

## Original Research

### Family Relationships Based On the Commitment and Acceptance Approach among Couples

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#### Abstract:

#### Background:

The purpose of this study is to investigate family relationships based on the commitment and acceptance approach among couples in Tehran.

#### Methods:

Due to its objective and nature, this study was a quasi-experimental and a pretest, posttest design with a control group during a two-month follow-up. The statistical population of the study coupled in Tehran who referred to counseling centers in the summer of 2021, due to lack of proper relationship with each other. From their sample, 30 couples were selected by available and purposeful sampling from the statistical population and were randomly assigned to the experimental group (15 pairs) and control (15 pairs). To collect information, the Family Relations Questionnaire by Dr. Valaei et al. was used. Data were analyzed using SPSS software and by the variances' analysis statistics.

#### Results:

Findings of the study showed that teaching the commitment and acceptance approach has been effected in improving family relationships and its components (such as intimacy in relationships, rational conflict resolution, independence and freedom in performance, independence and freedom in behavior) among couples.

#### Conclusion:

Family relationship training based on commitment and acceptance approach has increased family intimacy and improved their quality of life and subscales in couples.

**Keywords:** Family Relationships, Commitment, and Acceptance

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## Introduction

The family is an institution that is connected to society on the one hand and the individual on the other hand. Since achieving to a healthy society depends on achieving a healthy family, the importance of this institution is so great that it is considered one of the fundamental foundations of society. According to Olson, it is a balanced family whose members' relationships is moderate (1). In other words, cohesion, as one of the influential structures of the family, is an important dimension of striving for reciprocal relationships among family members. A cohesive family is characterized by a supportive and understanding family atmosphere in which its members tend to help each other to meet the needs and concerns of family members (2).

In this regard, Abbasi and Hamidifar (2019) (3) stated that high family cohesion leads members to experience life situations in a challenging rather than threatening way, and are more prepared to overcome problems. Having a warm and receptive family emotional relationship, such as a shield, protects the persons against psychological damage and leads members to use the best coping strategy when faced with stress (4).

Family cohesion is a sign of the emotional relation that family members have with each other and includes components such as emotional relationship, family relationship, parent relationship, child-parent relationship, altruism and interests, and finally, how to spend leisure time (5).

According to the content of family relationships, family is one of the components of cohesion, and family relationships contain a verbal exchange of information among each member of a family. Communication is divided into two categories: instrumental and emotional. Instrumental communication is related to daily activities and the emotional dimension refers to the transmission of positive and negative emotions among members. On the

other hand, family communication can be direct and clear or indirect and hidden. In direct and clear communication, both the message and the purpose of the message are clear. Some communications, although clear, have an indirect purpose. In some communications, although the content of them is not clear, the side of them is clear, and finally, some communications have neither a clear purpose nor a specific content. Ideally, relationships are both direct and clear and leading to a reduction in marital conflict (6).

New therapeutic approaches to family problem-solving recommend acceptance and commitment-based family therapy. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a type of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that cultivates mindful and valuable processes (7); and therapy is based on a communication framework and is rooted in applied textualism, and also has a function and focuses on how language affects cognition, emotion, and behavior (8); and its main purpose is to increase psychological flexibility; i.e., to help the patient to get out of the cycle of avoidance and cognitive integration (9), and instead of avoiding internal experiences, psychological flexibility have been increased towards these experiences. In other words, by effective control of the pains, sufferings, and tensions that life has inevitably created for someone, a person can create a fruitful and meaningful life for himself (10). Proper family relationships, marital intimacy, and forgiveness are among the skills that seem to be able to help a family flourish and survive. Family relationships are the source of the emergence of human emotions and the center of the most intimate relationships among individuals and the startup of thought, morality, and the transcendence of the soul. On the other hand, family and marital relations can affect marital satisfaction or conflicts (11). Family relationships involve the verbal exchange of information between members and the family.

These relationships can be direct and clear, or indirect and hidden, which are ideally both direct and clear, and lead to a reduction in marital conflicts (12). It seems that other styles of family relationships can affect marital conflicts.

Disagreements and misunderstandings are common in the family and occur naturally in all areas of employment, education, familial, marriage, and at the individual and group levels; therefore, family relationships are no exception. That is why it must be said that today, most families in the world experience some kind of conflict (13). Conflict means that a person sees a mismatch between his or her personal goals, needs, or desires and those of the other party. When family conflict escalates, it causes anger, enmity, resentment, hatred, jealousy, and verbal and physical abuse in family relationships and takes on an unusual state (14). Marital conflicts and divorce are serious threats to family relationships that challenge the stability and quality of marriage and have negative psychological, physical, social, and economic consequences. Negative effects on physical health, depression, and low productivity at work are among their consequences. Giff and Brayan (2000) believe that the process of marital conflict arises when one of the parties to the relationship feels that the other party suppresses some of his favorite issues (15).

Problems between husband and wife not only weaken the foundations of the family, but also affect the emotional, social, and subsequent adjustment of the couple; Therefore, marital relationship, despite being one of the deepest human pleasures, is also one of the greatest sources of suffering (16). The ability to manage and resolve conflicts constructively can form a strong relationship in the couple and help couples to establish an intimate and close relationship. It was not the presence or absence of conflict that determines the quality of marriage, but the way of managing conflicting

situations that determines the quality of the marital relationship (15). According to the presented materials, the main question of the present study is that, whether family relationship is effective based on the commitment and acceptance approach between couples?

Family is a meaningful word that arouses a wave of emotion when we think about it. The family is the place of comfort and security, the first social institution, and the foundation of any society (17). Individuals achieve their identity through the family (18).

The starting point for family formation is when two adults (a woman and a man) join together to consist a family. Marriage creates a role that is separate from previous roles. In fact, the existence of a family is essential for the growth and development of its various members and society. If the family center includes a healthy environment and warm relationship and sincere interpersonal interaction, it can lead to the growth and development of its members, and if there is an intimate relationship between husband and wife, there would be a positive effect on the mental health of the family and children (19).

### **Research Method**

Due to its objective and nature, this study was quasi-experimental with a pretest, posttest design plus a control group and a two-month follow-up. The dependent variable is counseling based on the Approach to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and the independent variable is family relationships. The study population consisted of all couples who were referred to counseling centers during the summer of 2021. The sample of the present study consisted of 30 couples who were selected from the statistical population by available and targeted sampling and were randomly assigned to experimental (15 pairs) and control (15 pairs) groups.

Necessary conditions for the participants to enter this study, was at least 2 years of living together and not having mental disorders, as well as the condition for leaving these sessions, was the absence of more than 3 counseling sessions.

### **Ethical considerations:**

In conducting this research to respect privacy and human boundaries, some points were considered that are briefly addressed. First, in selecting the sample group, individuals were selected who were willing and satisfied to participate in the research. In the next step, the members participating in the research were given sufficient assurance that the information obtained from this research was personal and confidential and the research results were statistically, and the general conclusion will be published, not individually.

### **Research Performance Method**

In this project, after the necessary coordination with the counseling centers of Tehran, the sample people were selected in two stages and were randomly replaced in two experimental and control groups. The experimental group received 10 sessions of 90-minute counseling based on the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), but the control group did not receive any group counseling program during this study. At the beginning of the course, both groups answered the family relationship questionnaire. At the end of 10 sessions, the researcher conducted a post-test (family relations questionnaire). The control group waited for counseling after the end of the three-month counseling and 2-month follow-up period and did not receive any treatment during these 5 months. At the end of the tenth session of the experimental group, the post-test was taken from both the experimental and control groups. Three months after the last session of the experimental group and in the follow-up, the subjects in both groups answered the same

questionnaire, and the pre-test and post-test results were compared in both groups; finally, both groups were followed up two months after the post-test. Ethically, after completing the research project, the control group underwent family therapy interventions for four sessions.

### **Research tools**

#### **Family Relations Assessment Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is a 72-item questionnaire that was previously translated and validated by Dr. Valaei et al. This questionnaire can assess family relationships in different ways. Internal validity of this questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.79 and internal validity of the subscales of intimacy in relationships, rational conflict resolution, independence, and freedom of action and behavior, were respectively 0.75, 0.68, 0.74, 0.69, and 0.73. The internal validity of the questionnaire was calculated by the Split half method which was equal to 0.76. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.63 and the reliability of the subscales was calculated between 0.53 and 0.68.

### **Analysis Method**

Data analysis was performed using SPSS 19 software and at the level of descriptive statistics, mean, and standard deviation, and at the inferential level, analysis of covariance was used.

### **Research Findings**

At first, the sample was examined in terms of demographic questions (age, level of education, duration of marriage). The age of the participants in the experimental group is 46.3%, 20 to 30 years old, 33.1%, 30 to 35 years old, and 20.6% over 40 years old, and in the control group 51.2%, 20-30 years old, 26.9%, 30 to 35 years old, and 21.9% are over 40 years old. In terms of education level, among the members of the experimental group, 26.7% have a diploma and associate's degree,

46.7% have a bachelor's degree, and 26.6% have a master's degree, and among the members of the control group, 13.3% have a diploma degree and associate's degree, 46.7% had a bachelor's degree, and 40% had a master's degree. Meanwhile, the duration of marriage of the participants in the experimental group was 32.6% between 2 to 3 years, 56.9% between 4 to 5 years, and 10.5% over 5 years; and the duration of marriage in the control group was 33.9% between 2 to 3 years, 46.8% were between 4 to 5 years old, and 19.3% were over 5 years old.

To describe the data related to the sample, we first calculated the central indicators and the distribution of research variables, which are as follows:

As shown in Table 1, the average score of intimacy variables in relationships and logical conflict resolution among the participants in the experimental group, there was an increase in the post-test compared to the pre-test.

One of the presuppositions of parametric tests for comparing means was the assumption of normal distribution of scores of sample groups in the population. For this assumption, the Smirnov-Kolmogorov test was used, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

As you can see in Table 2, the significance level of the test in all components is greater than 0.05, so the assumption that the score distribution is normal will be accepted.

Based on Table 4, it can be said that the observed F value of family relationships (intimacy in relationships, logical conflict resolution, independence and freedom in performance, and independence and freedom in behavior) at the level of 0.05 showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Besides, based on the analysis of the intra-experimental, it can be said that the effect of time interaction in the group was significant for the components of family relationships. Considering the above, it can be said that the teaching commitment and

acceptance approach has been effective in improving family relationships between couples.

## Discussion

The family as an emotional-social unit is the center of growth and development, healing and treating, change and transformation of injuries and complications that are both the bedrock and the collapse of relationships between its members (5). The relationship that is of special importance among other ones is the couple relationship, which takes place in the form of family structure. Although starting a family and having a relationship with your spouse is one of the healthiest and most satisfying relationships, many harms can damage this secure relationship. Acceptance and commitment-based therapy seems to free anxious and violent individuals from mental engagement with threatening thoughts and performance anxiety by encouraging people to practice repetitively focusing on neutral stimuli and purposeful awareness of body and mind. On the other hand, these techniques reduce anxiety and physiological stress in individuals by increasing the person's awareness of current experiences and returning attention to the cognitive system and more efficient information processing. In the reality therapy model, people are taught to identify their needs and to prepare and implement responsible programs to achieve their needs and goals. When a person's needs are identified and met, it makes them feel self-sufficient in the family (19).

Given that learning is a relatively stable change in behavior and sustainability in a feature of learning, so the learned behaviors do not disappear quickly as a result of learning, and when a person learns the right decision-making skills and develops his business, he does not return to previous behavior. Instead, he tries to use the learned skills in every situation.

Therefore, it is natural that the results obtained are stable.

Family relationship training based on commitment and acceptance approach has increased family intimacy and improved their quality of life and subscales in couples. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of research in the field of communication skills such as Keller et al. (2019)(1) Straus et al. (2018)(6) , Yousefi (2018)(15). They have stated that a communication training program is effective in increasing communication skills and relationship satisfaction. Research by Nemati et al. (2020) (10) found that couples who participated in the commitment and acceptance treatment program had better communication skills and higher communication satisfaction.

### Conclusion

According to the final results of family relations training based on the commitment and acceptance approach, family intimacy increases and the behaviors learned as a result of learning and teaching the right decision-making skills increase better communication skills and higher communication satisfaction.

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**Tables****Therapeutic Session**

<b>Session</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Brief Description of the Session</b>
The First Session	Doing relationships and familiarizing with the status of the family relationship of couples through the mindfulness process and examining the problem from the perspective of each member and conceptualizing the problem from the therapist's point of view.	Training mindset awareness in this session and give some examples about the problem of group's members, so they talk about what their shape is, and the therapist tries to lead the members to creative helplessness, and finally, the group leader expresses the problem from his or her point of view.
The Second Session	Introducing 5 psychological toxins, getting acquainted with the main nature of thoughts and mental stories, performing melodic thoughts practice, and naming stories.	Introducing 5 cognitive toxins to members as follow: 1- the toxin of avoiding experience, 2- the toxin of neglecting values, 3- the toxin of massing mind, 4- the toxin of being reactive, and 5- the toxin of not doing the session's practices. Each member deals with the implementation of his thought as a group of words that are not necessarily true. They also learn to take the stories of their minds less seriously.
The Third Session	Selection, the introduction of psychological layers, doing psychological practices.	In this session, group members choose one of the four ways. 1- Divorce 2- Stay and bear 3- Do not stay and change what they can. 4- Stay and accept what they cannot change. It is also explained to the members that thoughts come to everyone, but overestimating and mingling with them turns it into a psychological fog. Nine fog of psychology is introduced to members. A layer of musts, there is no place to try, I wish, only if ..., painful past, scary future, reasoning, judgment, hypotheses, deep fears.
The Fourth Session	Introducing misconceptions about marriage, learning how to separate from unpleasant thoughts and feelings by telling donut metaphors, and practicing useless stories.	Initially, it starts for the group members with practicing 3, 2, and 1 of beliefs that are unforgettable forever like these numbers. Then, the beliefs or myths of love are told. 1- Perfect wife 2- My wife is my half-lost 3- Love should be easy 4- Eternal love by expressing the metaphor of jelly donuts, members realize that thought cannot be removed or controlled. Besides, by practicing useless stories, members experience detachment from their thoughts.
The Fifth Session	Getting to know the values of life, paying special attention to the path of the value of marriage in a sincere relationship by doing the tenth anniversary of marriage	Familiarizing the members with the life map and 10 ways that are in everyone's life map. The path of family values, marriage, and intimacy, friendships, jobs and education, diversity and bias, spirituality, social life, nature, health. Special attention will also be paid to the value of

	and practicing how I want to be in a relationship with my spouse.	marriage and intimate relationships by practicing the tenth anniversary of marriage and practicing how I want to be in a relationship with my spouse.
The Sixth Session	Setting goals, introducing internal and external barriers	Members using the practice of meaningful goal-setting, immediate goals, short-term goals, mid-nation goals, and long-term goals are identified. Members are asked to set goals in the direction of the value of the relationship with their spouse, and to identify the smallest action, the resources needed, and the time to accomplish those goals (performing the operational plan exercise). As well as that, internal barriers, i.e. thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, bodily signs, and external barriers, i.e. events and issues that occur outside the world of their minds, and their three operational plans are introduced.
The Seventh Session	Introducing the antidote to internal barriers, the desire to do acceptance exercises, and the desire to do them.	In this session, will be explained to members the method of dealing with internal barriers, that is, greeting through the metaphor of the guest. Members are asked to perform the guest metaphor on their inner barriers.
The Eighth Session	Introducing the antidote to internal barriers, their results, and performing emotional atmosphere training.	In this session, it will express the antidote to other internal obstacles. Members will practice the semantics of emotions and will be explained metaphors for the results chosen by the group leader. Train metaphor (cell phone from hell/bullies and monsters/thoughts on the leaf)
The Ninth Session	Solution for external barriers to the value of spouse relationships.	In this session, the focus is on the issues and problems that members have with their spouses and the transformation of the war scene into peace. Familiarizing members with what they can and cannot control about their spouses. Introducing members to the 4 horsemen in a relationship based on war with their spouse as 1- Criticism, 2- Insult, 3- Defensiveness, 4- Sabotage Training alternatives for these 4 horsemen and teaching silent to group members.
The Tenth Session	Problem-solving for external barriers in the path of value by communicating with their spouse.	Explaining examples of things that turn life into a battlefield. Like ambushing, shaking hands, retaliating, playing the role of a lawyer, exhuming. Explain to members what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. Introducing 5 methods includes 1- Liberation from the mind, 2- Openness, 3- Valuation, 4- Involvement with the spouse, 5- Intimacy.

**Table 1: Descriptive indicators between experimental and control groups in family relationship variables and their components**

Variable	Dimensions	Groups	Frequency	Pre-test		Post-test	
				Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Family Relationships	Intimacy in Relationships	Experimental	15	6.46	1.76	9.53	1.68
		Control	15	5.73	2.84	6.80	2.27
	Logical resolution of conflicts	Experimental	15	3.40	1.40	6.40	2.02
		Control	15	4.06	1.48	3.20	1.78
	Independence and freedom in the performance	Experimental	15	8.13	1.88	10.53	1.98
		Control	15	7.53	1.84	8	1.95
	Independence and freedom in behavior	Experimental	15	9.60	3.83	10.13	3.29
		Control	15	8.73	1.98	9.06	2.89

**Table 2: Smirnov-Calmogoroff Test for default normality of sample group distribution**

Variable	Dimensions	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
		The Value of z	The Significant Level	The Value of z	The Significant Level
Family Relationships	Intimacy in Relationships	0.82	0.509	1.46	0.028
	Logical Resolution of Conflicts	1.09	0.181	1.09	0.181
	Independence and Freedom in Performance	1.25	0.858	0.91	0.375
	Independence and Freedom in Behavior	0.60	0.088	0.78	0.573

**Table 3. Effects and intra-experimental analysis of variance with repeated measures on the mean of family relationships in the control and experimental groups.**

Variable	Effect	Total Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Squares	F	Significant Level	Effect Size

<b>Between Experimental</b>	Intimacy in Relationships	Group	134.44	1	134.44	13.94	0.001	0.33
	Logical Resolution of Conflicts	Group	31.21	1	31.21	4.78	0.023	0.17
	Independence and Freedom in Performance	Group	306.17	1	306.17	42.65	0.0001	0.60
	Independence and Freedom in Behavior	Group	246.67	1	246.67	15.63	0.0001	0.36
<b>Intra-Experimental</b>	Intimacy in Relationships	Time	76.86	2	38.43	14.60	0.0001	0.34
		Time/Group	37.75	2	18.87	7.17	0.002	0.20
		Error	143.37	56	2.63	--	--	--
	Logical Resolution of Conflicts	Time	18.86	2	9.43	5.65	0.013	0.14
		Time/Group	56.42	2	28.21	13.93	0.0001	0.33
		Error	112.37	56	2.02	--	--	--
	Independence and Freedom in Performance	Time	32.82	2	25.86	7.58	0.006	0.21
		Time/Group	70.68	2	25.86	7.58	0.006	0.21
		Error	120.15	56	3.41	--	--	--
	Independence and Freedom in Behavior	Time	32.75	2	16.87	4.26	0.019	0.13
		Time/Group	70.48	2	35.74	9.04	0.0001	0.24
		Error	120.42	56	3.95	--	--	--