

The Investigation of the Effectiveness of the Solution-Oriented Counseling in Reduction of the Marital Conflicts of Two-Career Couples

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nowadays considering that the desire for marriage has reduced focus on marital counseling has been considered very important. Solution-oriented counseling is one of the short term counseling which emphasizes on solutions by the clients with the help of the counselor. The present research has been carried out with the aim of the determination of the effectiveness of the solution-oriented counseling in reduction of the different dimensions of marital conflicts of two-career couples.

Materials and Methods: The present research is semi-empirical with pretest, posttest and follow-up design. Statistical population of research consists of those groups of staff of education department in Zahedan City accompanied by their working spouses. Research sample consists of 14 couples selected out of couples determined as having conflict by the use of Barati and Sanaei (1996) marital conflict questionnaire and using random method they were arranged into two groups of test and control and every group consisted of 7 couples. Then the test group was under solution-oriented counseling for 8 sessions and at the end of sessions posttest was applied for both groups. The next month also the follow-up session and follow-up test were carried out. At the end the data were collected and the research hypotheses were tested by use of variance analysis with repeated measurement design.

Results: The results showed that the solution-oriented counseling is effective in reduction of all dimensions of marital conflict except for the dimension of the separating of financial affairs ($p < 0.01$). And also in case of the control group which had not received any intervention, no significant difference was observed between pretest and posttest scores

Discussion and Conclusion: According to the findings of this research, solution-oriented counseling has caused reduction in all of the marital conflict dimensions except for one case and consequently it has caused persistence of marital life and reduction in its conflicts.

KEY WORDS: Solution-oriented counseling, marital conflict, working couples, psychology.

Introduction

Family is something more than a group of individuals who are participating in a physical and psychological atmosphere with each other. Nowadays family is seen in different forms which each one is considered as a social-cultural system. Inside such a system, individuals are tied with each other by strong, mutual and durable affective links. Entering into this organized system is accomplished through birth or marriage. Families produce new members and though finally lose them, nevertheless family relations will remain [1], and no other system is like family [2]. In the last decades, economical problems and change in expectations of the families about the life have caused more incomes as being a necessity for family survival. Nowadays in most countries the lifestyle has changed from families with one-career couples to families with two-career couples, in a way that two-career couples constitute a large number of them [3].

In these couples in spite of the fact that working wife supports her husband better than non-working wife [4] and economically they have a better situation and experience less anxiety in financial affairs, but in their lives there are kinds of family and work conflicts including job tensions, too much job stress, role conflict, problems related to child care, protecting adults and problems related to the adjustment of the family job and personal needs [5].

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On the one hand, conflict is the imperative production of joint life. When two individuals live with each other as a couple, conflict will emerge. Because of the nature of the interaction of couples sometimes disagreements are observable or the needs are not met, and as a result, the spouses show the feelings of anger, despair and dissatisfaction towards each other [6].

Some people consider the marital conflict as resulting from a reaction to the individual differences, and when it becomes as more intense that the feelings of anger, hostility, grudge, hatred, jealousy and verbal and physical misconduct dominate their relations and show the form of the destructiveness and demolition, it is considered as an unusual status [7].

Recent findings have shown that there are important problems (interpersonal and intrapersonal) in the relationships of two-career couples, which is related to dividing the responsibilities child care and working at home [8, 9]. Also in comparison with divorce average, there is more divorce among two-career couples [10], and there are kinds of conflicts in the lives of the couples that both of them are working and it influences their lives and also it spreads to other aspects of their lives.

Researches show that 70% of men and 83% of women experience serious conflict between roles and demands from work and family [11] two-career couples, are pioneers at the beginning of 21st century for making a new identity [12].

Two-career couples at first were described as couples that both of them are working, have special characteristics which require a high degree of commitment [13], both of them have got jobs which require the sense of responsibility [9]. Both working couples propose that family decisions must be made regarding the characteristics of both of them [14], these couples are more under pressure for the tasks, cognition, conversation and more connection and they do these tasks as quick as possible [15].

According to some of the initial studies on working couples, the change of the family structure caused by employment of both wife and husband will lead to more conflict, less happiness and ambiguity of gender roles [16]. Recent findings indicate that there are important couples problems (interpersonal and intrapersonal) in relationships of two-career couples which depends on the dividing the responsibilities of child care and working at home in this new kind of life [8, 9]. Role conflict for working couples divides in two categories including professional-parental conflict and professional-spousal conflict [17].

If above mentioned cases are not solved, some problems will emerge in the marriage ties relationships and consequently in development and evolution of the family. Solving these problems requires that both husband and wife remain seriously in one's unique personal identity and at the same time they should be able to put aside this identity at times for the sake of healthiness and improvement of the relationship which is an inseparable aspect in marriage. It must be considered that in most cases, working couples can't respect their separate identities and build up a relationship accompanied by understanding. Therefore the couples won't be able to use their potential talents and capabilities for solving their problems. In this case the approaches of family therapy could help the couples in the course of development and evolution.

Solution-oriented short term therapy approach is among important approaches in the field of family therapy [18]. Through solution-talk, solution-oriented therapist helps family to believe that the reality lies in their minds so they will be able to create solutions based on their conceptions. Applicable solutions result from the cooperation of family members and as a result, family members will obtain new and revitalizing perceptions about themselves. If clients are successfully able to get to a cognition and sensational change, their abilities for solving and controlling the problem will be demonstrated [19].

Solution-oriented viewpoint does not know and behave the clients as patients and help them find a solution for their current problems. This viewpoint emphasizes here, now and also future. On the basis of the solution-oriented therapy viewpoint, change and evolution has been an unavoidable affair and specially constructive changes are possible, so in this kind of therapy, the emphasize is on the issues in which there is a probability for change in them and not in the issues that having hard texture and are unchangeable [20], therefore, solution-oriented counseling and therapy are known as hopefulness counseling [21]. The researches show that this approach could lead to useful results and operates well even in the emergency situation [22].

This viewpoint is welcomed by clients because of the limitations of therapy sessions and is a valuable therapy method for families [20]. Nowadays short term solution-oriented family therapy has obtained an increasing acceptance, but in spite of this acceptance, few researches have been carried out in this field. Conducted studies in short term family therapy center in Milwaukee in America, report the scope of success from 72% up to 80% in the therapy of clients' problems [23].

Solution-oriented approach has been carried out in the case of different population and situations including couples [24-27], marriage counseling [28], the solution of conflict in work system [29], the development of students [30], and crisis of psychiatry in the course of the adjustment of beliefs [31] and has obtained useful results. Also

Nazari (2004) investigated the effect of two methods of relation- enrichment and solution-oriented counseling on marital satisfaction of working couples and concluded that both methods have significantly increased marital satisfaction [27].

METHOD

The method which is used in this research is a semi-experimental method with pretest, posttest and follow-up design.

Population, Sample and the Sampling Method

Statistical population of this research consists of those groups of education department staff in Zahedan City and their working spouses, and statistical sample of the study includes 14 couples selected by use of marital conflict questionnaire and were determined as having conflict. They were arranged by random method in two equal test and control groups. Holding a job by both wife and husband, passing at least three years of their marriage and having child were the characteristics of the studied sample. In terms of education, four of them had M.A degree, thirteen of them held B.A degree, six of them had a two-year college degree and 5 of them had diploma. The range of the age of the participants was between 23 and 42 years old and the duration of their marriage was between 3 up to 12 years. Also in terms of the numbers of children, participants had at least one child and at most three children.

Tools of Method

Tools which are used in this research are Barati and Sanai marital conflict questionnaire (1996). This questionnaire measures seven dimensions of marital conflict including: reduction in cooperation, reduction in sexual intercourse, increase in emotional reactions, increase in attracting support of child, increase in personal relationship with one's relatives, reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends and separation of financial affairs from each other. In this test the norms has been founded by its designers on clients referring to judicial authorities or counseling centers for solving the marital conflict in Tehran and its psychometrical characteristics have been reported as following: Cronbach's alpha has been reported as following: for whole questionnaire 53% and for subscales of reduction in cooperation 30%, reduction in sexual intercourse 50%, increase in emotional reaction 73%, increase in attraction of support of child 60%, increase in personal relationship with one's relatives 64%, reduction in family relation with spouse relatives and friends 64% and separation of financial affairs from each other 51% [32]. In order to determine the validity of the test, some experts in family therapy were consulted and according to their views, this test has a suitable narrative content.

In present research Cronbach's alpha was obtained as following: for the whole test 74%, for subscales in reduction in cooperation 63%, reduction in sexual intercourse 71%, increasing of emotional reactions 76%, increasing of the attraction of support of child 69%, increase in personal relationship with one's relatives 78%, reduction in family relation with the spouse's relatives and friends 79% and separating financial affairs from each other 71%.

Method of Execution

At the beginning on the basis of principles and techniques of solution-oriented approach, the framework of sessions was established. Then through inserting an advertisement and issuing announcements and coordination with department of education, the potential clients were informed of such sessions and were asked to refer to counseling center of department of education for enrollment. After the applying the questionnaire on clients, the primary interview was carried out with them, and during a three-month period, 14 couples possessing necessary conditions for attending the sessions were chosen and then were divided in two test and control groups by random.

The test group received eight sessions of solution-oriented intervention and control group didn't receive any intervention. After the end of the sessions, again the questionnaire of marital conflict was executed and after one month, the follow-up session was held and the follow-up test was executed and then the results were analyzed. Several sources were used in order to compile the content of solution-oriented sessions [26, 24, 27, 33, 34]

A summary of discussions under study in sessions is as following:

First Session: Familiarization, expressing purposes, the process of sessions and group regulations, paying attention to all participants and listening to their purposes.

Second Session: Expressing principles of solution-oriented counseling, member's remarks about problems, affairs managements and discussions in the group and coming to an compromised solution, member's conversation about the problems of employment of both individuals, decentralization from negative cases and emphasize on positive ones.

Third Session: Applying scaling for estimation of participants' commitment rate and hopefulness for solving problems and discussing about rating, detection of the members' strength by use of questions like how, when, and what and its solution.

Forth Session: Encouraging participants to express the problems and their solutions in the field of financial affairs, child care and relation with relatives and discussing about it in the group, encouraging members for a conversing about solutions instead of form and detection of useful, weak or suitable solutions.

Fifth Session: Asking miraculous question and discussing about it in the group, encouraging members for expressing their abilities in solving problems and making the abilities strong.

Sixth Session: Asking miraculous question and discussing about answers in the group.

Seventh Session: Using the word "instead of" and replacing suitable thoughts, feelings and behaviors instead of problematic thoughts, feelings and behaviors and execution the technique of 180 degrees turning, requesting participants to express at least two positive characteristics of their spouses and to admire and express gratitude to them.

Eighth Session: Summarizing the sessions and requesting members for expressing opinions about sessions, execution of posttest and appreciating participants for cooperation and attending the sessions.

Findings

Statistical method used in this research is variance analysis with repeated measurement design.

Table No.1: Descriptive indices of scores of marital conflict of two groups in three phases of measurement.

Test	Group	Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest	Solution-oriented	Reduction in cooperation	13.31	1.31	14
		Reduction in sexual intercourse	14.23	1.22	14
		Increase in emotional reactions	23.11	1.09	14
		Increase in attracting support of child	11.56	1.04	14
		Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	15.67	1.11	14
		Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	16.09	2.01	14
		Separating financial affairs from each other	22.66	2.34	14
	Control	Reduction in cooperation	14.01	1.11	14
		Reduction in sexual intercourse	14.99	1.56	14
		Increase in emotional reactions	24.86	1.98	14
		Increase in attracting support of child	12.34	1.08	14
		increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	17.76	1.45	14
		Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	18.09	1.94	14
		Separating financial affairs from each other	23.01	2.34	14
Posttest	Solution-oriented	Reduction in cooperation	11.23	1.03	14
		Reduction in sexual intercourse	12.12	1.23	14
		Increase in emotional reactions	20.88	2.76	14
		Increase in attracting support of child	11.11	1.24	14
		Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	13.25	1.23	14
		Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	14.87	1.62	14
		Separating financial affairs from each other	22.44	1.04	14
	Control	Reduction in cooperation	14.13	1.11	14
		Reduction in sexual intercourse	14.45	2.01	14
		Increase in emotional reactions	23.88	2.92	14
		Increase in attracting support of child	12.78	1.21	14
		Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	16.98	2.09	14
		Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	17.69	1.71	14
		Separating financial affairs from each other	22.23	1.12	14
Follow-up	Solution-oriented	Reduction in cooperation	12.21	1.21	14
		Reduction in sexual intercourse	13.90	1.07	14
		Increase in emotional reactions	21.05	1.43	14
		Increase in attracting support of child	10.10	1.65	14
		Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	14.44	1.81	14
		Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	13.11	1.98	14
		Separating financial affairs from each other	23.14	2.51	14
	Control	Reduction in cooperation	14.32	1.21	14
		Reduction in sexual intercourse	14.69	1.09	14
		Increase in emotional reactions	24.11	1.26	14
		Increase in attracting support of child	12.13	1.57	14
		Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	16.78	1.34	14
		Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	18.22	2.67	14
		Separating of financial affairs from each other	23.54	2.98	14

Regarding table No.2, the effect of experimental intervention in test group is significant about all dimensions of marital conflict except for the separation of financial affairs.

Table No.2: A summary of variance analysis with repeated measurement design for two groups in different dimensions of marital conflict.

		SS	DF	MS	F	P
Solution-oriented	Reduction in cooperation	35.16	2	17.58	13.43	0.01
	Reduction in sexual intercourse	44.58	2	22.29	12.11	0.01
	Increase in emotional reactions	79.98	2	39.99	22.76	0.01
	Increase in attracting support of child	52.12	2	26.06	18.93	0.01
	Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	40.00	2	20.00	11.09	0.01
	Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	82.80	2	41.4	11.72	0.01
	Separating financial affairs from each other	12.36	2	6.18	0.73	0.53
Control	Reduction in cooperation	1.60	2	0.35	0.93	0.35
	Reduction in sexual intercourse	1.56	2	0.47	0.88	0.47
	Increase in emotional reactions	0.89	2	0.445	1.21	0.12
	Increase in attracting support of child	0.34	2	0.17	0.23	0.87
	Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	0.67	2	0.335	0.68	0.45
	Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	0.89	2	0.445	0.52	0.67
	Separating financial affairs from each other	8.34	2	4.17	0.22	0.88

As it is seen in tale No.2, the dimensions of reduction in cooperation, reduction in sexual intercourse, increase in emotional reactions, increase in attracting support of child, increase in personal relationship with one's relatives, reduction in family relation with spouse's relatives and friends and separation of financial affairs from each other show significant differences. Therefore in each of these components there is a significant difference between at least a pair of averages of pretest, posttest and follow-up. In order to investigate the issue that which pair of averages is different, dependent t-test was used and its results are presented in table No.3.

Table No.3: The results of the comparison of three times measured averages in the form of two-by-two in different dimensions of marital conflict.

Dimension	Comparison	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	T	Df	P
Reduction in cooperation	Pretest-Posttest	2.64	1.27	7.87	13	0.01
	Pretest-Follow up	2.78	1.43	11.13	13	0.01
	Posttest-Follow up	0.34	1.12	0.678	13	0.321
Reduction in sexual intercourse	Pretest-Posttest	2.13	1.23	6.89	13	0.01
	Pretest-Follow up	2.54	2.11	9.80	13	0.01
	Posttest-Follow up	0.45	1.24	1.23	13	0.871
Increase in emotional reactions	Pretest-Posttest	3.83	1.98	12.14	13	0.01
	Pretest-Follow up	3.65	1.72	9.07	13	0.01
	Posttest-Follow up	0.53	2.31	0.943	13	0.283
Increase in attracting support of child	Pretest-Posttest	2.89	1.76	6.34	13	0.01
	Pretest-Follow up	2.94	1.53	8.12	13	0.01
	Posttest-Follow up	0.32	2.34	1.98	13	0.12
Reduction in family relation with one's spouse's relatives and friends	Pretest-Posttest	2.77	1.21	7.49	13	0.01
	Pretest-Follow up	2.46	1.23	9.32	13	0.01
	Posttest-Follow up	0.18	0.87	1.94	13	0.089
Increase in personal relationship with one's relatives	Pretest-Posttest	3.29	2.11	10.13	13	0.01
	Pretest-Follow up	3.98	2.86	9.72	13	0.01
	Posttest-Follow up	0.61	2.18	0.76	13	0.634

In case of control group and considering that F proportion is not meaningful and there is no significant difference between scores of pretest, posttest and follow-up design, multi comparisons are not used.

Considering table No.3, the difference of scores of pretest-posttest and pretest-follow-up is significant for all dimensions of marital conflict. But difference of posttest-follow up is not significant in none of dimensions of marital conflict.

Also to table No.3 reflects that the effect of experimental operation is significant in all dimensions except for separation of financial affairs. Therefore it can be concluded with a 95% confidence in reduction of marital conflict

that group counseling with solution-oriented method has not been effective in reduction of marital conflict in the dimension of separating financial affairs. Also the difference of pretest-posttest and pretest-follow up design is significant in all dimensions of marital conflict. In other words with confidence of 99% it can be concluded that group counseling with solution-oriented method has caused reduction in marital conflict in dimensions of cooperation reduction, sexual intercourse reduction, emotional reactions increase, attraction of child support increase, increase in personal relationship with one's relatives and reduction in family relation with the spouse's relatives and friends, and this reduction has been continued up to the time of follow-up which has been one month after the end of counseling sessions.

DISCUSSION

The current research has been carried out with the aim of determination of effectiveness rate of group counseling with the method of solution-oriented in reduction of marital conflicts of working couples. After holding the sessions and collecting information, research hypotheses were tested using suitable statistical methods. The results indicated that group counseling with the method of solution-oriented, has been effective in reduction of all dimensions of marital conflict (reduction in cooperation, reduction in sexual intercourse, increase in emotional reactions, increase in attraction of child support, increase of personal relationships with one's relatives and reduction in family relation with the spouse's relatives and friends) except for the dimension of separating financial affairs. The results of present research is homolateral with the result of a research in which solution-oriented therapy was used in group form on couples and participants at the end of intervention showed significant improvement in the scale of marital satisfaction [24]. Also another research investigated the effectiveness of the solution-oriented couples therapy in improvement and increase of marital satisfaction. The result of the research reflected that the test group has significant difference in posttest in the scale of marital adjustment and all its subscales in comparison with control group, which confirms the efficacy of solution-oriented viewpoint in increasing marital satisfaction [25]. In the case of the inefficacy of solution-oriented counseling in reduction of separation of financial affairs dimension of marital conflict, it can be said that in fact both members of working couple had separate income and perhaps separate financial accounts and personal savings. Since the questions of questionnaire consider the separate financial accounts and personal savings as a sign of conflict, in working couples, this issue can be a normal affair and it cannot be proposed as an issue of conflict for these couples. So after intervention not so much changes are made in this dimension of marital conflict.

A review at literature of solution-oriented therapy shows that this kind of therapy has been used in different situations and for various clients and useful results have been obtained. Perhaps the reason for obtaining such useful results is that solution-oriented therapist adopts a non judgment, non confronting, understanding and cooperative stand and focuses on present and future hard exceptions, positives and abilities of clients and respects the clients' aims and uses internal sources and specialized knowledge of the clients themselves in reaching these purposes. The solution-oriented therapist makes assigned tasks proportionate with situation of each couple. He doesn't consider any situation as completely negative and considers change as a continuous and unavoidable process and focuses on the aspects of relation which has been effective previously instead of focuses on the problem and for maximizing positive results of deeds like respecting the client's viewpoint and showing empathy with trouble, and creating hope and positive expectations, he considers purity and genuineness as necessary aspects in the interaction from the therapist's side. The current study tried to use positive features of this therapy in making positive changes in working couples. This issue resulted in useful outcomes. Therefore considering the effectiveness of solution-oriented approach in reduction of different dimensions of marital conflict of working couples, using this approach by family counselors and psychologists is suggested. Couples under study in this research had at least diploma and held government employment. So there are limitations in generalizing it to couples with lower education and self-employment. Furthermore the present research has been carried out on couples in Zahedan City and may have limitations in generalizing the results to the couples of the other areas.

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