

The effectiveness of Martin Seligman's flourishing theory training on the components of conflict resolution styles in couples with conflicts in counseling centers in Ahvaz

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of Martin Seligman's flourishing theory training on the components of conflict resolution styles in couples with conflicts in counseling centers in Ahvaz. This research design was semi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test design with control and experimental groups. The statistical population of this research included all couples who were referred to Ahvaz counseling centers in 2018. The number of subjects was 30 couples diagnosed with moderate to high conflict after filling the Marital Conflict Questionnaire of Kansas Eggman et al. and were selected as available; 15 couples in the experimental group and 15 couples (30 women and 30 men) were in the control group. Before implementing the independent variable, both groups underwent a pre-test. Then the experimental group was subjected to Martin Seligman's flourishing theory training interventions during eight 60-minute sessions, while the control group did not receive this educational intervention. In this research, Rahim's Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire (ROCI-II) Kansas Marital Conflict Questionnaire by Eggman et al. (KMCS) was used. SPSS software and multivariate analysis of variance (MANCOVA) were used for data analysis, and a T-test was used to compare groups. The findings showed that the mean scores of constructive conflict resolution styles (integrative, domineering and compromising) in the experimental group increased after the intervention, and the mean scores of non-constructive conflict resolution styles (obliging and avoidant) decreased.

Keywords: marital conflict, conflict resolution styles, Martin Seligman's flourishing theory, conflict management

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Introduction

In examining the social relations between people, the relations within the family are significant. The family's health and society's expectation of the family's performance depends on the relationship between the couple (Sadeghi Fasaei and Malekipour, 2013). As the essential institution of society, the family plays the most fundamental role in creating and surviving a healthy society and is always the focus of researchers, sociologists, and psychologists (Kamp Dush, 2013). Families with correct and healthy relationships can better resolve their conflicts and are more satisfied with their relationships. Marital satisfaction and relationships between couples are among the variables used in studies related to family and relationships and their improvement (Funk and Rogge, 2007). Dissatisfaction with marital relationships is one factor that destroys relations with family members and has adverse consequences (Wood, Goesling, and Avlar, 2007). The Director of Statistics and Demographic Information and Migration of the Iranian Registrar announced that the number of divorces increased 3.5 times compared to marriages in the first six months of 2016. The study of Akbarzadeh et al. in Tabriz also showed that the score of marital conflicts in women applying for divorce is higher than in normal individuals. Researchers investigate and understand permanently how to create stable relationships between individuals, especially couples. Studies of couple relationships help develop our

understanding of the structural framework within which relationships arise. The quality and type of a couple's relationship are essential in enhancing family relationships (Toxel, 2006).

All marriages have many challenges. Most of them have a good start, but their sustainability requires the efforts and participation of both parties to maintain satisfaction from this marriage. It seems that the happiness, stability, and satisfaction of marriage depend on the couple and their performance (Hosseini et al., 2014). The skills to resolve conflict can be a crucial indicator of successful relationships. Research has shown that romantic relationships in the future of couples significantly correlate with applying conflict resolution methods (Weisskireh and Dlevi, 2013). Among the common factors in conflicts between couples, we can point out differences, tense interactions between couples, and disrespect that may be associated with dishonor (Buhler, 2014). The awareness and ability to manage and resolve conflicts constructively can form a compelling, intimate, and strong relationship between couples (Samohano, 2013). A solution that facilitates intimacy between couples is a constructive way to resolve conflicts. In contrast, destructive ways of dealing with conflict may aggravate the disturbance and anxiety in the couple's relationship (Dildar, Aisha, and Sumaira, 2013). Research shows that choosing the proper method to manage conflict in relationships is one of the most important and

determining factors in the quality of a relationship (Wheeler, Kimberly, and Shawna, 2010). Conflict resolution styles are answers or a set of patterned behaviors that individuals use when they have different conflicts, and they are classified based on two axes: assertiveness means conflict resolution according to personal interests, and participation means conflict resolution according to the other party's interests (Hacker and Wilmer, 2000). Some researchers believe that conflict resolution refers to the kinds of conflict management strategies that a person uses when dealing with a conflict (Haghighi et al., 2012). Rahim and Magner (2016) introduced five conflict resolution styles: avoidant, integrative, domineering, compromising, and obliging. The integrative (participative) style has characteristics such as prioritizing oneself and others (high determination and high participation). This style requires cooperation between the two parties, openness, exchange of information, examination of differences, and finding a solution acceptable to both parties (Yaghoubi and Mohammadzadeh, 2016). Avoidant style is characterized by allocating low importance to self and others. Usually, this style is accompanied by withdrawal; responsibilities are left to another person, and these persons do not believe in gaining profit from conflict resolution; therefore, they prefer to withdraw from the conflict. Being passive, staying away, fearing to face the conflict, undervaluing the conflict, and delaying the resolution are seen in this group of persons. It seems that this group is not interested in changing their understanding or getting to know the other person's point of view, which may temporarily create an escape route to solve the problem. However, it does not lead to the proper solution to the problem. In this style, a person neither seeks to achieve his own goals nor participates with others to achieve common goals (low determination and participation) (Yaghoubi and Mohammadzadeh 2016). A compromise (flexible) conflict resolution style is characterized by high involvement and low assertiveness. The basis of any compromise is permeability, i.e., for the compromise to be practical, the couple does not have to agree on everything, but they must honestly accept each other's position, which is almost the same as permeability. The main obstacle to conflict resolution in this style is the inability to be open-minded. Reconciliation often requires talking about differences in opinions and experiences in a systematic way (Yaghoubi and Mohammadzadeh 2016). The consensual conflict resolution style is characterized by moderate participation and assertiveness. In this style, none of the parties have a sense of being a loser and look at the conflict situation from a relatively equal position (Yaghoubi and Mohammadzadeh, 2016). In an obliging conflict resolution style (competitive), the person seeks to confirm his information and hypotheses, dominate the relationship, and compete to win (Yaghoubi and Mohammadzadeh, 2016).

Some therapeutic interventions, such as Martin Seligman's thriving theory training, are effective in couples' conflict resolution styles. Sigman's prosperity theory states that happiness and life satisfaction are intertwined, so prosperity can only be achieved by having this happiness and satisfaction. On the other hand, achieving prosperity also causes happiness and well-being. Moreover, these factors mutually affect each other (Seligman, 2014). In 2011, Seligman introduced the Perma model concerning flourishing theory, in which well-being is defined in five parts: positive emotion (P), entirety (E), positive relationships (R), meaning (M), and achievement (A). Seligman (2011) believes that these five parts are the main pillars of essential areas that individuals pursue because of themselves, and each can be measured independently. Many shreds of evidence demonstrate that positive education therapeutic interventions increase well-being (positive emotions, participation, happiness, and meaning in life). According to Seligman (2011), happiness means having positive emotions and meaning in life, and commitment to life. He claimed people could increase their happiness to the highest expected level through common activities. He introduced a multidimensional view of enhancing happiness, which includes paying attention to the past, present, and future aspects of emotional life (Seligman and Rashid 2011). Shahsawari and Esmaili (2017) researched the effect of Seligman's flourishing intervention on the social competence of high school female students with social anxiety disorder. The results approved that Seligman's flourishing intervention enhances the social competence of girls with social anxiety disorder. Rasa (2015), in his research, titled the effectiveness of flourishing education on reducing the psychological distress of high school students, also stated that flourishing education reduces depression, anxiety, and stress in experimental group students, compared to the control group.

Considering the constant differences between all people, in society or the family, providing training and ways to reduce or accept differences between couples can contribute to improving relationships and provide a robust basis for a healthy society. In this regard, this research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Martin Seligman's flourishing theory training on the components of conflict resolution styles in couples with conflicts in Ahvaz counseling centers.

Methods

In terms of the purpose of the study, it is assumed applied research, the method of collecting data and information, and the method of analysis; it is a semi-experimental research (pre-test, post-test design with a control group). The statistical population of the present study includes all conflicted couples referred to counseling centers in Ahvaz in 2018. Thirty couples (30 men and 30 women) referred to counseling centers in Ahvaz city in 2018 with available sampling methods were

selected equally and divided randomly into two experimental and control groups. The experimental group underwent training interventions based on Martin Seligman's flourishing theory.

Materials

Rahim conflict resolution style questionnaire (ROCI-II)
 This questionnaire was created by Rahim (1983) and includes 28 items and five factors of integrative style (items 1-7), dominant style (items 8-13), obliging style (items 14-18), avoidant style (items 19-22) and compromise style (items 23-28). The answers to this questionnaire were determined based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very little, 2 = little, 3 = occasionally, 4 = much, and 5 = very much). A higher score in each item indicates more application of that conflict resolution style. The cutting point in this research was 84, which is determined in each of the couples separately by adding up the total score of the conflict questionnaire, and it indicates the level of conflicts between the couples. This questionnaire has been standardized in Iran by Haghghi, Zarei, and Ghaderi (2011). Haghghi et al. (2013) reported the reliability coefficients of the factors of this questionnaire between 0.7 and 0.75 using Cronbach's alpha method, and its reliability coefficient using the bisection method was 0.68. Also, confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the 5-factor model of this questionnaire.

Kansas Marital Conflict Questionnaire of Eggman et al. (KMCS)

This scale was created by Eggman, Moxley, and Schumm (1985, quoted by Zal, Arab, and Thanagoui Moher, 2020) (KMCS: Kansas Marital Conflict Scale) and contains 27 questions. The responses to this scale are scored based on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, and 4 = almost always). Questions 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, and 23 are reverse-scored. The range of scores on this scale is between 27 and 108, and a lower score indicates more marital conflict. The cutting score was lower than 67 (Ansari et al., 2021), obtained from the sum of the total scores of the questionnaire questions, and indicates the presence of high conflicts in couples.

The flourishing training sessions included eight 60-minutes group training sessions. In each meeting, happiness strategies

and techniques were trained, and the logic of happiness exercises and their positive effects were discussed. Participants implement at least one of the techniques presented in each session in each flourishing strategy. In the next session, report to the group about the method of performing that technique and its emotional and cognitive effects, and receive emotional support from the group.

Data analysis was conducted using version 26 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS 26).

Results

Based on the results, the highest frequency of respondents according to age among women in the control group belonged to the age group of 40 to 50 years and in the experimental group to the age group of 20 to 30 years, and among men in the control and experimental groups to the age group of 30 to 40 years. The highest frequency of respondents in terms of education among women in control and experimental groups belonged to associate degrees; among men, in the control group belonged to diploma and lower, and in the experimental group belonged to bachelor's education. The highest frequency of respondents in terms of marriage history was in the control group with a history of fewer than 5 years and the experimental group with a history of 5 to 10 years.(Table 1)

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation of the components of conflict resolution styles in the experimental and control groups separately in the pre-test and post-test stages

The results showed the highest frequency of respondents according to age among women in the control group belonging to the age group of 40 to 50 years and in the experimental group to the age group of 20 to 30 years, and among men in the control and experimental groups to the age group of 30, It was up to 40 years. The highest frequency of respondents in terms of education among women in the control and experimental groups belonged to associate degrees, and among men in the control group they belonged to diploma and lower, and in the experimental group belonged to bachelor's education. The highest frequency of respondents in terms of marriage history was in the control group with a history of fewer than 5 years and the experimental group with a history of 5 to 10 years.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation of the components of conflict resolution styles in the experimental and control groups separately in the pre-test and post-test phases

Variables			Test group (n=30)				Control group (n=30)			
			Women (n=15)		Men (n=15)		Women (n=15)		Men (n=15)	
Statistical indicators			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
The	Integrative style	Pre-test	18.2	2.608	18.47	3.159	17.5	4.274	20.2	2.305
		Post-test	27.3	5.42	25.93	2.434	17.7	3.213	20.47	2.261

domineering style	Pre-test	16.5	1.606	17.2	2.808	15.6	1789	16.67	2.895
	Post-test	21.35	1.725	23.8	2.484	14.75	1.585	16.87	3.137
obliging style	Pre-test	16.5	1.701	16.6	3.961	17.15	1.387	18	4.456
	Post-test	11.75	1.618	9.67	1.988	16.62	1.436	18.33	4.701
Avoidant style	Pre-test	13.95	2.781	14.67	2.664	15.85	2.681	14.87	3.044
	Post-test	9.2	1.261	10.33	2.16	15.9	1.41	14.33	3.457
Compromising style	Pre-test	16.4	2.465	13.8	2.455	1.95	1.791	13.67	2.554
	Post-test	20.65	2.182	18.53	2.875	16.73	1.234	13.91	2.987

In the sample of women, the mean (standard deviation) for the score of 22 integrative styles for the experimental and control groups in the pre-test was 18.2 (2.608) and 17.5 (4.274), respectively. In the post-test, 27.3 (5.42) and 17.7 (3.213), respectively, for the domineering style, the experimental and control groups in the pre-test were 5.16 (1 / 606) and 15.6 (1 / 789), and in the post-test, 21.35 (1.725) and 14.75 (1.585), for the obliging style for the experimental and control groups in the pre-test, was 16.5 (1.701) and 17.15 (1.387) and in post-test was 11.75 (1.618) and 16.62 (1.436), for the avoidant style for the experimental and control groups, in the pre-test was 13.95 (2.781) and 15.85 (2.681), respectively, and in the post-test, 9.2 (1.361) and 15.9 (1.41) and for the compromise style for the experimental and control groups in the pre-test was 16.4 (2.465) and 15.95 (1.791) and in the post-test 20.65 (2.182) and 16.73 (1.234) (table2).

In the sample of men, the mean (standard deviation) for the integrative style score for the experimental and control groups

in the pre-test was 18.47 (3.159) and 20.2 (2.305) and in the post-test was 25 / 93 (2.434) and 20.47 (2.264), for the domineering style for the test and control group in the pre-test 17.2 (2.808) and 16.67 (2.859). In the post-test, 23.8 (2.484) and 16.87 (3.137); for the obliging style for the test and control group in the pre-test, 16.6 (3.961) and 18 (4.456) and the post-test 9.67 (1.988) and 18.33 (4.701), for the avoidant style for the experimental and control groups in the pre-test 14.67(2.664) and 14.84 (3.044) and in the post-test 10.33 (2.16) and 14.33 (3.457) and for the compromising style for the experimental and control groups in the pre-test was 13.8 (2.455) and 13.67 (2.554), and in the post-test was 18.53 (2.875) and 13.93 (2.987), respectively (table2).

Table2. The results of the homogeneity of variances (Levin) test between the dependent variables in the test and control group of women and men in the pre-test stage 1

Effectiveness	Dependent variable		Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	F	Significance level
Women's group	Conflict resolution styles	integrative style	1	28	0.147	0.704
		domineering style	1	28	0.201	0.657
		obliging style	1	28	0.006	0.938
		Avoidant style	1	28	1.391	0.246
		compromising style	1	28	1.721	0.197
Men's Group	Conflict resolution styles	integrative style	1	28	3.684	0.065
		domineering style	1	28	0.013	0.91
		obliging style	1	28	0.968	0.234
		Avoidant style	1	28	0.671	0.42

		compromising style	1	28	0.37	0.548
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In the sample of women, the results of Levin's test in integrative style ($F = 0.147$ and $p = 0.704$), domineering style ($F = 0.201$ and $p = 0.657$), obliging style ($F = 0.006$ and $p = 0.938$), avoidant style ($F = 1.391$ and $p = 0.246$) compromising style ($F = 1.721$ and $p = 0.197$) confirmed the assumption of homogeneity of variances for all variables and their sub-components. In the men's sample, the results of Levin's test in

integrative style ($F = 3.684$ and $p = 0.065$), domineering style ($F = 0.013$ and $p = 0.91$), obliging style ($F = 0.968$ and $p = 0.334$), the avoidant style ($F = 0.671$ and $p = 0.42$) the compromising style ($F = 0.37$ and $p = 0.548$) confirmed the homogeneity of variances for all variables. They confirmed their sub-components (Table 2).

Table3. The results of the analysis of covariance in the MANCOVA on the average scores of the post-test of conflict resolution styles and its components in the sample of women in the experimental and control groups

Variable statistical indicators	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	mean squares	F	Significance level	Effect size	Statistical power
integrative style	962.839	1	962.839	24.977	0.001	0.574	1
domineering style	53.2	1	53.2	12.832	0.001	0.41	0.995
obliging style	150.448	1	150.448	52.193	0.001	0.738	1
Avoidant style	71.712	1	71.712	14.379	0.001	0.437	0.998
compromising style	155.193	1	155.193	12.794	0.001	0.409	0.995

In the sample of women, the F value for the integrative style component was 24.977, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the domineering style component was 12.832, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the obliging style component was 52.193, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The value of F for the avoidant style component was 14.379, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the compromising style

component was 12.794, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Therefore, it can be concluded that the training of Martin Seligman's flourishing theory was effective in conflict resolution styles in couples with conflict. Scores in constructive conflict resolution styles (integrative, domineering, and compromising) increased, and scores in non-constructive conflict resolution styles (obliging and avoidant) decreased (Table 3).

Table4. The results of the analysis of covariance in the MANCOVA on the average scores of the post-test of conflict resolution styles and its components in the sample of men in the experimental and control groups

Variable statistical indicators	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	mean squares	F	Significance level	Effect size	Statistical power
integrative style	295.635	1	295.635	126.605	0.001	0.824	1
domineering style	4837.873	1	4837.873	450.333	0.001	0.943	1
obliging style	427.346	1	427.346	107.74	0.001	0.8	1
Avoidant style	109.541	1	109.541	53.09	0.001	0.663	1
compromising style	149.34	1	149.34	69.766	0.001	0.721	1

In the group of men, the F value for the integrative style component was 126.605, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the domineering style component was 450.633, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the obliging style component was 107.74, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the avoidant style component was 53.09, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the compromising style component was 69.766, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Therefore, it can be concluded that the training of Martin Seligman's flourishing theory was effective in conflict resolution styles in couples with conflict. Scores in constructive conflict resolution styles (integrative,

domineering, and compromising) increased, and scores in non-constructive conflict resolution styles (obliging, avoidant) decreased (Table 4).

Discussion

Regarding the training of Martin Seligman's flourishing theory on the components of the conflict resolution style, the F value for the integrative style component was 24.977, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the domineering style component was 12.832, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the obliging style component was 52.193, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The value of F for the avoidant style component was 14.379, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The F value for the

compromising style component was 12.794, which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Therefore, it can be concluded that the training of Martin Seligman's flourishing theory is effective in conflict resolution styles in couples with conflict. Scores in constructive conflict resolution styles (integrative, domineering, compromising) increased, and scores in non-constructive conflict resolution styles (obliging, avoidant) decreased.

Moreover, the results of this study are consistent with the work done by Kiyani and Mohammadi (2017). These researchers examined the effectiveness of positive psychology on depression and self-esteem in married women. The results of the MANCOVA test demonstrated that positive psychology education had significantly changed the two variables of depression and self-esteem of married women. Positive psychology training caused a significant decrease in depression and a significant increase in women's self-esteem. In addition, the results of the follow-up tests approved that the therapeutic effect of positive psychology on depression and self-esteem was maintained after one and a half months. Kiyani and Mohammadi (2016) discussed the effectiveness of positive psychology on the resilience of mothers of exceptional children. As a result, a significant difference was found between the mean values after the two tests in the experimental group and the control group. This means that providing positive psychological interventions has a positive and significant effect in increasing maternal resilience. Based on the results of this research, the resilience of mothers of exceptional children can be improved by using positive psychology interventions. So, using this skill is recommended as an effective training program to increase the resilience of mothers with exceptional children.

Furthermore, this research is in accordance with the research conducted abroad; Parker (2021) found that with self-actualization, the interest in studying individual differences and solving marital conflicts improves. Parolin et al. (2020) also examined happiness-based therapy in females with marital conflict and incompatibility, essential issues related to treatment specificity and prediction, and reported similar results.

In general, in this research, five conflict resolution styles were introduced, which approve that flourishing education has led to more use of constructive conflict resolution styles, including compromising and cooperative or consensual and integrative or partnership, as well as the use of non-constructive conflict resolution styles like domineering and avoidant decreases, which shows that this training has a positive effect on a person's behavior. Instead of avoiding conflict and running away and suppressing, with this training, individuals can be encouraged to have constructive conversations to solve problems. Instead of domineering and selfishness in the

relationship, it is suggested that couples get to know each other's needs and eliminate selfishness and self-centeredness, which are destructive factors in the relationship.

In this research, it was observed that the quality of the marital relationship after flourishing training got a higher score, which approves that the subjects have acquired the necessary knowledge to have an effective and successful marital relationship. Paying attention to yourself and your spouse, planning to solve the problem, and having effective communication styles are important factors in the quality of the marital relationship. Each got a better score after the flourishing training, demonstrating the positive effect of this training. It should be noted that we should diagnose the importance of what we learned from this training to implement them in our lives.

In Martin Seligman's flourishing education, it was stated that life is not meaningless. Everyone should live with motivation and purpose. Without goals and motivations, there is no reason to live. So this is the importance of finding a purpose in life. Every person needs a goal to have a meaningful life, meaning it is more valuable than life itself. Through this training, you learn to know transient and lasting pleasures and understand what a pleasant and meaningful life is like. We should examine our needs and our family and our goals in life and plan for ourselves according to our needs and goals according to our characteristics, and also value ourselves and our family as the most influential persons in our lives and raise our knowledge and learn how to appreciate and thank each other appropriately. We should be taught about forgiveness and the importance and benefits of that, and learn that living with past grudges and regrets only hurts us and damage our relationships.

Conclusion

In general, based on the available findings, it can be stated that Martin Seligman's flourishing theory training in the variable of conflict resolution styles improves the scores of constructive conflict resolution styles (integrative, domineering, and compromising) and decreases the scores of non-constructive conflict resolution styles (obliging and avoidant). Therefore, it is important that couples learn the necessary skills under the supervision of a counselor or qualified professional prior to marriage. Essential skills such as empathy, creating intimacy, understanding, listening and analyzing, training on the effective marital relationship, and awareness of the needs of a woman and a man play essential roles in having a successful marriage.

One of the limitations of the research was the absence of a follow-up phase in the research. Finally, it is suggested that psychologists and family counselors should use Seligman's theory to reduce couples' conflicts.

Conflict of interest

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None

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