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# The compilation of an educational package for enrichment of marital life based on emotional focused therapy and investigation of its efficacy on newly-married couples's marital adjustment

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## **Abstract**

**Introduction:** One of the factors that cause maladjustment between couples is the lack of fulfillment of attachment needs and their limited expression of emotion. In other words, couples enter into their present relationship with their expectations and past experiences, which can play an important role in meeting their spouse's needs. The purpose of the present study is to compile an educational package for enrichment of marital life based on emotional focused therapy (EFT) and thereby to investigate its efficacy on marital adjustment in newly-married couples.

**Materials and Methods:** The present study applied in the format of pre-test and post-test for the two groups of control and experimental. Thirty couples were selected purposefully among couples who referred to the counseling centers of Gorgan city. Then they were divided randomly to two groups of experimental and control. The experimental group participated in 8 three-hour sessions of group education. Data collected via Lock and Vallas (1995) questionnaire and analyzed based on covariance analysis.

**Results:** The results of the data analysis indicate that education based on EFT was more effective in couples' marital adjustment for participants of experimental group than control group ( $P < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the effect of education of enrichment of marital life based on EFT was stable and no significant difference was identified between the averages of pre-test and post-hoc test stages.

**Conclusion:** Overall, the results approved the effective role of education enrichment of marital life based on EFT on increasing the marital adjustment in newly-married couples.

**Keywords:** Couples, Emotion, Marital adjustment

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## Introduction

The knowledge of a successful marriage is a wish that comes to the mind of every human being, there are undoubtedly people who do not experience a very happy marriage, the increase in incompatibilities observed in the lives of couples and the increasing spread of divorce in recent years (1) and citing According to the official statistics in Iran, about 200 out of every 1,000 marriages lead to divorce (2), which has led to the configuration of a large amount of personal and institutional research to help couples enter and maintain healthier marriages and enjoy It has become higher than the quality of life (3).

One of the broadest concepts for determining the level of happiness and stability of a relationship is marital compatibility (4). Marital adjustment is a situation where the husband and wife feel happy and satisfied most of the time and enjoy being together (5).

Until 1980, researchers focused on epidemiological variables, sexual relations, financial issues, number of children, religion, and couple's occupation, and only in recent years have they emphasized the importance of personality factors and emotions in marital adjustment. Goldman (6) found a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and the ability to resolve conflict in the relationship between couples and emphasized the importance of the role of empathy in romantic relationships. The main factor of marital discord is not the amount of anger expressed or the number of conflicts, but the humiliation and defensive distancing that causes marital distress (7).

Regarding marital problems, several therapeutic and educational programs for improvement, prevention and treatment of behavioral, emotional and social problems of couples based on different approaches have been developed and their effectiveness in marital satisfaction has been shown (8). Research indicates that the ability to communicate emotionally is significantly related to marital compatibility and secure intimacy. In their research, Kelly and Conely showed that couples who have high adjustment use more loving, affirming and supportive expressions (9).

Haws (10) showed in his research that couples who have the ability to understand and accept each other's thoughts and feelings are more

compatible in married life. EFT is one of five methods supported by empirical observations. The results of the researches conducted by Johnson and Zuccarini (11), Johnson and Greenberg (12), Wisman and Jacobson (13), Johnson and Tallitman (14), Irfan Menesh (15), Fallahzadeh (16) and Hayati (17), In terms of the effectiveness of emotional-oriented couple therapy, it has shown a significant impact on various dimensions of marital relationships, including intimacy. Also, in studies in which EFT has been compared with drug treatment, other psychological treatments and waiting list, it was shown that EFT treatment was more effective in improving marital adjustment compared to other treatments and waiting list (18).

Emotion-oriented couple therapy is an integrated approach of inculcating three systematic perspectives, humanism and attachment theory. In the emotion-oriented approach, it is assumed that conflict in married life occurs when spouses are unable to satisfy each other's attachment needs for safety, security, and satisfaction (19).

The emotion-oriented approach refers to the important role of emotions and emotional communication in organizing interactive patterns and specific key experiences in close relationships and considers emotions as a factor of change (20). The goal of the emotion-oriented couple therapy approach is to access and process the existence of basic emotional reactions in the interactions of couples (21). Attachment and related emotions are known as the core identifying important characteristics in intimate relationships between couples (22).

Emotion-oriented therapy strikes at the heart of marital disturbances and presents lasting and meaningful changes to couples by targeting key emotions (23). Considering the complex nature of marital relationships and the effects of emotions, needs, fears and attachments on couples' relationships, it is necessary to create effective interventions to help couples.

Therefore, in order to treat and solve marital problems, methods must be revived to increase intimacy and compatibility in the relationship. This research aims to develop and implement an educational package based on an emotion-oriented approach using sources and researches and based on the existing theory.

## Materials and Methods

This interventional research was conducted using the design of test and control groups with pre-test-post-test. Also, to check the durability of the treatment effect in the test group, a follow-up stage was also included and its results were compared with the post-test stage. In this research, a training package based on an emotion-oriented approach was compiled and presented to the test group for 8 sessions (3 hours per week) and its effect on marital adjustment was measured compared to the control group.

The statistical population of the present study includes all the couples who referred to the counseling centers in Gorgan city, who referred because of dissatisfaction and improvement of their marital relationship, among them 30 couples were selected by the convenient sampling method. The criteria for entering the study included a maximum of one year of cohabitation, simultaneous attendance of couples in training sessions, age 20 to 35 years, no children, and at least a high school diploma.

### Research instrument

*A) Lock-Wallace Marital Prediction Test:* It was prepared and compiled by Locke and Wallace with the aim of measuring marital compatibility (24). This test is one of the first short scales to measure marital compatibility, this test has 15 questions that include various propositions such as a general rating of satisfaction with marriage and questions about agreement or disagreement about They ask important issues of married life such as financial issues (25). The numerical value of the scores of this scale is different. The first question is one of the general indicators of marital happiness and it is assigned a higher numerical value, scores lower than 100 are generally considered as incompatible couples. The average of the sub-sample of compatible couples was 9.135 and the average of the sub-sample of incompatible couples was 7.71. The internal consistency is very good and the correlation coefficient between its two halves is calculated to be 0.90. The correlation coefficient of this test with the marriage prediction test of Locke and Wallace has been reported high (25).

*B) The educational package for the enrichment of married life based on the emotion-oriented*

*approach:* In this study, the educational package for the enrichment of married life was developed by the researcher. The basic theory on which the package was set was emotion-oriented theory. First, to familiarize with the emotion-oriented approach and to identify its main components, books on attachment processes and emotion-oriented couple therapy were studied (26). Then by reading the book *Enriching Marital Life* (27) about various educational programs for enriching married life such as prevention and promotion of couples (PREP), marriage encounter (ME), relationship between couples, TIME program for a better marriage, couple intimacy training , Relationship Enhancement (RE), Olson Preparation/Enrichment, and the Association for Couples Enrichment for Marriage (A.C.M.E) program were reported. After that, the books, emotion-oriented workbook for couples (28) and clinical guide to help new parents (29) were prepared and studied, and the sections related to the main components of the emotion-oriented approach were selected. After confirming the materials collected by the professors, the educational program for enriching married life was developed based on the emotion-oriented approach. According to the factors, the total number of sessions was determined to be eight three-hour sessions. This program includes skills and techniques that have been designed and compiled based on emotion-oriented theory and identification of its related components. A program aimed at teaching effective communication skills (29), familiarizing couples with relationship anxiety cycles (28), attachment bonds and how to create safe attachment bonds between couples (30), checking the history of couples' attachment, identifying and recognizing emotions, thoughts and behaviors of couples in negative cycles, teaching different types of emotions and how to identify and understand them in themselves and their spouses, familiarizing couples with attachment needs and how to improve their attachment bonds, and presenting materials on maintaining intimacy and reviving couples' sexual life (28,29).

Inferential statistics includes the main part of the statistical analysis, and the analysis of covariance statistical test was used for the analysis.

**Results**

Descriptive information on the level of marital compatibility is presented in Table 1 according to

the pre-test and post-test in the test and control groups.

**Table 1.** Descriptive information on the level of marital adjustment by the measurement stage in the groups

Group	Pre-test	Post-test
Experimental	60.26 ± 10.06	79.50 ± 10.13
Control	59.86 ± 10.49	60.65 ± 10.32

As can be seen, the average of the test groups in the post-test stage shows an increase compared to the pre-test. Based on the results listed in the table, it can be described that the marital life

enrichment training based on emotion-oriented approach compared to the control group has increased the marital adjustment of couples.

**Table 2.** Variance analysis test to check the sameness of regression coefficients

Statistical index	SS	df	F	P
Group + marital adjustment	12.87	1	1.28	0.25

As the results of Table 2 show, according to the F coefficients calculated for the interaction of the group and the pre-test, it is not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ). As a result, there is no significant difference between the regression coefficients between the dependent and covariance variables in the two groups, and the assumption of homogeneity of the regression coefficients in the

test and control groups is maintained. According to the set of presuppositions, it can be seen that the data of this research has the ability to be entered into the covariance analysis of one variable, and the differences between the two groups in the dependent variable can be examined.

**Table 3.** Covariance analysis

Statistical index	SS	df	F	P	Effect size	Test power
Pre-test	1223.06	1	19.34	0.001	0.38	0.98
Group	2522.42	1	39.89	0.001	0.56	0.99
Error	1707.21	27				
Total	5524.97	29				

The results of Table 3 show that by removing the influence of the pre-test variable and considering the calculated F coefficient, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the adjusted averages of the marital adjustment scores of the participants according to the group membership of the test and the control in the post-test stage ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, according to the revised averages in graph 1 and the results of the tables, it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and the education of marital life enrichment based on the emotion-oriented approach in the participants of the experimental group compared to the control group had a greater

effect on the improvement of marital adjustment in couples. The level of this effect of "practical significance" was 0.56, that is, 56% of the total variance or individual differences in the promotion of marital adjustment in couples was related to marital life enrichment training based on emotion-oriented approach. In order to check the durability of the marital life enrichment training based on the emotion-oriented approach in the experimental group in the follow-up phase, the correlated t-test was used.

**Table 4.** Comparing the averages of the post-test and follow-up stages of the test group

Statistical index	Post-test mean	Follow-up mean	Means difference	df	t	P
Marital adjustment	79.26	80.46	1.20	14	0.19	0.84

As the table shows, considering that the significance level obtained is greater than 0.05; so, with 95% confidence, the effect of the marital life enrichment training based on the emotion-oriented approach has been permanent and no significant difference can be observed between the averages of the post-test and follow-up stages.

### Discussion

Undoubtedly, there are people who do not experience a very satisfying marriage, and such unsuccessful marriages can have unwanted consequences (30).

In this regard, couple therapists have introduced different therapeutic models for the treatment of troubled couples and emotional dysregulation, one of the most extensive approaches being the emotion-oriented approach. In the emotion-oriented approach, it is assumed that conflict in married life occurs when spouses are unable to satisfy each other's attachment needs for safety, security and satisfaction, in other words, troubled marital relationships indicate the failure of couples to establish a supportive relationship with an insecure attachment pattern (19). Considering the major role of emotions in attachment theory, this treatment refers to the important role of emotions and emotional communication in organizing interactive patterns and key specific experiences in close relationships, and considers emotions as a factor of change (20).

Due to the prominent role of emotion in marriage and couples' adjustment, so far no educational program based on emotion-oriented approach has been developed, nor has the effectiveness of education of marital life enrichment program based on this approach on various aspects of married life been studied. Therefore, this study aims to develop an educational package based on an emotion-oriented approach and investigate its effect on marital adjustment in a sample of newly married couples in Gorgan city. The research findings indicated the effectiveness of marital life enrichment training based on emotion-oriented

approach on the marital adjustment of newly married couples. In other words, the educational-intervention package has a significant effect on increasing the marital adjustment of newly married couples, and this process continued in the follow-up phase.

The results of the research are consistent with the research findings related to the effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy (EFT). Gottman et al. (31) also found that support and emotional conflict are the basic components of a marital relationship and these factors can predict the future of the relationship more strongly than behavioral conflicts.

They also noted that the tone of expressing emotion between couples is much more important than the content of studies and the ability to resolve conflicts. According to them, the cause of marital discord is not the amount of anger expressed or the number of conflicts, but the humiliation and defensive distancing that causes marital distress. Kelly and Colony (9) showed in their research that couples who have high compatibility use more loving, affirming and supportive expressions. Also, Hawes et al. (10) showed in their research that couples who have the ability to understand and accept each other's thoughts and feelings are more compatible in married life.

Also, Erfanmanesh (15), Soltani (32), Hossein Abadi (33) and Zia-ul-Haq (34) showed the effectiveness of EFT on increasing the positive feelings of couples towards each other and increasing marital adjustment. Considering that the marital life enrichment education program in the current research was developed by considering the main components of the emotion-oriented approach and focusing on factors such as emotions, communication skills, relationship worry cycles, history and attachment bond, it can be Regarding the results of this hypothesis, he argued that the training package is based on an emotion-oriented approach with an effect on how to communicate effectively, get to know one's interactive cycles, develop emotional bonds,

identify fears, identify beliefs and the history of couples' attachment. , identifying emotions and understanding the relationship between emotions, behavior and thoughts and the attachment needs of each of them and understanding the importance of sex in married life has improved the marital compatibility of couples.

As can be seen from the comparison of the scores of the control and test groups, the test group reported more consistency in the post-test after receiving the experimental method used in this research compared to the control group.

In addition to confirming the effectiveness of enrichment education based on emotion-oriented approach in this study, the content of the used program is also one of the other achievements of this research.

In fact, this study confirms the adequacy of the training program used to be used in couples training programs.

Therefore, from the present research, it can be concluded that the education based on the emotion-oriented approach, with emphasis on discovering and recognizing the interactive style and replacing the new perception of the communication style of couples and focusing on the attachment, emotions, trust of couples towards each other's acceptance, leads to It has improved the marital adjustment of couples. This has been shown in many studies in which EFT has been compared with drug treatments, psychological treatments and waiting lists (35).

### Conclusion

The results of this research confirm the effect of marital life enrichment education based on emotion-oriented approach in increasing the adjustment of newly married couples. The follow-up of couples showed that the effects of using the training used can be stable over time.

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