

The Effect of Intimate Relationship Skills Training in Improving Tehran Women's Relationships

Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the practical application of intimate relationship skills training programs in improving married women's communication skills and intimacy in Tehran. In terms of purpose, the present study is applied and is also a quasi-experimental method in which a pre-test-post-test design with a control group was used. The present study's statistical population included all female employees as deputy director of treatment at Tehran University of Medical Sciences in 2018, among which 30 people were selected by availability and randomly replaced in the experimental group (15 people) and the control group (15 people). The Walker-Thompson Marital Intimacy Scale (MIS-17) and Jarabak's (2004) communication skills were used to collect data. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) is used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. In addition, the research data is analyzed by the SPSS-23 computer program. The results indicated that PAIRS affects women's marital intimacy and sexual satisfaction.

Keywords: *Intimate Relationship Skills, Communication Skills, Intimacy of Married Women, Tehran Women*

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Introduction

Satisfaction is one of the most important aspects of life quality that spouses experience in their relationship (Taniguchi, Freeman, Tyler, & Malkaden, 2006). Communication is the main purpose of marriage, which allows the couple to discuss and exchange ideas and become aware of each other's needs. Also, couples' relationships aim to satisfy all levels of needs. Communication problems are the main problem among more than 90% of troubled couples (Bahari et al., 2011). Recent research has emphasized the spouses' communication skills because the marital relationship is the core of the family system. Disruption in communication is considered a serious threat to family survival, and an impenetrable and ineffective relationship is an important predictor of divorce (Sharifian et al., 2014). Communication skills include behaviors that maintain marriage (Danyel, 1999). In many therapeutic approaches, communication skills training attempts to correct problematic communication (Nazari, Taheri Rad, and Asadi, 2013). Communication training is not only a specific therapeutic approach but also a part of all perspectives and an approach. Communication training in working with couples is important, and the inseparable part of couple therapy is direct or implicit training in communication. In other words, couples need coach-student training to correct their deficiencies and learn more ways of effective communication (Weeks & treat 2001). The family system is among the most important social systems formed based on marriage between two sexes (Aslani, Jamei, and Rajabi, 2015). Therefore, humans' fundamental motivation is establishing and maintaining close ties and relationships with others (Besharat, 2012). Marriage is considered the most intimate adult relationship because it is a relationship with a major source of affection and support (Montesi, koner, Dawber, Kew, & Limberg, 2013).

Intimacy means closeness, derived from the Greek word (intima), which is the innermost layer and wall of the veins. People enter the mysterious world of intimacy and closeness when two people share the innermost parts of their minds and souls. Cultivating intimacy is an important interpersonal factor due to its essential role in developing close relationships and its relationship with marital satisfaction (Grif & Malherb, 2001). Therefore, intimacy creates personal and relationship satisfaction and plays the main factor in providing health, adjustment, happiness, and a sense of meaning in couples (Yoo, 2014). In addition, intimacy develops relationship commitment and increases communication compatibility (Fallahzadeh, Tanabi, and Farzad, 2012). The ability to create and maintain intimacy with one's spouse help the individual cope with communication problems and have satisfying relationships (Monteci et al., 2013); Inversely, avoiding intimacy is a characteristic of a less satisfied person with their relationship. According to many studies, dissatisfied spouses introduce communication failure as one of the most common problems (Pashang, Saliminia, Mehrani, and Soodagar, 2014). Thus, Svyral, Matos, and Costa (2015) define intimacy as a communication event. Recently, counseling and family professionals have recognized intimacy as a major concern and an important process in developing friendly relationships. Technological, cultural, economic, social, and religious changes have significantly changed the basic function of marriage, including love and intimacy between husband and wife (Burger and Hannah, 1999). Sternberg (1987) divides love into three parts. Passion, intimacy, and commitment: Intimacy is described as behaviors that increase emotional closeness. Emotional closeness includes mutual support and understanding, communication and sharing, activities, and assets with the other person. Sexual satisfaction is one of the

factors directly and indirectly related to the couples' marital intimacy, better marital performance, and communication between couples (Qaisari and Karimian, 2013).

Many programs teach communication skills. One is Pierce's Practical Application of Intimate Skills program, a training program developed by Gordon to teach the skills needed to form intimate relationships (Drmarya and Hannah, 2013). The program emphasizes goals such as reordering attitudes, spouses' beliefs about love, communication, marriage, and family life, educating and promoting self-awareness, spouse emotional literacy and emotional performance, weakening dysfunctional behaviors, and disrupting intimacy by strengthening Skills and behaviors that are enriched with intimacy and effectiveness in effective relationships. This approach includes theory-based, comprehensive, and action-based concepts, which provide an influential way for couples to change (Eisenberg, Plasu, & Aschnydr, 2011). Educational interventions have been conducted to promote relationships between couples based on relationship enrichment.

The evidence shows that couples are engaged with drastic and persistent problems establishing and maintaining intimate relationships in today's society. Preventive interventions are necessary to address potential pre-existing problems due to marital problems. Due to the numerous marriages, it is necessary to teach PAIRS. In these marriages, couples are unsatisfied with their lives due to the lack of communication skills to create intimacy. Prevention and education of couples have been less considered and studied in our country because providing more services has the treatment aspect. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of PAIRS training in improving the communication skills and intimacy of married women in Tehran.

In terms of purpose, the present study is applied and is also a quasi-experimental method in which a pre-test-post-test design with a control group was used. The present study's statistical population included all female employees as deputy director of treatment at Tehran University of Medical Sciences in 2018,

Table 1: Intervention method of PAIRS

First session	Introducing group members and educational program plan
	The unique role of each couple in the quality of married life
	The logic of emotion and the role of emotional intelligence in intimate communication
	The role of attachment in intimate communication
	The hopes and fears of a couple's relationship and what happens when we face stress
	Homework: Women were asked to write down three of their hopes and three of their fears of living together
Second session	Investigating and displaying stressful communication styles
	Communication roadmap
	Consistent communication methods
	Application of communication patterns (increasing individual skills, learning and developing healthy communication skills)

among which 30 people were selected by availability and randomly replaced in the experimental group (15 people) and the control group (15 people)

Measuring tools

Communication skills

A revised version of the communication skills questionnaire developed by Jarabak (2004) was used to evaluate communication skills. This questionnaire has 34 items that a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always) is required to answer. This questionnaire validity in the research of Hossein Chari and Fedakar (2005) in a sample of 733 Iranian students using Cronbach's alpha method and halving the total test score in the students' sample has been reported to be equal to 0.71 and 0.69. In addition, Hossein Chari and Fedakar (2005) used the statistical factor analysis method to examine the questionnaire construct validity in their research. They found five factors: "verbal and non-verbal message comprehension skills," "emotion regulation skills," "listening skills," "insight skills in the communication process," and "communication determination."

Walker-Thompson Marital Intimacy Scale (MIS-17)

The scale has 17 questions. Walker and Thompson (1983) developed this scale to measure affection and intimacy. This scale is part of a larger scale and includes several intimacy dimensions, but its manufacturers have reported it as an independent scale. The subject score on the intimacy scale is obtained by adding the scores of the questions and dividing it by 17. The scores range from (1) never to (7) always. In addition, a higher score is a sign of greater intimacy. Alexis Walker and Thompson reported the scale reliability through Cronbach's alpha from 0.91 to 0.97. Etemadi (2005) and Khazaei (2007) reported the calculated alpha coefficient for the scale as 0.96 and 0.85 in Iran (Etemadi 2005).

Intervention method

The PAIRS were taught in 8 sessions, each lasting 1:30 hours (Table 1).

Third session	The levels that increase communication effectiveness include active listening, healthy self-expression, etc.
	Resolving powerful conflicts (healthy expression of anger, repressed emotions)
	Bank love and investment in it
	Planning powerful dynamics (cauldron of emotions and empathy, etc.)
	Family system and family structure
	Reading daily DTR temperature to cultivate communication
Fourth session	Homework: Women are asked to express their repressed emotions and anger to their husbands in daily conversations and discuss their personal and future two-person goals.
	Investigating the stages of emotional development
	Identifying the right caring behaviors and applying caring behaviors
	Savings in the love bank
	Negotiations for change
	Empathy in emotions
Fifth meeting	Assignment: Women should use caring behaviors and express their concerns and grievances directly, and husbands should empathize.
	Negative emotions and the role of anger in relationships
	Deterring aggression and coping with anger
	Dirty Warfare Techniques
	Tools and exercises to express anger in a healthy way
	Tools and exercises for important changes are discussed
Sixth Session	Homework: Women were asked to express their negative emotions correctly and healthily.
	Communication agreement
	Revealing hidden expectations
	Coping with conflict
	Negative emotions come to the surface
	Checking the assumptions
Seventh session	Assignment: Agree to reveal the hidden expectations of the relationship in the daily conversation and pay attention to the negative emotions that come to the surface.
	How the brain processes emotions.
	Our communication and emotional levels
	Identifying severe emotional sensitivities
	Identifying the defective ring of emotional sensitivity
	Breaking negative patterns and correcting unhappy relationships
Eighth Session	Assignment: Breaking negative relationship patterns and expressing emotional sensitivities in daily conversations
	Healing the present with the past
	Identifying your sections

Therefore, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) is used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. The SPSS-23 computer program also analyzes the research data.

Findings

Table 2: Descriptive information on communication skills and marital intimacy by evaluation stage in groups

Variable	Factors	pre-test	post-test
	Statistical index		
	Average	53.71	77

Table (2) shows the descriptive information of the Communication Skills and Marital Intimacy Scale separately for pre-test and post-test in the experimental and control groups.

Communication skills	examination Group	Standard deviation	6.05	9.09
	control group	Average	71.27	71.60
		Standard deviation	7.34	8.53
Marital intimacy	examination Group	Average	53.53	80.59
	control group	Standard deviation	80.5	66.7
		Average	93.51	73.51
		Standard deviation	24.5	74.5

As observed, the average of the experimental group in the post-test stage has increased compared to the pre-test. In addition, the results indicate that the implementation of PAIRS for

couples has increased married women's communication skills. The implementation of PAIRS has also increased married women's marital intimacy.

Table 3: Analysis of covariance

Statistical index Variables	SS	df	MS	F	sig	ETA coefficient
pre-exam	1381.00	1.00	1381.00	46.81	0.001	0.63
group	196.64	1.00	196.64	6.67	0.016	0.20
Error	796.60	27.00	29.50			
Total	2396.30	29.00				

As observed in Table (3), according to removing the effect of the pre-test variable and calculating the coefficient F, a significant difference was observed between the adjusted means of communication skills scores of the participants in terms of the group membership of "Experiment and Control" in the post-test stage ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, based on the modified means in Table (3), it is concluded that PAIRS in the

experimental group participants had a greater impact on married women's communication skills than in the control group. The effect extent of "practical significance" was 0.20. It means that 20% of the total variance or individual differences in married women's communication skills were related to PAIRS.

Table 4: Analysis of covariance

Statistical index Variables	SS	df	MS	F	sig	ETA coefficient
pre-exam	465.27	1.00	465.27	15.39	0.001	0.36
group	347.99	1.00	347.99	11.51	0.002	0.30
Error	816.06	27.00	30.22			
Total	1769.37	29.00				

As observed in Table (4), according to removing the effect of the pre-test variable and the calculated F coefficient, a significant difference was observed among the adjusted means

of marital intimacy scores of participants in terms of group membership "experiment and control" in the post-test stage ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, it is concluded that PAIRS in the

experimental group participants had a greater impact on married women's marital intimacy than in the control group. The effect extent of "practical significance" was 0.30. It means that 30% of the total variance or individual differences in married women's marital intimacy were related to PAIRS.

Discussion:

According to removing the effect of the pre-test variable and the calculated F coefficient, the covariance analysis results showed a significant difference between participants' adjusted means of communication skills scores in terms of group membership "experiment and control" in the post-test. Therefore, it is concluded that PAIRS in the experimental group participants had a greater impact on the married women's communication skills than in the control group. This study's findings are consistent with the following studies: Abbasi's (2014) studies, which investigated the effectiveness of group training programs on PAIRS communication patterns of couples ready for marriage; Shirali's (2014) studies, which investigated the effect of communication skills training on Patterns of communication and intimacy with spouses in couples in Ahvaz and Moradi Mehr's (2013) studies, which investigated the effect of communication skills training on intimacy and improving relationships between marriage candidates who participated in premarital counseling classes in Tehran. Scott et al. (2013) also concluded that premarital communication training and these skills implementation outside the educational environment improve couples' relationships.

To explain this finding, it is accepted that effective human communication and interpersonal relationships are the basis of human identity and perfection. In addition, they form the primary basis of connection with others and help individuals flourish and improve the quality of their relationships (Fergus, 2000). Communication is the essence of any relationship. Therefore, the relationship is strengthened when open, clear, and emotional communication. Inversely, communication weakens the relationship when it is established defensively, aggressively, and ineffectively. The relationship rapidly collapses and is finally destroyed when the communication is largely blocked. Our personality development and mental health are related to our ability to communicate. Lack of communication or frequent meetings with poor communication emotionally and physically makes an individual weak. The love between spouses, lovers, friends, parents, and children is significantly reduced if there are no communication skills (Bolton, 2007). Guttman (1994) classifies four categories of negative communication patterns and calls them the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. He states that most of the negative communication patterns of couples

involved in these four categories include criticism against the complaint, humiliation, defensive behavior, and lack of cooperation (Al-Darbak and Figiordo, 2009). Before marriage, men and women must learn some of the consequences and immature and uninformed behaviors they will encounter throughout their lives because premarital relationships are the basis for a couple's subsequent relationship. The Pierce program concentrates on communication skills. Communication skills are one of the techniques used in the Pierce program for marital therapy. Common sense exercises, such as guided conversation, effectively improve communication skills. The Pierce program uses home techniques to learn and retain new communication skills and encourages participants to test and practice the skills learned regularly (Maria and Hannah, 2013).

The results showed that PAIRS training has effectively increased married women's marital intimacy and has increased marital intimacy. The present study results are consistent with Imani's studies (2012), which concluded that communication skills increase marital satisfaction. The present study results are consistent with Asadi Shishegran's (2016) studies investigating the effectiveness of communication skills training during the engagement on couples intimacy. They concluded that research hypotheses about the effect of communication skills training on couples intimacy had been confirmed. The present study results are also related to Shirali's (2014) studies investigating the effect of communication skills training on communication patterns and intimacy with spouses in couples in Ahvaz. Their results showed that communication skills training increases intimacy with the spouse and the constructive communication pattern and reduces the communication pattern of expectations, Withdrawal, and avoidance-reciprocal communication patterns. There is also a relation between the present study results and Moradi Mehr's (2013) studies that investigated the effect of communication skills training on intimacy and improving mutual relations of marriage candidates who participated in premarital counseling classes in Tehran. They concluded that communication skills training increased intimacy and improved marital relations. The present study results are consistent with Wiener's (2013) studies which investigated the effect of the communication skills training method on couples' intimacy and marital adjustment. The findings show that PAIRS training has increased married women's marital intimacy, creating a more positive atmosphere in life, more power to resolve marital problems, and reduced interpersonal conflicts. Continuous intimacy is one of the basic principles of this treatment. The marriage foundations weaken, and the power to solve and overcome problems reduces when the intimacy diminishes. According to different treatment experiences, important issues such as commitment, cooperation, loyalty, and creative

management of individual differences are organized more quickly between couples when they learn to create, recreate and maintain intimacy (Hosseini 2019). One characteristic that differentiates the quality of the intimate relationship from the superficial can be intimacy.

The intervention group members were given techniques in this study from different categories of emotional, intellectual, activity, and context to reduce dysfunctional behaviors, disrupt intimacy, strengthen the skills and behaviors that enrich intimacy and effectiveness in the relationship, gain the ability to overcome problems and the power to solve problems. In this study, some people may have refused to answer the questionnaires and given unrealistic answers due to the cooperation and familiarity of the subjects.

conclusion

The results showed that PAIRS training has effectively increased married women's marital intimacy and has increased marital intimacy. According to the training results, it is suggested to investigate the application of intimate relationship skills to women and girls in the workplace and at university.

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