Clinical Trial Protocol
Iranian Registry of Clinical Trials

07 Nov 2026

The Effectiveness of Emotion-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on Marital Burnout, Marital Stress, and Intimacy in Couples with Marital Conflicts

Protocol summary

Study aim
Determining the Effectiveness of Emotion-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on Marital Burnout, Marital Stress, and Intimacy in Couples with Marital Conflicts

Design
A phase II randomized, double-blind, parallel-group clinical trial with a control group will be conducted on 30 couples with marital conflicts. Randomization will be performed using the RAND function in Microsoft Excel.

Settings and conduct
In this study, a field experimental research method with a pretest–posttest design and a control group, using parallel groups and a double-blind procedure, will be employed. The study will be conducted in family counseling centers in Ahvaz. All clinical caregivers and evaluators who interpret the data will be blinded to group allocation, and all information will be kept confidential, with code names assigned to the participants.

Participants/Inclusion and exclusion criteria
Inclusion Criteria: Be between 25 and 50 years old. Have been married for at least 3 years. Have marital conflicts. Have at least a high school diploma. Be willing to cooperate and participate in the couples therapy sessions. Exclusion Criteria: Have psychiatric disorders and use psychiatric medications. Have physical problems that interfere with the intervention process.

Intervention groups
Intervention: Emotion-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Couples Therapy approach, in the present study, was designed based on the Emotion-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Couples Therapy approach and by integrating Dattilio's (2010) comprehensive cognitive-behavioral model and Johnson's (2008) Emotion-Focused Couples Therapy protocol. This intervention will be delivered to the couples in the experimental group in 15 sessions of 60 minutes each.
Control group: They will not receive any intervention.

Main outcome variables
Marital Burnout; Marital Stress; Intimacy in Couples.

General information

Reason for update
The reason for the update is to revise the code of ethics number and its date.

Acronym

IRCT registration information
IRCT registration number: **IRCT20260511069352N1**
Registration date: **2026-05-18, 1405/02/28**
Registration timing: **prospective**

Last update: **2026-06-08, 1405/03/18**
Update count: **1**

Registration date
2026-05-18, 1405/02/28

Registrant information

Name
Sami Khanfari Pour Jafari

Name of organization / entity

Country
Iran (Islamic Republic of)

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Email address
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Recruitment status
Recruitment complete

Funding source

Expected recruitment start date
2026-06-10, 1405/03/20

Expected recruitment end date
2026-07-11, 1405/04/20

Actual recruitment start date
empty
Actual recruitment end date
empty
Trial completion date
empty

Scientific title
The Effectiveness of Emotion-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on Marital Burnout, Marital Stress, and Intimacy in Couples with Marital Conflicts

Public title
Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy
Purpose
Education/Guidance
Inclusion/Exclusion criteria
Inclusion criteria:
Be between 25 and 50 years old. Have been married for at least 3 years. Have marital conflicts. Have at least a high school diploma. Be willing to cooperate and participate in the couples therapy sessions.
Exclusion criteria:
Have psychiatric disorders and use psychiatric medications. Have physical problems that interfere with the intervention process.
Age
From **25 years** old to **55 years** old
Gender
Both

Phase
N/A
Groups that have been masked

- Care provider
- Outcome assessor
- Data analyser

Sample size
Target sample size: **60**
More than 1 sample in each individual
Number of samples in each individual: **2**
Each participant is in fact a couple consisting of one man and one woman.
Randomization (investigator's opinion)
Randomized
Randomization description
In this study, in order to achieve completely random allocation and to eliminate any researcher interference or bias, a simple randomization method will be used. First, a complete list of couples referring to the counseling center who meet the inclusion criteria of the study will be prepared. Then, an initial numerical identification code will be assigned to each couple. These codes will be entered into a Random Number Generator software. The software will generate a unique random number for each couple. After the numbers are generated, the participants will be listed in ascending order based on their random numbers. Subsequently, in sequence, the first fifteen couples on the list will be assigned to the experimental group and the sixteenth to the thirtieth couples will be assigned to the control group. This procedure will be designed in such a way that the order of entry or the researcher's familiarity with the participants will have no role in the allocation process, and the group assignment of each participant will not be predictable before the completion of the randomization process.
Blinding (investigator's opinion)
Double blinded
Blinding description
In this study, in order to reduce bias, blinding will be performed at the level of clinical caregivers, the outcome assessor, and the data analyst. The list of participant allocation to the study groups will be accessible only to the researcher responsible for allocation or to a person who will not be directly involved in the process of outcome assessment and data analysis. Therefore, the clinical caregivers who will provide routine care will remain unaware of the allocation of participants to the study groups. In addition, outcome assessment will be conducted by an individual who will not participate in the group allocation process and will not have access to the allocation list. This assessor will collect and record the data related to the variables under study solely on the basis of participant identification codes, in such a way that he or she will not be aware of each participant's assignment to the intervention or control group. Furthermore, the data will be coded before entering the statistical analysis stage, and the groups will be identified using neutral labels such as A and B. The statistical analyst will receive the data in the form of these codes and will remain unaware of the actual assignment of the codes to the intervention or control group until the end of the statistical analysis. Unblinding of the groups will be carried out only after completion of the preliminary data analysis.
Placebo
Not used
Assignment
Parallel
Other design features

Secondary Ids

empty

Ethics committees

1

Ethics committee
Name of ethics committee
Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz
Street address
Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz, Farhang Shahr
City
Ahvaz
Province
Khouzestan
Postal code
6134937333
Approval date
2026-04-15, 1405/01/26
Ethics committee reference number

IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1405.038

Health conditions studied

1

Description of health condition studied
Marital conflicts between couples
ICD-10 code
Z63.0
ICD-10 code description
Problems in relationship with spouse or partner

Primary outcomes

1

Description
Marital Burnout
Timepoint
before performing the intervention and two weeks after completion of the intervention
Method of measurement
Paines' Marital Burnout Questionnaire (1996)

2

Description
Marital Stress
Timepoint
before performing the intervention and two weeks after completion of the intervention
Method of measurement
Orth-Gomér et al.'s Marital Stress Questionnaire (2000)

3

Description
Marital Intimacy
Timepoint
before performing the intervention and two weeks after completion of the intervention
Method of measurement
Bagarozzi's Couples Intimacy Questionnaire (2001)

Secondary outcomes

empty

Intervention groups

1

Description
Intervention group: The emotion-based cognitive-behavioral couples therapy intervention consists of 15 sessions of 60 minutes each, designed with the aim of improving marital interactions, modifying dysfunctional cognitions, and increasing couples' awareness and regulation of emotions. This program is implemented by integrating Dattilio's comprehensive cognitive-behavioral model (2010) and Johnson's emotion-focused couples therapy protocol (2008). In the first session, an effective therapeutic relationship is established with the couples, the framework and goals of the treatment are explained, and an initial assessment of marital problems is conducted. In the second session, the main issues and conflicts affecting marital dissatisfaction are identified and the vulnerable and growth areas in the couples' relationship are determined. The third session is devoted to teaching the interaction between cognition, emotion, and behavior and their role in shaping couples' communication patterns. In the fourth session, adaptive behavioral skills are taught in order to increase positive interactions and reduce negative interactions. In the fifth session, couples' expectations, attributions, assumptions, and dysfunctional cognitive distortions are identified and modified. The sixth session examines attachment schemas and internal working patterns and their relationship with couples' current cognitions and behaviors. In the seventh session, maladaptive attachment schemas and their effects on couples' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral interactions are modified. The eighth session is devoted to increasing emotional awareness, identifying primary and secondary emotions, and encouraging couples to express authentic emotions. In the ninth session, skills for tolerating and regulating emotions in marital interactions are strengthened. The tenth session addresses the identification of cognitive factors influencing the experience and expression of emotions in the marital relationship. In the eleventh session, cognitive errors affecting mood and marital relationships are corrected through cognitive restructuring. The twelfth session is devoted to teaching communication and problem-solving skills for managing marital conflicts. In the thirteenth session, the skill of emotional expression and the cognitive and behavioral barriers to effective communication are examined, and strategies for preventing the decline of intimacy are taught. In the fourteenth session, the learned cognitive, behavioral, and emotional skills are practiced and generalized. In the fifteenth session, the therapeutic process is summarized, the extent of couples' changes is evaluated, and strategies for maintaining the improvement of marital relationships are presented. This therapeutic program will be implemented for the couples in the experimental group in 15 sessions of 60 minutes each.
Category
Behavior

2

Description
Control group: They do not receive any intervention or treatment.
Category
N/A

Recruitment centers

1

Recruitment center

Name of recruitment center
Lantern Path Counseling and Psychological Clinic
Full name of responsible person
Sami Khanfari Pour Jafari
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Sponsors / Funding sources

1

Sponsor
Name of organization / entity
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Full name of responsible person
Aslan Egdernezhad
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Fax
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Grant name
Grant code / Reference number
Is the source of funding the same sponsor organization/entity?
Yes
Title of funding source
Islamic Azad University
Proportion provided by this source
100
Public or private sector
Private
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
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Position
Master's student
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Sharing plan

Deidentified Individual Participant Data Set (IPD)
No - There is not a plan to make this available
Justification/reason for indecision/not sharing IPD
Participant data is completely confidential and I do not intend to publish it.
Study Protocol
Undecided - It is not yet known if there will be a plan to make this available
Statistical Analysis Plan
No - There is not a plan to make this available
Informed Consent Form
Undecided - It is not yet known if there will be a plan to make this available
Clinical Study Report
Undecided - It is not yet known if there will be a plan to make this available
Analytic Code
No - There is not a plan to make this available
Data Dictionary
No - There is not a plan to make this available