are more inclined toward intimacy. Hence, intimacy is a strong variable in predicting marital satisfaction and marital conflicts (33). Other research have shown that intimacy accompanies marital satisfaction and adaptation (35,11).

In explaining the effectiveness of Choice Theory on increasing marital satisfaction, researches that emphasize developing the feeling of responsibility to satisfy the basic needs of the self and the spouse, abandoning outer control, and becoming familiar with the qualitative world of the spouse, in the Choice Theory, can be mentioned. Glasser believes that human beings get married to satisfy their basic needs (36). According to Choice Theory, problems show up when spouses have different and unrealistic expectations regarding the ways to satisfy their basic needs, or when the seriousness of the needs are different. Glasser claims that if couples are trained regarding their basic needs, the awareness of the needs and the effort to satisfy the needs of the spouse, increases, and can affect marital intimacy and satisfaction, and reduce marital conflicts (21).

And, in explaining the effectiveness of group counseling based on Choice Theory on reducing marital conflicts, it can be said that one of the theories aimed at resolving marital conflicts, is the Choice Theory by W. Glasser. This theory considers the presence of love and intimate relations necessary for a healthy life, and provides basic information for therapists to improve the clients' lives (20). Glasser considers behavior to include the four components of functioning, thinking, feeling, and physiology. Most people control the components of functioning and thinking, directly, and the components of feeling and physiology indirectly. The main emphasis of the Choice Theory is on the two components of functioning and thinking (17).

Although, the results of this research and other similar research showed that use of counselling and remedial methods based on choice theory can affect variables related to marriage and stable marital life (23,24), the limitation of random selection of samples, using available samples and only from one sex (married women), from one counselling centre in one city make it necessary to results have been generalized with more cautious. It is suggested that in future, a wider statistical population be used and also statistical samples be selected from both sexes (men and women).

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## اثربخشی مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر نظریه انتخاب بر افزایش صمیمیت و رضایت زناشویی و کاهش تعارضات زناشویی در زنان متأهل

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### چکیده

**مقدمه:** ازدواج به عنوان مهم‌ترین و اساسی‌ترین رابطه بشری توصیف شده است. افزایش صمیمیت و رضایت و کاهش تعارضات زناشویی از مهم‌ترین مولفه‌های ازدواج پایدار به شمار می‌روند. مشاوره و درمان‌های مبتنی بر نظریه انتخاب به عنوان یکی از روش‌های موثر بر افزایش مولفه‌های ازدواج پایدار مورد استفاده قرار گرفته است. این پژوهش با هدف تعیین اثربخشی مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر نظریه انتخاب بر افزایش صمیمیت و رضایت زناشویی و کاهش تعارضات زناشویی زنان متأهل شهر بندرعباس انجام شد.

**روش کار:** روش این پژوهش نیمه - تجربی با طرح پیش آزمون و پس آزمون با گروه کنترل بود. جامعه آماری پژوهش شامل زنان متأهل مراجعه کننده به مرکز مشاوره و خدمات روان شناختی مهر جنوب در شهر بندرعباس بودند که داوطلب شرکت در برنامه مشاوره گروهی بودند. بدین منظور ۴۵ نفر آنان، پس از انجام مصاحبه فردی انتخاب و در دو گروه آزمایش و کنترل) به طور تصادفی جایگزین گردیدند. پرسشنامه‌های پژوهش شامل پرسشنامه صمیمیت زناشویی، رضایت زناشویی و تعارضات زناشویی به عنوان پیش آزمون بر روی دو گروه اجرا شد. جلسات مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر نظریه انتخاب در گروه آزمایش اجرا و پس از هشت هفته، پرسشنامه‌ها مجدداً توسط دو گروه تکمیل گردید. تحلیل داده‌ها نیز با استفاده از آزمون تحلیل کواریانس یک و چند متغیره و آزمون تعقیبی توکی انجام پذیرفت.

**نتایج:** یافته‌ها نشان داد که مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر نظریه انتخاب منجر به افزایش صمیمیت زناشویی و رضایت زناشویی و کاهش تعارضات زناشویی در زنان متأهل و در گروه آزمایش (۱) در مرحله پس آزمون، در مقایسه با گروه کنترل شده است ( $P < 0/01$  و  $P < 0/05$ ).

**نتیجه‌گیری:** با توجه به نتایج حاصله می‌توان گفت که مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر رویکرد نظریه انتخاب تأثیر قابل توجهی در بهبود وضعیت زناشویی زوجین داشته و می‌تواند توسط زوج درمانگران در بهبود کیفیت رابطه زناشویی مورد استفاده قرار گیرند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** نظریه انتخاب، زناشویی، صمیمیت، تعارض

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