



Research paper

## Comparing the Effectiveness of Positive-Oriented Psychotherapy with Schema Therapy on the Quality of Life and Irrational Beliefs

Farokhtaj, Moein <sup>1</sup>; Marashi, Sayed Ali \* <sup>2</sup>; Hashemi, Seyed Esmaeil <sup>3</sup>

1. PhD Student Psychology, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran. Email: [moien.farokhtaj@gmail.com](mailto:moien.farokhtaj@gmail.com)
2. Corresponding Author: Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran. Email: [Sayedalimarashi@scu.ac.ir](mailto:Sayedalimarashi@scu.ac.ir)
3. Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran. Email: [esmaeil@scu.ac.ir](mailto:esmaeil@scu.ac.ir)

### Abstract

The aim of this study was to compare the effectiveness of positive-oriented psychotherapy with schema therapy on the quality of life and irrational beliefs. This was a semi-experimental study with two experimental groups and one control group, which used a pre-test, post-test with follow-up design. The statistical population included all couples applied for divorce who referred to counseling centers in Ahvaz. A sample of 45 couples were selected by purposeful sampling, randomly divided into three groups. The tools were Jones' irrational beliefs and quality of life questionnaires of the World Health Organization. The data were analyzed using repeated measurement covariance and post hoc test. The results showed positive psychotherapy was more effective than schema therapy in increasing the quality of life as well as reducing the irrational beliefs of these couples. Therefore, schema therapy was more effective than positive psychotherapy.

**Keywords:** Irrational beliefs, positive psychotherapy, quality of life, Schema therapy

### Introduction

Marital relationships significantly shape individuals' overall life satisfaction and emotional well-being. The quality of communication and conflict resolution methods within couples often determines the stability and satisfaction in a marriage (Afshani et al., 2024). Divorce, as a common outcome of unresolved conflicts, adversely affects not just the couple but also their social environment. Among the approaches that have attracted the attention of clinical psychologists in recent years in the field of marital life and family therapy is positive couple therapy (Kordvani et al., 2024). On the other hand, schema therapy is one of the successful approaches in the field of marital problems and family health (Mohammadian et al., 2022). Additionally, irrational beliefs—rigid, illogical thought patterns—are critical contributors to psychological disturbances, leading to maladaptive behaviors like withdrawal and aggression. Therefore, interventions targeting both quality of life and irrational beliefs are essential. While both approaches have proven benefits, their comparative efficacy in addressing marital and divorce-related challenges remains under-researched. This study fills that void by focusing on couples seeking divorce, a group particularly vulnerable to psychological distress. The research hypotheses were as follows:

- Schema therapy and Positive psychotherapy increases the quality of life and reduces irrational beliefs in couples seeking divorce.
- The effect of positive psychotherapy on quality of life and irrational beliefs in couples seeking divorce is different compared to schema therapy.

## Method

The study adopts a semi-experimental design with pretest-posttest-follow-up evaluations across three groups: Positive-Oriented Psychotherapy, Schema Therapy, and a control group. 45 couples from counseling centers in Ahvaz, Iran, were recruited through purposive sampling. Each group consisted of 15 couples. Inclusion criteria included being married for less than five years and voluntarily participating in the intervention. Couples with incomplete data or who missed two consecutive sessions were excluded. The experimental groups underwent 90-mins of 10 sessions with Young's schema therapy training and 90-mins. 8 sessions, once a week, using Seligman and Csikszent-Mihaly's positive psychology-based therapy, while the control group received no intervention. To analyze the data, analysis of covariance and Bonferroni post hoc tests were used in SPSS software.

## Tools

**Positive-Oriented Psychotherapy Therapy (PPT):** Schema-based therapy program was implemented by Yang et al. (2003). Conducted over eight 90-minute weekly sessions, focusing on fostering positive emotions, identifying strengths, and developing resilience.

**Schema Therapy:** Positive psychology-based therapy was implemented by Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000). Delivered in ten 90-minute sessions, emphasizing identifying maladaptive schemas, restructuring cognition, and emotional regulation.

**World Health Organization quality of life (WHO-QOL-BREF):** This questionnaire was developed in 1996 with a 100-question form. It has four domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment, with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for total scores was 0.78.

**Irrational Belief Questionnaire (IBQ):** This questionnaire was designed by Jones (1968) and consists of 40 questions and 10 subscales with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .66-.80. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was 0.82.

## Results

**Table 1. Results of the analysis of between-subject and within-subject effects on research variables**

Variable	Effect	Source	Sum of squares	DF	Mean Squares	F	P	Effect Size
Quality of life	Between subjects	Group	1274.97	1	1274.97	27.02	0.001	0.56
		Error	990.75	2	23.58			

<b>Irrational Beliefs</b>	<b>Within subjects</b>	<b>Time effect</b>	2044.31	1.55	1314.63	303.71	0.001	0.87
		<b>Time effect × Group</b>	906.98	3.11	291.62	67.37	0.001	0.76
		<b>Error</b>	282.71	65.31	4.33			
	<b>Between subjects</b>	<b>Group</b>	2126.97	2	1063.49	25.49	0.001	0.54
		<b>Error</b>	1751.68	42	41.70			
	<b>Within subjects</b>	<b>Time effect</b>	1779.24	1.45	1223.97	192.77	0.001	0.82
		<b>Time effect × Group</b>	1051.77	2.90	361.77	56.97	0.001	0.73
		<b>Error</b>	387.64	61.05	6.35			

Both PPT and Schema Therapy significantly improved participants’ quality of life compared to the control group. PPT demonstrated a superior impact on life quality, attributed to its focus on fostering positive emotions and resilience.

**Table 2. Results of Bonferroni post hoc test to compare within-group and out-group changes on research variables**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Source of Variation</b>		<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>P</b>	
<b>Quality of life</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	Posttest	-8.57	0.001
		<b>Pretest</b>	Follow-up	-7.88	0.001
		<b>Posttest</b>	Follow-up	0.68	0.123
	<b>Group</b>	<b>Positive psychotherapy</b>	Schema therapy	2.76	0.03
		<b>Positive psychotherapy</b>	Control	7.44	0.001
		<b>Schema therapy</b>	Control	4.69	0.001
<b>Irrational beliefs</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	Posttest	8.22	0.001
		<b>Pretest</b>	Follow-up	7.04	0.001
		<b>Posttest</b>	Follow-up	1.17	0.055
	<b>Group</b>	<b>Positive psychotherapy</b>	Schema therapy	5.88	0.001
		<b>Positive psychotherapy</b>	Control	-3.76	0.02
		<b>Schema therapy</b>	Control	-6.64	0.001

Improvements were sustained during the follow-up phase, indicating long-term benefits of both therapies. Both therapies effectively reduced irrational beliefs, with Schema Therapy showing greater efficacy. This difference may stem from Schema Therapy's targeted approach to dismantling maladaptive thought patterns and promoting healthier cognitive frameworks. The follow-up assessments confirmed the durability of these improvements.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study showed that Through techniques like imagery rescripting and cognitive reframing, participants learned to challenge their ingrained negative thought patterns, leading to better emotional regulation and relational harmony. These mechanisms likely contributed to Schema Therapy’s superior effectiveness in reducing irrational beliefs. PPT emphasizes cultivating positive emotions, optimism, and resilience, which are directly linked to improved quality of life. By focusing on strengths and promoting positive perspectives, PPT helps individuals reframe challenges as opportunities for growth. Integrating these therapies into counseling programs can provide comprehensive support for couples, helping them navigate marital challenges and transitions more effectively. The lack of mental and psychological focus of

some of the couples participating in the study due to the stress and pressure of current living conditions is considered a limitation of this study. Considering the results obtained, it is suggested that in other studies, in addition to using a questionnaire, the clinical interview method be used to collect data. Considering the results of this study, it can be stated that both treatment methods can be of great help in the field of family issues and preventing divorce. In addition, in premarital counseling, positive psychology training can play a significant role in increasing the quality of life, and on the other hand, schema therapy training can be very helpful in reducing irrational beliefs in couples and preventing these beliefs from developing throughout life.

## References

- Afshani, S. A., Abooei, A., & Asihaddad, F. (2024). The relationship between aggression and quality of life of couples seeking divorce. *Journal of the Iranian Institute for Health Sciences Research*, 23(1), 91-100. (Text in Persian) <https://doi.org/10.61186/payesh.23.1.91>
- Jones, R.G. (1968). *A factored measure of Ellis's irrational beliefs with personality and maladjustment correlates*. Texas: Technological College. <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/18941>
- Kordovani, S., Pour, S. K., & Nejad, F. S. T. (2024). Comparison of the effectiveness of integrated behavioral couple therapy and schema-focused couple therapy on conflict resolution styles in conflicting couples. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 5(2), 68-78. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.5.2.8>
- Mohammadian, S., Asgari, P., Makvandi, B., & Naderi, F. (2022). The effect of schema therapy on cognitive avoidance, anxiety, and empathy in couples referring to ahvaz counseling centers. *Family and Health*, 11(4), 58-69. (Text in Persian) DOR: 20.1001.1.23223065.1400.11.4.7.6
- Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: an introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>
- World Health Organization. Division of Mental Health. (1996). *WHOQOL-BREF: Introduction, administration, scoring and generic version of the assessment: field trial version, December 1996*. World Health Organization. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/63529>
- Young, J. E., Klosko, J. S., & Weishaar, M. E. (2003). *Schema therapy: A practitioner's guide*. Guilford Press. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2003-00629-000>

## Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all couples seeking divorce who visited counseling centers in Ahvaz and participated in this study.

## Funding

All the financial resources of this research were provided by the authors of the research.

## Conflicts of interest

No conflicts.



This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International (CC BYNC4.0 license) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

---