

The Effectiveness of Emotional Expression Training on Sexual and Marital Satisfaction in Young Couples in Shiraz

Abstract

The present study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of emotional expression training on sexual and marital satisfaction in young couples in Shiraz. In this regard, 40 young couples in the age group of 25 to 35 years old in Shiraz city were randomly assigned to two experimental (20 couples) and control (20 couples) groups after homogenizing them. The pretest was implemented in both groups and then the emotional expression training (9 sessions) was performed on the experimental group and after one week the posttest was implemented in both groups. The measurement tools used in this study included Enrich Couple Scale, Hudson Index of Sexual Satisfaction, and Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples. Data were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of variance. The results showed that the mean scores of sexual satisfaction in the post-test stage increased compared to the pretest stage, so emotional expression had a significant effect on improving the sexual satisfaction of young couples. Based on the mean scores, it can be seen that in the post-test stage, the mean scores of communication and conflict resolution dimensions have increased and idealistic distortion has decreased. Thus, emotional expression has a significant effect on improving these three dimensions.

Keywords: *Emotional Expression, Sexual Satisfaction, Marital Satisfaction, Young Couples of Shiraz*

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Introduction

Human life is made of various cycles and stages, one of the most complicated stages is marriage and family formation. Husband and wife relations, as the main core of the family, affect many dimensions of human life, as its stability and satisfaction could bring about many positive characteristics such as mental health and growth for the members of the family. This relationship also provides a conducive environment for the children and helps improve the growth and health of the family members (Michalitsianos, 2014).

Many people expect it to be associated with happiness and satisfaction with life and enjoy every moment of their life. What is more important than the marriage itself is the success of the marriage or the satisfaction of the couple. The relationship between the couple as the core of the family affects many aspects of human life. Sexual instinct is one of the innate needs of human beings. In this regard, Maslow (1976, quoted in Vandermassen, 2004), this need has been placed in the category of physical needs or basic vital needs. Sexual intercourse is a biological requirement for every living creature. According to the World Health Organization, sex between couples is not synonymous with sexual intercourse, and its purpose is not simply to experience or not to experience orgasm. Sex and its importance in married life are higher than a physical relationship and it is a kind of energy that motivates people to create love, affection, and intimacy among themselves. These relationships in marital life are as emotional as they are sexual and physical. One of the most important and effective variables in sexual satisfaction is the quality and how couples communicate with each other (Turka, 2011). Sexual

satisfaction is a mental assessment that includes effective reactions that arise from the assessment of sexual relations in general and affect the general health of the individual in various ways (Daniel and Bridges, 2012)

Several studies have proved a significant correlation between sexual satisfaction and satisfaction with interactions and marital relationships (Elliott and Umberson, 2008). Many studies suggest that many couples have potential and hidden conflicts over sexual issues, but consider it a secret and avoid revealing it (Spotten, 1996). Some studies have shown that sexual issues are among the most important issues in married life in terms of importance. The studies conducted by Terman have shown that although sexual factors are one of the most important factors, they are not stronger than other issues. Problems in sex can be a sign of other problems in the marriage and it is rooted elsewhere.

How married life can affect a person's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life, job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, the way of raising children, and success rate in various life tasks (Heidari, 2011). Marital satisfaction is a situation in which a couple feels happy and satisfied with being together (Fathi Ashtiani, Ahmadi Nodeh Khodabakhsh, 2004). The rate of divorce, domestic violence, and disputes show that marital satisfaction is not easily achieved.

Another issue that affects the couple's marital dissatisfaction is the sense of loneliness. Therapists consider the sense of loneliness an unpleasant emotional, lethal and inhibiting experience that people in social relations feel; this sense could lead to mental obsession, fatigue, dejection and avoiding gatherings (Stoeckli, 2010). In other words, the sense of

loneliness indicates the individual's cognitive awareness of his shortcomings and dysfunctions in an interpersonal network that would end up in the sense of grief, vanity, apprehension and anxiety (Mund & Johnson, 2020).

Marital satisfaction is one of the most important indicators to determine familial performance in which the couples feel happiness and satisfied with each other and being with one another (Williamson & Lavner, 2020). In this connection, several researchers consider marital satisfaction to be a concrete feeling of happiness, satisfaction, and conformity between the spouses and couples' rejoicing in the relations. In contrast, others view it to be the individual's mental assessment of the relationship and internal and external compatibility between the man and the woman under various situations in life to create a bilateral understanding of each other (Hou, Jiang & Wang, 2019).

Marital satisfaction is a personal experience in the marriage that can only be evaluated by the person in response to the level of marital relationship pleasure many factors affect marital satisfaction in the life of the couple and this feeling plays a major role in the normal family functions (Jiang, Wang, Zhang, Liu, et al., 2015).

Marital satisfaction is a multidimensional issue and depends on many factors. Therefore, its success depends on multiple factors. However, like any other relationship, some factors are more important in this regard. If these factors are available, marital satisfaction can be achieved. Several studies emphasize that there is a very strong association between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction (Christopher et al., 2000). Sexual satisfaction is also a major predictor of marital satisfaction. Also, sexual intimacy in marriage is related to emotional intimacy. Sexual satisfaction may lead to a happier marriage because it adds to the rewards related to the couple. How satisfied couples are with their sex and what factors affect sexual satisfaction is an important issue. Married men have higher sexual satisfaction than women (Christopher et al., 2000). Since sex is an important part of marriage during life (Peterson and Seligman, 2004), it is best to examine sexual satisfaction at different ages.

Additionally, talking with others about stressful events helps one to gain information about the event or to use effective coping methods, as well as organize his or her thoughts in the best way. In other words, verbal expression of traumatic experiences facilitates the coping process, and emotional disclosure is as effective in life in this regard. Nowadays, the significant role of emotions in marital conflicts is increasingly accepted (Solymanian, 1994) and a growing number of studies are being conducted in this regard. Now, the fundamental importance of regulating and using emotions in satisfaction as well as spouses' conflicts have been considered, and the

emotional nature of human attachment has resulted in extensive studies.

In addition to emotionally focused therapy, other approaches have focused on emotions, while many others are still unwilling to address this issue. Emotional expression as one of the main components of emotion refers to the external display of emotion, regardless of the positive or negative value (or the way it is manifested), in facial, verbal, physical, or behavioral forms. Emotion expression also includes behavioral changes associated with emotion such as changes in the face, voice, gestures, and body movements. Smiling, frowning, crying, and running away are examples of emotional expressions. Given what was stated above, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of emotional expression training on sexual and marital satisfaction in young couples in Shiraz.

Methods

The present study was conducted within the framework of a quasi-experimental design. The statistical population of the study included all young couples in Shiraz in the age groups of 20 to 35 years. Out of 250 applicants, 40 couples who met the inclusion criteria were selected, of which 20 couples were randomly assigned to the experimental design and 20 couples were randomly assigned to the control group after homogenizing them.

Research tools

Enrich Couple Scale

The Enrich Couple Scale was selected to assess marital satisfaction. This scale has been used as a valid research tool in several studies and clinical works. Larsen and Olson (1989) used it to assess marital satisfaction and believe that this scale is sensitive to changes in the family. Using random sampling in a national study on 5039 couples, it was found that using this scale can discriminate between satisfied and dissatisfied couples with 85-95% accuracy. Each of the topics in this scale is related to one of the important areas. Assessing these areas within a marital relationship can describe the potential problems of couples, or it can identify areas of strength and empowerment.

The scale consists of four 35-item subscales that can be used as a research tool, including satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution. The Enrich Couple Scale is a general measure of marital relationships including idealistic distortion, marital satisfaction with personal issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, children and marriage, family and friends, equalitarian roles related to men and women, religion orientation, couples' solidarity, and marital changes. The scales of this questionnaire are as follows:

Idealistic distortion: The questions of this scale are derived from the revised questionnaire on agreement with marital

customs and traditions. This scale measures couples' tendency to answer questions based on socially accepted behaviors. A high score indicates an unrealistic relationship about a marital relationship.

Marital satisfaction: This scale measures people's satisfaction and compliance with 10 aspects of marital relationship, including personality issues, marital relationship, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationships, marriage and children, family and friends, and equalitarian roles, and religious orientations. A high score indicates high marital satisfaction.

Communications: This scale measures a person's feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about the extent and nature of marital relationships. A high score indicates the couple's awareness and satisfaction with the level and type of their communication and a low score indicates a lack of satisfaction with the communication.

Conflict resolution: This scale assesses the spouse's attitudes, feelings, and beliefs in creating or resolving the conflict, as well as the couple's methods in ending the conflicts. A high score indicates realistic attitudes about conflicts in marital relationships, and a low score indicates dissatisfaction with the way conflicts are resolved.

The validity of this tool was examined and confirmed by the content validity method (panel of experts). Also, to determine the reliability of this tool, the "re-test" method was used and $r = 0.89$ was obtained for this questionnaire. The validity of this scale was also calculated through its correlation with the sexual satisfaction subscale of the Enrich Couple Scale, which was obtained at 0.74 (Putters and Campbell, 2008, quoted by Pourakbar, 2011). This questionnaire was administered by Pourakbar (2011) to re-design at intervals of 15 days to assess the normative status of the scale. The results of the test and its re-implementation were analyzed by a correlation test. The results of this test show a correlation of 0.956 at a significance level of 0.1. Also, for a more accurate examination, the reliability obtained from the test-retest method was 0.88. The calculated Guttman coefficient was also 0.80.

Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS)

This index was developed in 1981 by Hudson, Harrison, and Crosscup to assess couples' satisfaction levels. This scale has 25 questions and is considered as part of self-report
Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of variables

questionnaires. The subject's answer to each test item is scored on a 7-point scale, ranging from 0 to 6. The total score of the subjects in the whole test varies between 0 and 150. Some items on the scale are also scored in reverse. The questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 24 and 25 are scored in reverse. A high score on this scale indicates sexual satisfaction. The internal consistency of this scale was calculated by the designers and Cronbach's alpha was obtained at 0.91.

The reliability of the scale by test-retest method with a one-week method was obtained at 0.93. The validity of the scale was calculated through discriminant validity, the results of which showed that the scale can discriminate between couples with and without sexual problems (Hudson et al., 1981; quoted by Daniel and Bridges, 2012). In the short form of the questionnaire which included 47 questions, Solymanian (1994) obtained its Cronbach's alpha coefficient at 95%. The method of calculating the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was presented to the research supervisor (after a thorough review and attitude). After reviewing the original questionnaire and the method of calculating its validity and reliability, the method was approved by him and the Enrich Index of Sexual Satisfaction was used to estimate the level of marital satisfaction in the study groups and compare the marriages.

To conduct the study, each couple in the control and experimental groups took the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and the Hudson Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire for the pretest. After obtaining the questionnaire scores, nine 2-hour sessions of emotional expression training class (by emotionally focused couple therapy protocol) were held in the experimental group in the assembly hall of the Farhangian Club. After one week, to ensure the effectiveness of the training, both groups underwent Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and Hudson Index of Sexual Satisfaction post-stage and they were scored. Then, posttest and pretest scores of both groups were compared by SPSS software and multivariate analysis of variance to evaluate the effect of emotional expression and appreciation training.

Results

Table (1) presents the mean and standard deviation of the studied variables in the pretest and posttest stages.

Variable	Pretest			Posttest		
	Group	Mean	SD	Group	Mean	SD
Marital Satisfaction	Control	90.28	13.6	Control	20.28	06.6
	Experimental	28.27	84.6	Experimental	68.35	26.5
Communication	Control	58.26	00.8	Control	23.25	2.7
	Experimental	48.25	33.8	Experimental	83.35	33.6
Conflict resolution	Control	18.25	36.7	Control	43.24	77.6

	<i>Experimental</i>	<i>30.26</i>	<i>84.7</i>	<i>Experimental</i>	<i>33.35</i>	<i>34.6</i>
<i>Idealistic distortion</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>50.13</i>	<i>24.4</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>63.13</i>	<i>43.3</i>
	<i>Experimental</i>	<i>53.13</i>	<i>10.3</i>	<i>Experimental</i>	<i>88.10</i>	<i>98.2</i>
<i>Sexual satisfaction</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>33.77</i>	<i>85.35</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>20.75</i>	<i>05.34</i>
	<i>Experimental</i>	<i>13.54</i>	<i>45.17</i>	<i>Experimental</i>	<i>98.91</i>	<i>41.25</i>

According to the results of Table (1), in the pretest stage, the maximum mean value belongs to the variable of sexual satisfaction in the control group. Also, in the posttest stage, the

maximum mean belongs to the sexual satisfaction variable in the experimental group.

Table 2: Results of multivariate analysis of covariance test

<i>index</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Squared mean</i>	<i>statistic F</i>	<i>sig</i>
<i>posttest</i>	<i>Marital satisfaction</i>	<i>35.46724</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>35.46724</i>	<i>38.235</i>	<i>001.0</i>
<i>Group</i>	<i>Marital satisfaction</i>	<i>52.25168</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>52.25168</i>	<i>79.126</i>	<i>001.0</i>
<i>Error</i>	<i>Marital satisfaction</i>	<i>76.15284</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>50.198</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>Marital satisfaction</i>	<i>00.418356</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>

Based on the results of the analysis of covariance in Table (2), the F-index for the variable of sexual satisfaction in the posttest and the group is significant at the level of 0.001. According to the mean scores, the mean scores of sexual satisfaction in the post-test stage have increased compared to

the pretest stage, so emotional expression has a significant effect on improving the sexual satisfaction of young couples. To investigate the effect of emotional expression on marital satisfaction of young couples, multivariate tests and analysis of covariance were used, the results of which are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Results of Multivariate test

<i>test</i>	<i>value</i>	<i>statistic F</i>	<i>Error degree of freedom</i>	<i>sig</i>
<i>Pillai's Trace</i>	<i>634.0</i>	<i>16.42</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>001.0</i>
<i>Wilks Lambda</i>	<i>366.0</i>	<i>16.42</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>001.0</i>
<i>Hotelling's Trace</i>	<i>73.1</i>	<i>16.42</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>001.0</i>
<i>Roy's Largest Root</i>	<i>73.1</i>	<i>16.42</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>001.0</i>

According to the results of Table (4), the F value in the four tests of Pillai's Trace, Wilks Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root is significant at the level of 0.001. Therefore, the effect of the group variable on the dependent

variable on the existence of a significant difference is positive, so it can be stated that there is a significant difference between the groups.

Table 4: Results of Multivariate analysis of covariance test

<i>Index</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Squared mean</i>	<i>F statistic</i>	<i>sig</i>
<i>posttest</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>04.2273</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>04.2273</i>	<i>05.78</i>	<i>001.0</i>
	<i>Conflict resolution</i>	<i>44.2501</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>44.2501</i>	<i>31.146</i>	<i>001.0</i>
	<i>Idealistic distortion</i>	<i>56.204</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>56.204</i>	<i>64.15</i>	<i>001.0</i>
<i>Group</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>94.987</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>94.987</i>	<i>92.33</i>	<i>001.0</i>
	<i>Conflict resolution</i>	<i>53.718</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>53.718</i>	<i>02.42</i>	<i>001.0</i>

	<i>Idealistic distortion</i>	<i>90.55</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>90.55</i>	<i>72.25</i>	<i>026.0</i>
<i>Error</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>19.2184</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>12.29</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
	<i>Conflict resolution</i>	<i>20.1282</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>09.17</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
	<i>Idealistic distortion</i>	<i>69.817</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>90.10</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>00.59416</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
	<i>Conflict resolution</i>	<i>00.57535</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>
	<i>Idealistic distortion</i>	<i>00.15685</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>

According to the results of the analysis of covariance in Table (1), it can be seen that the *F* index for the dimensions of communication and conflict resolution in the posttest and the group is significant at the level of 0.001. According to the mean scores, it can be seen that in the posttest stage, the mean scores of communication and conflict resolution have increased and idealistic distortion has decreased, so emotional expression has a significant effect on improving these three dimensions.

Discussion

The results revealed a significant difference between the control group and the experiment group in the sexual satisfaction, so emotional expression had a significant effect on improving the sexual satisfaction of young couples. Therefore, it can be stated that the results of this study are consistent with the results of a study conducted by Solymanian (1994) who concluded that emotion expression training is effective in increasing women's marital satisfaction. In explaining this result, it can be stated that we face an integrated method in emotional expression training that emphasizes both the principles of individual attachment style and is an experimental method. Through this training, in addition to paying attention to the external factors of problems, we can emphasize the internal factors and the roots of dissatisfaction in couples. In this method, we reach the depth and root of conflicts, and by focusing on the deep emotions in the couple; we reach a clue to achieve the couple's marital dissatisfaction.

Since the issue of sexual satisfaction in couples is directly related to the emotional relationships and emotions of each couple, proper training on the way of expressing emotions in couples increases couples' satisfaction with marital relationships by helping to reveal the couple's sexual needs and increase the sense of security in couples, especially women, and examining communication inefficiencies in couples' sexual relationships and addressing them in a way that strengthens their ability to express the need for sex and popular techniques and methods in women, and the ability to express inner emotions and stimulating words in men.

Thus, through emotional expression training, dynamic interpersonal communication takes place and can change and improve the couple's performance positively. Reducing the confusion in adult romantic relationships and creating safer attachment bonds in the spouse can increase emotional

relationships. Sex occurs because of love and is an answer to existential issues, which increases with the expression of the emotions of this love and affection for the spouse. By strengthening these relationships, more emotional relationships are created between the couple, increasing the couple's sexual satisfaction.

The results showed that emotional expression has a positive effect on the marital satisfaction of young couples. There is a significant difference between the control group and the experiment control in the dimensions of marital satisfaction. It was found that emotional expression has a significant effect on improving these three dimensions. Therefore, it can be stated that the results of this study are consistent with the results of a study conducted by Huebner et al. (2017).

In explaining this result, it can be stated that various variables affect the relationship between couples, so emotional expression training has a significant impact on the quality of life of couples and it can measure aspects of couples' lives that improve marital satisfaction. This training improves couples' relationships by empowering couples in emotional and cognitive components. This effectiveness can be discussed in two axes. The first axis is the nature and dimensions of the intervention and the second axis is the nature of the dependent variable.

Concerning the nature of the therapeutic intervention, the work is done on attachment-oriented emotions and the emphasis is on individual growth and deepening intrapersonal and interpersonal changes, in such a way that the person's emotions are at the center of attention and through the analysis of emotions, the person gains insight into the issue. Also, by looking at the attachment styles of each couple, active emotions in today's relationships are attributed to the couple learning from their past experiences, which are the real and constructive units of behavior and by revealing the unconscious emotions of the person, it is possible to increase the couple's satisfaction. Concerning the nature of the dependent variable, it can be stated that marital satisfaction has an emotional and intrapersonal nature and helps to increase the inner sense of satisfaction in couples by increasing the ability of people to express emotions correctly.

Conclusion

The results revealed a significant difference between the control group and the experiment group in sexual satisfaction,

so emotional expression had a significant effect on improving the sexual satisfaction of young couples. The results also revealed that emotional expression has a positive effect on the marital satisfaction of young couples. There is a significant difference between the control group and the experiment group in the dimensions of marital satisfaction. It was also shown that in the post-test phase, the mean scores of communication and conflict resolution dimensions increased and idealistic distortion decreased. Hence, the emotional expression had a significant effect on improving these three dimensions.

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Conflicts of interest

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