

A Survey of the Effect of Brief Solution-focused Approach on Reduction of Marital Conflicts

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Abstract

Introduction: The adverse conflicts are the set of the events imposed on one or more family members or all of them or the family and affect all the family members. The present study is aimed to evaluate the effect of solution-focused approach on the reduction of the marital conflicts of the couples in Qom city. **Methods:** The method was semi-experimental with pre-test, post-test and experiment and control group. The study population was the couples referring family consulting centre and they were volunteers. The sample size was 50 couples being a volunteer in the study, and they were selected as convenient and random sampling method in experiment and control group. The study instrument was including a demographic questionnaire and marital conflict questionnaire of Sanayi. For data analysis, in addition to descriptive statistics methods, covariance analysis method was applied. **Results:** The data analysis showed that solution-focused approach was effective on whole marital conflict scale ($F = 24.089, P < 0.001$) and all the subscales of low collaboration ($F = 7.4, P < 0.001$), low sexual intercourse ($F = 50.4, P < 0.001$), increase of emotional reactions ($F = 10.89, P < 0.001$), increase of child support ($F = 22.3, P < 0.001$), increase of the relation with the relatives ($F = 77.4, P < 0.001$), reduction of the relation with the relatives and friends of the spouse ($F = 31.02, P < 0.001$), separating finances ($F = 71.1, P < 0.001$), and reduction of effective relation ($F = 1.73, P < 0.001$). **Conclusion:** The problem-solving skills among the couples can prevent many conflicts. Problem-solving training is of great importance as one of the life skills, and it is used more in solution-focused approach. By various techniques of this approach, we can help the couples with the problems that know the solution and improve their marital satisfaction.

Key words: Brief solution-focused couple therapy approach, couples, marital conflict

INTRODUCTION

Mostly, marital life failure is because seen each other in a useless circle of the endless talking, or they feel alone in their marital life.^[1] Unfortunately, divorce statistic is increased recently. Our country is not an exception and divorce is increasing in Tehran, and it is increased by 12%. There is one divorce for every 5 marriages, and it is increased gradually.^[2]

An intimate couple relationship is including the challenge that they learn how to communicate with each other and how they are different. In keeping the communication and the differences, the conflict is created. When various degrees of independence and dependence are required for the common decision making of the couples, the contradictory situation is occurred. Wal and Nolan (1987) stated that the conflicts can be defined in a range of responses ranging from mild disagreement to violent conflict.^[3] In various studies, anxious couples reported a high level of conflict, negative feeling and complaint

compared to the peers without any problems.^[4] As the inability in solving the conflicts leads into losing the intimacy, better understanding of the conflict, and helping the spouses to learn constructive management is of great importance.^[5]

Today, the family therapists proposed some solutions to reduce the conflict between the couples and one of the approaches is the solution-focused approach. This approach is a form of brief treatment relying on the clients' resources. The treatment model aimed to help the clients to reach their goals via creating the solutions for their problems. This approach is in contradiction with the problem-focused traditional treatments in most of

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Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:
www.jhhjournal.org

DOI:
10.4103/2468-6565.190976

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How to cite this article: Shahsiah M. A Survey of the Effect of Brief Solution-focused Approach on Reduction of Marital Conflicts. J Hum Health 2015;1:67-71.

other approaches and some of the other treatment methods. Myers besides referring to the competition quality between the opposite philosophies believes that individuals respond the conflict via various ways.^[6]

According to a solution-focused therapist, continuous change is unavoidable. This, it is emphasized on changing issue in treatment process not on impossible issues. This model emphasizes on taking small steps for the start and change, and the process is changed. The capabilities and solutions are emphasized in this model rather than the problems.^[7]

Like the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) model, solution-focused model aim is to solve the complaints being raised. They do it by helping the clients to think about the different activity making them happy in their life. Solution-focused therapists rely on the clients to achieve their goals more than MRI therapists. They believe that the human beings have the required skill to solve their problems but by exaggerating about their problems, they cannot see their strengths and abilities. It is assumed in this approach that the client knows what to do to solve his problems, and the therapist should help them to make new application cases for the pre-learned knowledge. The general aim of this approach is helping the client to start problem-solving process.^[8]

de Shazer uses the metaphor of a lock and a key to explain his therapeutic approach – clients' complaints are like locks on doors that can be opened to a happy life on condition that the can find the key. When it is tried to find about the reason of locked door, the time is lost, and failure is increased. Especially when the family tries to find the key, the general role of the therapist is to find the 'main key' for the family, some of the interventions being applied for a range of the locks.^[8] He considered common treatment collaboration between the client and the counsellor and both discover the solutions.^[9] Despite the problem-focused view, solution-focused family therapy emphasizes on finding the solutions. This view focuses on the definition of the presented problem and is based on systematic view and social structuralism.^[10]

Divorce process starts with the tension between the couples, and this leads into emotional indifference and conflict. This incompatibility breaks the social relations of the people and the members and endangers the organizational unity and leads into family dissolution. Based on high divorce rate and the importance of the family in our country, the present study aimed to evaluate the effect of solution-focused family therapy on reduction of marital conflicts in couples susceptible to divorce.

METHODS

The present study is an applied design. The semi-experimental method was used in this study. The present study was conducted on control and experiment group. The study population of the study was all the couples referring to family consulting centre

of Qom city. A total of 50 couples registered to participate in the study and they were divided into experiment and control group randomly. For both groups, a pre-test was done 1-week before doing consulting method and post-test was done after the end of the sessions. The pre-test was performed of all the subjects in the first session. For the experiment group, the solution-focused approach was performed in 6 sessions and the second group (control) did not receive any education or treatment method. The sessions were held weekly and totally 6 sessions were taken. Finally, post-test was performed of both groups. The sessions took averagely 1-h and half. For data analysis, covariance analysis test was applied. The following instruments were applied in the present study. Marital conflict questionnaire: A marital conflict questionnaire is a 54-item tool that measures marital conflict devised by Dr. Bagher Sanai *et al.* (2007). This questionnaire measures eight aspects of marital conflict: Reduced cooperation, reduced sexual intercourse, increased emotional reactions, increased child support, increased personal relationships with relatives, reduced family relationship with the spouse's relatives, separating finances, and reduction of effective communication.

Validity and reliability

The Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire as a whole for a population of 270 persons was calculated at 0.96 and for each of the eight subscales as follows: Decrease in cooperation 0.81, decrease in sexual relations 0.61, increase in emotional reactions 0.70, increase in trying to gain child support 0.33, increase in personal relationships with relatives 0.86, reduced family relationship with the spouse's relatives 0.89, separating finances 0.71, and decrease in effective communication 0.69.^[11,12]

RESULTS

The results were analysed via covariance analysis. Table 1 shows the descriptive results about the scores of marital conflict in experiment and control group.

The results of Table 1 showed that there is a significant difference between various levels of test variable (pre-test and post-test).

First hypothesis

Brief solution-focused family therapy approach is effective on reduction of the marital conflicts of the male and female susceptible to divorce [Table 2].

Table 1: The descriptive data of general marital conflict

Tests	Groups	Mean	SD	Couples
Pre-test	Control test	152.56	14.27	2525
		178.06	17.46	
Post-test	Control test	219.43	23.56	16
		179.06	17.87	

SD: Standard deviation

Table 2: The mean and SD of the scores of marital conflict dimensions in experiment group in gender

Group	Experiment						
Test	Pre-test				Post-test		
Statistical indices	Gender	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
Reduced cooperation	Woman	25	16.7	2.6	25	14.1	2.2
	Man	25	16.3	2.19	25	11.8	1.4
Reduced sexual intercourse	Woman	25	15.6	1.9	25	14.2	2.3
	Man	25	16.7	2.8	25	11.7	1.9
Increased emotional reactions	Woman	25	24.8	3.3	25	21.21	3.2
	Man	25	24.5	3.7	25	20.43	1.9
Increased child support	Woman	25	15.2	2.5	25	13.6	2.7
	Man	25	16.7	2.5	25	12.06	1.6
Increased personal relationships with relatives	Woman	25	18.5	2.1	25	18.04	3.02
	Man	25	18.4	3.6	25	14.1	2.4
Reduced family relationship with the spouse’s relatives	Woman	25	18.9	3.6	25	18.1	2.3
	Man	25	19.6	3.5	25	13.4	1.39
Separating finances	Woman	25	22.5	3.9	25	17.6	3.3
	Man	25	23.2	1.9	25	14.55	2.1
Reduction of effective communication	Woman	25	34.7	5.7	25	36.2	4.7
	Man	25	37.1	3.5	25	27.8	3.4

SD: Standard deviation

The results of the first hypothesis about the effect of brief solution-focused couple therapy on the reduction of marital conflict of the couples are shown in Table 3.

Second hypothesis

Brief solution-focused family therapy approach is effective on marital conflicts dimensions of the male and female susceptible to divorce.

After the control of the scores of pre-test of the result of covariance analysis showed that there is significant difference between two groups in the mean of marital conflict ($F = 24.089$, $P = 0.001$) and the effect of 0.45 showed the difference between the mean of the scores of two groups of independent variable (solution-focused treatment) and it is concluded that brief solution-focused couple therapy was effective on reduction of total score of marital conflict of the couples. The results of the subscales of marital conflict are shown in Table 4.

The results of the table showed that brief couple therapy is effective on all subscales of marital conflict ($P = 0.01$) and the effect on reduced cooperation (0.21), reduced sexual intercourse (0.63), increased emotional reactions (0.32), increased child support (0.43), increased personal relationships with relatives (0.72), reduced family relationship with the spouse's relatives (0.57), separating finances (0.71), and reduction of effective communication (0.56). Statistical power was high in all the above dimensions and it showed that the sample size was adequate in the present study.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the present study showed that brief solution-focused couple therapy was effective on marital conflict and its dimensions ($P < 0.001$). Watsel, Prest and

Table 3: The results of covariance analysis to compare the mean of the residual scores of marital conflict in team membership

Variables	Sum of squares	df	F	P	Eta2	Power
Post-test	2232.78	1	12.23	0.002	0.30	0.92
Group	4421.77	1	24.07	0.001	0.46	0.99

Zimerman (1997, cited in Nazari and Soleimani, 2007) applied dyadic adjustment scale to evaluate the changes in couples relation and the scores in the couples' condition scale as pre-test and post-test showed the reduction of couple's divorce.^[13]

The results of the analysis showed that brief solution-focused treatment improved the sexual relationship of the couples as 0.63. The results of the study are consistent with the study of Saeidi. By the improvement of emotional relation of the couples, it can be expected that their sexual intercourse was improved. The brief solution-focused treatment improved the sexual issues between the couples.^[14] The solution-focused treatment improved the 0.72 of the relation with the relatives and friends of the spouse. The couples should consider the border between themselves and others (the main family and friends). These borders considered the couples a separate system of other systems and they are flexible borders and the couples can use the recommendations of the main family. This is done by some techniques as glass house metaphor and improving the relation with the spouse family.

The treatment improved as (0.56) the effective communication of the couples. Mudd in a study titled 'solution-focused treatment and training communication skills' showed that solution-focused approach increases communicative skills. The result of the present study is consisting with the study

Table 4: The results of covariance analysis of the mean of the residual scores of the dimensions of marital conflict scale

Variable	The sum of squares	df	F	P	Effect	Power
Reduced cooperation	28.7	1	7.4	0.01	0.22	0.94
Reduced sexual intercourse	139.09	1	50.4	0.001	0.64	1
Increased emotional reactions	86.8	1	10.8	0.001	0.33	0.93
Increased child support	64.3	1	22.3	0.001	0.44	0.99
Increased personal relationships with relatives	125.8	1	77.2	0.001	0.73	1
Reduced family relationship with the spouse's relatives	131.3	1	31.02	0.001	0.58	1
Separating finances	146.6	1	71.1	0.001	0.72	1
Reduction of effective communication	31.5	1	1.73	0.05	0.58	0.96

of Mudd.^[15] Solution-focused treatment was effective on reduced cooperation of the couples (0.20). It can be said that the couples who participated in solution-focused counselling reached higher level of cooperation skill compared to control group. The results were consistent with the results of the study performed by Moore, who stated that the subjects participating in solution-focused sessions solved their interpersonal problems by their capabilities.^[16]

Solution-focused couple therapy had a positive effect on separating finances. One of the determining factors of power in the family is money. When there is conflict, the couples have different views about spending money, and one of them tries to spend much money (woman) and the man tries to be cautious about the expenditure. It does not seem that solution-focused treatment directly affected the increase of the participation of the couples in economic affairs of the house. It can be said that when the couples' relation is improved, the money is spent fairly, and they try to agree on spending the money.

A solution-focused approach based on Lee results can be applied for the experts with various experience level and one member instead of the whole family. This characteristic of the solution-focused counsellor is an advantage compared to the view of family therapy that emphasize on the presence of all family members in counselling sessions.^[17]

The results of the present study were consistent with the results presented by O'Hanlon and Weiner-Davis, showing that the subjects participating in solution-focused counselling revealed better methods to cope with the emotional issues compared to control group.^[18]

The results of the present study were consistent with the results of Lamber *et al.* They found that the clients in the study could cope with the adjustment problems, drug abuse and anxiety compared to the control group.^[19]

Furthermore, the results of the present study were consistent with the results of the study performed by Conoley, Graham, New, Craig, Opry, Cardin, Brossart and Parker (2003, cited in Kuri, 2009). They found that the parents and the students participating in the solution-focused counselling showed less problematic behaviours and could reduce their behavioural problems.^[20]

As most of the couples who referred to counselling centre and most of the couples who have problems in their relations

but they do not admit the centres are failed in solving their problems and creating problem-solving skills among the couples can prevent many conflicts. One of the most important skills being proved as life skills from the World Health Organization is 'problem-solving skill'. Problem-solving training is of great importance as one of the life skills, and this technique is applied mostly in solution-focused approach. By various techniques of this approach, we can help the couples with their problems and their solutions and improve their marital satisfaction. This approach is effective due to the short duration of the sessions in creating the couples cooperation.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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