

## Effects of Life Skills Workshops on Marital Satisfaction

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**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of life skills workshops on marital satisfaction.

**Methods:** Eighteen female counselors, psychologists and social workers working at welfare organizations of Khuzestan participated in life skills workshops. The program focused on communication skills training, assertiveness training, anger management and negative mood management. Data was gathered before the first and after the last sessions, through Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS). Obtained data were tested using paired t-test. The probability level of 0.05 was accepted statistically significant. The data were analyzed using SPSS (version 17).

**Results:** The paired T test has shown statistically significant differences between participants' marital satisfaction before and after workshops ( $p=0.001$ ). It has also been observed that means of marital satisfaction scores have changed as 7.277 points.

**Conclusion:** These interventions have a positive effect on marital satisfaction by improving life skills. This type of educational workshops may have merits as a preventive and/or intervention measure for other couples and may be a valuable and efficient resource for clinicians.

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### Introduction

From the inception of therapeutic interventions in families, marriage has been a central area of interest. Preoccupation with marital quality is well founded, because research in U.S over the course of decades has indicated that individual well being is strongly related to being married. Moreover, these studies have found that among the married, marital satisfaction is much more important than other factors such as occupational success, religion, housing, and finances combined with personal well being (1). Happiness and fulfillment springing from a harmonious marriage can play a crucial role in couples'

lives, because these affect their physical and psychological health (2). Marital discord is an extremely pervasive mental health problem and is related to a wide variety of other health problems (3).

In addition, marital conflict can be particularly distressing for children as it can lead to an unpleasant emotional climate in the family, can threaten the child's emotional and physical well-being and can diminish the physical and/or emotional availability and sensitivity of the parents (4). A number of factors contribute to the success or failure of marital relationships. Communication is commonly accepted as a substantial factor which impacts the degree of marital satisfaction that a couple may enjoy in their relationships (5). Hence, one of the major focuses of many marital enrichment programs is communication skills training (6). An integral part of communication is the ability to assertively express oneself (7). The ultimate goal of assertion is to help marital partners

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become more self expressive in a positive, non-hostile way and bringing them closer together as a cohesive unit rather than driving them apart (8).

By using assertive rather than aggressive responses in a marital relationship, defensiveness that impedes communication can be minimized. Indeed, aggressive responses by spouses exert a negative influence on the relationship, block the assertive responses and impede mutual honesty (5). Several researchers have found that both spouses exhibit more negative communication in relationships characterized by aggression (8-12). Many researchers found an increasing marital satisfaction after applying strategies for anger management (13). One of other important factors in successful marital life is "cognition". Researchers point to the role of irrational beliefs as strong predictors of an upset marital life. They suggested that therapeutic programs for maladjusted relationships should be based on spouse's cognitive reconstruction (14). Some specialists suggest that the beliefs which are base of personal disorders are also effective in maladjusted interpersonal relationships. The Cognitive errors are troublous elements that enter marital interactions (15). Hence, using strategies to improve quality of relationship and marital satisfaction is necessary for the survival of marriage. Learning life skills can help couples achieve this goal. Life skills are a set of abilities that causes adjustment and makes positive and useful behavior (16). The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of participating in life skills workshops on marital satisfaction. These workshops were designed to teach participants life skills in an effort to improve marital relationships. The program focused on communication skills training, assertiveness training, anger management and negative mood management.

### Materials and Methods

The female counselors, psychologists and social workers working at welfare organizations of Khozestan were invited to the life skills workshops. Informed consent forms were taken from all 18 staff members before their

participation in this study. This program consisted of 4 workshops: communication skills training (myths, active listening, empathy, body language, and negotiation), assertiveness training (false beliefs, passivity-aggression spectrum, basic rights, cost/benefit, situation analysis, types of assertive behavior), anger management (false beliefs, warning signs, monitoring, cooling down techniques and substitutions) and negative mood management (mood/ thought monitoring and differentiation, automatic thoughts, cognitive errors and basic challenges). Educational techniques such as role playing, group discussion and homework assignments were used in this regard. Workshops were held at 1 month intervals and each workshop lasted 6-8 hours. The entire sessions were held in Ahvaz welfare organization by a team consisting of a psychiatrist, a child psychiatrist, and three third year psychiatry residents.

Participants completed a demographic inventory consisting of 3 items on age, marriage status and years of education. Data were gathered before the first and after the last sessions, using Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS).

The GRIMS is a 28-item questionnaire for the assessment of marital satisfaction. Questions are scored in the Likert 4-degree scale from 0 to 3. The minimum score in this scale is 0 and maximum score is 84. High score is a sign of more critical marital state (17). Rust, Bennun, Grown and Golombok (1990) mentioned a high content validity for this instrument due to its properties. In addition, comparison of mean scores of the questionnaire with therapists' diagnoses in marital clinics showed a high discriminatory validity for it. Rust et al. evaluated reliability by calculating Cronbach's alpha, split-half reliability as a measure of internal consistency reliability and test re-test reliability. Cronbach's alpha was 0.89 for women and 0.85 for men, while split-half reliability was 0.65 for women and 0.94 for men. The internal consistency reliability was 0.95 for women and 0.92 for men and test re-test coefficient consistency was 0.80 in a 12-month period (18). In a study by Besharat in 2002 the balanced score in 9

degrees in intensity and infirmity of problems, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 for women and 0.94 for men showed the internal consistency of the questionnaire (17). The correlation coefficients among the results in 2 sessions with a 2-week interval,  $r=0.94$  for all subjects, 0.93 for women and 0.95 for men, showed the scale great reliability (17).

The obtained data were tested using paired t-test. The probability level of 0.05 was accepted statistically significant for this study. The data were analyzed using SPSS, version 17.

## Results

Twenty four counselors, psychologists and social workers working at these organizations participated in this program. From them, 18 participants with 30 to 44 years of age were permanent members and participated in all sessions. All of them were married and their educational status was high school diploma and Bachelor of Science. Table 1 shows that mean of marital satisfaction scores has changed as same as 7.277 points between pre and post-testing, from a mean of 57.66 on the pre-GRIMS to a mean of 64.94 on the post-GRIMS. Table 1 shows statistically significant differences between participants' marital satisfaction before and after workshops. These results indicate that these workshops have a positive effect on marital satisfaction by improving life skills.

**Table 1.** Relationship between life skills training and marital satisfaction

	N	Mean	SD	p-value
Total score of marital satisfaction (pre test)	18	57.66	13.03	0.001
Total score of marital satisfaction (post test)	18	64.94	7.34	

## Discussion

The present study indicates that education of Life skills improves marital satisfaction. Results of the present study are consistent with the findings of some of previous studies. For instance Yaclin and Karaban in 2006 studied effects of a Couple Communication Program on marital adjustment and found that

this program had positive effects on marital adjustment levels by improving communication (2). Weigle in 2006 investigated the impact of participating in an Imago therapy workshop, focused on communication skills improvement, on marital satisfaction. Five couples participated in that workshop; all of them reported increased satisfaction in their marital relationships and reported that they could handle conflicts more effectively after workshop (19). Furthermore, Pitner studied the effects of a communication skill weekend workshop on marital satisfaction and relationship changes in 90 couples. Participants showed a statistically significant improvement in their marital satisfaction and quality of relationship after the weekend experience (20). The effects of using a communication skills workshop that employed assertiveness training skills on the dyadic adjustment of marital relationships were investigated by Breen in 1989 in 28 couples. He found statically significant differences between pre and post-workshop marital satisfaction in study group, and between scores of control and study groups after workshop (5). Another study in Iran on 80 couples evaluated effect of couple Imago relationship therapy focused on communication skills improvement in marital satisfaction on their children's behavior. Results of that study revealed that Imago could be an acceptable method in resolving couples discord in Iranian culture. However, its effects on children's behavioral prospect need to be assessed in plenary studies (21).

Deschner and McNeil studied results of anger control training of battering couples among 134 subjects. Results of that study showed that 85% of the families were free of further violence after anger control training (22). Holtzworth-Munreo et al. in 1995 have discussed the necessity of marital violence prevention programs for engaged and newly couples at risk for marital violence (23).

Rafiee Bandari and Nouranipur studied the effects of cognitive-behavioral education on marital satisfaction in 2003. They concentrated on cognitive reconstruction and correction of irrational beliefs (about his/her role or spouse's role in marital relationships) and

behaviors that were affected by cognition, and found it useful (15).

Mentioned studies are consistent with our study, although they were different in methods and in culture.

In aforementioned intervention programs the couples had participated but in this study just one of them (female) has participated. However, the marital satisfaction has improved. Thus, it could be recommended that if the couples couldn't participate in psychotherapy or workshops together, it should be continued with one of them.

In some of previous studies such as Deschner and McNeil (1986), Yaclin and Karaban (2006) and Pitner (1995) just a single skill of the intervention program has been focused, while in our study four major skills were chosen from 10 skills confirmed by WHO as the life skills. Hence, this intervention has covered relational domains more completely than other manuscripts in marital field. The basic skills were learned at first in workshops sequence.

Other outstanding points of this study are as follows: The long interval between workshops could be helpful because participants had enough time to practice learned skills. Furthermore, they could present their conflicts and problems in the following session which led to practical answers.

In general, in authors' opinion, workshops at 1-month intervals, workshops sequencing and basic knowledge of participants had extended effects on improving marital satisfaction.

Finally, Educational workshops such as life skills may be a valuable preventive tool for couples and an efficient adjunct therapy for clinicians who are trying to help couples struggling to maintain their marital relationship.

### Limitations

Our study had some limitations. As all of the participants were female, the conclusion might not be attained to the "only male" population. Besides, it is not revealed that which workshops have had more effects on marital satisfaction, because each workshop was not appraised separately.

### Recommendations

This kind of intervention is recommended to be studied in other populations such as housewives, males and couples, and consequently be compared with control groups and each other. Besides, workshops which include more skills might lead to a higher level of marital management and satisfaction.

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