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Orginal Article

Equivalence of Performance Analysis Psychotherapy (FAP) and Schema Therapy on Emotional Experience towards Spouse, Forgiveness and Gratitude of Couples Referring to Isfahan Counseling Centers

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Abstract

The present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (FAP) and Schema Therapy on emotional experience toward one's spouse, forgiveness, and gratitude among couples attending counseling centers in Isfahan City. Marital relationships are dynamic emotional systems that can be improved through structured psychotherapeutic interventions. FAP focuses on enhancing awareness of interpersonal behaviors and reinforcing positive interactions in the therapeutic relationship, while Schema Therapy emphasizes identifying and modifying deep-seated maladaptive schemas that influence emotions and behaviors in close relationships. The research employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest, posttest, and follow-up phases, including two experimental groups and one control group. The statistical population comprised all married couples aged 25–45 years in Isfahan. Using convenience sampling, 30 couples were selected and randomly assigned to three groups: Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (10 couples), Schema Therapy (10 couples), and a control group (10 couples). The two experimental groups each received eight 90-minute weekly sessions, whereas the control group received no intervention. Data were gathered using three standardized instruments: the Emotional Experience toward Spouse Questionnaire (Bradshaw, 1995; 6 items), the Forgiveness Questionnaire (Rye et al., 2001; 15 items), and the Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough et al., 2002; 6 items). These tools were administered at three time points—pretest, posttest, and a two-month follow-up—to assess the persistence of therapeutic effects. Data analysis was performed using repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed no significant difference between FAP and Schema Therapy in

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improving emotional experience toward the spouse and gratitude. However, there was a significant difference in forgiveness, where Schema Therapy proved more effective than FAP in increasing couples' forgiveness capacity and reducing marital conflicts. The follow-up results further indicated that treatment outcomes were maintained over time. Overall, both interventions were beneficial in enhancing positive marital emotions, empathy, and appreciation within couples. Nonetheless, Schema Therapy demonstrated greater efficiency in fostering forgiveness, emotional regulation, and long-term relational harmony. These findings suggest that Schema Therapy can serve as a valuable intervention model for counselors aiming to improve relationship satisfaction and reduce conflict in marital settings.

Keywords: Functional Analytic Psychotherapy, Schema Therapy, Emotional Experience, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Couples

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The family is a fundamental social institution founded on marriage. The health of this union is a critical indicator of its members' psychological well-being, deeply dependent on the relationship's quality and continuity. As the most intimate human connection, a durable and high-quality marital relationship requires specific emotional skills. Research consistently shows that behavioral and emotional exchanges between couples are among the strongest predictors of marital quality. The "emotional experience" within the marriage is particularly pivotal, determining its resilience or collapse. When negative emotions like resentment and anger dominate, the relationship's climate deteriorates, fostering conflict. Conversely, positive emotions like love and appreciation strengthen the relationship's foundation. Two key constructs for a healthy emotional climate are "forgiveness" releasing anger after a transgression—and "gratitude"acknowledging a partner's positive qualities. These are crucial for healing relational wounds and enhancing satisfaction. Identifying effective interventions to promote these factors is essential. This study compares two therapeutic modalities: Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (FAP) and Schema Therapy. FAP is a contextual behavioral therapy that emphasizes the in-session, moment-to-moment analysis of behaviors, using the therapeutic relationship to foster new, effective ways of relating. In contrast, Schema Therapy is an integrative approach that identifies and modifies deep-seated, maladaptive cognitive-emotional patterns ("early maladaptive schemas") often rooted in past experiences, which are triggered in intimate relationships like marriage. This

study aimed to empirically compare the effectiveness of FAP and Schema Therapy on the emotional experience towards one's spouse, forgiveness, and gratitude among couples seeking counseling.

Method

This research employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test, and follow-up, involving two experimental groups and one control group. The statistical population was couples aged 25 to 45 attending counseling centers in Isfahan. Using available sampling, 30 couples were selected and randomly assigned to three groups: FAP (10 couples), Schema Therapy (10 couples), and a control group (10 couples). The FAP group received an 8-session intervention of Functional Analytic Psychotherapy. The Schema Therapy group also received an 8-session intervention. The control group received no intervention during this period. Data was collected using standardized questionnaires:

1. The 6-item Emotional Experience towards Spouse questionnaire (Brashaw, 2009).
2. The 15-item Forgiveness questionnaire (Bakhshash Ray et al., 2001).
3. The 6-item Gratitude questionnaire (McCullough et al., 2002).

These questionnaires were administered to all groups at three stages: pre-test, post-test, and a follow-up (e.g., two months post-intervention). Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA in SPSS.

Results

The findings revealed distinct therapeutic outcomes. For the variables of "emotional experience towards the spouse" and "gratitude," no statistically significant difference was found between FAP and Schema Therapy. Both methods were equally effective in fostering a more positive emotional experience and enhancing gratitude among the couples. However, a significant difference emerged for "forgiveness." While both interventions increased forgiveness scores compared to the control group, the improvement was significantly greater in the Schema Therapy group than in the FAP group. Thus, Schema Therapy proved more effective than FAP in enhancing forgiveness skills, a critical factor for resolving marital conflicts.

Discussion

The results indicate that both FAP and Schema Therapy are beneficial interventions for improving the emotional climate of marriages by enhancing positive emotional experiences and gratitude. Their shared effectiveness

suggests both approaches successfully equip couples with skills for more positive engagement in the present moment.

The superior efficacy of Schema Therapy in fostering forgiveness is attributable to its fundamental approach. It emphasizes mutual support, uncovering deep-seated emotions, and identifying core emotional needs and maladaptive schemas activated in the relationship. By facilitating new, positive experiences and healthier interaction cycles, it helps couples rebuild their relationship. This profound cognitive-emotional restructuring within a safer relationship provides the psychological groundwork for forgiving a partner's past transgressions by addressing the historical roots of resentment.

In contrast, FAP's primary focus on the "here-and-now" and shaping current behaviors, while effective for general improvement, may not penetrate as deeply into resolving long-held, schema-driven resentments, limiting its impact on forgiveness. Consequently, therapists should consider their primary goal—general emotional improvement versus enhancing forgiveness—when selecting an approach. Further research with larger, more diverse samples is recommended to enhance the generalizability of these findings

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