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# The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Training Techniques on Couples on the Verge of Divorce

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## ABSTRACT

Now a days divorce is the most important threat to the family institution and understanding its influencing factors is one of the priorities of mental health. The aim of this study is to investigate the efficacy of training the cognitive –behavioral techniques of the marriage performance of couple son the verge of divorce. This study used aquasi-experimental design with pretest, post-test, and control group. The subjects of this study consisted of 15 clients as the experimental group and 15 patients as the control group which were selected with multi-stage random sampling from the counseling center of Social Welfare Organizaion and Family Court center of Neyshaboor. The experimental group was trained for 8 sessions about the cognitive - behavioral techniques. The results showed training cognitive-behavioral techniques improves the marriage performance using analysis of covariance and independent t-test. Furthermore, in terms of the effectiveness of cognitive - behavioral techniques there was a significant difference between the two sexes.

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## Introduction

Despite all the conservative approaches to the family institution, this institution has undergone extensive and profound semantic, structural and functional changes over the last century. These changes are due to the different evolutionary elements (Ghoreishi ,Shirmohammadi and Borjvand, 2014). The family, as the first institution of sociability and oldest natural core ,has existed in all human societies since the beginning of history and mankind has been unable to find a replacement for it. This issue shows the ubiquity of this institution and the necessity of its existence. Marriage is the basis of family formation and divorce is on its opposite pole, which leads to its demise. Divorce is followed by individual, familial and social lcollapse and brings more negative effects for women than men. In addition, it imposes many costs on the body of society. Studies show that only 5 percent of marriages ended in divorce in nineteenth-century, but in the twentieth century and nowadays almost half of all marriages result in divorce. Researchers believe that factors such as increasing women's economic independence, reduction of income in men without college degrees, increasing expectations of marriage and the social acceptance of the issue are involved in the divorce (Amato, 2000).

Family cognitive-behavioral therapy is the most complete approach which is based on family on the basis of learning and cognitive principles. In family cognitive-behavioral therapythe way family members think and how they behave is noticed. It is believed that negative thoughts or self-talk leads to conflict or inconsistent interaction. In the cognitive-behavioral approach the way information is organized, stored and processed by individuals is emphasized. (Kandel, 1981; quoted from Leihi, 2010) as Dativapdoski(1990; quoted from Leihi, 2010), have stated,cognitive therapists work on three interconnected levels: (1) the most achievable level i.e the automatic thoughts (ideas, beliefs and assumptions), that people have about a particular situation, (2) a deeper level or infrastructure assumptions (rules that make up the foundation of automatic thoughts) and (3) the

core level, fundamental beliefs or schemas (unconditional and inflexible beliefs to organize information)starting at the Automatic Thoughts, therapist hopes to create a three-level change. Research done by Mohyeddini et al (2003), shows that cognitive-behavioral interventions of a group therapy improves the family processes. The results of study done by Parvin, Davoodi and Mohammadi (2012), indicates that the disciplinevariables within the family, the family power structure and social capital within the family have the most significant relationship with the amount of emotional divorce. The results of the study of Honarian and Younesi (2011),indicates that factors influencing the divorce, includes topics such as lack of communication skills, mental illness, lack of maturity and addiction. The results of study done by Sharifi, Karsouli and Beshlideh (2011) showed that the effectiveness of couples attributions retraining in reducing marital erosion of couples and reduction of the likelihood of divorce is confirmed and can have an effective role in determining couples therapy strategies.

Therefore the present study aimed to investigate the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral techniques on marriage performance of couples on the verge of divorce in counseling center of Social Welfare Organization of Neyshaboor. Accordingly, to it has investigated the effectiveness of Cognitive - Behavioral techniques on marriage performance of couples on the verge of divorce, and investigation of the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral techniques on the marriage performance of men and women.

## Research Methodology

The present research is a quasi-experimental type with a method of pre-test and post-test with experimental and control group. The statistical population of this research includes all couples on the verge of divorce (wife and husband), including the clients who referred themselves to Welfare Counseling Center or those who were referred by the family court of Neyshaboor during the year 2014. The considered sample at this research were 30 persons among the couples who had applied

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for divorce or were on the verge of divorce which was performed randomly and by the sampling method. At the first phase among 100 clients (including men and women) who had referred to Neyshaboor Welfare Counseling Center during the year 2013, the entrance conditions were investigated and persons who were qualified to enter into the research population, were selected ( in this phase 19 person were considered disqualified for entrance and so were omitted from the research population). In the 2nd phase some persons were selected from the total of the remaining samples (81 persons), and they received phone call for finding their willingness to participate at counseling sessions, so 55 persons accepted to cooperate, and in the 3rd phase, among the 55 persons who accepted to cooperate 30 persons were selected randomly.

**Table 1. The results of the statistical analysis comparison of the mean of marriage performance of experimental and control groups in the pretest and post-test**

variable	Group	Stage	number	Mean	Standard deviation	T	significance	Degrees of freedom
Marriage Performance	Experimental group	Pre test	25	206.53	7.78	55-4/	0/0001	14
		Post-test	25	215.13	10.81			
	Control Group	Pre test	25	201.33	13.45	871/	0/08	14
		Post-test	25	201.13	13.58			

**Table 1. The results of the statistical analysis comparison of the mean of marriage performance variable between male and female**

variable		number	Mean	Standard deviation	T	Degrees of freedom	Significance level
Marriage Performance	Female	15	12.85	5.78	28-2	13	0/04
	Male	15	12.5	7.12			

#### Data collection tools:

Marriage performance questionnaire, is a survey with 66 phrases which is produced by Sanaei, Refahi, and Pashasharifi (2008) based on studying research and theoretical literature inside and outside the country. This questionnaire includes 11 components of "relationship, emotional tools, problem solving, decision-making, role, flexibility, parenting style, economy and financial issues, family and friends, values, mental and physical care, and general practice" Grading of this questionnaire is based on Likert scale and options of "always", "often", "sometimes", "rarely" or "never" to the value of 5 to 1 in positive phrases and 1 to 5 in negative statements. Given the multiple value of the responses and by using Cronbach's alpha the validity of the test obtained 97% and each one of the components was determined as follows: relationship 0.87, emotional expression 0.83, problem solving and decision making 0.83, role 0.84, flexibility 0.73, parenting style 0.76, economy and financial issues 0.82, family and friends 0.77, value 0.82, mental and physical care, 0.70, and the overall performance 0.85. (Sanaei, 2008). Also, using factor analysis with varimax rotation and principal components,

construct validity of the questionnaire in 11 determining factors is 0.56 variance of the total questionnaire. (Refahi, 2008; quoted from Sanaei, 2008).

The structure of each meeting was such that each session lasted 90 minutes and held once a week. Generally each session included the following: a plan for the current meeting (5 minutes), assessment of progress in treatment until that date (10 minutes) report of assignments (15 minutes), a new task" means introducing new topics or skills (45 minutes), determining which tasks should be done till another session (15 minutes). In the following the list of sessions is stated: Session I: Familiarity with the group, introduction to the purpose and duration of treatment, the group rules, etc., second session: Introduction to cognitive - behavioral therapy, familiarity with some of the cognitive-behavioral techniques, the third session: Introduction to cognitive errors, the fourth session: the impact of thoughts on people's; the fifth session: the impact of thoughts on the activity; sixth session: the impact of thoughts on relationships, the seventh session: How to enjoy a better life and control our thoughts through a cognitive - behavioral therapy, eighth session: closing-feedback session to the family members (the books were used in the training sessions included cognitive therapy techniques written by Neenan and Dryden (2010), Hutton and Clark (2010), Leih (2010), and Houghton and Salkolin (2002).

#### Findings

The mean of marriage performance in the experimental group is 206.53 in the pre-test and 215.13 in the post-test. The increase in the mean in the experimental group with the value  $t = -4.55$  and the  $p = 0.0001$  has a significant difference. Also in the control group the mean of marriage performance in the pretest is 201.33 and 201.13 in the post-test. The reduction in the mean in the experimental group with the value  $t = -1.87$  and the  $p = 0.08$  is not statistically significant. Therefore the results show that training cognitive-behavioral techniques improves the marriage performance of the couples on the verge of divorce. As Table 2 shows the mean of marriage performance in women is -12.85 and -5.12 in men. Levene's test (Levene's  $p = 0.49 > 0.05$ ) shows that the variances of marriage performance of men and women are equal. By assuming the equality of the variances, the decision criterion ( $p$ ) equals to 0.04 and less than 0.05 and there is sufficient reason to reject the null hypothesis. So statistically there was a significant difference between the marriage performance of men and women in the statistical sample. According to the results of the research it can be stated that the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral techniques is different between men and women regarding marriage performance.

#### Discussion and Conclusion

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is a problem-focused treatment. The goal of treatment is to reduce the self-condemnation attitudes and increase the positive attributions and improve coping skills, in other words, the cognitive-behavioral therapy is an intervention which makes emotional and behavioral changes by teaching new ways of coping and understanding thoughts with a problem-focused approach in individuals Hutton and Clark (2010).

In this study also during eight sessions the couples were trained using cognitive-behavioral techniques, and since the main purpose and emphasis of cognitive - behavioral therapy is on thinking modification and consequently thought, the couple got familiar with the formation of negative thoughts as well as cognitive errors and its impact on behavior and also learned how to fight the negative and mental thoughts in the last session. They also learned to apply positive thoughts and cognitive-behavioral techniques in their life and the improvement of marital life of the couples at the end of the course confirms the usefulness of this

type of treatment in solving marital problems and improvement of marriage performance of couples.

The obtained results of the first hypothesis of the study showed that the cognitive –behavioral techniques improved the marriage performance of couples. The research results were consistent with the results of Javidi, Bolghan Abadi, and DehghaniNeyshabouri(2003) regarding the impact of couple therapy with cognitive-behavioral method on the sexual satisfaction enhancement and marriage performance improvement. Cognitive approaches deals with investigation and modification of the beliefs, expectations, perceptions and destructive and irrational attributions. Correcting wrong perceptions and beliefs, removes any misunderstanding, reduces resentment and anger, noticing positive aspects of each other's behavior and ultimately increasing the intimacy (Leihi, 2010).

The results of the second hypothesis of this study showed that the effectiveness of cognitive –behavioral techniques is different on marriage performance of males and females. Results of Karami, Fakhrazri and Ghasemzadeh (2003), showed that group counseling with a cognitive- behavioral approach has been effective in reducing the depression and feelings of inadequacy among children of divorce. However, this reduction was significantly different between boys and girls so that this reduction was seen more in girls. The results of the present study regarding the significant difference between the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral techniques is explained in this way that as most women are easily affected in terms of emotion and feelings they also are easily affected in terms of hope in setting up a new life, and the amount of applicability of these cognitive behavioral techniques to improve life is more regarding the difficult conditions after divorce.

According to the results of the research hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of cognitive -behavioral techniques on improvement of the marriage performance of couples on the verge of divorce, it is suggested that cognitive-behavioral counseling group be used as an independent and efficient way to increase marriage stability and reduction of the divorce risk. It is suggested that the cognitive errors modification and logical thinking classes be held in a group in counseling centers.

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