

## The Effectiveness of Appreciation Training on Sexual and Marital Satisfaction in Young Couples in Shiraz

### Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of emotional expression training on sexual and marital satisfaction in young couples in Shiraz. The present study was conducted in a quasi-experimental design framework. This study's statistical population included all young couples in Shiraz aged 20 to 35 years. About 40 couples with controlled conditions were selected out of 250 applicants, among which 20 couples were randomly assigned to the experimental design and 20 couples to the control group after matching. A pre-test from both groups and five sessions of appreciation training (made by a researcher protocol) was performed on the experimental group in the conference hall of the Farhangian Club. Then, a post-test was performed on both groups after a week. In this study, the enrich couple questionnaire and Hudson's sexual satisfaction questionnaire were used as the measurement tools. Data analysis was performed using multivariate analysis of variance. The results indicated that the average scores of communication dimensions and conflict resolution increased in the post-test stage, and the ideal distortion decreased. Therefore, appreciation has a significant effect on improving these three dimensions.

**Keywords:** *Appreciation Training, Sexual Satisfaction, Marital Satisfaction, Young Couples in Shiraz*

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### Introduction

One of the key indicators of success in marriage is to have marital satisfaction (Fredman, 2016). Marital satisfaction refers to the couples' positive and rejoicing attitude towards various aspects of their relations, such as communication, personal issues, conflict resolution, financial issues, sex relations and children (Taniguchi, 2006).

Psychologists believe that divorce is a kind of emotional rupture of the couple or at least one of the couples, known as one of the most valid dissatisfaction indicators in marital relationships. Undoubtedly, this emotional rupture is harmful and creates different injuries for couples (Corporal, 2013; quoted by Azizi et al., 2016). The published statistics show that Iran ranked the fourth country in divorce to marriage ratio (Azizi et al., 2016). There is a common discussion in the scientific community about the family and ways to strengthen it. Related sciences, especially psychology, daily try to take action to increase family stability (Lawrence et al., 2008). Couples' satisfactory sexual relations play a significant role in strengthening the stability of families. The tendencies, attractions, and quality of human sexual life are as productive and complex as the living principle. Sexual activity and gender are an important part of Marital life. Therefore, knowing a correct and good way of life is an art that needs more extensive research and deeper experience than other arts. Sexual instinct is one of man's innate needs. Maslow defines sexual instinct as a category of physical or basic vital needs. Many studies about marriage-related factors have indicated that sexuality is among the most important issues for couples (Davis and Shaver, 2006).

It is believed that a happy marital life is partially related to sex, but this relationship can be an important factor in the happiness or unhappiness of the marital life. When this relationship is not satisfying, it may lead to deprivation, failure, insecurity (endangering mental health), and family breakup. Sexual dissatisfaction can also create deep problems in the couple's relationship, such as hatred for the spouse, resentment, jealousy, competition, revenge, humiliation, and lack of self-confidence. These issues are strengthened or revealed by tensions and differences and gradually enlarge the gap between spouses (Christopher and Spratcher, 2000). Sexual instinct also has a constructive and fundamental role in health and mental balance. Due to these characteristics, sexual desire differentiates from other biological needs and becomes a mental and psychological need. Creating a healthy and satisfying marital relationship results from a healthy and successful sexual relationship with continuous sexual satisfaction.

According to the research, marital satisfaction is created when the current situation in the marital relationship matches the expected situation. The couples can protect the family against harm by increasing the satisfaction level in marital life.

With the fast development of the positivist psychological movement in recent years, a growing interest has been shown in examining the positive aspects of communication performance (Fincham, 2010). It refers to constructs consistent with some studies, which serve as bases for appreciation, including positive processes that occur among couple relations (Lambert, 2010). Appreciation is an inherent sense of acknowledgment and gratefulness for life. In other words, appreciation is the general tendency to concurrently detect and

respond with gratitude to the benevolent roles of other people, as well as positive experiences and outcomes the individual gains (McCullough, 2002). Appreciation is a cognitive-emotional state and is usually associated with the perception that the individual has received a benefit that he did not deserve or has failed to achieve; rather, it is a benefit that has occurred to him due to his good intentions (Bono, 2006).

We let others know that their efforts have not been useless by appreciating their efforts and love. This issue teaches other people, especially family members, to be grateful for the other's love. It also reinforces behavior because appreciating someone's action will help him do the same at other times when he does a favor. It is possible to get rid of the tiredness of the hard work and effort others have done for us. The fundamental hypothesis is that a sense of gratitude to God, others, life, and the universe can lead to greater peace of mind, happiness, physical and mental health, and deeper and more satisfying interpersonal relationships. If we classify positive psychology into curiosity, creativity, hope, forgiveness, passion, humor, religiosity, spirituality, and appreciation, appreciation is a subcategory of positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).. Appreciation dates back only twenty years and is a key aspect of positive psychology (Wood et al., 2008). On the other hand, appreciation is a kind of love that has a precipitating role in forming new emotional bonds (McCullough et al., 2003). Appreciation training promotes positive relationships with others, especially when the person is a human spouse. A great part of life satisfaction refers to this positive relationship. Therefore, it is easier to be convenient with people who remember and speak of their kindness in addition to telling their vice. As mentioned, this study investigates the effectiveness of appreciation training on sexual and marital satisfaction in young couples in Shiraz.

The present study was conducted in a quasi-experimental design framework. This study's statistical population included all young couples in Shiraz aged 20 to 35 years. About 40 couples with controlled conditions were selected out of 250 applicants, among which 20 couples were randomly assigned to the experimental design and 20 couples to the control group after matching.

#### **Research tools:**

Enrich couple scale:

The Enrich questionnaire was selected to evaluate marital satisfaction. This questionnaire has been used as a valid research tool in numerous researches and clinical works. Fowers and Olson (1989) used this questionnaire to evaluate marital satisfaction. They found this scale sensitive to changes in the family. In addition, they used random sampling in a national study with 5039 couples and showed that this questionnaire could distinguish satisfied and dissatisfied

couples with 85-95% accuracy. Each topic in this questionnaire is related to one of the important areas. Evaluating these areas within a marital relationship can describe the couple's potential problems and identify their strength and reinforcement areas.

This scale includes four 35-item subscales that can be used to research satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution. The Enrich Couple Scale is a general measure of marital relationships, including idealistic distortion, marital satisfaction, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sex, children and parenting, family and friends, egalitarian roles related to men and women, religious orientation, marital correlation, and marital change. This questionnaire scales are as follows:

**Idealistic distortion:** These scale questions are from the modified questionnaire of agreement with marital customs and traditions. This scale measures the couple's tendency to answer questions based on socially desirable behaviors. A high score shows an unrealistic relationship about a marital relationship.

**Marital Satisfaction:** This scale measures people's satisfaction and adaptation to 10 aspects of the marital relationship, including personality issues, marital relationship, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relation, marriage and children, relatives and friends, egalitarian roles and religious orientation. A high score indicates high marital satisfaction.

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

**Conflict resolution:** This scale evaluates the spouse's attitudes, feelings, and beliefs in creating or resolving the conflict and the couple's methods in finishing the argument. A high score shows realistic attitudes about conflicts in marital relationships, and a low score shows dissatisfaction with the conflict resolution method.

The tool's validity was evaluated and confirmed by the content validity method (expert panel). In addition, the "retest" method was used to determine the tool reliability, and  $r = 0.89$  was obtained for this questionnaire. In addition, this scale validity was calculated through its correlation with the sexual satisfaction subscale of the Enrich Questionnaire, which was 0.74 (Putters and Campbell, 2008, quoted by Pourakbar , 2011). Pourakbar (2011) directed this questionnaire to be re-design at 15-day intervals to evaluate the scale normative status. A correlation test analyzed the test result and its re-run. These test results also show a correlation of 0.956 at a significance level of 0.1. In addition, the validity obtained from

the test halving method is 0.88 for a more detailed review. The calculated Guttman coefficient is also 0.80.

### The index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS)

The index of Sexual Satisfaction was built in 1981 by Hudson-Harrison and Crosscup to evaluate couples' satisfaction levels. This scale has 25 questions and is part of self-report questionnaires. The subject's response to each item test is determined at the level of a 7-point scale between 0 and 6, and the total score of the subjects in the whole test varies between 0 and 150. Some items on the scale also have inverse scoring. Inverse scoring includes questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 24 and 25. A high score on this scale reflects sexual satisfaction. The designers calculated this scale's internal consistency, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.91. The scale's validity was calculated by a one-week retesting method equal to 0.93. The scale's validity was calculated through discriminant validity. The results showed that the scale could identify couples with and without sexual problems (Hudson et al., 1981; quoted by Daniel and Bridges, 2012). Pourakbar (2011) directed this questionnaire to be re-design at 15-day intervals to evaluate the scale normative status. A correlation test analyzed the results of the test and its re-run. These test

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of case variables

Variable	pre-test			post-test		
	group	Mean	standard deviation	group	Mean	standard deviation
Marital Satisfaction	Control	90.28	13.6	Control	20.28	06.6
	experiment	28.27	84.6	experiment	68.35	26.5
communication	Control	58.26	00.8	Control	23.25	2.7
	experiment	48.25	33.8	experiment	83.35	33.6
Conflict resolution	Control	18.25	36.7	Control	43.24	77.6
	experiment	30.26	84.7	experiment	33.35	34.6
Idealistic distortion	Control	50.13	24.4	Control	63.13	43.3
	experiment	53.13	10.3	experiment	88.10	98.2
Sexual satisfaction	Control	33.77	85.35	Control	20.75	05.34
	experiment	13.54	45.17	experiment	98.91	41.25

As observed in Table 1, the highest mean value in the pre-test stage belongs to the sexual satisfaction variable in the control

Table 2: Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Variable	group	Statistics	Freedom degree	Significance level
Marital Satisfaction	Control	0.081	80	0.200
Communication	Experiment	0.104	80	0.200
Conflict resolution	Control	0.116	80	0.189
Idealistic distortion	Experiment	0.129	80	0.089
Sexual satisfaction	Control	0.091	80	0.200

results indicate a correlation of 0.956 at a significance level of 0.1. In addition, the validity obtained from the test halving method is 0.88 for a more detailed review. The calculated Guttman coefficient is also 0.80. The "retest" method was also used to determine the tool reliability, and  $r = 0.89$  was obtained for this questionnaire. Enrich's marital satisfaction and Hudson's sexual satisfaction questionnaire were taken from each couple in the control and experimental groups for pre-testing to conduct the research. Five sessions of appreciation training (made by a researcher protocol) were performed on the experimental group in the conference hall of the Farhangian Club after obtaining the questionnaire scores. After one week, post-tests, including Enrich Marital Satisfaction and Hudson Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire, were taken from both groups and scored to ensure the effectiveness of the training. Then, post-test and pre-test scores of both control and experiment groups were compared by SPSS software and multivariate analysis of variance to evaluate the effect of emotional expression and appreciation training.

### Findings

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the studied variables in the pre-test and post-test stages.

group. In addition, the highest mean in the post-test stage belongs to the sexual satisfaction variable in the experimental group.

Based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test table and significance level in all five variables that are more than 0.05, it is concluded that the data distribution is normal.

Table 3: Levene's test results

Variable	Statistics F	Significance level
Marital Satisfaction	1.07	0.304
communication	0.403	0.527
Conflict resolution	0.317	0.575
Idealistic distortion	3.15	0.080
Sexual satisfaction	16.67	0.001

Except for sexual satisfaction, Levene's test and the significance level in all variables are more than 0.05, showing no significant difference between the variance of the control group and the experiment in the pre-test stage.

Table 4: Multivariate analysis of covariance Results

Indicator	Variable	Total squares	Freedom degree	Average square	Statistics F	Significance level
Post-test	Sexual satisfaction	46724.35	1	46724.35	235.38	0.001
group	Sexual satisfaction	25168.52	1	25168.52	126.79	0.001
Error	Sexual satisfaction	15284.76	27	198.50	-----	-----
Total	Sexual satisfaction	418356.00	30	-----	-----	-----

As observed in Table 4, it is concluded that the F-index for the sexual satisfaction variable in the post-test and the group is significant at the level of 0.001. According to the mean scores, it is also concluded that the mean scores of the sexual satisfaction variable in the post-test stage are increased compared to the pre-test stage. Therefore, appreciation significantly affects the improvement of young couples' sexual satisfaction.

Table 5: Multivariate test results

Test	value	Statistics F	Error freedom Degree	Significance level
Pillais Trace	0.634	42.16	73	0.001
Wilks Lambda	0.366	42.16	73	0.001
Hotelling's Trace	1.73	42.16	73	0.001
Roy's Largest Root	1.73	42.16	73	0.001

As observed in Table 5, it can be seen that the value of F 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 based on significant difference is positive. In addition, there is a significant difference between the groups.

Table 6: Results of multivariate analysis of covariance

Indicator	Variable	Total squares	Freedom degrees	Average square	Statistics F	Significance level
Post-test	communication	2273.04	1	2273.04	78.05	0.001
	Conflict resolution	2501.44	1	2501.44	146.31	0.001
	Idealistic distortion	204.56	1	204.56	15.64	0.001
group	communication	987.94	1	987.94	33.92	0.001
	Conflict resolution	718.53	1	718.53	42.02	0.001
	Idealistic distortion	55.90	1	55.90	25.72	0.026
Error	communication	2184.19	75	29.12	-----	-----
	Conflict resolution	1282.20	75	17.09	-----	-----
	Idealistic distortion	817.69	75	10.90	-----	-----
Total	communication	59416.00	80	-----	-----	-----
	Conflict resolution	57535.00	80	-----	-----	-----

As observed in Table 6, it is concluded that the F-index for the dimensions of communication and conflict resolution in the post-test and the group is significant at the level of 0.001. The average score shows that the average scores of communication dimensions and conflict resolution are increased in the post-test stage, and the Idealistic distortion is decreased. Therefore, appreciation significantly affects the improvement of these three dimensions.

The results showed that appreciation positively affects young couples' sexual satisfaction. There is also a significant difference between the control group and the experiment on sexual satisfaction. Therefore, appreciation has a significant effect on improving young couples' sexual satisfaction. No research has been conducted on the effectiveness of emotion expression training in young couples' sexual satisfaction. Therefore, we need to discuss the research that addresses the issue to compare this study's results with other studies. In addition, it is said that this study's results are consistent with the findings of Cordova (2003), Honarparvaran et al. (2010), and Rambod et al. (2010). As mentioned, appreciation is a kind of emotional expression and the ability to express positive emotions in couples. Appreciation is considered as respect and attention that a person can create a feeling of value and love in his wife through greeting. The feeling by which the wife thinks that her actions and herself are acceptable and valuable to her husband. Teaching appreciation and implementing it in life create a form of love in the spouses with an accelerating role in forming new emotional bonds. This issue makes spouses more attached to each other, and the appreciation effectiveness is strengthened and encouraged by creating an effective atmosphere. Couples increase the number of similar responses in similar situations by highlighting the other party's abilities and expressing a satisfactory sense of these abilities. For example, each couple can express emotion related to a particular behavior, situation, or phoneme during sex or express satisfaction with great sex and satisfy sexual needs after sex. Therefore, they can help spouses know the correct way of communication and provide more efficient and progressive sexual relations by promoting stimulating behaviors in couples.

The results also showed that appreciation positively affects young couples' marital satisfaction. In addition, the results show a significant difference between the control group and the experiment in the dimensions of marital satisfaction. The results also showed that the average scores of communication dimensions and conflict resolution have increased in the post-test stage, and the ideal distortion has decreased. Therefore, appreciation has a significant effect on improving these three dimensions, and this study's results are consistent with the

findings of Cordova (2003), Honarparvaran et al. (2010), and Rambod et al. (2010). The new research indicates that grateful people are happier and more social than those who carefully check all the negative aspects of their lives and ignore the positive ones. They rarely criticize physical illnesses and quickly help each other when there are personal problems. They express their emotional and spiritual support to each other more than others. According to psychologists, appreciation makes a positive relationship with others, especially when this person is your spouse. Life satisfaction is related to this positive relationship; that is why people are more comfortable with you, knowing that you also remember and say their kindness in addition to telling their story. More appreciative people are more satisfied. They are more satisfied with their own lives and realize their spouse's goodness more. Happiness means life satisfaction. When it comes to appreciation in couples' lives, it is accepted that it is a subcategory of couples' ability to express and state their interpersonal emotions. Training appreciation ability creates a sense of satisfaction in couples through which the person can declare that he appreciates the other person's efforts. As reinforcement in married life, this issue has increased the level of physical and emotional support from each couple. On the other hand, it is indirectly stated that the other party has considered the efforts made and are not wasted. The wife's appreciation of her husband for outside efforts creates a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem in the husband and increases his motivation to do more difficult things. In addition, the man's appreciation of his wife for housework and possibly outdoors motivates her to become more empowered in special situations and life problems. Therefore, the spouses are inspired to enter into a caring, loving, and valuing relationship. This appreciation leads to the cycle of generosity and support, which provides the conditions for establishing emotional relationships to achieve satisfaction, contentment, and adjustment and satisfy one of the basic needs of the human psyche. According to theoretical issues and empirical research, appreciation is one of the important well-being factors. Therefore, training ways and effects of appreciation in life can increase young people's marital satisfaction.

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#### ***Conflict of interest***

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#### **Conclusion**

Marital satisfaction is one of the effective factors in creating sexual satisfaction in couples. Therefore, the sexual instinct is

developed and is satisfied safely and securely to be the basis of peace and the human way and facilitate them to achieve humanity. With its positive functions, appreciation will create psychological and emotional security and regulate sexual behaviors and couples harmony. Therefore, healthy life and marital relations will undoubtedly positively affect marital satisfaction. It is also concluded that appreciation has a direct and significant effect on the performance of sexual relations.

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