Clinical Trial Protocol
Iranian Registry of Clinical Trials

22 Nov 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
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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
Age
From **20 years** old to **50 years** old
Gender
Both

Phase
N/A
Groups that have been masked

- Care provider
- Outcome assessor
- Data analyser

Sample size
Target 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
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Province
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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
Shekoufeh Khosravan
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Sponsors / Funding sources

1

Sponsor
Name of organization / entity
Islamic Azad University
Full name of responsible person
Aslan Egdernezhad

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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
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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