



Research Paper

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Comparing the Effects of Emotion-focused Couple Therapy and Gottman's Couple Therapy on Relationship Commitment and Attachment Trauma of Couples

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Article Info.	Abstract
<p>Received: 30.06.2022</p> <p>Accepted: 01.04.2023</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>attachment trauma,</i></p> <p><i>marital commitment,</i></p> <p><i>Gottman's couple therapy,</i></p> <p><i>emotionally focused couples</i></p> <p><i>therapy</i></p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>The objective of this study was to compare the effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy and Gottman's couple therapy in commitment in the relationship and the couple's attachment trauma. The study followed a quasi-experimental research design with a pretest-posttest and a control group. The statistical population of the study included all couples who referred to psychology and counseling centers under the supervision of the judiciary in Tehran in 2020. Among the population, 21 couples were randomly selected and were randomly assigned into the first experimental group, the second experimental group, and the control group. Data were collected using the Adams and Jones' Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI) and Milkin's Attachment Injury Measure (AIM). The experimental groups underwent intervention for seven 1.5-hour sessions (once a week) and the control group did not receive any intervention. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance and Bonferroni post hoc test using SPSS software (version 26). Emotionally focused couple therapy and Gottman's couple therapy (in comparison with the control group) had significant effects on the commitment in the relationship ($F = 60.580$, $P < 0.001$) and the attachment trauma ($F = 41.875$, $P < 0.001$). In addition, emotionally focused couple therapy was more effective in the commitment in the relationship and the couple attachment trauma ($P < 0.001$). Emotionally focused couple therapy, compared to Gottman's couple therapy, could be a more effective intervention to improve marital commitment and repair couples' attachment trauma. The implications of the study regarding determining the effective treatment and future studies are discussed.</p>
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Introduction

Marriage is a sincere and deep social bond between couples; its stability is influenced by factors such as marital satisfaction and commitment (Schoebi et al., 2012). A healthy marriage plays a significant role in overall well-being and life satisfaction. Factors such as romantic commitments and attachment in marriage have an effect on the strength of stable marital relationships (Callaci et al., 2020). Marital commitment is the strongest and the most stable predictor of marital relationship quality and stability; couples' low commitment to each other is related to their relationship conflict (Bazzazian et al., 2019). Increasing marital commitment has an effective role in the compatibility of couples and the consistency of a healthy marital relationship (Tariveh et al., 2021). Another damaging factor in couples' relationships is attachment trauma. Attachment trauma is a disorder in the important process of making a connection between an individual and his partner, which is formed based on a disturbance in the primary relationship between a baby (or a child) and his main caregiver (Farina et al., 2019). Attachment trauma is an important source of attachment injury in couples' relationships. Although commitment in the relationship and couples' attachment trauma both harm the quality of marital relationship and its stability, the promising issue is that these two concepts are capable of being repaired under the influence of couple therapy interventions.

Considering the theoretical foundation of Gottman's couple therapy based on Attachment Theory (Greenman & Johnson, 2022) and the role of Emotion-focused therapy in identifying and improving emotions and inner feelings in order to shape and to create safe attachment bonds (Wiebe et al., 2017), and considering the fact that conducting a comparative study of couple therapy methods can help therapists to identify the best treatment according to the type of couple's problems, it is necessary to conduct a research study with the aim of comparing these two approaches. Therefore, the current research study sought to find out if there was a difference between the effectiveness of emotion-focused couple therapy and Gottman's couple therapy in relationship commitment and attachment trauma.

Methodology

This study was practical in terms of purpose, and the design of which was semi-experimental, of pretest-posttest with a control group type. The statistical population of the study included all couples who referred to psychology and counseling centers under the supervision of the judiciary in Tehran in 2020. Based on the calculation of the sample size in the G*Power software, which was based on the calculation of the effect size, the alpha coefficient, and the significance level in previous similar studies, and according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 21 couples were selected through convenience sampling method, and every seven couples (14 individuals) were randomly assigned to the first experimental group (emotion-focused couple therapy intervention), the second experimental group (Gottman's couple therapy intervention) and the control group. The instruments included Dimensions of Commitment Inventory and Attachment Injury Measure. The questionnaires were filled out in pretest and posttest phases. Then, they were analyzed. The emotion-focused couple therapy intervention protocol was based on Goldman (2016), and that of Gottman's couple therapy was arranged according to the main protocol of Gottman and Gottman (2015). Then, they were implemented according to the standardization of these two interventions in previous research studies in Iran (Saemi et al., 2020) and the socio-cultural characteristics of the participants. This research study was conducted according to ethical considerations, and the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation), multivariate covariance analysis and Benferroni post hoc test using SPSS software (version 26).

Results

According to the findings, there was no significant difference between the experimental groups and the control group ($P < 0.005$). In addition, examining other demographic information through Chi-square test showed that

there was no significant difference between the experimental groups and the control group in terms of gender ($P = 0.127$), number of children ($P = 0.022$), level of education ($P = 0.276$), level of income ($P = 0.101$), and employment status ($P = 0.053$).

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of dependent variables in experimental and control groups in pretest and posttest phases

Dependent variables	Measures	Pretest		Posttest	
		M	Std. deviation	M	Std. deviation
Relationship commitment	Emotion-focused couple therapy	80.57	5.96	195.14	10.69
	Gottman's couple therapy	73.71	10.60	160.85	22.51
	Control group	76.28	8.15	90.57	14.53
Attachment trauma	Gottman's couple therapy	38.71	8.55	93.28	8.44
	Gottman's couple therapy	31.57	7.13	66.14	11.69
	Gottman's couple therapy	29.85	7.77	42.42	7.59

As it is evident in Table 1, in both experimental groups, the mean scores of relationship commitment and attachment trauma of couples in the posttest were significantly different from those of the pretest.

Table 2. The results of univariate analysis of covariance in the posttest scores of the relationship commitment

The source of index change The dependent variable	Sum of the squares	df	Mean of the squares	F	Sig.	Effect size	Power test
Relationship commitment	2249.143	2	10574.571	60.580	.001	.771	.98
Pretest	54432.000	1	54432.000	311.832	.001	.897	1.000
The simultaneous effect of relationship commitment and the pretest	18804.000	2	9402.000	53.863	.001	.750	.97

According to Table 2, considering relationship commitment, there was a significant difference between the two experimental groups and the control group in the pretest and posttest. In addition, the simultaneous effect of experimental and control groups and the measurement stage of relationship commitment was significant. Therefore, Gottman's couple therapy and emotion-focused couple therapy had significant effects on relationship commitment.

Table 3. The results of univariate analysis of covariance in the posttest scores of the attachment trauma

The source of index change The dependent variable	Sum of the squares	Df	Mean of the squares	F	Sig.	Effect size	Power test
Attachment trauma	6285.905	2	3142.952	41.875	.001	.699	.96
Pretest	12070.095	1	12070.095	160.815	.001	.817	1.000
The simultaneous effect of attachment trauma and the pretest	3089.333	2	1544.667	20.580	.003	.533	.93

As Table 3 shows, Gottman's couple therapy and emotion-focused couple therapy had significant effects on attachment trauma.

Table 4. The results of Benferoni's follow-up test comparing the differences between the means of Gottman's couple therapy, emotion-focused couple therapy, and the control group in the posttest phase

Variables	The compared groups	Mean differences	Std. error	Sig.
Relationship commitment	Emotion-focused couple therapy- the control group	102.97	9.64	.001
	Gottman's couple therapy- the control group	72.87	8.80	.001
	Emotion-focused couple therapy- Gottman's couple therapy	30.09	9.50	.028
Attachment trauma	emotion-focused couple therapy- the control group	49.27	5.89	.001
	Gottman's couple therapy- the control group	32.25	5.37	.001
	emotion-focused couple therapy- Gottman's couple therapy	21.02	5.80	.020

According to Table 4, the difference between the control group with emotion-focused couple therapy and Gottman's couple therapy in terms of relationship commitment and attachment trauma in the posttest phase was significant ($P < 0.05$). Furthermore, since the mean scores of the experimental groups were significantly different from each other, the effectiveness of Gottman's couple therapy and emotion-focused couple therapy was not the same. Thus, it can be concluded that the effect of Gottman's couple therapy on attachment trauma was less than that of emotion-focused couple therapy.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, emotion-focused couple therapy and Gottman's couple therapy had significant effects on commitment in the relationship, although the effect of Gottman's couple therapy on commitment in the relationship of couples was less than that of emotion-focused couple therapy. This result is in line with the findings of Deylami et al. (2021), Gottman and Tabares (2018), Madani et al. (2017), Padash et al. (2020), Rajaei et al. (2019), Shahmoradi et al. (2021) and Soleiman Borujerdi et al. (2019). Moreover, the findings of the research study indicated that emotion-focused couple therapy and Gottman's couple therapy had significant effects on couples' attachment trauma compared to no intervention; these treatment methods improved the attachment trauma of couples, although the effect of Gottman's couple therapy on the couples' attachment trauma was less than that of emotion-focused couple therapy.

The general finding of the current research study was that emotion-focused couple therapy could be a more effective intervention for improving marital commitment and repairing couples' attachment trauma compared to Gottman's couple therapy. This finding has practical implications in determining the effective intervention. Thus, more investigations are required in future studies. Considering the higher effect of emotion-focused couple therapy than Gottman's couple therapy on commitment in couples' relationship and improvement of attachment trauma, it is suggested that therapists use this therapeutic approach in order to achieve hidden emotions in interactive situations, to improve attachment patterns and to facilitate accepting one's role in the relationship. Furthermore, based on the findings, using the integrated approach of emotion-focused couple therapy with Gottman's couple therapy can have a greater effect on improving commitment, resolving attachment trauma, improving compatibility between couples and reducing divorce among couples. It seems useful to use these interventions in family and couple counseling centers to improve marital commitment, to reduce the effects of trauma and to build trust to improve secure attachment.

Conflict of interest

This paper was extracted from a dissertation on Psychology in Semnan Science and Research Unit; its findings do not have any conflict with personal or organizational interests.

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