

# The Comparison of the effectiveness of group counseling based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory on increasing marital satisfaction and decreasing marital conflicts in married women

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## Original Article

### Abstract

**Introduction:** Marriage has always been emphasized as the most important factor in achieving the emotional needs. The satisfaction of marital relationship decreases over time and among many couples. This study was carried out to compare the effectiveness of group counseling based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory on increasing satisfaction and decreasing marital conflicts among married women.

**Methods:** This semi-experimental research was run with pre-test and post-test design with experimental (2 groups) and control group. The statistical sample consisted of 45 married women who had referred to the counseling and psychological services center in Bandar Abbas city to solve their marital problems during 2016. They were selected using purposive sampling method from the initial 75 volunteers and randomly replaced in two experimental groups (Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory experimental groups) and one control group. The data was collected through the Enrich marital satisfaction questionnaire and marital conflict questionnaire by Sanaie et al and were analyzed using SPSS 22 software. Statistical methods such as single- and multi-variable covariance analysis tests were used for data analysis.

**Results:** The results showed that group counseling led to increase in marital satisfaction and decrease in marital conflicts in married women in the post-test, compared with the control group ( $P < 0.01$ ), but no significant difference was observed between the effectiveness of two approaches on marital satisfaction and conflicts ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Group counseling based on two theories had significant effects on increasing the satisfaction and reduction of marital conflicts and can be used by the couple therapists.

**Key words:** Marital Therapy, Family Conflict, Personal Satisfaction

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### Introduction:

Marriage has always been emphasized as the most important and the most excellent social customs to meet the emotional needs of adults. Unfortunately, the satisfaction and happiness of

marital relationship decreases over time and among many couples (1). The first published studies on marital satisfaction are related to Terman's works (2). Marital satisfaction refers to a situation in which the husband and wife are

more likely to feel happy and satisfied with marriage and satisfaction with each other. One of the most important aspects of the marital system is the sense of satisfaction that spouses experience after marriage (3). Marital satisfaction is the conformity of the status quo with the expected situation. According to this definition, marital satisfaction exists when the present situation of an individual in marital relationship is in line with his expected situation. In the past three decades, the eight criteria have been used for marital success, including 1- Stability, 2- Social expectations, 3- Personality development, 4- Partnership, 5- Happiness, 6- Satisfaction, 7- Compatibility and 8-Integrity (4).

Marital conflict and relationship turmoil can be defined as dissatisfaction of at least one of the couples with the relationship that increases rapidly (5). Conflict-related interactions often include four characteristics of cavil, rejection, inappropriate request and distress each other (6).

Greeff and Bruyne believe that there is a conflict when one of the parties understands that his opponent has suppressed some of his favorite issues (7). Gottman believes that although the strengths and weaknesses of marriages are aggravated under the conditions of external crises such as unemployment or financial problems, but these crises themselves alone do not lead to the marriage collapse (8). The difference in Gottman's style with a variety of couple therapies is that he focused on relationships between them as an independent unit instead of focusing on couples (9).

Group counseling based on Gottman's theory is a method of group counseling extracted from the John Gottman's theory. Gottman's theory is based on the fact that marital relationship is a complex system in which the movement of marital interactions with a certain order moves towards predictable points (10). Gottman et al. during studies have shown that marital disturbance greatly affects physiological function (11). Gottman, Caughbin and Huston believe that in successful marriages, men and women share a deep and meaningful feeling. Their goal is not just to reconcile and cope, but to do more, that means supporting the ambitions and aspirations of each other and giving meaning to each other life (12).

Gottman and Silver have investigated a large number of couples. The researchers reported that couples with marital intimacy and marital satisfaction use the same communication capability. For example, a quick start in the conversation will undermine the relationship and allow the woman to influence family decisions increases marital satisfaction (13).

Greenlee carried out a review study entitled "emotional correlation for couples based on Gottman's theory. According to the results of this study, recent research on Gottman's theory suggests that therapies in this area have examined the effectiveness of this approach on marital interactions, marital intimacy, and marital satisfaction, and found that Couples' emotional parallelism has increased with this approach (14). Group counseling based on Glasser's choice theory is a method of group counseling derived from William Glasser's choice theory. Glasser's choice theory is a "do-it-is-based" approach, which seeks to meet the needs by satisfying the images of the qualitative world. This theory considers the existence of love and intimate relationships essential for healthy life and provides basic information for counselors to improve the lives of clients (15).

In the best way, Glasser's choice theory can be considered as a consulting cycle that consists of two main elements: (1) creating a counseling environment; and (2) implementing specific methods that lead to changes in behavior (16, 17). Reality therapists examine the principles of choice theory with clients and help them identify their basic needs, discover their qualitative world, and eventually help them to understand that they have chosen the perfect behaviors that are their signs (18, 19).

Glasser believes that the methods that lead to change are based on the assumption that humans are motivated to change when 1) they know that their current behavior does not provide them what they like and 2) believe that they can choose other behaviors that make them closer to what they want (20).

Lohse, Hilderman, Cheung, Tatla, Van der Loos in a study entitled "Reality Therapy for adults after a stroke"; carried out a systematic and meta-analysis study. Twenty-six studies entered this analysis. According to the results of

this study, education, counseling and treatment based on Reality Therapy are effective in improving the psychological well-being of adults after stroke (21).

Henderson, Dunham and Dermer in a study entitled "Change, choice and family", integrated the two theories of Glasser and Gottman. They concluded given that the emphasis on reality is the basis of choice theory and at the same time the Gottman theory, these common points can be the basis for the sharing of therapeutic techniques. Also, combining these two variables can also be the basis for controlling behaviors (22).

This study examined the hypothesis that group counseling based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory have different effectiveness on increasing satisfaction and reduction of marital conflicts. In this regard, counseling based on Gottmann's theory and Glasser's choice theory was considered as independent variable and satisfaction and marital conflicts were considered as dependent variables. Required data were collected through the Enrich marital satisfaction questionnaire and marital conflict questionnaire by Sanaie et al and were analyzed using SPSS22 software and statistical methods such as single- and multi-variable covariance analysis test and Tukey's post hoc test.

### Methods:

This study was carried out to test the hypothesis of the difference in the effectiveness of group counseling based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory on increasing satisfaction and reducing marital conflicts. Therefore, this study 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 who had referred to Mehr-e Jonoob counseling and psychological services center in Bandar Abbas due to marital problems during 2016. In this study, 75 clients were volunteer to participate in group counseling program that 45 subjects were selected among them through purposive sampling method and individual interviews based on criteria such as passing five years or more since marriage, non-divorce, lack of hospitalization due to psychological and

psychiatric problems, and the lack of use of psychiatric drugs. The selected sample was randomly placed in three groups of 15 subjects in the Gottman theory experimental group, 15 in Glasser's choice theory experimental group and 15 in the control group.

In order to collect the data needed to test research hypothesis in the pre-test and post-test stages in the experimental and control groups, Enrich marital satisfaction and Sanaie marital conflicts questionnaires were used. Then, collected data were analyzed using SPSS22 software and statistical methods such as single- and multi-variable covariance analysis test and Tukey's post hoc test.

Enrich Marital Satisfaction questionnaire has been developed by David H. Olson, David J. Fournier and Joen M Druckkman. The Enrich questionnaire is a 115-point scale. Due to the high number of questionnaires' questions, in this study its short form of 47 questions was used. The alpha coefficients of this questionnaire in the Olson, Fournier and Druckman report (1989) for the subscales of ideal distortion of marital satisfaction, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management of leisure activities, sexual relationships, children and parenting, family and friends, egalitarian roles has been reported equal to 0.9, 0.81, 0.73, 0.68, 0.75, 0.74, 0.76, 0.48, 0.77, 0.72, and 0.71, respectively (23).

The Marital Conflict Questionnaire was developed by Sanaie, Barati, Boostanipour (2000), Cronbach's alpha for the whole questionnaire was equal to 0.96 for a 270-person group, and for eight following subscales has been reported as follows: the decrease of cooperation was 0.81, decrease of sexual relations was 0.61, increase of emotional responses was 0.70, increase of support for children was 0.33, Increase of personal relation with relatives, 0.86, decrease of family relationship with spouse and friends relatives, 0.89, separation of financial affairs from each other 71.7 and decrease of effective communication was 0.69 (23).

In this research, Cronbach's alpha calculation method was used in order to determine the reliability of research tools. The results of Cronbach's alpha for Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire showed a reliability coefficient of

0.83 and 0.89 for the Marital Conflict Questionnaire.

In order to carry out the research, after dividing the research sample in the experimental groups (1 and 2) and the control group, the questionnaires, including the Enrich marital satisfaction questionnaire and Sanaie's marital conflicts were completed by three groups (experimental groups 1 and 2, and control group) and the experimental group participated in a 8-session group counseling program based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory. The control group did not receive any group counseling program.

The structure and content of Gottman's group counseling sessions based on Michael Harvey's comprehensive book of Couple Therapy, the Gurman's handbook of Couple Therapy, The Seven Secrets of Successful Marriage and Marital interaction were described in the following table (24, 25, 13, 9). The structure and content of group counseling sessions of Glasser's choice theory were also developed as follows using Glasser's choice theory and based on the group therapy design derived from Glasser's Choice Theory book and thesis of Rahimi-Niat and the counseling book using Glasser's Choice Theory (26-28).

**Table 1. Group counseling program based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's theory**

Session number	Group counseling content based on Gottman's theory	Group counseling content based on Glasser's theory
<b>First</b>	Introducing the group members and Gottman's theory and explaining the goals of the group counseling program	Introducing the group members and Glasser's choice theory and explaining the goals of the group counseling program
<b>Second</b>	Explaining the solid home of common life	Explaining Marital Problems
<b>Third</b>	investigating the marital conflicts	Explaining controlling and external and internal control
<b>Fourth</b>	Introducing the Four Factors of the marital relationship collapse	Talking about the destructive habits of control
<b>Fifth</b>	Increasing interactions with the spouse	Talking about the desirable world and its components
<b>Sixth</b>	Body language and body physiology in marital relationships	Describing the five marital needs
<b>Seven</b>	Failure in trying to repair relationships	Introducing the overall behavior and its components
<b>Eight</b>	Empowering to create a common concept in marital life	Agreement about a program for improvement of the relationship quality

One week after the end of the group counseling sessions based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's theory, members of the experimental and control groups were invited to participate in the counseling program and discuss their experiences and feelings and complete the Marital Satisfaction and Conflict Questionnaire again. For the control group, four sessions were held related to Glasser's Choice Theory after the post-test implementation.

### Results:

At first, the demographic characteristics of the statistical sample including age, age of marriage, and education level are presented.

**Age:** as we can see in table 2, the investigating of statistical sample showed that their average age was 35.2 and their age range was 22 to 55.

**The marriage age:** the examining of marriage age of statistical sample showed that average age of their marriage was 22.7 and the age range of their marriage was 17 to 32. The details have presented at following table.

**Education levels:** the examining of education levels of statistical sample showed that the most frequency is related to the level of bachelor's degree and higher. The details have presented at the following table.

Before examining the research hypothesis and implementing the covariance analysis test, Shapiro-Wilk test was used to examine the normal distribution of the variables in the research, and Levene's test was used to observe the homogeneity of the variables variance of the research. The results showed, the probability values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for marital satisfaction variables in the pre-test is (0.196) and post-test (0.107) and marital conflict in the pre-test (0.613) and in post-test (0.649), it is shown that the distribution of these variables is normal in the sample. Therefore, parametric tests can be used in order to analyze the results of this study.

Homogeneity of the variances of the variables in this study: The Levene test has been used for

ensuring the homogeneity of the variances of the research variables.

The null hypothesis for the equality of the variances of the two groups' scores in the research variables is confirmed. The default for the equality of variances of variables of this study was confirmed in both experimental and control groups.

Regression slope homogeneity: Also, study of the homogeneity of the regression slope of variables showed that the F value of the interaction between the diffraction and independent variables was 2.121, 2.047 and 0.352, which is not significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2. Distribution of average age in experimental and control groups**

Groups	Average age	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Choice theory group	33.3	7.53	22	48
Gattman theory group	36	9.11	25	55
Control group	36.3	6.76	29	51
Total	35.2	7.8	22	55

**Table 3. Distibution of the average age of marriage in experimental and control groups**

Groups	Average age of marriage	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Choice theory group	22.6	3.56	18	28
Gattman theory group	21.4	3.01	17	28
Control group	24.3	3.5	20	32
Total	22.7	3.48	17	32

**Table 4. Education levels of sample groups**

Groups		Diploma and associate	Bachelor and higher	Total
Choice theory group	Frequency	5	10	15
	Percentage	33.33	66.67	100
Gottman theory group	Frequency	8	7	15
	Percentage	53.33	46.67	100
Control group	Frequency	7	8	15
	Percentage	46.67	53.33	100
Total	Frequency	20	25	15
	Percentage	44.44	55.56	100

**Table 5. Results of homogeneity analysis of the slope of variable regressions**

Variable	Mean square	Degrees of freedom	F	Significant
Marital Satisfaction*Groups	1640.03	2 and 33	2.047	0.145
Marital conflict*Groups	497.206	2 and 33	0.352	0.706

**Table 6. Results of Multi-variable covariance analysis for comparing the averages of marital satisfaction and marital conflicts in the experimental groups (1 and 2) and the control group**

Variables	Title of test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Significance level.	eta <sup>2</sup>
Groups	Pillais Trace	0.624	5.747	6	76	0.0001**	0.312

\*\*Sig  $P < 0.01$  & \*  $P < 0.05$

**Table 7. Results of single-variable covariance analysis for comparing mean post-test scores of marital satisfaction and marital conflict in experimental groups (1 and 2) and control group**

Variable	Source of changes	Sun of squares	Degrees of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance level.	eta <sup>2</sup>
Marital satisfaction	Pretest	40.21	1	40.21	0.099	0.755	0.003
	Group	9557.58	2	4778.79	11.76	0.0001**	0.376
	Error	15843.38	39	406.24			
Marital conflict	Pretest	319.16	1	319.16	0.448	0.507	0.011
	Group	5447.01	2	2723.5	3.82	0.03*	0.164
	Error	27780.42	39	712.31			
Total	Marital satisfaction	854183	45				
	Marital conflict	851745	45				

\*\*Sig P&lt;0.01 &amp; \*P&lt;0.05

**Table 8. LSD test results for unplanned pairwise comparison of mean scores of the marital satisfaction and marital conflict in three groups of test groups1 and 2 and control group**

The dependent variable	Groups (i)	Group (j)	Difference in average	Standard error	Significance
Marital Satisfaction	Choice group	Gottman group	2.58	7.48	0.732
	Control group	Choice group	-32.74	7.52	0.0001**
	Control group	Gottman group	-30.16	7.46	0.0001**
Marital Conflict	Choice group	Gottman group	-3.41	9.91	0.732
	Control group	Choice group	25.34	9.96	0.015*
	Control group	Gottman group	21.92	9.89	0.033*

\*\*Sig P&lt;0.01 &amp; \*P&lt;0.05\*

Therefore, the inhomogeneity of regression slopes assumption is rejected, therefore the regression slope of two variables is homogeneous and the conditions for using the statistical covariance analysis test are met. the comparison of the mean scores of marital satisfaction and marital conflicts in the first three groups, the second test group and the control group, after controlling the pre-test effect, Multi-variable covariance analysis test (MANCOVA) and LSD post hoc test were used in order to investigate the hypothesis of the research, the difference between the effectiveness of group counseling based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory.

As shown in Table 6, the significance levels of all tests indicate that no significant difference was observed between the studied groups at least in terms of one of the dependent variables (marital satisfaction and marital conflict). Single-variable analysis of covariance was used to find out the difference between the results of the test.

As shown in Table 7, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of post-test on marital satisfaction ( $\eta^2 = 376.6$ ,  $P = 0.01$ ,  $F = 1.117.71$ ,  $F(39 \text{ and } 1)$ ) and marital conflict ( $\eta^2 = 0.616$ ,  $0 < P$ ,  $3.82 = (39 \text{ and } 1)F$ ) in the

experimental groups after eliminating the pre-test effect. In such a way that in marital satisfaction, the mean scores of the post-test of experimental groups (1 and 2) were significantly higher than those of the control group and in the marital conflict, the mean scores were lower than those of the control group. Now, the LSD post hoc test was used for unplanned pairwise comparison of the mean scores of the marital satisfaction and marital conflict, in the test group 1 and 2, and the control group. Table 8 shows the results.

According to the result of the LSD test, no significant difference was observed between the mean of marital satisfaction and marital conflicts in the effectiveness of group counseling based on Glasser's choice theory and Gottman's theory ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis that "there is a significant difference between the effectiveness of group counseling based on choice theory and Gottman's theory on marital satisfaction and conflict reduction in married women" was not confirmed.

### Conclusion:

The study of the research hypothesis showed that group counseling based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory led to increase of

marital satisfaction and decrease of marital conflict in married women of experimental groups (1 and 2) in the post-test stage, compared with control group. According to the results, no significant difference was observed in the effectiveness of group counseling based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory in two variables of marital satisfaction and marital conflict and both Gottman's theory and choice theory had an appropriate effectiveness and almost equal effect on the variables studied.

The study of the research background suggests that several studies have reported the effectiveness of Glasser's choice theory on marital satisfaction and the improvement of communication patterns. Keshavarz Afshar, Asadi, Jahan Bakhsh et al. in their research studied the effect of problem solving education based on choice theory on couples' communication patterns. According to their results, a significant difference was observed between the experimental and control groups in communication patterns (27). Also, regarding the effectiveness of Gottman's theory researchers have reported the effectiveness of this approach on sexual satisfaction, forgiveness, happiness, maladaptive schemas of the couples, conflicting communication beliefs of the couples, marital stress, happiness and marital satisfaction, which are consistent with the findings of this study (28-30).

Razi during a study investigated the effectiveness of teaching conflict solving skills using Gottman method on marital satisfaction. According to his research results, Gottman's conflict resolution theory has a positive and significant effect on the marital satisfaction of conflicting women (29). Sakizadeh during a study investigated the effectiveness of marital skills training based on Gottman's model on marital stress and marital happiness in couples. According to the results of this study, Gottman's marital skills training reduced marital stress and increased marital happiness (30).

Rajaei, in her study showed that couple therapy by Gottman method can help reducing emotional divorce, improving verbal-non-verbal relationships and reducing interpersonal cognitive distortions of conflicting couples (31).

Rajaei, in her study showed that couple therapy by Gottman method can help reducing emotional divorce, improving verbal-non-verbal relationships and reducing interpersonal cognitive distortions of conflicting couples (33).

In fact, there are many common therapeutic elements in these two counseling methods that can explain the relatively similar effects of these two approaches. One of the most important common points of the two approaches is the emphasis on maintaining and enhancing the intimate relationships of couples, and the other one is the emphasis on reality, which forms the basis of both approaches (9, 13, 20).

Therefore, the joint emphasis of two theories, despite the different ways in practice, leads to relatively similar effects of these methods. These two aspects emphasize on communication topics of the couples, while the marital satisfaction and marital conflict structures are both influenced by couples' communication status (32, 33).

In this regard, Tallman and Hsiao state that there are serious and frequent disagreements from the very early days of marital relationship that if they are not resolved, they can make marital satisfaction and stability face with a serious threat (34). Marital conflicts are the same and even more serious. In fact, the conflict is an inevitable thing that is created in all families. But the dysfunctional relationship of couples is what causes conflict to deepen and overcome (35).

In general, it can be stated that marital satisfaction and marital conflict are both influenced by couples' communication status, while Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory have common aspects such as the emphasis on the importance of couples' relationships and the emphasis on reality, which leads to the same effectiveness of these two approaches.

Considering the limitations of this study, especially the limitation of the impossibility of random sampling and the lack of participation of married men in the group counseling program and the selection of married women, it is suggested that in future studies, the samples be chosen from larger society in a randomized sampling method with the participation of couples. However, according to the results of the effectiveness of the group counseling method

based on Gottman's theory and Glasser's choice theory on increasing marital satisfaction and decreasing marital conflicts, the use of counseling methods derived from these two approaches by couple therapists and family counselors could improve the relationship between the couples and family members.

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

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### چکیده

**مقدمه:** ازدواج به‌عنوان مهم‌ترین عامل برای دستیابی به نیازهای عاطفی همواره مورد تأکید بوده است. رضایت از رابطه زناشویی در طول زمان و در میان بسیاری از زوجین کاهش می‌یابد. پژوهش حاضر با هدف مقایسه اثربخشی مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر نظریه گاتمن و نظریه انتخاب گلاسر بر افزایش رضایت و کاهش تعارضات زناشویی زنان متأهل انجام شد.

**روش کار:** این پژوهش نیمه تجربی با طرح پیش‌آزمون - پس‌آزمون با گروه‌های آزمایش (دو گروه) و کنترل انجام شد. جامعه آماری شامل ۴۵ نفر از زنان متأهل بودند که طی سال ۹۵ برای دریافت خدمات روان‌شناختی به مرکز مشاوره و خدمات روانشناختی در شهر بندرعباس مراجعه نموده بودند. این تعداد از بین ۷۵ داوطلب اولیه به شیوه هدفمند انتخاب و در دو گروه آزمایش و یک گروه کنترل به شیوه تصادفی جایگزین گردیدند. گروه‌های آزمایش در برنامه مشاوره گروهی شرکت نمودند و در گروه کنترل هیچ مداخله‌ای صورت نگرفت. داده‌های مورد نیاز از طریق پرسشنامه‌های رضایت زناشویی انریچ و تعارضات زناشویی ثنایی و همکاران جمع‌آوری و با استفاده از نرم‌افزار SPSS 22 و روش‌های آماری مانند آزمون تحلیل کواریانس یک و چند متغیره و آزمون تعقیبی توکی مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت.

**نتایج:** یافته‌ها نشان داد که مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر نظریه گاتمن و نظریه انتخاب گلاسر منجر به افزایش رضایت و کاهش تعارضات زناشویی در زنان متأهل در مرحله پس‌آزمون، در مقایسه با گروه کنترل گردید ( $P < 0/01$ )، اما تفاوت معنی‌داری در اثربخشی دو رویکرد بر رضایت و تعارضات زناشویی مشاهده نگردید ( $P > 0/05$ ).

**نتیجه‌گیری:** مشاوره گروهی مبتنی بر دو نظریه اثرات قابل توجهی در افزایش رضایت و کاهش تعارضات زناشویی داشته و می‌توانند توسط زوج درمانگران مورد استفاده قرار گیرند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها** زوج درمانی، تعارض خانواده، رضایت فردی

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