

Comparing Effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Combining ACT & EFT in the Spiritual Well-being of Couples Referring to Counseling Centers in Sari: An Experimental Study

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Finding effective therapeutic approaches to improving the spirituality of individuals, especially couples, is very helpful in reconciling their differences, enhancing their intimacy and preventing family problems. The present study attempts to compare the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), emotion-focused therapy (EFT) and combined therapy in the spiritual beliefs of couples referring to counseling centers.

Methods: The study was quasi-experimental and used a pre-test, post-test control group design. The participants were selected from the families referring to counseling centers in Sari using available sampling method. People with an IQ of higher than 85 and no addiction were included in the study. They responded to Inclusive Spirituality Index (ISI), and 56 couples with scores lower than the average were randomly selected and assigned to experimental and control groups. Group 1 participated in ten 90-minute sessions of ACT, Group 2 in six 90-minute sessions of EFT and Group 3 in Sixteen 90-minute sessions of combined therapy and the control group received no treatment. The participations were finally retested using ISI A delayed posttest was also administered after one month. Considering normal distribution of the data, the significance of the results was tested by covariance analysis and Mauchly's Sphericity Test. In this study, all the ethical considerations have been observed and no conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Results: The three forms of treatment significantly increased spiritual well-being of the spouses asking for divorce, but no significant difference was observed among the three groups. The effects were found to persist after one month.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, all three methods of intervention can promote the spiritual well-being of the couples, spirituality can be changed, and spiritual well-being increases through education and therapy. Accordingly, the originality of ACT and EFT lies in increasing the spiritual well-being of couples demanding divorce and reducing divorce rates.

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Summary

Background and Objective

The development of spirituality is one of the major issues in psychology and sociology. Seeking for

effective therapeutic approaches to improving the spirituality of individuals, especially couples, has been very helpful and rational in reconciling their differences and enhancing their intimacy and preventing divorce and family problems. Spirituality is the basic knowledge that increases the process of

adaptation to the environment and serves at least five functions leading to behaviors adaptable to the environment; attention to the transcendental capacity of affairs, that is attention to the integrity of the creation; experiencing a high level of self-awareness; examination and refinement of daily experiences in relation to a religious and spiritual feeling; the use of spiritual resources in solving the problems of life and doing righteous acts such as forgiveness, sacrifice, and so on (1).

Many studies show that spirituality plays an important role in enhancing marital satisfaction, marital happiness and marital adjustment and optimal marital functioning (2, 3). Spiritual harmony of couples positively predicts marital functioning (4). When spiritual health is seriously compromised, a person may have mental disorders, such as feeling of loneliness, anxiety and loss of meaning in life, which can disrupt the relationship between spouses.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is a way to communicate better with life, because it can alleviate physical pain and make life rich and meaningful (5). This treatment increases the meaningfulness of life by creating a sense of acceptance and experiencing all moments of life and providing a direct insight into the role of the mind in creating obscure anxiety (6). Fredrickson showed that acceptance and commitment therapy, which focuses on the lives of value-based and personal spirituality, improves the sense of meaningfulness in life (7).

Therefore, emotional regulation in couples can be effective in their adaptability, intimacy, happiness and increasing marital satisfaction.

Since the acceptance and commitment therapy tries to meet the behavioral needs and adapt them to the life values, enhances the meaning of life and helps people to live in the present time, and experience acceptance and a great deal of flexibility by knowing about the values and practicing commitment (8) and considering the fact that emotion-focused therapy focuses on the role of emotions and emotional relationships in organizing spouse's pattern of relationships and facilitating their ability to engage in healthy interaction and reduces marital Conflict and increases intimacy (9), combination of these two approaches seems to play a very important role in changing the individuals' lifestyle and their behavioral stability in marital life, which is why we decided to examine this important issue.

According to the studies, there has been no research on the effectiveness of ACT, EFT and the combination of these two therapies in the spiritual beliefs of families. In this study, we addressed the effectiveness of ACT, EFT and combining these two therapies in spiritual well-being of couples.

The purpose of the present study was to compare the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) with emotion-focused therapy (EFT) and the combined therapy in the spiritual beliefs of couples referring to counseling centers in Sari.

Methods

Compliance with ethical guidelines: All relevant ethical principles, including confidentiality, informed consent of the participants, and disqualification from the study were observed. Following the completion of the study, the control group attended ten free treatment sessions as an appreciation of their participation in the study.

The study was quasi-experimental and used a pre-test, post-test control group design. The samples were selected using available sampling method. The requirement for inclusion in the study was having an IQ of higher than 85 and non-addiction. The participants first responded to inclusive spirituality index (ISI), and 56 couples whose test scores were lower than the average were selected and assigned to four groups (14 couples in each group). Then, experimental group 1 participated in ten 90-minute sessions of ACT, and group 2 in six 90-minute sessions of EFT and group 3 in sixteen 90-minute sessions of combined therapy. Group 4 or the control group received no treatment. At the end of the treatment, the participations were retested using ISI. The posttest was administered after one month. Because of the normal distribution of data, the significance of the tests was tested by Covariance analysis and Mauchly's Sphericity Test.

Results

The results of statistical analysis showed that all three methods of treatment (ACT, EFT and the combination of these two treatments) significantly increased spiritual well-being of the spouses asking for divorce, and this difference was significant when compared to the control group. No significant difference was observed, however, among the three methods of treatment. The persistence of the effect of all three treatments has been shown in a one-month follow-up.

Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, all three methods of intervention can be used to promote the spiritual well-being of the couples wanting divorce. The results showed that spirituality can be changed, and spiritual well-being increases through education and therapy. On the other hand, the findings showed that originality in ACT and EFT is in the fact that they increase spiritual well-being of the couples who seek divorce and, subsequently, reduce divorce rates.

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Ethical considerations

This article is based on the comparison of the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Emotion Therapy (EFT) on the spiritual beliefs and Family Function referred to the Sari Counseling Center (According to McMaster's model). Ethics Code: IR.IAU.TMU.REC.1396.214

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Authors' contributions

This article is extracted from doctoral dissertation of the first author. Dr. Farideh Dokaneheefard, was the corresponding author and supervisor and Dr. Masoumeh Behboodi was the advisor to this study.

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