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Investigating the Effectiveness of Schema Therapy on Metacognitive Beliefs, Marital Compatibility and Resolution of Couples' Conflicts in the First Five Years of Marriage

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of schema therapy on metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and resolution of couples' conflicts in the first five years of marriage. **Method:** The research sample includes 110 couples (55 couples in the experimental group, 55 couples in the control group) from couples who had conflicts, were in the first five years of marriage, and referred to counseling clinics in Karaj. The samples were selected as available and voluntary sampling. The research design is pre-test-post-test with a control group. The research tools include the Metacognitive Beliefs Questionnaire (MCQ-30), the modified Marital Compatibility Scale, and the Marital Conflicts Questionnaire, and the analysis of covariance method was used to analyze the data. **Findings:** The results of the research showed that schema therapy promoted metacognitive beliefs and increased marital compatibility and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts in the first five years of marriage in the experimental group compared to the control group. **Conclusion:** In the schema therapy approach, couples learn to consider themselves responsible for changing their behavior and test their perception with reality. It is suggested that this approach be used to promote metacognitive beliefs and increase marital compatibility and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts in the first five years of marriage.

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Introduction

The institution of the family can be considered one of the most important institutions of any society. With the marriage of a man and a woman, a family is formed, and the family can be considered as a small social group, if it has a healthy function, it can provide a basis for growth and development for its members [1]. However, two people who have their own opinions, attitudes, thoughts, emotions, behaviors, culture and philosophy of life, During the process of adaptation and taking steps in life, they face stressful events and tense moments. Therefore, the emergence of differences and conflicts between couples is a natural thing, but the important issue is how they face this problem [2]. Conflict is

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inevitable in human relationships. That is, arguments and arguments occur in all relationships, affection and conflict are among the most common phenomena in human relationships [3]. Conflict is the lack of agreement and disagreement between two people, incompatibility and opinions and goals and behavior that takes place in the direction of opposing the other, as well as conflict between people due to conflicting interests and differences in goals and perceptions [4]. The increasing increase of marital conflicts in the contemporary world and the risk of separation and its negative effect on the mental health of couples and their children have caused counselors, especially those who work with families, to develop theories and plans for Provide help to conflicted and divorcing couples [5 and 6]. Conflict strongly affects many aspects of marital relationship, such as metacognitive beliefs and marital compatibility.

In recent years, metacognition is considered as one of the obvious predictors of complex tasks. This term refers to the process of thinking about thinking and knowledge about "what we know" and "what we don't know" [7]. In other words, metacognition includes a multifaceted concept that includes knowledge (beliefs), processes, and strategies that evaluate, monitor, or control cognition [8]. Metacognitive beliefs are the beliefs that a person has about thinking and its processes. Metacognitive thoughts and beliefs are beliefs that are not in harmony with the existing realities and are forced and obliged, these thoughts are soulless and inflexible and cause disturbed and uncomfortable states in a person and ultimately lead to anxiety, depression and guilt [9]. In the metacognitive approach, metacognitive beliefs are the key and guide that influence the way people respond to negative thoughts, beliefs, symptoms, and emotions. Such beliefs lead to the creation of a pattern of thinking that is dominated by worry, rumination, threat fixation, and uncontrollable thoughts [10]. The emergence of these patterns can fuel the misfortunes of married life and cause incompatibility between couples, especially in the early years of marriage.

Marital compatibility, which means the level of satisfaction, agreement and understanding between husband and wife, is one of the important and influential factors in increasing the quality of married life and as a result, healthier family functioning [11]. Marital compatibility is one of the terms that is widely used in family and marital studies. This term is related to many other terms such as success, marital stability, marital happiness, marital satisfaction [12]. While the mentioned terms each indicate only one dimension of marriage, marital compatibility is a multidimensional term that illuminates the multiple levels of marriage and is a process that occurs throughout the life of the couple. Because it requires adaptation of tastes, recognition of personality traits, creation of behavioral rules and formation of communication patterns [13]. Marital compatibility is related to how couples understand each other and cooperate with each other despite having different personalities. Marital compatibility is a continuum and changes in the process of this continuum. Satisfaction, satisfaction and happiness in life requires the efforts of couples. After marriage, there are changes in the lifestyle, social relations and interpersonal relations of the parties, all of which require the compatibility of the couples [14]. Based on this, paying attention to this issue and its promoting components is considered a necessity and it is always necessary to use approaches that can work effectively and help to strengthen the foundation of the family, especially in the early years of marriage.

In the psychological perspective, there are different approaches that examine the effect of cognitive processes on behavior. These approaches believe that cognitive processes such as: expectations, beliefs, documentation style, perceptions, and some cognitive biases are the main cause of inconsistent behaviors and beliefs [15]. One of the famous approaches in this field is schema therapy. Schema therapy deals with the deepest level of cognition, targets the primary maladaptive schemas, and helps patients overcome these schemas by using cognitive, experiential (emotional), behavioral, and interpersonal strategies. The primary goal of this psychotherapy model is to create psychological awareness and increase conscious control over schemas, and its ultimate goal is to improve schemas and coping styles [16]. This approach focuses on both behavior control and emotion control, which ultimately leads to couples' satisfaction with life. Based on this, this research examines the effectiveness of this approach on metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility, and resolving couples' conflicts in the first five years of marriage.

Moradi Vafa et al. (2023) investigated the effectiveness of couple therapy based on schema therapy on the marital satisfaction of couples. The statistical population of the research includes all couples who have been married for 1 to 5 years and had referred to Mehrdostan Counseling Center in Tehran due to marital dissatisfaction. The results show that couple therapy based on schema therapy is effective in increasing and improving the marital satisfaction of couples [17].

Ghasemi and Movahhedi (2022) studied the effectiveness of schema therapy on rumination, cognitive fusion, cognitive avoidance and neurocognitive processing in couples applying for divorce. The results showed that schema therapy reduces rumination, cognitive fusion, and cognitive

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avoidance, and also increases beta frequency and decreases delta in the FZ region. Based on the results obtained from this research, the schema therapy method can be used as an effective intervention to reduce rumination, cognitive fusion and cognitive avoidance of couples applying for divorce [18].

Ahmadzadeh Aghdam et al. (2020) investigated the effectiveness of couple therapy with a schema therapy approach on frustration and marital commitment in couples. The findings showed that in the pre-test stage, there is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of marital frustration and marital commitment. But in the post-test stage, there was a significant difference between them in terms of both variables of marital frustration and marital commitment. In other words, couple therapy using the schema therapy method reduced marital frustration and increased marital commitment and their dimensions in couples. This improvement was also maintained in the follow-up phase [19].

Pennequin et al. (2019) showed that coping strategies of emotional projection and logical thinking have a significant positive relationship with metacognitive experience and when we face problems, metacognitive experiences help to solve daily problems [20].

Research method

In this research, a quasi-experimental research method (pre-test and post-test design with an equal control group) was used. The statistical population in the present study consists of couples who had conflicts, were in the first five years of marriage and referred to counseling clinics in Karaj. The sample of this research consisted of 110 couples who were selected through available and voluntary sampling, and then 55 couples were voluntarily assigned to the control group and 55 couples to the experimental group. The research tools are:

A) Metacognitive Beliefs Questionnaire (MCQ-30): This questionnaire is a 30-item self-report tool that measures people's beliefs about their thinking. This tool is designed to measure several metacognitive elements, some of which play a central role in the metacognitive model of psychological disorder. Answers in this scale are calculated on a four-point Likert scale: 1 = I do not agree to 4 = I agree very much. These scales have five subscales: 1) positive beliefs about worry, 2) beliefs about uncontrollability and dangerous thoughts, 3) beliefs about cognitive certainty, 4) beliefs about the need to control thoughts, and 5) cognitive restraint. In the research of Wells et al., the range of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the subscales is from 0.72 to 0.93 and its reliability by retest method for the total score after a period of 18 to 22 days is 0.75 and for the subscales from 0.59 to 0.87 was reported [21].

B) Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale: This questionnaire was created by Busby et al. (1995). The original form of this scale was made by Spanier (1988) and based on Levi's and Spiner's theory about the quality of marital relationships. Fincham and Bradbury (2000) also introduced this questionnaire as a suitable tool to evaluate the quality of marriage after presenting their theory about the quality of marital relationships. This 14-question questionnaire is based on Spanier's original 32-question form, which is graded on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 to 5. This tool consists of three subscales: "Agreement", "Satisfaction" and "Cohesion".

Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the three-factor structure of the questionnaire in America and showed its validity. The reliability of the questionnaire according to Cronbach's alpha method was reported from 0.80 to 0.90 in Hollist and Miller's study [22]. c) Marital conflicts questionnaire: Sanai Zaker and Barati (2008) developed this questionnaire with the aim of measuring the seven main dimensions of couples' conflicts. The questionnaire contains 42 questions and measures seven aspects or seven dimensions of marital conflicts, which are: Reducing cooperation, reducing sexual relations, increasing emotional reactions, increasing child support, increasing personal relations with relatives, decreasing family relations with spouse's relatives and friends, and separating financial affairs from each other. Scoring is done in such a way that five options are considered for each question and 1 to 5 marks are assigned to them. The maximum total score of the questionnaire is 210 and the minimum score is 42. The maximum score of each subscale is equal to the number of questions in that subscale multiplied by 5. In this tool, a higher score means more conflict and a lower score means a better relationship. Marital conflicts questionnaire has good content validity. In the stage of analyzing the test materials after the preliminary implementation and calculating the correlation of each question with the entire questionnaire and its scales, 13 questions out of the 55 initial questions have been removed. To normalize the questionnaire of marital conflicts with Cronbach's alpha method, for the whole questionnaire, it was 0.71 and for its seven components, respectively, decrease in cooperation 0.73, decrease in sexual relations 0.60, increase in emotional reactions 0.74, increase in child support 81. 0, increasing personal relationship with one's relatives 0.65, decreasing family relationship with spouse's relatives and friends 0.81 and separating financial affairs from each other 0.69 have been obtained [23].

In this plan, the couples who are in the first five years of life were selected as available and voluntary sampling and were voluntarily replaced in the experimental and

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control groups. Also, before the implementation of schema therapy, the selected couples in both groups were measured by the pre-test of metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts. The role of the pre-test in this plan was to control and compare the metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and the ability to resolve conflicts of the experimental and control groups in the pre-test and post-test. Then, after the schema therapy sessions on the experimental group, a post-test was taken from both groups, and as a result, it was determined whether the changes in metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility, and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts were caused by the schema therapy sessions or not.

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

The results of research

The descriptive findings of the research are as follows:

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of scores of metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and the ability to resolve conflicts of couples in the experimental and control groups in the pre-test stage.

Variable	stage	Statistical index → group	Mean	standard deviation	Qty
Metacognitive beliefs	pre-test	experiment	20.64	3.32	55
		Control	21	4.06	55
	Post-test	experiment	45.77	8.47	55
		Control	21.04	2.57	55
marital compatibility	pre-test	experiment	11.04	2.35	55
		Control	20.51	1.41	55
	Post-test	experiment	19.24	2.34	55
		Control	20	1.64	55
The ability to resolve couples' conflicts	pre-test	experiment	10.57	1.66	55
		Control	18.11	2.06	55
	Post-test	experiment	18.37	1.71	55
		Control	16.77	2.35	55

Table 2. The results of multivariate covariance analysis on the mean post-test scores of metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and conflict resolution of couples in the experimental and control groups with the pre-test control.

title of exam	amount	The DF of hypothesis	The DF of error	F	P	Effect size	Statistical power
Pillai effect test	0.94	6	17	520.5	0.001	0.94	1
Wilkes Lambda test	0.05	6	17	520.5	0.001	0.94	1
Hotelling effect test	18.4	6	17	520.5	0.001	0.94	1
The largest root test	18.4	6	17	520.5	0.001	0.94	1

As can be seen, for the variable of metacognitive beliefs of couples in the first five years of life in the post-test stage, the mean and standard deviation in the experimental group were 20.64, 3.32; In the control group, 21.06, and in the pre-test stage, the mean and standard deviation of the experimental group is 45.77, 8.67, and in the control group, 21.04, 2.57. Also, in the marital compatibility variable in the post-test stage, the mean and standard deviation of the experimental group were 19.24 and 2.34; in the control group 20 and 1.64 and in the pre-test stage for the experimental group 11.04, 2.35 and for the control group 20.51, 1.41 was obtained. For resolving couples' conflicts in the post-test stage for the experimental and control groups, respectively, 18.37, 1.71, and 16.77, 2.35, and in the pre-test stage, for the experimental and control groups, respectively, 10.57, 1.66, and 18.11, 2.06 was obtained.

Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) method was used to check the research hypotheses, and the results are presented in the following tables.

The first hypothesis of the research indicated that "schema therapy is effective on metacognitive beliefs of couples in the first five years of marriage".

The second hypothesis of the research indicates that "schema therapy is effective on couples' marital compatibility in the first five years of marriage".

The third hypothesis of the research indicates that "schema therapy is effective on the ability of couples to resolve conflicts in the first five years of marriage".

As it is clear in the table, with the pre-test control, the significance levels of all the tests indicate that there is a significant difference between the couples of the experimental and control groups at least in terms of one of the dependent variables (metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and resolution of couples'

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conflicts), (F = 520.51 and p>0.001). In order to find out in terms of which variable there is a difference between the two groups, two one-way analysis of covariance was performed in the form of MANCOVA, and the results are presented in Table 3. The effect or difference is equal to 0.94. In other words, 94% of the individual differences in the post-test scores of metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts are related to the effect of schema therapy. Statistical power is equal to 1, in other words, there was no possibility of second type error.

Table 3. Results of one-way analysis of covariance in the form of MANCOVA on the average scores of metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and conflict resolution of couples in the experimental and control groups with pre-test control.

Variable	sum of squares	DF	mean square	F	P	Effect size	Statistical power
Metacognitive beliefs	3015.13	1	3015.13	79.01	0.001	0.78	1
marital compatibility	402.49	1	402.49	139.7	0.001	0.86	1
The ability to resolve couples' conflicts	261.68	1	261.68	69.08	0.001	0.75	1

As it is clear in the table, with the pre-test control, there is a significant difference between the couples of the experimental group and the control group in terms of metacognitive beliefs (p<0.001 and F=79.01). In other words, according to the average of the metacognitive beliefs of the couples of the experimental group compared to the average of the control group, schema therapy has improved the metacognitive beliefs of the experimental group. The effect or difference is equal to 0.78. In other words, 78% of individual differences in post-test scores of metacognitive beliefs are related to the effect of schema therapy. Therefore, the first research hypothesis is confirmed. As shown in Table 3, with the pre-test control between the couples of the experimental group and the control group in terms of marital compatibility (p<0.001 and F=139.68) and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts (p<0.001 and .f= 69.08) there is a significant difference. In other words, according to the mean of marital compatibility and the ability to resolve conflicts of experimental group couples compared to the mean of the control group, schema therapy has increased the marital compatibility and conflict resolution ability of experimental group couples. The amount of effects or differences shows that the percentages of individual differences in the post-test scores of marital compatibility and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts are related to the effect of schema therapy. Therefore, the second and third hypotheses of the research are confirmed.

Discussion

The aim of the current research is to investigate the effectiveness of schema therapy on metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and conflict resolution of couples in the first five years of marriage. The results of the research are presented as follows:

The main hypothesis of the research on the effect of schema therapy on metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and conflict resolution of couples who are in the first 5 years of marriage, showed that the main hypothesis is confirmed at the 0.001 level. And there is a significant difference between the couples of the experimental and control groups in terms of one of the dependent variables (metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility and resolution of couples' conflicts). The effect or difference was equal to 0.94, which showed that 94% of the individual differences in the post-test scores of metacognitive beliefs, marital compatibility, and the ability to resolve couples' conflicts are related to the effect of schema therapy [5].

The first hypothesis of the research indicated that "schema therapy is effective on metacognitive beliefs of couples in the first five years of life".

According to the results, it was found that there is a significant difference between the couples of the experimental group and the control group in terms of metacognitive beliefs with the pre-test control. In other words, according to the mean metacognitive beliefs of experimental group couples compared to the mean of the control group, schema therapy improved the metacognitive beliefs of the experimental group. Therefore, the first research hypothesis was confirmed.

The second hypothesis of the research indicated that "schema therapy is effective on the marital compatibility of couples in the first five years of marriage".

The third hypothesis of the research indicated that "schema therapy is effective on the ability to resolve couples' conflicts in the first five years of marriage".

According to the results, it was found that there is a significant difference between the couples of the experimental group and the control group in terms of marital compatibility and conflict resolution. In other words, according to the mean of the variables in the experimental group compared to the mean of the control group, schema therapy increased the marital compatibility and conflict resolution ability of the couples in the experimental group. Therefore, the second and third hypotheses of the research were confirmed [11].

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Conclusion:

In the first five years of life, couples have low metacognitive beliefs in dealing with life challenges due to psychological challenges, self-conflicts, and stressful situations. In the first five years of life, couples are emotionally restless and have a lot of stress, and their metacognitive beliefs are low under such conditions. In this research, it was found that schema therapy improves the metacognitive beliefs of couples in the first five years of life. It should be said that schema therapy in couples, because it initiates new behavior based on mental motivation to change the individual, causes couples to have better beliefs in the process of improving conditions.

Adaptable people go through stressful events without losing their mental health and suffering from mental illnesses. Also, it seems that in some cases, with the hard experiences they have gone through, they progress, become successful, and find higher adaptability in themselves. People who strengthen their ability to resolve conflicts can overcome various unfortunate events and maintain their mental health in married life [17]. As a result, increasing the level of compatibility as well as the ability to resolve conflicts in people leads to the reduction of emotional problems and the emergence of life satisfaction.

In fact, this approach describes behavioral problems and interpersonal relationships in different ways and offers different solutions for them. Addressing and solving the problems of marital incompatibility and searching for its causes in the form of psychological services for couples who have interpersonal problems and obstacles and lack of knowledge of appropriate behavior methods seem necessary. Therefore, helping spouses to change their irrational beliefs and control their actions and thoughts can give them a broader and clearer insight into solving marital problems. In this way, couples learn to consider themselves responsible for changing their behavior and test their perception with reality [12]. As a result, a change of attitude has been created in them and they identify their faulty beliefs. This will lead to a change in their expectations from each other and from marriage, and will ultimately lead to less conflict in them. Due to the limited statistical sample in this center, it is not possible to generalize the results obtained from the current research to larger samples and communities. Therefore, in order to generalize the results obtained in larger societies, it is suggested to implement the schema therapy method to solve occupational and marital conflicts in a larger sample size so that it can be generalized.

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Authors Contributions:

The author contributed to the data analysis. Drafting, revising and approving the article, responsible for all aspects of this work.

Ethical Consideration:

The research data and literature have not been copied from any worksauthor upon reasonable request.

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