

Clinical Trial Protocol

Iranian Registry of Clinical Trials

27 Jul 2026

The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy in Improving Marital Communication Quality and Trust among Couples Experiencing Emotional Divorce.

Protocol summary

Study aim

Determining the Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy on Marital Communication Quality and Trust in Relationships among Couples with Emotional Divorce

Design

This study is a randomized clinical trial with parallel groups and double blinding conducted on 30 couples with emotional divorce. Randomization will be performed using Random Number Generator software.

Settings and conduct

This study is conducted at counseling centers in Ahvaz city on couples with emotional divorce. After obtaining informed consent, participants are randomly assigned to the intervention and control groups; the intervention group receives cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and the control group receives usual care. Data are collected at pretest and posttest, and the study is conducted in a double-blind manner. The clinicians, outcome assessors, and data analyst will be unaware of the participants' group allocation.

Participants/Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria: experiencing emotional divorce, being at least 20 and at most 50 years old, having lived at least 5 years in their marital life, and holding at least a high school diploma. Exclusion criteria: having psychological disorders and using psychiatric medications, and having physical problems that could interfere with the intervention process.

Intervention groups

Intervention group: Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy; it is an integrative approach to reduce marital distress and psychological problems in relationships, which is implemented based on the model of Epstein and Baucom (2002; cited in Salehi et al., 2021) in 10 sessions of 90 minutes, twice a week for 5 weeks. Control group: They do not receive any intervention.

Main outcome variables

Marital Communication Quality; Trust in Couples' Relationships

General information

Reason for update

Acronym

IRCT registration information

IRCT registration number: **IRCT20260511069361N1**

Registration date: **2026-06-11, 1405/03/21**

Registration timing: **registered_while_recruiting**

Last update: **2026-06-11, 1405/03/21**

Update count: **0**

Registration date

2026-06-11, 1405/03/21

Registrant information

Name

Shekoufeh Khosravan

Name of organization / entity

Country

Iran (Islamic Republic of)

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Recruitment status

Recruitment complete

Funding source

Expected recruitment start date

2026-06-10, 1405/03/20

Expected recruitment end date

2026-07-06, 1405/04/15

Actual recruitment start date

empty

Actual recruitment end date

empty

Trial completion date

empty

Scientific title

The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy in Improving Marital Communication Quality and Trust among Couples Experiencing Emotional Divorce.

Public title

The Effect of Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy on Marital Communication Quality and Trust in Couples

Purpose

Education/Guidance

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria**Inclusion criteria:**

Being between 20 and 50 years old Having at least 5 years of marital life Having at least a high school diploma Willingness to cooperate and participate in couple therapy sessions Couples experiencing emotional divorce

Exclusion criteria:

Having psychological disorders and using psychiatric medications Having physical problems that interfere with the intervention process

AgeFrom **20 years** old to **50 years** old**Gender**

Both

Phase

N/A

Groups that have been masked

- Care provider
- Outcome assessor
- Data analyser

Sample sizeTarget sample size: **60**

More than 1 sample in each individual

Number of samples in each individual: **2**

Each participant is in fact a couple consisting of one man and one woman.

Randomization (investigator's opinion)

Randomized

Randomization description

In this study, a simple randomization method was used to assign participants to the experimental and control groups. The unit of randomization in this study was the couples visiting the counseling center. First, a complete list of eligible couples based on the study entry criteria was prepared. Then, a unique numeric identification code was assigned to each couple. These codes were entered into the Random Number Generator software, which generated a random number for each couple. After these numbers were generated, the couples were sorted in ascending order according to their random numbers. Then, the participants were sequentially assigned to two groups; the first 15 couples on the list were assigned to the experimental group, and the next 15 couples to the control group. By this method, the order of entry into the study and the researcher's knowledge of the participants had no role in group selection. For allocation

concealment, the person responsible for entering data into the software was independent of the clinical operations team and could not be aware of or alter the allocation process. Additionally, the identification codes were kept confidential and separate from other participant information. Therefore, it was not possible to predict the group assignment for any couple before the completion of the randomization process.

Blinding (investigator's opinion)

Double blinded

Blinding description

To ensure blinding, the group allocation process will be performed randomly by an individual outside the research team, who will have no involvement in the treatment process or outcome assessment. Outcome assessors and the data analyst will be faced with anonymous numerical codes for the groups and will have no information regarding the nature of the intervention (experimental or control group). Furthermore, all therapy sessions will be designed and conducted in a manner that ensures the therapist remains unaware of the participants' pre-test and post-test assessment results, in order to prevent bias during the implementation of the protocol. To maintain blinding, all assessment reports will be coded, recorded, and provided for final analysis by an independent research assistant

Placebo

Not used

Assignment

Parallel

Other design features**Secondary Ids**

empty

Ethics committees**1****Ethics committee****Name of ethics committee**

Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz

Street address

Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz, Farhang Shahr

City

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Province

Khouzestan

Postal code

6134937333

Approval date

2026-04-15, 1405/01/26

Ethics committee reference number

IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1405.040

Health conditions studied**1****Description of health condition studied**

Emotional Divorce in Couples

ICD-10 code

Z63.0

ICD-10 code description

Problems in relationship with spouse or partner

Primary outcomes

1

Description

Marital Communication Quality

Timepoint

before performing the intervention and two weeks after completion of the intervention

Method of measurement

Busby et al.'s Marital Quality Scale (1995)

2

Description

Trust in Couples' Relationships

Timepoint

before performing the intervention and two weeks after completion of the intervention

Method of measurement

Rempel and Holmes Interpersonal Trust Questionnaire (1985)

Secondary outcomes

empty

Intervention groups

1

Description

The Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT) intervention consists of 10 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, conducted twice a week, designed with the aim of improving marital interactions, increasing intimacy, and correcting dysfunctional cognitive and behavioral patterns in the relationship. This program is implemented based on the CBCT model by Epstein and Baucom (2002; cited in Salehi et al., 2021). In the first session, introductions, familiarization of the couple with the therapist, establishment of a therapeutic alliance, introduction of the treatment framework, and setting common goals are performed. In the second session, acceptance of individual errors and forgiveness of the spouse's mistakes are taught with the goal of reducing blaming and increasing responsibility in the relationship. The third session is dedicated to teaching behavioral techniques, including the five love languages and the concept of the emotional bank account, to enhance the couples' affectionate behaviors and intimacy. In the fourth session, gender differences between men and women in emotional and communication domains are examined to foster mutual understanding and more effective interaction between the couples. In the fifth session, behavioral and cognitive techniques for improving sexual relationships and increasing physical

and emotional intimacy are taught. In the sixth session, effective and healthy conversation skills are taught with the aim of improving the expression of feelings and reducing misunderstandings. The seventh session is dedicated to teaching active listening and anger management to prevent the escalation of conflicts. In the eighth session, cognitive interventions, including the identification and correction of dysfunctional beliefs and negative thoughts about the spouse, are presented. In the ninth session, three personality levels (Parent, Adult, and Child) and the thought-feeling-action triangle model are examined to increase the couples' self-awareness regarding behavioral patterns. In the tenth session, unrealistic expectations from the spouse are corrected, and by summarizing the topics, a plan for the continued application of skills after the end of treatment is provided. This program is implemented in the form of 10 sessions of 90 minutes, twice a week, for the experimental group. The duration of the intervention will be 5 weeks

Category

Behavior

2

Description

Control group: They do not receive any intervention or treatment.

Category

N/A

Recruitment centers

1

Recruitment center

Name of recruitment center

Fanoos-e-Rah Counseling and Psychological Clinic

Full name of responsible person

Shekoofeh Khosravan

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Sponsors / Funding sources

1

Sponsor

Name of organization / entity

Islamic Azad University

Full name of responsible person

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Grant name**Grant code / Reference number****Is the source of funding the same sponsor organization/entity?**

Yes

Title of funding source

Islamic Azad University

Proportion provided by this source

100

Public or private sector

Public

Domestic or foreign origin

Domestic

Category of foreign source of funding

empty

Country of origin**Type of organization providing the funding**

Academic

Person responsible for general inquiries**Contact****Name of organization / entity**

Islamic Azad University

Full name of responsible person

Shekoufeh Khosravan

Position

Master's student

Latest degree

Bachelor

Other areas of specialty/work

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Fax**Email**

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Sharing plan**Deidentified Individual Participant Data Set (IPD)**

No - There is not a plan to make this available

Justification/reason for indecision/not sharing IPD

Participant data is completely confidential and I do not intend to publish it.

Study Protocol

Undecided - It is not yet known if there will be a plan to make this available

Statistical Analysis Plan

No - There is not a plan to make this available

Informed Consent Form

Undecided - It is not yet known if there will be a plan to make this available

Clinical Study Report

Undecided - It is not yet known if there will be a plan to make this available

Analytic Code

No - There is not a plan to make this available

Data Dictionary

No - There is not a plan to make this available