



# Effectiveness of Satisfactory Marriage Training Intervention in Marital Conflicts and Marital Disillusionment

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## Abstract

**Background and Objective:** Unresolved marital conflicts are always accompanied by disillusionment and daily tensions, leading to ignoring the needs of couples and declining the quality of their marital relationships. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of satisfactory marriage training intervention in marital conflicts and marital disillusionment.

**Materials and Methods:** The present research method was semi-experimental with pre-test, post-test, and follow-up with a control group and repeated measures design. A total of 30 individuals were selected using the availability sampling method and randomly divided into two experimental and control groups. The data were obtained through the Marital Conflict Questionnaire and Marital Disillusionment Questionnaire and analyzed with descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics using multivariate analysis of covariance and SPSS software (version 22).

**Results:** The obtained findings showed that marital conflict and marital disillusionment scores significantly reduced from pre-test to post-test ( $P < 0.05$ ) and follow-up ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the experimental group. However, no significant change was observed from pre-test to post-test ( $P > 0.05$ ) and follow-up ( $P > 0.05$ ) in the control group.

**Conclusions:** It can be concluded that satisfactory marriage training intervention was effective in marital conflicts and marital disillusionment. Therefore, satisfactory marriage education leads to the reduction of marital conflicts and marital disillusionment, thereby improving the quality of life of couples.

**Keywords:** Couples, Marital conflict, Marital disillusionment, Satisfied marriage

## Background

Sustainable and satisfactory marital relationships are associated with mental health, physical health, and family growth. These relations provide a conducive environment for children's development and promote the growth and health of family members [1]. Marital conflicts and divorces are serious threats challenging the stability and quality of marriage and have negative psychological, physical, social, and economic consequences. Unresolved marital conflicts are always accompanied by disillusionment and daily tensions, leading to ignoring the needs of spouses, declining the quality of their marital relationships, and decreasing marital satisfaction. The results of studies indicated that marital satisfaction is associated with spouses' well-being [2], is considered a protective factor for the family unit, determines the quality of life [3], and is the strongest predictor of life satisfaction among all the components of life satisfaction prediction [4].

## Objectives

Regarding the importance of considering basic

needs in any relationship, especially intimate and marital relationships, and very high costs of unpleasant marriages for couples, their children, and generally their society, this study aimed to develop a model for the promotion of relationship satisfaction, increase in responsibility in the relationship, and improvement of the quality of the couple's relationship. The major criticisms of satisfactory marriage intervention include its overly simplistic approach, potential for minimizing the client's problems, and possibility that some clients may not possess skills or resources to solve their problems [5]. With this background in mind, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of satisfactory marriage training intervention in marital conflicts and marital disillusionment.

## Materials and Methods

The present research method was semi-experimental with pre-test, post-test, and follow-up with a control group and repeated measures design. The statistical population of this study consisted of

**Table 1.** Satisfactory marriage training sessions

Session	Content of sessions
First	Emphasizing individuals' power to choose their marital status, introducing destructive patterns of communication, understanding couples' behaviors by emphasizing infrastructure goals, introducing some destructive relationship goals and ways to deal with them and change them, training strategies for starting the best changes in life, and offering suggestions for adding some useful habits
Second	Explaining the reasons why some individuals tend to have discouraging attitudes in a relationship, frustrating one of the couples in a relationship, disappointing patterns of behavior, proposing ways to encourage and support one's spouse, such as trusting, paying attention to spouse's strengths, and accepting unquestionably
Third	Examining effects of the prevailing atmosphere on families and parenting styles, couple's lifestyle, current priorities, and common plays in marital communication in shaping the couple's current relationship
Fourth	Examining verbal and nonverbal communication, influence of infrastructural beliefs and communication goals on couple's behaviors, unhealthy communication styles based on Satire's theory, and correct ways of expressing emotions
Fifth	Presenting ways to improve communication, such as expressing one's emotions and goals and accepting responsibility, trying to understand the spouse's mental space, and removing or replacing destructive beliefs and documents
Sixth	Discussing awareness of one's feelings, beliefs, and intentions, ability to share them with the spouse, and challenging them, providing feedback, and expressing one's opinions without judgment
Seventh	Presenting useful choices for marital communication, such as being brave, happy, loving, and honest, and ways to accomplish each, and techniques to influence thoughts and emotions with new choices
Eighth	Discussing conflict sources, such as children, religion, friends, and employment, as the main steps and public actions to resolve a conflict and manage anger
Ninth	Describing practical solutions to deal with possible conflicts in the areas of communication prone to disagreement in detail
Tenth	Addressing the essential issues for satisfactory marital relationships

all married men and women with a spouse over 25 years of age in Zanjan, Iran, in 2019, out of whom 30 individuals were selected using the availability sampling method and randomly divided into two experimental and control groups. The inclusion criteria of the present study were an age of over 25 years, marriage duration of at least 6 years, at least one child, willingness to participate in the study, minimum educational level of diploma and maximum educational level of bachelor's degree, native of Zanjan province, and even close social and economic classes.

The ethical considerations were observed in the present study. Accordingly, in the executive part, the privacy and confidentiality of the collected data were observed. Explaining the research objectives to the participants, obtaining their informed consent, willingness to participate in the study, giving the right to withdraw from the study, lack of educational harm, answering the questionnaire items, and providing the results to the participants if they wish as other ethical principles were observed in the present study.

### Marital Conflict Questionnaire

It is a 42-item questionnaire. The items of this questionnaire and its subscales were developed under the guidance of Madahi et al. (2013) and based on clinical experiences in Iran to measure the conflicts between husband and wife. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale was 0.71. The predictive validity of the questionnaire for predicting certain mental psychosomatic illnesses, including migraine headache ( $P < 0.01$ ; 0.28), was confirmed [6].

### Kayser's Marital Disillusionment Questionnaire

This questionnaire with 21 items is used to assess the

level of disillusionment or lack of emotion for the spouse. The questionnaire consists of three dimensions, namely attachment, emotional alienation, and emotional support. It was observed that there is a significant positive correlation between this questionnaire with Schneider and Regents' disillusionment questionnaire ( $r=0.93$ ) [7].

The data were obtained through the Marital Conflict Questionnaire and Marital Disillusionment Questionnaire and analyzed with descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics using multivariate analysis of covariance and SPSS software (version 22).

### Results

The average age values of the participants were 33.53 and 33.13 years in the experimental and control groups, respectively (Table 2).

Marital conflict in the experimental group decreased from pre-test to post-test and follow-up; however, no significant change was observed from pre-test to post-test and follow-up. Regarding marital disillusionment, the mean of this variable in the experimental group decreased from pre-test to post-test and follow-up; nevertheless, there was no significant change from pre-test to post-test and follow-up, indicating the effectiveness of the

**Table 2.** Descriptive indicators of study participants in two experimental and control groups

Variable	Experimental group		Control group		
	F <sub>i</sub>	%	F <sub>i</sub>	%	
Gender	Female	7	46.7	9	60
	Male	8	53.3	6	40
	Total	15	100	15	100
Educational level	Diploma	6	40	5	33.3
	Undergraduate	9	60	10	66.7
	Total	15	100	15	100

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of study variables in experimental and control groups

Variable	Stage	Group			
		Experimental		Control	
		Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Marital conflict	Pre-test	142.80	8.33	143.66	8.56
	Post-test	113.00	9.07	144.73	8.58
	Follow-up	112.80	13.19	143.53	7.23
Marital disillusionment	Pre-test	52.26	5.20	52.33	5.39
	Post-test	44.20	4.87	50.20	5.17
	Follow-up	38.73	5.53	50.80	4.73

**Table 4.** Analysis of variance of repeated measurements to investigate marital conflict of experimental group in comparison to that of control group in three stages of study

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F	P	Effect size
Group effect	10027.77	1	10027.77	169.46	0.001	0.85
Error	1656.84	28	59.173			
Main effect of three stages of implementation	4338.95	2	2169.47	21.32	0.001	0.43
Error	5697.95	56	101.74			
Interactive effect of group × three-stage implementation	4614.42	2	2307.21	22.67	0.001	0.44

intervention in the reduction of marital conflicts (Table 3).

The main effect of the group ( $\eta^2=0.85$ ;  $P<0.05$ ;  $F=146.46$ ) was significant for studying the mean marital conflict of the experimental group, compared to that reported for the control group. Accordingly, there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of the mean marital conflict scores. In addition, the main effect of the three stages of implementation ( $\eta^2=0.43$ ;  $P<0.05$ ;  $F=21.32$ ) was significant indicating that the interactive effect of the three stages of research implementation, including pre-test, post-test, and follow-up, was significant in the experimental and control groups ( $\eta^2=0.44$ ;  $P<0.05$ ;  $F=22.6755$ ). In other words, there was a significant difference between the scores of marital conflicts in the three stages of pre-test, post-test, and

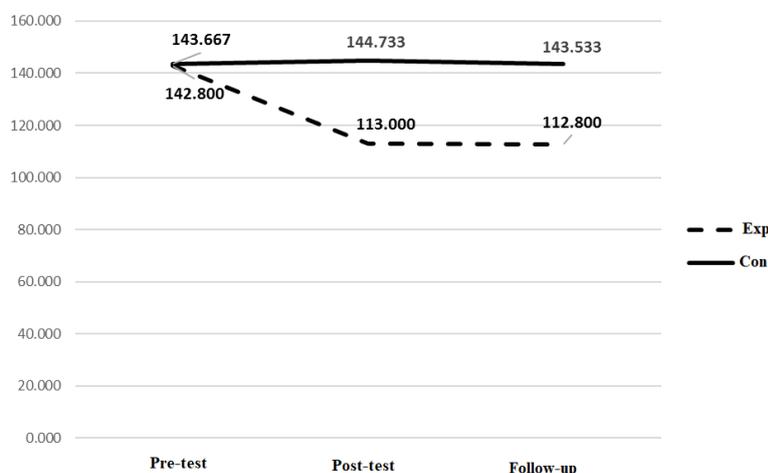
follow-up by considering different experimental and control groups, indicating the effectiveness of the intervention package (Table 4).

Marital conflict scores significantly reduced from pre-test to post-test ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=29.80$ ) and follow-up ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=0.00$ ) in the experimental group. Nonetheless, no significant change was observed from pre-test to post-test ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=1.06$ ) and follow-up ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=0.13$ ) in the control group (Table 5).

Marital conflict scores decreased from pre-test to post-test and follow-up in the experimental group; nevertheless, no significant change was observed from pre-test to post-test and follow-up in the control group, indicating the effectiveness of the intervention package in the reduction of marital conflicts (Figure 1).

**Table 5.** Bonferroni test for comparison of marital conflict in three stages of study according to experimental and control groups

Group	Variable	Stage I	Stage J	Mean difference (I-J)	P-value
Experimental	Marital conflict	Pre-test	Post-test	29.80*	0.001
			Follow-up	30.00*	0.001
Control	Marital conflict	Pre-test	Post-test	-1.06	1
			Follow-up	0.13	1

**Figure 1.** Trend of changes in marital conflict scores from pre-test to post-test and follow-up in both experimental and control groups

**Table 6.** Results of analysis of variance with 3 × 2 repeated measures to investigate marital disillusionment of experimental group in comparison to that of control group in three stages of study

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F	P	Effect size
Group effect	822.04	1	822.04	27.77	0.001	0.49
Error	828.57	28	29.59			
Main effect of three stages of implementation	886.822	2	443.41	17.63	0.001	0.38
Error	1407.82	56	25.14			
Interactive effect of group × three-stage implementation	540.02	2	270.01	10.74	0.001	0.27

**Table 7.** Bonferroni test for comparison of marital disillusionment in three stages of study according to experimental and control groups

Group	Variable	Stage I	Stage J	Mean difference (I-J)	P-value
Experimental	Marital disillusionment	Pre-test	Post-test	8.06*	0.001
			Follow-up	13.53*	0.001
Control	Marital disillusionment	Pre-test	Post-test	2.13	0.54
			Follow-up	1.53	1

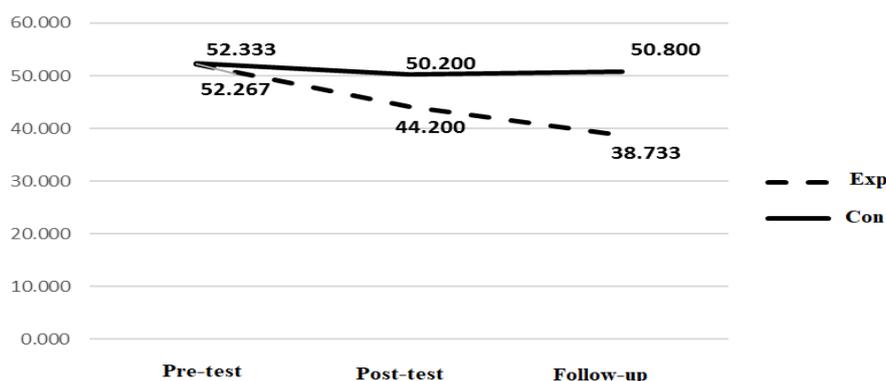
The analysis of variance with repeated measurement of 2 × 3 was used due to existing both independent within-subjects (with three levels) and between-subject (with two levels) variables and a dependent variable (marital disillusionment), the results of which are shown in Table 6. Firstly, the sphericity hypothesis of covariance analysis using Mauchly’s test was evaluated before using analysis of variance with repeated measures, indicating that this assumption was confirmed ( $X^2=2.59$ ;  $P>0.05$ ).

The main effect of the group ( $\eta=0.49$ ;  $P<0.05$ ;  $F=27.77$ ) was significant to examine the mean marital disillusionment of the experimental group, compared to that reported for the control group. Accordingly, there was a significant difference between both groups in terms of the mean marital disillusionment scores. In addition, the results indicated that the main effect of the three stages of

implementation ( $\eta=0.38$ ;  $P<0.05$ ;  $F=173.63$ ) was significant. Similarly, the findings revealed that the interactive effect of the three-stage implementation on the marital disillusionment variable ( $\eta=0.27$ ;  $P<0.05$ ;  $F=10.74$ ) was significant in the experimental and control groups.

Marital disillusionment scores significantly reduced from pre-test to post-test ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=0.86$ ) and follow-up ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=13.53$ ) in the experimental group. However, no significant change was observed from pre-test to post-test ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=2.13$ ) and follow-up ( $P<0.05$ ;  $d=53.53$ ) in the control group (Table 7).

Marital disillusionment scores decreased from pre-test to post-test and follow-up in the experimental group. Nevertheless, there was no significant change from pre-test to post-test and follow-up, indicating the effectiveness of the intervention package in the control group (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Trend of changes in marital disillusionment scores from pre-test to post-test and follow-up in both experimental and control groups

**Discussion**

The investigation of the mean marital conflict between the experimental and the control groups showed that the marital conflict scores in the experimental group were significantly different from those reported for the control group, and this difference remained stable in the follow-up period. The couples who are satisfied with marriage use

effective techniques to resolve their conflicts [8]. The results demonstrated that conflicts are inevitable in married life, and even existing conflicts indicate the intimacy of a relationship [9]. Therefore, resolving marital conflicts has a strong relationship with marital satisfaction, and failure to resolve or ignore these conflicts leads to dissatisfaction and alienation. The findings of the

present study are consistent with the results of studies conducted by Windle et al. [10], Pinosof and Haselton [11], and Reisner et al. [12]. Robles et al. argued that marital satisfaction means emotional support, shared interests, and conflict resolution, noting that conflict resolution is considered one of the most important factors influencing overall marital satisfaction [13].

Generally, according to the results of the present study and above-mentioned findings and since marital relationships cannot be imagined without avoidance, satisfied married couples have characteristics helping them not only successfully resolve conflicts but also achieve personal growth. Some of these characteristics are humor, empathy for each other's needs and emotions, support for each other, win-win mentality, responsibility, emotion regulation skills (e.g., suppressing physiological skills, stress-relieving conversation, anger management, and gentle conversation), and ability to recognize the distinction between impasse conflicts and manageable conflicts. Therefore, marital conflict in families acts as a double-edged sword, indicating that it leads to increased marital satisfaction, thereby contributing to the growth of the relationship and trust in the relationship among the couples considering it an opportunity to get closer to each other's worlds [14].

The results of analyses indicated that satisfactory marriage protocol, which is based on Glaser's needs, with a significant effect on marital disillusionment, is responsible for post-test and follow-up in the experimental group, compared to the control group, leading to reduced marital disillusionment and relationship well-being. Numerous factors threatened marital relationships over time, resulting in the erosion of love and intimacy between couples, and disillusionment is considered one of the factors with many causes [15].

Disillusionment is a gradual decrease in a spouse's emotional attachment, which is accompanied by feelings of alienation, immorality, and indifference between the couple replacing positive emotions with negative ones and leading to the breakdown of the relationship if it is severe [16]. Marital disillusionment is caused by the negative comparisons of the relationship to other relationships, in which the individual claims that he or she wished to be in another relationship and lost many opportunities by entering into this relationship, thereby getting angry and severely criticizing his/her partner. The result of such comparisons is the entry of the individual and the couple into the abyss of betrayal, occurring gradually not suddenly. However, the spouse feels appreciated by making positive comparisons in satisfactory marriage. Instead of resorting to

extramarital affairs, they solve the problems within the relationship and experience a lot of self-disclosure and credibility [17]. Positive comparisons are regarded as a key component of marital satisfaction in which an individual uses listening, dialogue, self-disclosure, and empathy skills instead of resorting to assertiveness, criticism, defensive behavior, and sabotage, which are known as Gottman's quadrupeds.

Marital satisfaction is a quality that is influenced by personality factors (e.g., pleasantness of responsibility), cognitive factors (e.g., realistic and happy expectations), and situations (e.g., conflict, interpersonal social support, and intimacy) [18]. Disillusionment is a context in which the couple's relationship pattern is a demand for withdrawal. In other words, one couple requests a change and the other rejects the request and negatively reacts to it [19]. Satisfied couples always recognize their responsibility in the relationship without looking for the other to blame [20]. Their relationship pattern is not in the form of demand for withdrawal, which is a characteristic of unhappy couples, but in the way of realistic expectations based on greater knowledge of each other. Furthermore, their goal is to grow their mutual relationships. Their relationship is similar to a refuge, with commitment and trust as its pillars, and its layers are covered with friendship and intimacy, conflict resolution, goal setting, and common meaning [21].

One of the main limitations of experimental studies is the generalization of the results. Although the present study aimed to use real-life examples of marital problems and sampling was based on the random sampling method, caution should be exercised due to interpersonal differences as well as research situation in generalizing the results. Health and family specialists use the findings of the present study to choose their treatment plan in which the emotional needs of the couple are preferred. Furthermore, it is required to carry out further studies to identify other variables affecting marital satisfaction and marital disillusionment by the examination of the factors, such as stable personality and interpersonal, cultural, economic, and transitory status. Moreover, the types of conflicts, including manageable conflicts and sustainable conflicts, were not distinguished in the present study.

## Conclusions

It can be concluded that satisfactory marriage training intervention was effective in marital conflicts and marital disillusionment. Therefore, satisfactory marriage education leads to the reduction of marital conflicts and marital disillusionment.

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All the ethical principles were observed in the present study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and implementation of the stages. In addition, informed consent was obtained from all the study subjects. The participants were also assured of the confidentiality of their information. Moreover, the subjects were free to withdraw from the study at any time, and the results would be available to them if desired. This article was based on a doctoral dissertation in counseling with the ethics code of IR.KUMS.REC.1397.5015 approved by Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran.

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### Authors' contributions

Conceptualization [Shahla Khatibi]; Methodology [Mahmoud Gudarzi]; Investigation [Yahya Yarmohammadi]; Writing Original Draft [Shahla Khatibi]; Writing, Reviewing, and Editing [All authors]; Funding Acquisition [All authors]; Resources [All authors]; Supervision [Mahmoud Gudarzi]

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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