

The Effectiveness of Group Training of Solution-focused Approach in Happiness of Couples

Ahmad Farhady¹, Afshin Ahrmian², Maryam Nooralizadeh³ and Mansour Sudani⁴

¹ Payame Noor University, Iran

² Islamic Azad University, Bushehr, Iran

³ Ministry of Education, Bushehr, Iran

⁴ Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

*Corresponding author's e-mail: Farhady.a@gm

ABSTRACT: The present study aims to examine the effectiveness of group training of solution-focused approach in happiness of couples who referred to Busher family counseling centers. Solution-focused approach is a short-term remedy that emphasizes on clients' finding of a solution for their problems with the help of counselor. Research sample consists of 44 couples with the lowest levels of happiness randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The research instruments are the revised version of Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI). Research design is the one with pre-test, post-test with control group and follow-up test. In addition to using descriptive statistics, repeated measurement test is also used to analyze data. Data analysis shows that solution-focused approach has significantly improved happiness.

Key Words: Solution-Focused Approach, Couples' Happiness

Received 14 Jan. 2014
Accepted 18 Mar. 2014

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a holy promise that has existed in different societies and most religions have recommended it. It has been recognized as a desirable human union that leads to formation of one of the most important units of society, i.e., family. This seemingly small community gives special meaning to people life. Goldenberg [1] considers family as the first social organization where individual lives in it. He also considers family as a center of help and relief which should decrease mental pressures that affect its members and pave the way for its members' growth and development.

While some marriages are conducive to couples' growth and development, many of them might end up in several problems for couples. A question that rises at this juncture is that why some couples come to a mutual understanding in their marriages while others face with difficulty in solving a number of uncomplicated problems in their lives. Most couples don't have any problem in contact with third parties but they rarely can grow their intimate relationship with mutual understanding [2]. Landis [3] believes that discord and other marriage problems begin from the fourth month after marriage. The beginning of these problems is when man concludes that his wife is not a woman that he wanted to have and also woman begins to gradually think that her husband is not the man who he was at the beginning.

From the very beginning of human civilization thinkers had argued about human life and how to have a good life. Some people see their ideals in wealth, some in having meaningful relationships and others in helping those in need. Though, all of these situations are different, but they have in common a sense of wellbeing. In fact, though these people have different conditions, they have a common sense of wellbeing. Happiness is one of the most important factors in human life and, according to their convivial nature, human being have always shied away from being depressed and they want to be happy and lead a happy life. Carr [4] characterized happiness as positive mental state with high levels of life satisfaction, higher levels of positive affect as well as lower levels of negative affect. So many scholars believe that the essentials to reach satisfaction and happiness are to be aware of opportunities that ensure the steps to perfection for our enjoyment of deep satisfaction. Though, it is not easy to identify factors associated with happiness, we should recognize the situations in which we are biologically designed to be able to experience joy [4].

Given that the marital relationship is a complex relationship, its success is influenced by several factors. Moreover, like any other relationship some factors have more importance in the meantime [5]. Family therapy therefore seeks to investigate and explain these factors and also the relationship between couples and problems which are related to the quality of adaptive and maladaptive behaviors. So the questions that come to mind are why couples become incompatible and finally turn to separation and divorce and also what factors are leading to conflict and divorce.

According to what went before, the researchers are now focused on devising ways to increase positive interactions after the marriage. In the meantime, one of the effective ways is to hold training classes and consulting services to enhance the effectiveness of the marital relationship [6].

Markman and Halhlweg research has shown that training classes improve couple relationships and reduce their grievances [3]. One of the approaches that help couples in this regard is solution-focused family therapy approach. Solution-Focused Counseling (SFC) is an evolved counseling method which was introduced by Deshazer and his colleagues and was completed in Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at beginning of 1980 [7,8,9]. Solution-focused method for counseling is a substitute for problem-focused methods considered in exercise and clinical method of mental health. Although its root is in the hypnotherapy profession of Milton Erickson and other family system theories, it is equally rooted in post-structural and postmodern ideology as well as structural ideology [8]. Due to its emphasis on non-pathological approach to individual therapy, short remedy sessions, functional and practicable nature and easy techniques of implementation, Solution-focused therapy (SFT) is now one of the most popular approaches in the field. The source of this method is short-term remedy model of Mental Research Institute (MRI). Short-term remedy is investigated by several theorists of psychodynamic like Sifneos, Malan and Davanloo. This method avoids focusing on problems and exclusively emphasizes on solutions. These solutions might have signs of previous experiences of individual or might prove to be true in his/her future experiences [10]. This method is a post structural interpretation [9] and a normative theory that emphasizes on the role of language in the construction of social reality.

This therapy believes that clients have essential competence and creativity needed to make a change within them. This approach attaches very great importance to personal resources of clients for change to occur. It also maintains that clients have the capability of finding solutions that lead to progress in their lives but they have lost the ability to see these potentials in them [10]. This method is also based on the ability and competence to ensure client for positive change in their lives through access and use of resources and capabilities and internal forces. The basis of this method is counselor's confidence on clients' ability and competence for positive changes in their lives through access and use of personal resources and capabilities as well as internal forces. Solution-focused therapy is a force-based method emphasizing on human evolving resources and references and also emphasizing on how these forces can be used for changing processes [11]. Solution-oriented interventions emphasize on exceptions or objections concerning problems and see the future without any problem. Therefore, certain potential abilities are required in order to prepare cure seekers to delve into their past and even times without little problems and also help them think about how to implement these plans for the future [12]. This model focuses on taking small steps to get started. This approach focuses on clients' capabilities and resources on the present, helps couples find possible solutions for their problems. Therapists believe that solution-focused approach can be used to solve a range of problems including marital relations [9].

Research has shown that solution-oriented group training helps promote couples' happiness, well-being and marital adjustment and is primarily considered as one of the basic prevention programs. Bannink [13] showed that short-term solutions- focused therapy with a focus on hope and optimism had a significant efficacy in the treatment of behavioral changes in clients with anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. In another study, Frederick [14] considered the influence of short-term solutions-focused therapy on the Kingdom of God and cosmological coordination. The results indicated the efficacy of short-term solutions-focused therapy in the proof of God's Kingdom. It also encouraged Christians to see God's Kingdom in present instead of future. Similarly, [15] considered the effectiveness of workshop of solution-oriented counseling regarding insufficient learning of colored skin students (other than white). They reported workshop of solution-oriented counseling as an example of the key role that professional school counselors can have in the school reform movement.

In a research, Guterman and Rudes [16] showed that when the results of emotional- logical behavior therapy are not effective, improvement in clients can be achieved by integrating solution-oriented techniques together. Nelson [17] in his study also examined the effectiveness of solution-focused group therapy in reducing marital conflict and reported a significant increase in marital satisfaction of the case study.

Jonson and Lobow [18] selected some couples in order to increase satisfaction of relationship and promote quality of relations and problem solving methods. They exposed them to solution-focused therapy and the results indicated the effectiveness of this remedy. Mudd [19] also examined the efficacy of solution-focused therapy and group communication skills for couples. The results of the data analysis were approved by t-test and at $p = 0.01$. Overall, according to what was stated, this question might arise whether training of solution-based approach can be effective for couple's happiness. In this context, the present study seeks to answer this question considering the following research hypothesis.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research hypothesis:

Group training of solution-focused method effect on happiness of couples who referred to Bushehr family counseling centers.

Research method: This study is kind of an applied research which uses a semi-experimental design method with a pre-test and post-test pattern along with control group and follow-up test.

Statistical Population: Statistical population of this research includes all literate couples who were at least in their first marriage anniversary. They referred to Bushehr counseling centers due to marriage unhappiness and required consultations to solve their problems.

Sample and sampling method: In this study a simple random sampling method is used. At the outset by referring to Bushehr family counseling centers and informing them about holding training sessions, 230 couples volunteered to fill the revised version of OHI (Oxford Happiness Inventory). Among 92 couples who scored less than (40-42) in happiness test, 44 couples was selected randomly as the sample of this study and were divided into two control and experimental groups. Thus, 22 couples were grouped in the experimental group and 22 couples were in the control group.

Research tools: In this research, revised OHI of happiness was utilized to measure the variable of couples' happiness.

Revised Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI): In order to measure the variable of happiness, OHI, as a special measurement tool which has been used in several studies, was administered. This 29-item questionnaire was developed by Arjil and Low in 1989 and its scores can range from 0 to 87. The majority of the population in the present study get the scores from 40 to 42.

Reliability and validity of Revised OHI: In a study done by Fransis, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated as 0.97. He also reported alpha coefficients of 0.89, 0.90, 0.89 and 0.89 in a cross-cultural survey in Britain, America, Australia and Canada, respectively. By obtaining the test-retest reliability of 0.83 after 3 weeks, Valliant found that the test-retest reliability of OHI is more than reliability of the General Health Questionnaire and the Beck Depression Inventory.

Taking validity factor into account, it is clear that on the basis of distinction of three supposed components of happiness, correlation of OHI with feeling scale of BradBurn is 0.32, with life satisfaction of Arjil is 0.57 and with depression scale of Beck is - 0.52.

Also other studies showed that scores of this scale have a meaningful correlation with Self-respect Scale ,coping styles , locus of control and religiosity. In order to examine initial reliability and validity of Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, Ali Pour and Nour Bala in the academic year of 1377-78 studied 101 undergraduate students (62 women and 39 men) at Allame Tabatabaee and Shahed Universities with average age of 22.5 (with 19-39 years old range). Cronbach's Alpha was 0.93 and split-half reliability test was 0.92. Also the reliability of test-retest questionnaire after 3 weeks (n= 25) was 0.79. In the present study, the reliability coefficient of OHI using Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the total scale, respectively as 94.0 and 89.0 which is a good indication of the reliability of the questionnaire.

Procedure: After conducting the pre-test, participants were randomly selected and then divided into control group and experimental group as they received training sessions using Deshazer's solution-focused method for experimental group in 7 sessions during 2 months. Each session was held once a week for 90 minutes. Control group couples didn't receive any intervention in the meantime. Training sessions were in a way that in the beginning of each training session, a summary of the previous session's discussion was initially given by the participants and then the related assignments were reviewed and new topics were taught by the instructor.

At the end of each session, group members provide the instructor with a summary of the topics discussed during the session and then the assignment for the next session was clearly assigned. At the end of training sessions, post-test was conducted again for both groups. Besides, to consider stability of training sessions' efficacy, follow-up test was also conducted for both groups one month after giving post-test.

The method of managing couple therapy sessions by using solution-focused approach

First session: The objectives are introducing group members to each other and to the group's leader as well as introducing principles, goals and effects of solution-focused approach and determining the frameworks and total counseling principals of solution-focused approach.

Second session: To help couples to develop their own targets based on solutions-focused approach positively, definitely, tangibly and measurably.

Third session: The objective is to help couples to discover their capabilities and to admire each other in appropriate times and perceive that there might be different interpretations of one single event in family life.

Fourth session: The goal is to help couples recognize positive exceptions in their life with their spouse as in this manner hope is made in them and they can decrease their problems.

Fifth session: The objective is to help couples to eliminate disturbing behavioral patterns by using a miraculous question.

Sixth session: the goal of this session is help couples take up another way for thinking, feeling and behavior and also help them experience new feelings.

Seventh session: gathering previous topics, concluding and accomplishing post-test.

Eighth session: accomplishing follow-up test one month after conducting post-test.

Data analysis method: In order to analyze the data, in this research descriptive and inferential statistical methods including ANOVA with repeated measures to determine the effectiveness of training and retesting effect as well as interaction effect were used. It must be reminded that in order to analyze collected data SPSS-16 was used. Meanwhile for all hypotheses, meaningful level of $\alpha= 0.05$ was considered.

RESULTS

Research findings: Group training of solution-focused method influences on happiness of couples who referred to Bushehr family counseling centers.

Table 1. Descriptive data in variable of couples' happiness:

Group	Number of couples	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up test	
		average	SD	average	SD	average	SD
Experimental	22	66.40	8.03	115.91	2.16	108.18	1.95
Control	22	64.48	7.12	65.59	9.27	61.68	9.13

As the results of Table 1 show the average of control and experimental group in pre-test do not differ significantly (66.40 versus 64.68).

But significant differences were observed in average scores of two groups' post-tests (115.91 versus 65.59). This difference is to the benefit of experimental group. Furthermore comparison of average scores of both groups in follow-up test showed that the difference between two groups had lasting effects during the time which was to the benefit of experimental group (108.18 versus 61.68).

Table 2. Results of ANOVA with repeated measurement to consider the effect of group and retest in variable of couples' happiness:

Source Of changes	SS	FD	Average of squares	F	Level of meaningfulness
Training effect	35607.75	1	35607.75	94.47	0.0001
error	15830.15	42	376.47		
Retest effect	15325.95	2	7662.97	79.53	0.0001
Reaction of training with retest	16060.92	2	8030.46	83.35	0.0001
Error	8093.12	84	96.34		

As the results of the above Table show F value of training effect is equal to 94.47 which indicate that the difference between control group and experimental group in learning is meaningful at $p < 0.0001$ level ($p = 0.05$).

Table 2 also shows that the experimental group scored higher in couples' happiness than the control group after the training sessions. The effect of retest (pre-test, post-test and follow-up test) with F value is equal to 79.53 in $p < 0.0001$ level. This shows that, as the results of Table 2 indicate, the scores of post-test and follow-up test of experimental group are generally higher than the scores of pre-test.

Interaction effect (training \times test) with an F value equals to 35.83 which is significant in $p < 0.0001$. That is, interaction among conducting three test phases and training interventions have made meaningful changes in the strategies of couples' happiness in the experimental group compared to those of the control group.

Considering the above explanations and findings in Tables 1 and 2, there existed significant differences between the experimental and control groups in terms of the scores of training in the happiness variable. This in fact shows the effectiveness of training of solution-focused method in increasing happiness of the experimental group's couples in comparison with those in the control group during the training stages. In other words, training of solution-focused method increased couples' happiness in the experimental group in comparison to those in the control group. So it can be concluded that the related hypothesis is confirmed.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the effectiveness of group training of solution-focused method in marriage happiness and adjustment of couples who referred to family counseling centers in Bushehr. In this section findings resulted from data analysis are considered. Regarding to the first research hypothesis, as it was observed in Tables 1 and 2, there are significant differences between couples of the control group and the experimental group in the post-test scores. So the related hypothesis is confirmed. In other words, the resulted findings show the effectiveness of training of solution-focused method in increasing happiness of the couples in the experimental group compared with couples in the control group.

The results of the present study are consistent with Bannink [13] that considered the solution-focused therapy for clients with mental problems resulted from shock. He focused on hope, optimization, satisfaction, health and efficiency in his research. Also, the results of this study are in line with Frederick [14]. Findings of this study confirm the results of Green et al. [20] that considered solution-focused way of life for making goal, health and hope.

The results of this research is also concordant with the findings of Zimmerman et al. [21] and Cookburn et al. [22] who found that solution-focused counseling is effective for making hope. The results of this study also is consistent with findings of Cookburn et al. [22] who stated that participating subjects in solution-focused counseling solved their problems and improved their emotional relationships by using their capabilities and emphasizing on positive points [23].

Emphasizing on individual capabilities for changes and making hope along with emphasizing on positive points are among the main points of solution-focused counseling. In all, the results of the above studies showed that subjects could use their capabilities for change and the results in this area are consistent with the principal hypothesis of solution-focused counseling. To justify, it can be said that solution-focused method believes that clients have essential capabilities and qualifications to make change in them. Solution-focused therapy not only attaches importance to personal resources of clients for change, but it also emphasizes that clients have lost their abilities to see these capabilities and need to be helped .

So with attention to one of basic elements in solution-focused counseling, it is emphasized that individuals have all the things that are necessary for their problem solving. It is also believed that clients have potential and natural ability to help themselves, and it is the therapist's duty to help individual create new application to recognize these natural capabilities that were inherent in clients before. So in this research, training of solution-focused method could help couples recognize and increase the awareness of their abilities and inner powerfulness. Clients are also helped to discover obstacles to happiness and use solution-focused techniques to increase their happiness.

Suggestion for future study: Considering short-term effectiveness of the solution-focused approach, consultant therapists are recommended to use this therapy. Furthermore holding training workshops about different marital issues as well as training couples in coping with marital discord proportionate to their needs are recommended in order to equip couples with suitable strategies and skills for solving problem.

At the end, it is recommended that similar researches be accomplished in other regions or provinces in order to make better decisions about generalization of the results. In addition, it is recommended that the effectiveness of solution-focused therapy be examined regarding other variables like education level, culture and employment in other couples.

REFERENCES

1. Boustan, A. 2007. Comparison of the effectiveness of approaches to teaching couples group therapy on marital satisfaction in married student. *Counseling Research & Developments*, 6(24).
2. Beck, A.T. 1991. *Cognitive therapy of adjustment*, (pp.201-221). New York: Haworth press.
3. Mohammadi, K. 2007. The study of effectiveness of group solution-focused therapy in increasing marriage adjustment and relation of clients referred to Ahvaz Dispute Settlement Council. Unpublished MA thesis of family counseling, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz.
4. Carr, A. 2004. *Positive psychology*. Translated by Pasha Sharifi, H., Najafi Zand, J., & Sanaee, B. (1385). Sokhan publications: Tehran.
5. Navabinejad, S. 1998. *Necessary qualifications and features of girl and boy for marriage: Young and Family Forming*. Parents Teacher Associations publications: Tehran.
6. Shafiabady, A. & Naseri, G. 1997. *Theories of counseling and psychotherapy*. Iran University Press: Tehran.
7. Deshazer, S. & Berg, I.K. 1997. "What work?" Remarks on research aspects of solution focused brief therapy. *Journal of family therapy*, 19: 121-124.
8. Deshazer, S. 1991. *Putting difference to work*: New York: Norton.
9. Deshazer, S. 1994. *Words use originally magic*. New York: Norton.
10. Cheung, S. 2005. Strategic and solution-focused therapy. In M. Harrey (Eds.), *Handbook of couple Therapy*, PP194-208, New Jersey: John Wiley.
11. Corcoran, J. 2002. Developmental Adaptations of solution-focused family therapy. *Journal Oxford university press. Brief Treatment and crisis intervention*, 2(4):112-143.
12. Corcoran, J. & Pilliai, V. 2007. A review of the research on solution-focused therapy. *British Journal of social work advance access published September 14(1)*: 67-88.
13. Bannink, F.P. 2008. Posttraumatic success: solution-focused Brief Therapy. *Journal permissions Oxford university. Brief Treatment and crisis intervention Advance Access published*, 4(5): 28-41.
14. Frederick, V.T. 2008. Solution-focused Brief Therapy and the kingdom of God: Acoomological Integration. *Pastoral psycho*, 56: 413-419.
15. Cook, B.J. & Kaffenberger, C. J. 2007. A solution – Focused counseling and study skills program for middle school. *Professional school cownseling*; 7 (2):78-92.
16. Guterman, J.T. & Rudes, J. 2005. A solution-focused approach to rational-emotive behavior therapy: toward a theoretical integration. *Journal of rational emotive & cognitive-behavior therapy*, 23 (3), 99-122.
17. Nelson, T. (2001). Solution focused couple group. *Journal of systemic therapies*, 4(1), 4-20.
18. Jonson, S. & Lobow, J. 2000. The "coming of age" of couple therapy a decade of review. *Journal of marital and family therapy*, 26: 23-38.
19. Mudd, J. 2000. *Solution focused therapy and communication skills train and integrated approach to couples*. Faculty of Virginia Polytechnic and State University.
20. Green, L.S., Oades, L.G. & Grant, A.M. 2006. Cognitive –behavioral, solution – focused life coaching: Enhancing goal striving well-bing, and hope. *Journal of positive psychology*, 1(3): 142-149.
21. Zimmerman, T.S., Jacobsen, R.B., Macintyre, M. & Watson, C. 1996. Solution-focused parenting groups; An Empirical study. *Journal of systemic therapies*, 15(4): 12-25.

22. Cookburn, J.T., Thomas, F.N. & Cockburn, O.J. 1997. Solution foused therapy and psychotherapy adjustment to orthopedic rehabilitation in a work hoardening program. *Journal of occupational rehabilitation*, 7(2): 97-106.
23. Nazari, A. 2004. Examining the effect of solution-focused counseling on marriage satisfaction of employed couples. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation. Tehran Teacher Training University: Tehran.