Original Research

The Effectiveness of Compassion Focused-Theraphy on Increasing the Distress Tolerance and Loneliness in Women Affected By Marital Infidelity

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Abstract:

Background:

The purpose of this study was to assessment the effectiveness of compassion - focused therapy on increasing the tolerance of distress and loneliness in women affected by marital infidelity who referred to counseling centers. The basis of compassion-based therapy was to strengthen and increase the kindness towards oneself and others which ultimately improves one's mental health.

Method:

Method for the present study was searched from a systematic review by searching the keywords in websites and magazines, and quarterly journals. Also, abstracts of published articles were studied and finally, 26 final articles were selected for comprehensive review and data extraction.

Results:

The results showed that compassion -focused therapy is effective in increasing the stress tolerance of traumatized women in marital infidelity and also comparison therapy is effective on the feelings of loneliness of traumatized women in marital infidelity.

Conclusion:

Compassion-focused therapy leads to high psychological flexibility. As a result of the evolution of this system, a person's resilience increases and ultimately leads to an improvement in the level of stress tolerance and an increase in the feeling of emotional and cognitive connection.

Keywords: Compassion-Focused Therapy, Distress Tolerance, Loneliness, Marital Infidelity

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Introduction

The family as a single social group involves the most basic human relationships which are formed based on marriage (1).

Marriage is the most important event in the life of every human and has been described as the most fundamental human relationship because it provides the basic structure for establishing a family relationship and educating the next generation (2). The cornerstone of marriage and one of the main factors of any long-term and romantic relationship is the loyalty of couples to each other. Among the harmful factors that threaten the fidelity of couples to the marriage contract and sometimes lead to their separation from each other can be pointed out marital infidelity.

Marital infidelity is known as the most painful and harmful event that destroys the intimate relationship of couples and breaks their secure bonds. This ominous event weakens couples' loyalty to marriage, destroys the structure and stability of the relationship between them and leads to divorce and separation them (3). Family therapists have recommended the several definitions of marital infidelity, such as Susan Johnson defining marital infidelity as a potential breakdown that threatens couples' secure bounds and further activates their attachment and fear needs and considers it as a precondition for crises that reduce the emotional relations of spouses and undermine the secure and secure bonds between them (4). Betrayal and faithlessness can be occur in anyone's life, which in turn disrupts a person's physical and mental peace (5). In many cases, marital dissatisfaction of couples causes them to have a more relaxed view of marital infidelity (6). For some people, marital infidelity means having sexual relationship and for others, having a secret emotional relationship with someone other than the spouse (7). To escape from the harm of betrayal, one resorts to the wrong solutions that may lead to psychological damages.

Low psychological abilities are one of the main causes of failure in emotional and marital relationships. Therefore, one of the important psychological symptoms in the face of marital infidelity is the decrease in the level of tolerance for distress, which is characterized by the ability to analyze psychological situations. Distress tolerance is a common construct for research on emotional disorder, which is defined as extra-emotional instruments as the capacity to experience and tolerate negative psychological states (8).

Also, stress tolerance is multidimensional in nature and involves several dimensions like as 1) ability to tolerate, 2) evaluation and capacity to accept emotional state, 3) how a person regulates emotion, 4) the amount of attention absorbed by negative emotions and the amount it contributes to the development of dysfunction (9). Research shows that stress tolerance affects the evaluation and consequences of experiencing negative emotions because people who have less stress tolerance than others, react more strongly to stress. In addition, people who have weaker coping skills with stress try to avoid such emotions by using strategies aimed at reducing negative emotional states. In this way, stress causes people to not be able to manage and regulate their emotions very well when faced with threatening and stressful challenges, and as a result, they are negatively affected by unpleasant emotions which leads to marital burnout and In the long run, it leads to the termination of the marital relationship (10).

Therefore, after exposing the infidelity, resolving, controlling and treating post-traumatic reactions, regulating emotion and reducing the feeling of loneliness in the injured spouse can be the areas of intervention of the therapists in marital infidelity. Feeling lonely is a negative emotion that arises from the inadequacy and weakness of interpersonal relationships, and as a result, the person feels sad, empty, and irrelevant. Research shows that

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the length of time of loneliness is not alone a major determinant of the amount of stress, but the threat of separation and the quality of communication with relatives plays an important role in feeling lonely (11).

Women who have been harmed by marital infidelity and feel lonely not only lack social skills, but also cannot use their social skills very well (12). Since they feel vulnerable, they take a cautious and isolated approach to others and try to protect themselves by isolating themselves and not engaging in social relationships. These people allow their negative thoughts and doubts to distract them from responding appropriately to social interactions and do not use positive self-talk effectively; they also exaggerate their weaknesses and underestimate their strengths. Their nonverbal behaviors also distance them from others and allow external factors to control their lives. When people feel lonely, some give up and some keep trying; Therefore women whose husbands have been unfaithful are always alone. If they can get out of their loneliness, it will undoubtedly be easier for them to endure hardships (13).

In Iranian society, due to cultural issues, the man's infidelity does not cause the woman to seek divorce. Most of what women want is to escape the pain of marital infidelity. Thus, psychotherapy seems to provide a context for people to vent their negative emotions and feelings and heal the wounds of the past. Injured women can learn the skills needed to deal constructively with the injury in the treatment process (5).

One of the psychological approaches that can be helpful in this regard is Compassion-Focused therapy. Compassion-Focused education is one of the treatment methods derived from the third wave of psychotherapy that is effective in improving physical and psychological characteristics. In fact, compassion-based education focuses on four areas: past experiences, foundemental fears, security strategies, consequences, and unintended consequences. Compassion-based education was developed when research showed that some people who are highly self-critical and ashamed cannot do well in creating a kind, compassionate and self-supporting inner voice when they were entering the traditional therapies (15). Compassion means being aware of the suffering and adopting a comforting and compassionate attitude towards oneself at a time when things are going badly (16). Compassion can be considered as an emotion regulation strategy in various ways, in which the experience of annoying and undesirable emotions is not prevented, but an attempt is made to accept the feelings in a kind way (16). According to the presented materials, the main purpose of this article is the effectiveness of compassion therapy on increasing the tolerance of stress and loneliness in women affected by marital infidelity.

Theoretical Principles

Compassion Therapy

Compassion can be defined as the ability to be sensitive to the suffering of oneself and others along with a commitment to strive to heal or prevent it (Gilbert, 2014). The growing interest in the concept of compassion led to the development and evaluation of a variety of compassion-based interventions, among which compassion-focused therapy (17) is considered the best intervention today (18).

Compassion is considered as a dimensional structure that includes two related mindsets (17). The first mindset is the ability to be sensitive to the suffering of oneself and others, which is related to a number of characteristics, such as motivation to care. And the ability to feel empathy and sympathy. The second mentality, the commitment to alleviate suffering requires a special set of dependency skills in the space of attention, cognition, behavior, and emotion that contribute to the formation of a compassionate mind. Examples

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include the ability to replace self-critical thinking with compassionate self-correction and to create feelings of compassion for oneself and others (17).

Compassion-focused therapy was originally designed to help individuals which develop accepting feelings about themselves, as well as to help them for developing a compassionate inner voice (19). This integrated treatment is derived from neuroscience, social psychology, developmental psychology, as well as many other treatment models for mental problems (18).

Compassion-focused therapy envisions three systems of emotion regulation in individuals: the threat system, the pleasure system, and the relief system. The threat system's task is to monitor and deal with dangers, and the emotions of anger, fear, stress, and hatred belong to it. The pleasure system is the motivational system for motivating the pursuit of rewards and needs, and the feeling of excitement, pleasure, energy, and arousal is related to this system. The relief system is the regulator in the other system, that is, threat and hedonism. Feelings of satisfaction, contentment, peace, security and well fare are the emotions associated with this system.

Compassion-focused therapy considers illness as a result of a person's difficulty in accessing his relief system and as a result of the hyperactivity of other systems (17).

In compassion-focused therapy, people learn not to shy away from or suppress their painful feelings, so they can, in the first place, recognize their experience and feel compassion for it.

Compassion-based therapy is an approach to helping with emotional problems and self-destructive tendencies. Compassion-based therapy increases compassion with special exercises, thinking, visualizing, and focusing on what allows one to be kind in a non-judgmental way. This approach teaches the person to calm down and kindly remove the feeling of shame and anxiety and self-blame. Shame and embarrassment are now considered to be factors influencing mental vulnerability and an important component of psychological problems and aggressive tendencies. This problem is also considered as a clue to the individual's suffering and avoidance forms such as denial, identity breakdown disorder and problems seeking help (19).

Tolerance of distress in women affected by marital infidelity. Distress tolerance is a common construct for research into emotional disorder. Stress tolerance is defined as an individual's ability to experience and tolerate negative emotional states (20). In fact, distress tolerance is a variable of individual differences that refers to the capacity to experience and resist emotional distress (21). Stress tolerance is increasingly seen as an important structure in the development of new insights into the onset and maintenance of psychological trauma as well as prevention and treatment.

Stress tolerance is how people respond to negative emotions. It includes additional information beyond the individual's awareness of the amount of negative emotions experienced. This behavior is a beneficial emotional response that is defined as a person's ability to tolerate unpleasant inner states (22). In fact, distress tolerance is a variable of individual differences that refers to the capacity to experience and resist emotional distress (23). People with low stress levels engage in behavioral disorders in a misguided attempt to cope with their negative emotions (24).

Loneliness

The history of the study of loneliness suggests that the structure was conceptualized in the past with other problems such as depression, shyness, anger, isolationist behavior, and so on; but in recent definitions and conceptualizations, the feeling of loneliness is considered as a psychological construct independent of other problems that has its own

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risks (12). A review of the research background on the definition and concept of loneliness also shows that there are relatively significant differences between definition's experts in this field. For example, some researchers consider loneliness like as a psychological condition caused by quantitative and qualitative deficits in social relationships. According to theories such as Weiss (1973), loneliness is a severe negative experience that one actively avoids recalling. Even if he has to remember, he does so with great dissatisfaction and downplays the helplessness caused by the feeling of loneliness (25).

Feelings of loneliness are associated with emotional emptiness, non-expression of interpersonal feelings, and psychological regression in such a way that the needs of intimacy are not created, and even if they are to some extent, they remain essentially unsatisfactory. According to Perlman and Pilo (1981), loneliness is an unpleasant experience that occurs in response to quantitative or qualitative deficiencies in social relationships. At that time, feeling lonely was considered a positive concept, meaning the voluntary withdrawal from the daily struggles of life to achieve higher goals (such as meditation and communication with God).

Feeling lonely is not only unpleasant, but also associated with a variety of physical ailments and mental health problems. The feeling of loneliness confronts the people involved with feelings of emptiness, sadness and lack of belonging, and in various ways affects social interactions with others, lifestyle and physical and mental health. Feeling lonely is defined as behaviors such as avoiding contact with others. Alhagin (2004) describes loneliness as a hateful, disturbing, and unpleasant experience that causes one to feel inferior and experience uncomfortable moods in which the state can have its own consequences (26).

Marital Infidelity

Marital infidelity is considered as any violation of the marital relationship by establishing physical, sexual or emotional intimacy with someone outside the martial relationship. Emotional infidelity also involves establishing an emotional and intimate relationship (spending moments and leisure time together, having an intimate conversation) with someone outside of the marital relationship. Physical infidelity also refers to physical contact (touching the organs and sexual parts of the body) with a person other than the spouse (27). Infidelity occurs when one of the spouses believes that his or her marital life is faithful; If the other spouse has secretly broken the contract. Today, due to changes in social relationships and also changes in attitudes in addition to sexual relationship in particular, having private and confidential relationships with another person, unusual infatuation and love, emotional relationships beyond normal friendship, use of pornography, communication unconventional in cyberspace also involved into this definition. In other words, according to the group definition, sexual intercourse with a person other than the spouse is called an extramarital affair. But it is not necessary to have only sex in order to be able to have a relationship in this category, but any relationship with a heterosexual person, which is hidden from the spouse, is considered an extramarital affair.

People enter into marital infidelity for a variety of reasons, including: curiosity, diversity, motivation to experiment, struggle with inefficiency and gain self-confidence, entertainment, escapism, problems with intimacy, revenge, and sexual curiosity (28).

Fisher (2007) (28) also points to attraction, power-seeking, proving masculinity and femininity, and proving attractiveness as causes of infidelity. Finally, Glaser considers the re-experience of personal and sexual intimacy as the most important motivation of

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married men and women who are drawn to illegitimate relationships; Something they no longer find in their life together. So the charm of illegitimate relationships is that neither party blames or boasts (28).

Review of Literature

Rouhani et al., (2021) (29), conducted a study entitled the effectiveness of compassion based therapy on feelings of loneliness in women affected by marital infidelity. The research method was quasi-experimental including the pre-test, post-test and one control group with a 2-month follow-up phase.

Analysis of information obtained from the questionnaires was performed through SPSS software. The results showed that compassion therapy significantly improved feelings of loneliness, marital boredom and quality of marital life and the results were stable in the follow-up period.

Conclusion: Based on the results of the present study, it can be said that compassion therapy It can be used as a suitable intervention option in improving the feeling of loneliness in women affected by marital infidelity (29).

Shojaei Hesari et al., (1999) (30), investigated the effectiveness of compassion therapy on the tolerance of married women. The sample of the present study consisted of 40 people who were randomly selected as a sample and randomly divided into two groups of control (N=20) and experimental (N= 20). Both groups were pre-tested firstly and answered the Simmons and Gaher (2005) Distress Tolerance Questionnaire. Compassion-based therapy was performed in 8 sessions based on the protocol presented by Gilbert for 8 weeks and 1 session per week and each session lasted 90 minutes for the experimental group and the control group did not benefit from this treatment. At the end of the treatment sessions, both groups again answered the questionnaires used in the study and the results were analyzed using Spss software. The results showed that compassion-based therapy was significantly effective on distress tolerance.

Speekerman et al. (2018) (20), in a study aimed at investigating ways to improve mental health in compassion-focused therapy and its effect on changing self-esteem and self-criticism, found that compassion-focused therapy will be increase the self-confidence and will be decrease the Self-criticism.

PheniliPhenili Johns et al. (2015) (31), in a study aimed at investigating the relationship between self-compassion and emotion regulation and stress among psychologists found that self-compassion negatively predicts problems of emotion regulation and stress symptoms and problems emotion regulation mediates self-compassion and stress; This means that compassion regulates emotions and thus reduces stress symptoms.

Method

This article is a review type. Search for related documents in the Google Database using the keyword "compassion therapy, distress tolerance, loneliness, and marital infidelity." Relevant material was also searched in sites such as the Journal of Psychology, Civilica, Springer, Elsevier and Emeralda, and a total of more than 34 articles were found. Finally, based on the criteria and after studying and reviewing the abstract, eliminating duplicate and irrelevant items, 26 articles were selected and used in writing the present article. Criteria such as thematic relevance of titles, validity and relevance of the abstract to the intended purpose were used as selection criteria.

Results

According to studies conducted in 26 articles in the field of compassion-based therapy, the findings indicate that compassion therapy has an effect on increasing the suffering tolerance of women affected by marital infidelity, and also that compassion therapy affects the loneliness of women affected by infidelity and

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also , compassion based therapy is influential on injured women loneliness in marital infidelity.

Discussion

In a marital relationship, infidelity means breaking the covenant and commitment of the couple regarding sexual, emotional and sentimental relations. Betrayal is one of the worst experiences a person can be experience of it. Betrayal is against a promise that makes the other person no longer trust you. Those who have been betrayed have different definitions of betrayal. Betrayal is when a person loses trust, lies to you, deceives you, or abuses you. Infidelity in marriage is a common phenomenon that will have bitter consequences, and a person may not be able to trust his partner forever, leading to divorce and breaking up the family. Various variables can lead to marital infidelity in couples. One of these factors is feeling lonely. Today, psychological contexts consider loneliness as one of the main and important elements such as the unpleasant feeling of missing or losing a partner, the unpleasant and negative aspects of lost relationships, and the loss of a relationship with another (23). Most people think that marriage protects them from loneliness, while the feeling of loneliness has nothing to do with the number of relationships we are in and depends more on the quality of the relationship and the inner feeling. Studies show that at least 20% of people feel lonely, and interestingly, about 60% of them are married and living with their spouse. The feeling of loneliness in marriage gradually develops and eventually causes separation and severance of spouses to the extent that it leads to marital infidelity.

Research findings showed that compassion-based therapy has an effect on feelings of loneliness, this finding is consistent with the studies of Joynes et al. (2015) (31). Explaining this finding, we can indicate that in this treatment, the person understands the real meaning of life by increasing realistic, effective, logical thinking and reducing the avoidance of indirect psychological experiences and increasing awareness of their existence by focusing on the present. And teaches clients to free themselves from the confusion of avoidance in order to reduce unpleasant inner experiences; In other words, the main mechanism of effectiveness of this therapy method can be considered as improving efficiency by increasing psychological flexibility, through which one can overcome some of the sufferings and thoughts related to problems arising from life and oneself. To prepare for the future that results from a deep understanding of the meaning of life.

It can also be said that compassion focused therapy on betrayed women teaches the development of kindness, self-understanding, avoidance of psychological studies, excessive tendency to criticism, acceptance of problems and sufferings, inappropriate judgment about oneself and the situations in which one finds oneself. This therapy through increasing compassion and kindness to oneself and accepting problems causes people to treat others more intimately despite the problems in their lives (10) and show more efficiency in the face of problems and to maintain mental balance and try harder cognitively. Thus, increasing the intimacy of compassion-based therapy by increasing support from others , promoting self-esteem, facilitating positive social feedback, feeling emotionally and cognitively connected to others, achieving a purposeful life, and sharing others' emotional states reduce feeling of lonely.

Compassion-based therapy also has a significant effect on distress tolerance. Explaining the findings of this study, it can be said that the threat and protection system in women is very active, which will result in increased levels of stress and anxiety. On the other hand, the satisfaction and relief system in

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these people does not have good growth levels because they did not have the conditions to change this system. According to Parker et al. (2017) (3), self-compassion leads to high psychological flexibility. In fact, compassion-based therapy acts like physiotherapy of the mind, neutralizing the threat system and activating the relief system. As a result of the evolution of this system, the individual's resilience increases and ultimately leads to improved anxiety tolerance levels.

Conclusion

People who are self-compassionate are better able to cope with upsetting events because they have a higher acceptance ability than other people. Thus, emotional turmoil in these people will be decreases and turbulence tolerance will be increases, which ultimately realizes the ability of people to relieve and control themselves.

Mindfulness is one of the techniques used in compassion-based therapy. Exercises such as relaxing rhythmic breathing, compassionate thinking, compassionate imagery, and sitting meditation are some of the mindfulness exercises that are done during the sessions. Mindfulness increases self-monitoring and awareness. Mindfulness meditation activates the parasympathetic system, which can lead to deep muscle relaxation, reduce tension and arousal, and ultimately reduce pain and increase tolerance. The emphasis of these trainings is on using techniques to reduce stress and deal with pain and be aware of your condition. One of the components that is emphasized in mindfulness sessions is patience.

Patience means the ability to endure problems with a sense of calm and self-control. In fact, these trainings help people to solve their problems in stressful situations without judgment and by accepting the situation calmly.

Mindfulness predicts distress tolerance. Mindful people react to situations with a correct and realistic understanding, pay attention to situations without judgment and react with awareness, and also respond to difficult situations without involuntary behaviors, and therefore have a high tolerance. Researchers have found that people with high self-esteem are aware of the negative events of the mind and do not equate themselves with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors resulting from negative events. In fact, compassion acts as a shock to the negative consequences of adverse conditions.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that compassion training workshops be held by support organizations (psychology and counseling centers) for injured women of marital infidelity.
- It is recommended that psychologists and counselors use compassion-focused therapy and related exercises alongside other therapeutic approaches, especially when their clients are highly self-critical.

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