Clinical Trial Protocol
Iranian Registry of Clinical Trials

08 Nov 2026

The Effectiveness of Emotional Schema Therapy on Insecure Attachment Styles, Emotional Regulation, and Cognitive Flexibility in Couples on the Brink of Divorce

Protocol summary

Study aim

Determining the effectiveness of emotional schema therapy on insecure attachment styles, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility in couples on the verge of divorce

Design

A randomized, parallel-group, controlled clinical trial was conducted on 28 individuals (14 couples) on the verge of divorce. Simple randomization was used for randomization.

Settings and conduct

This study is being conducted at the Hamdeli Psychology Clinic in Semnan and involves couples on the verge of divorce. Participants are randomly divided into two groups: the experimental group, which receives emotional schema therapy, and the control group, which only follows the center's routine programs.

Participants/Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria: The couple must be between 25 and 45 years old, the couple must be on the verge of divorce and have a case pending in counseling centers or family court, and the couple must not have psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Exclusion criteria: Participants must not have severe psychiatric illnesses, drug or alcohol addiction.

Intervention groups

In this study, the experimental group will participate in 12 90-minute sessions over a month, designed based on the principles of emotional schema therapy. The content of these sessions includes identifying maladaptive schemas, processing negative emotions, and strengthening emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility in couple relationships. In contrast, the control group will only receive the center's routine programs and will not receive any specialized therapeutic intervention related to the research topic.

Main outcome variables

Insecure attachment styles, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility

General information

Reason for update

Acronym

IRCT registration information

IRCT registration number: **IRCT20250311065037N1**
Registration date: **2025-04-07, 1404/01/18**
Registration timing: **prospective**

Last update: **2025-04-07, 1404/01/18**
Update count: **0**

Registration date

2025-04-07, 1404/01/18

Registrant information

Name

Atiyeh Mazarei Sotoudeh

Name of organization / entity

Islamic Azad University, Semnan Branch

Country

Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Phone

+98 23 3343 4657

Email address

atisotoudeh9@gmail.com

Recruitment status

Recruitment complete

Funding source

Expected recruitment start date

2025-05-05, 1404/02/15

Expected recruitment end date

2025-06-05, 1404/03/15

Actual recruitment start date

empty

Actual recruitment end date
empty
Trial completion date
empty

Scientific title
The Effectiveness of Emotional Schema Therapy on Insecure Attachment Styles, Emotional Regulation, and Cognitive Flexibility in Couples on the Brink of Divorce

Public title
The effect of emotional schema therapy on insecure attachment styles, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility
Purpose
Treatment
Inclusion/Exclusion criteria
Inclusion criteria:
The couple's age must be between 25 and 45 years old. The couple is on the verge of divorce and has a case pending in counseling centers or family court. Individuals must not have severe psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, which is determined through medical records or an initial interview. Both people must be willing to participate in intervention sessions and complete an informed consent form. Couples must be able to attend all scheduled intervention sessions and pre- and post-tests. Individuals must have the ability to understand and respond to questionnaires and related activities in Persian.
Exclusion criteria:
The occurrence of severe family or psychological problems during the study that make it difficult to continue participation will result in withdrawal from the study. If one or both partners refuse to continue participating in the research, they will be excluded from the study. Individuals will be withdrawn from the study if acute physical or psychological conditions arise that make continuation of the intervention inappropriate.
Age
From **25 years** old to **45 years** old
Gender
Both

Phase
N/A
Groups that have been masked

- Participant

Sample size
Target sample size: **28**
Randomization (investigator's opinion)
Randomized
Randomization description
In this study, 28 people (14 couples) will be randomly divided into two groups: intervention and control. For this purpose, a simple random allocation method will be used. First, each of the 14 couples will be given a unique number from 1 to 14. These numbers will then be entered into the Random Allocation Software (RAS). The software will randomly select 7 numbers and assign them to the intervention group. The remaining 7 numbers will be assigned to the control group. To ensure that the randomization is carried out correctly and to prevent any bias, the allocation process will be carried out by an independent person who is not involved in the research. This randomization method ensures that each participant has an equal chance of being placed in one of the groups and that the number of people in each group is balanced.
Blinding (investigator's opinion)
Single blinded
Blinding description
In this study, blinding is done one-way, so that participants are unaware of the type of intervention they are receiving. To this end, all participants attend therapy sessions that are identical in appearance and physical environment. Therapists, who are aware of the type of intervention, consistently implement the same procedure for all groups, and there are no obvious differences between sessions for participants. In order to maintain blinding, participants are not provided with information about the exact type of intervention. They are only informed that they are participating in a study to investigate the effectiveness of emotional schema therapy. No additional explanation of the details of the treatments is given to participants until the end of the study to reduce the effects of bias.
Placebo
Not used
Assignment
Parallel
Other design features

Secondary Ids

empty

Ethics committees

1

Ethics committee
Name of ethics committee
Ethics Committee of Semnan Azad University
Street address
Islamic Azad University, University Town, Semnan
City
Semnan
Province
Semnan
Postal code
3513137111
Approval date
2024-12-30, 1403/10/10
Ethics committee reference number
IR.IAU.SEMNAN.REC.1403.096

Health conditions studied

1

Description of health condition studied
Marital Conflicts
ICD-10 code

Z63.0

ICD-10 code description

Problems in relationship with spouse or partner

Primary outcomes

1

Description

Insecure Attachment Styles

Timepoint

Before the start of the intervention and after completing 12 intervention sessions.

Method of measurement

Brennan et al.'s Close Relationship Experience Questionnaire (1998)

2

Description

Emotion Regulation

Timepoint

Before the start of the intervention and after completing 12 intervention sessions.

Method of measurement

Gross and John's Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (2003)

3

Description

Cognitive flexibility

Timepoint

Before the start of the intervention and after completing 12 intervention sessions.

Method of measurement

Dennis and Vanderwal Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire (2010)

Secondary outcomes

1

Description

Depression

Timepoint

Before the start of the intervention and after completing 12 intervention sessions.

Method of measurement

Beck Depression Inventory - Second Edition (1996)

2

Description

Anxiety

Timepoint

Before the start of the intervention and after completing 12 intervention sessions.

Method of measurement

Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (1983)

3

Description

Health-related Quality of Life – Mental Health

Timepoint

Before the start of the intervention and after completing 12 intervention sessions.

Method of measurement

En: World Health Organization Quality of Life Questionnaire – Short Form (WHOQOL-BREF, 26 items)

Intervention groups

1

Description

Intervention group: The experimental group undergoes an emotional schema therapy intervention, which is held in 12 weekly 90-minute sessions. This intervention is designed to reduce insecure attachment styles, improve emotional regulation, and increase cognitive flexibility in couples on the verge of divorce. Initially, participants are introduced to the basic concepts of emotional schemas, their role in emotion regulation, and their impact on attachment styles. Then, cognitive and behavioral techniques are taught to identify and modify emotionally maladaptive schemas, especially in the context of couple relationships. In subsequent sessions, participants perform exercises such as cognitive restructuring, increasing tolerance for unpleasant emotions, modifying dysfunctional behavioral patterns in intimate relationships, and creating effective emotion regulation strategies. In the final stages, the focus is on strengthening cognitive flexibility, accepting emotions, changing dysfunctional attachment styles, and improving emotional interactions in couple relationships. Finally, the skills learned in the sessions will be reviewed and consolidated to better manage emotional and communication challenges in life together.

Category

Treatment - Other

2

Description

Control group: This group does not receive any intervention and serves only as a comparison. Participants in this group continue to receive the usual care and standard support or counseling services that they normally receive. During the study, no therapeutic intervention related to emotional schema therapy is implemented for them. The purpose of this approach is to leave the control group without intervention so that the results of this group can be compared with the group that has undergone emotional schema therapy intervention. This method allows for a precise assessment of the effects of the therapeutic intervention on insecure attachment styles, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility in couples on the verge of divorce.

Category

Treatment - Other

Recruitment centers

1

Recruitment center

Name of recruitment center
Hamdeli Psychology Clinic
Full name of responsible person
Ali Mohebi
Street address
corner of Azadi 10, Azadi Street, Amirkabir Boulevard.
City
Semnan
Province
Semnan
Postal code
3519835689
Phone
+98 23 3336 1969
Email
info@hamdeliclinic.ir

Sponsors / Funding sources

1

Sponsor

Name of organization / entity
Islamic Azad University, Semnan branch
Full name of responsible person
Mohammad Karim Sohrabi
Street address
Islamic Azad University, University Town, Semnan
City
Semnan
Province
Semnan
Postal code
3513137111
Phone
+98 23 3365 6180
Email
karim_sohraby@yahoo.com

Grant name

Grant code / Reference number

Is the source of funding the same sponsor organization/entity?
Yes

Title of funding source
Islamic Azad University, Semnan branch

Proportion provided by this source
100

Public or private sector
Public

Domestic or foreign origin
Domestic

Category of foreign source of funding
empty

Country of origin

Type of organization providing the funding
Academic

Person responsible for general inquiries

Contact

Name of organization / entity
Islamic Azad University, Semnan Branch
Full name of responsible person
Atiyeh Mazarei Sotoudeh
Position
Student
Latest degree
Bachelor
Other areas of specialty/work
Psychology
Street address
No. 64, First Floor, Unit 2, Moallem Square, Varzesh Blvd
City
Semnan
Province
Semnan
Postal code
3514744185
Phone
+98 23 3343 4657
Email
atisotoudeh9@gmail.com

Person responsible for scientific inquiries

Contact

Name of organization / entity
Islamic Azad University, Semnan branch
Full name of responsible person
Maryam Salehyan
Position
Assistant Professor
Latest degree
Ph.D.
Other areas of specialty/work
Psychology
Street address
Islamic Azad University, University Town, Semnan
City
Semnan
Province
Semnan
Postal code
3513137111
Phone
+98 23 3365 4040
Email
maryam.salehyan@gmail.com

Person responsible for updating data

Contact

Name of organization / entity
Islamic Azad University, Semnan Branch
Full name of responsible person
Atiyeh Mazarei Sotoudeh
Position

Student

Latest degree

Bachelor

Other areas of specialty/work

Psychology

Street address

No. 64, First Floor, Unit 2, Moallem Square, Varzesh Blvd

City

Semnan

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3514744185

Phone

+98 23 3343 4657

Email

atisotoudeh9@gmail.com

Sharing plan

Deidentified Individual Participant Data Set (IPD)

Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Study Protocol

Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Statistical Analysis Plan

Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Informed Consent Form

Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Clinical Study Report

Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Analytic Code

Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Data Dictionary

Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Title and more details about the data/document

In this study, data and documentation will be shared in accordance with ethical principles and confidentiality considerations. Individual data of participants will only be published after removing identifying information and in the form of anonymous data. The original data, including the results related to the research variables, will be made available to qualified researchers in the form of a structured dataset without personal information. In addition to quantitative data, methodological documentation of the research, including the study protocol, data collection methods, intervention implementation instructions, and tools used, will also be shared.

When the data will become available and for how long

Data and documentation from this study will be available for one month after the publication of the final results. This time frame is intended to ensure thorough data analysis and ethical sharing of information.

To whom data/document is available

The data and documentation of this research will be available only to researchers and experts in the relevant scientific field who work in academic institutions, research centers, and reputable scientific organizations. Access requests from independent researchers will also be considered if they submit a relevant research plan and receive approval from the research ethics committee. Access to data for people working in industry will only be possible if they cooperate with academic or research centers and comply with research ethics principles.

Under which criteria data/document could be used

The data and documentation of this study may only be used for scientific and research purposes related to the subject of the study, and any commercial or promotional use is prohibited. Statistical analyses and meta-analyses are permitted in compliance with scientific and ethical principles. The use of data must be in such a way that the identity of the participants cannot be identified. Applicant researchers must submit a formal application, sign an ethical commitment letter, and receive approval from the research ethics committee. Reference to the original source is mandatory, and sharing of data with third parties without official permission is prohibited.

From where data/document is obtainable

If you need data, please contact atisotoudeh9@gmail.com.

What processes are involved for a request to access data/document

After receiving the request and reviewing it by the principal investigator, the data will be sent to the applicant within a maximum of one week, along with a commitment not to publish the data without the name of the principal investigator.

Comments