



Research paper

The Effectiveness of Compassion-Focused Positive Couple Therapy on Entitlement Schema, Bullying, and Marital Adjustment in Narcissistic Men

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of compassion-focused positive couple therapy on the entitlement schema, bullying, and adjustment of narcissistic men with marital conflicts. This quasi-experimental study had a pretest-posttest design with follow-up. The statistical population included men with symptoms of narcissism and marital maladjustment in Tehran. A sample of 30 was purposively selected and assigned to experimental and control groups. The research instruments were the Narcissistic Personality Inventory for Iranian Couples, the Marital Bullying Scale, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and Maladaptive Schemas Questionnaire. and the data were analyzed by repeated measurement analysis of variance test. The experimental group received compassion-focused positive couple therapy along with their spouse. The intervention affected entitlement schema, marital bullying and marital adjustment, and this effect persisted to the follow-up. Therefore, compassion-focused positive couple therapy can improve the marital relations of narcissistic people

Keywords: Positive couple therapy, entitlement, bullying, narcissism

Introduction

Successful marital relationships rely on constructive communication and emotional patterns, and any spouse's personality disorder can directly impact their intimate relationship. Narcissism is a personality disorder affecting marital relationships. Studies show that narcissism is associated with the entitlement schema. If the entitlement schema is not approved, it can lead to bullying and affect the marital relationship. (Freis, et al., 2021). Vulnerable behavioral patterns in narcissists show the lack of compassion for themselves and others; Therefore, it is important to provide effective treatments that strengthen compassion in marital relationships. Compassion-focused positive couple therapy helps couples demonstrate kindness, warmth, compassion, and support in the face of confrontational thoughts. (Neff, 2022). This approach emphasizes couples' positive emotions and holds that marital conflicts are caused by experiencing negative emotions in communication interactions, e.g., criticism, defensiveness, humiliation, and blame (Winter, et al., 2022). Research reported that compassionate mind training affects grandiosity and entitlement. The maladaptive dimensions of narcissism are negatively correlated with love, and self-compassion can help alleviate narcissism. Given that the harms caused by narcissism impact the affective center of the family,

this research addresses the following hypotheses; compassion-focused positive couple therapy improves bullying, entitlement schema, and marital adjustment in narcissistic men.

Method

This quasi-experimental study had a pretest-posttest design and one-month follow-up. The statistical population included men with narcissistic personality and marital conflicts in Tehran in 2021. Using purposive sampling, a sample of 30 out of 34 people were selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The inclusion criteria were scoring higher than 20 on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory for Iranian Couples. In fall 2021, couples who wished to improve their marital satisfaction were invited to visit a counseling center in the east of Tehran. The eligible people were allocated to experimental and control groups by drawing lots. They received the intervention individually in 15 90-minute sessions, once per week. Data were analyzed using repeated-measures ANOVA.

Tools

Narcissistic Personality Inventory for Iranian Couples: This 40-item inventory was validated by Mohammad Shari et al. (2019) for Iranian couples. The internal consistency coefficient of the factors of narcissism in couples was reported as 0.61-0.83. In this study, the internal consistency of the factors was between 0.73 and 0.86.

Marital Bullying Scale: This 30-item scale was developed by Golparvar (2015) with Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. The confirmatory factor analysis confirmed its construct validity with optimal goodness-of-fit indices. In this study, the reliability coefficient was 0.87.

Early Maladaptive Schemas Questionnaire-Short Form: This 75-item inventory was validated by Young and Brown (1990). Participants who obtained with cut-off point of 18.63 indicates a maladaptive schema. It has reported 0.96 Cronbach's alpha reliability and more than 0.80 for all subscales. In this study, the reliability coefficient for the whole questionnaire was 0.93 and for the entitlement schema was 0.61.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS): The 32-item DAS was validated by Spanier (1976). Its Cronbach's alpha reliability ranged from 0.80 to 0.90. This scale has concurrent validity and correlates with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. In this study, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.84.

Compassion-focused positive couple therapy: The experimental group received compassion-focused positive couple therapy. The intervention was based on Singer, Mackey & Gilbert's model.

Results

The mean age was 37.41 years in experimental and 36.53 in control groups. The mean marriage duration was 8.91 years in experimental and 7.36 in control groups. The statistics and p-value of the variables showed normal data distribution. The assumptions of homogeneity of variances and variance-covariance were confirmed ($P \geq 0.05$). Mauchly's sphericity test rejected the assumption of sphericity for the variables. Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used to test the hypotheses.

There was a significant difference between the pretest, posttest, follow-up, and time x group interaction for entitlement, bullying and marital adjustment (Table1).

Table 1. Analysis of variance test with repeated measurement for variables

Variable	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean of Squares	F	Effect size
Entitlement	Time	38919.94	1.25	19459.97	76.13*	0.42
	Time x Group	22910.56	1.65	11455.28	32.45*	0.38
	Group	32489.76	1	32489.76	53.71*	0.65
Bullying	Time	18762.21	1.17	9381.10	38.40*	0.63
	Time x Group	10934.18	1.87	5467.09	24.47*	0.54
	Group	12540.29	1	12540.29	31.91*	0.36
Marital Adjustment	Time	86267.87	1.06	43133.93	90.98*	0.49
	Time x Group	54369.23	1.91	27184.61	91.87*	0.68
	Group	83409.10	1	83409.10	72.65*	0.72

*P<0.05

The mean scores of entitlement schema and bullying decreased at posttest compared to pretest in the experimental group (Table 2). The intervention had a persisting effect on entitlement schema and bullying. The mean score of marital adjustment increased significantly at posttest compared to pretest in the experimental group, and the intervention had a persisting effect on adjustment (p<0.05).

Table 2. The results of Bonferroni test to compare the mean scores of variables in three stages

Variable	stages	Mean (Adjusted)	Difference in Stages	Difference of Means
Entitlement	Pretest	24.13	Pretest-posttest	10.93*
	Posttest	13.20	Pretest-follow-up	11.07*
	Follow-up	13.06	Posttest-follow-up	0.14
Bullying	Pretest	69.86	Pretest-posttest	21.93*
	Posttest	47.93	Pretest-follow-up	22.93*
	Follow-up	46.92	Posttest-follow-up	1.01
Marital Adjustment	Pretest	75.46	Pretest-posttest	-36.20*
	Posttest	111.66	Pretest-follow-up	-37.60*
	Follow-up	113.06	Posttest-follow-up	-1.40

*P<0.05

Discussion and Conclusion

Compassion-focused positive couple therapy improved entitlement schema, bullying, and marital adjustment. By this intervention, narcissists' needs are met more rationally, their treatment of their spouse becomes more adaptive, the spouse's capabilities become highlighted, the belief in own and spouse's perfection changes, and the entitlement schema becomes inactivated. It also helps people enjoy self-regulation, mindfulness, empathy, moral judgment

and bear painful emotions, thereby altering their functioning from bullying to healthy. This intervention transforms blaming, neglect into empathy and acceptance, and teaches couples to develop human and moral behaviors. As couples access subtler feelings, gain a better understanding of their spouse's perspective and avoid judging them, and identify the negative cycle and barriers of positive interactions, their tendency to hurt and humiliate their spouse changes and positive moods emerge with encouraging reactions. Since the samples were unique and effectiveness was limited, the specific data cannot be generalized to other populations. Family counselors should administer this treatment to improve marital adjustment in couples with a narcissistic spouse.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.



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