

A comparison in the effectiveness of the Olson Circumplex Model and the Walsh Integrated Approach on couples' resilience and conflicts

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Abstract

Introduction: The present study was conducted aiming to compare the effectiveness of Olson Circumplex Model and Walsh Integrated Approach on the couple's resiliency and conflict.

Method: In the experimental method, 30 couples owning the qualifications cited by the researcher and those who referred to the counseling offices in zone 3 of Tehran in 2014 because of marital conflicts were selected through random sampling and were randomly put into experimental and control groups (two experimental and one control group). Both experimental groups were put under the effect of independent variables (i.e., Olson Model and Walsh Approach) during eight nineteen-to- a hundred twenty minute sessions. The applied instruments were resilience scale (CD-RISC) and Marital Conflicts Questionnaire (MCQ). Finally, the collected data were analyzed via MANOVA method.

Findings: Results taken from the data analysis implied that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the variables of marital resilience and conflicts compared to the control group ($p < 0.05$). No significant difference was observed in the resilience variable when investigating the comparison of the degree of effectiveness of the two approaches ($P > 0.05$). However, there was a significant difference between two groups in the variable of marital conflicts and the means and it showed that Olson Circumplex Model enjoyed a higher effectiveness in reducing the couples' marital conflicts than the Walsh Integrated Approach.

Conclusion: According to the findings of the study, Olson Circumplex and Walsh Integrated Approach can be applied to decrease the couples' marital conflicts.

Keywords: Olson Circumplex Model, Walsh Integrated Approach, Couple's Resilience, Conflicts

Introduction

Family is considered to be the most important social foundation in all societies. People come into existence in the family and the society is consolidated by the people. Since the family institution generates manpower and is the channel to other social institutions it is considered as one of the basic foundations and major institutions of each society [1] which is today formed according to specific principles and norms and its preservation and promotion is of a great value, though the degree of its stability depends on the couples' interactions. Since family members are greatly interacting with each other, some conflicts between them may arise. Furthermore, conflicts can be considered as a process wherein one of the parties finds out that the other suppresses the topics under his/her interest [2]. Systematic therapists consider marital conflicts as struggles to take over power positions and resources and remove the other party's privileges. Marital conflict is some kind of constant and meaningful incompatibility between two spouses expressed at least by one of them.

In this field, as one of the effective variables on the couple's relations and the disputes between them, resilience has a valuable origin in family psychology and family therapy in removing stress and conflict and its undesirable outcome. As an important concept in the research and theory of mental health, within the recent two decades, resilience includes dynamic procedures that result in nurturing positive and reconstructive adaptation in the texture of remarkable hardships [3]. In a definition, resilience is the capability to return to the primary status with a higher strength, an active process of survival, self-proof and growth in response to crisis and challenge [4]. Researchers believe that resilience is a kind of self-repair with positive emotional, affective and cognitive outcomes [5].

Kumpfer [6] believed that resilience is the return to initial balance or achieving a higher-level balance (under threatening conditions) and therefore, it provides a successful adaptation in life, while he points out that a positive adaptation to life can be considered both as one of the outcomes of resilience and as an antecedent and causes higher levels of resilience. He believes that this is due to the complex definition and procedural view to resilience [7].

Family resilience can be the result of factors inside and outside of the family [8]. Walsh [9] mentions three key processes of organizational models (cohesion and flexibility in the family), belief systems (values, beliefs, dominant attitudes in the family) and communicational processes (transfer process of beliefs, information exchange among the members) for the family resiliency [10]. The conducted studies reveal that some of the resilient people return to the normal level of performance after facing difficult life situations while some others promote compared to the past, after encountering failures, tragedies and difficulties [11]. The study findings [12-14] show that the characteristics of individual resilience plays an important role in marital satisfaction, couple's relations, decrease of marital stresses and increase of positive emotions.

In the field of applied psychology, several approaches such as relation therapy [15], cognitive-behavioral therapy, marital relation enrichment [16], image therapy [17], etc. have been studied and reviewed in order to decrease the conflicts, increase the couple's intimacy and adaptation and cope with problems related to them. Some of the theories such as theory of cybernetics, theory of systems, theory of learning, etc. have been used by family experts to treat families.

But family systematic approach is a new fact which helps explain surprising behaviors [18]. In dealing with family conflicts, this approach focuses on family communication patterns and conflict between competing hierarchies. Olson and Walsh are among the theorists of systematic approach and each study the family through offering a model and an approach [19].

Olson proposes the Circumplex model with a systematic view towards family. The important hypothesis of this model is that balanced couples and families intend to be more useful (action-oriented) as compared to imbalanced

systems. On this basis, in this model he focuses on three main dimensions of family and marital systems: family cohesion, familial and marital flexibility as well as familial and marital communication. Olson separates 16 types of families and puts them in three general groups of normal families, abnormal families and problematic families through combining two dimensions of cohesion and flexibility. He considers these two dimensions indicating marital and family satisfaction.

The other approach suggested in systematic therapy is Walsh Approach. In order to evaluate family dynamics and practical assessment along with special therapeutic recommendations, he plans a form and shape and proposes a comprehensive theory of personality as the common characteristics of all families [20]. In this approach, the goal is to identify and empower key interactional procedures that enable family to resist against disturbing life challenges and return to its natural state. This view helps call these families as challenged ones through looking at damaged families from the viewpoint of resilience and flexibility and consequently it emphasizes potential capabilities of these families to reconstruct and grow themselves. Walsh's Approach is based on the viewpoint that both individual and communicational abilities can be created by collective efforts in dealing with sudden crises or long-term hardships.

According to the above facts and studies that indicate that the structure and function of family is one of the most important determinants in the couple's psychological and individual adaptation and family members, and the fact that theorists of family therapy and physicians believe that the important function of family is to support the growth of members and for this purpose, family should be interested in the adaptation of its roles and regulations to the members' growth needs [21]. Also considering the fact that there has not been any conducted studies so far to investigate the effect of proposed models in family systematic approaches such as Olson Circumplex Model and Walsh Integrated Approach on other variables related to family especially couples, the present study intended to examine the effectiveness of Olson Circumplex Model and Walsh Integrated Approach on marital resilience and conflicts of couples.

Methodology

This study was an experimental study with a pretest-posttest and control group design. According to it, 30 couples with the qualifications specified by the researcher who referred to counselling offices in district 3 of Tehran in 2014 because of marital conflicts were randomly chosen as samples and were randomly put in three groups (two experimental groups and a control group). After being encountered and also after receiving the agreement of all couples, the resilience scale and marital conflict questionnaire were administered. Afterwards, 30 couples whose scores in the questionnaires were lower than the mean level and owned the qualifications specified by the researcher (age range of 30-40 years, marriage duration of 5 years, minimum education of high school diploma,

being interested in participating in the sessions, lack of any personality and mental disorders) were selected as samples and were put into three groups (two experimental groups and a control group).

After selecting the sample group and after randomly putting them in two experimental and a control group, each experimental group was put under the influence of independent variables (Olson and Walsh Approaches) within eight sixty-to-ninety minute sessions. Two weeks after the completion of training sessions and also 3 months after that, the resilience scale and marital conflicts questionnaire were once again administered on three groups as the posttest and follow-up, respectively.

Resilience scale (CD-RISC): A 25-item scale was developed by Conner and Davidson [11] by reviewing the research resources during 1979-1991 in the field of resilience in order to measure the power of coping with stress and threat. Questions are scored via Likert scale ranging from zero (quite wrong) to four (always correct) [11]. The maximum score in this questionnaire is 100 and the minimum is zero. The score of each subject is equal to the total score or total values obtained from each question. The degree of resilience for each subject is equal to the obtained raw score divided by 100 multiplied by 100. Mohammadi [22] has reported the reliability of this instrument 0.89 through Cronbach's alpha method. The validity of the scale was determined by using factor analysis method and calculation of each score and its comparison with the total score showed that except three questions, coefficients of other questions have been reported ranging from 0.14 to 0.64. In the study by Ebadatpour *et al.* [23] it has been calculated by Cronbach's alpha and has been reported 0.90.

Marital conflicts questionnaire (MCQ): A 54-question instrument was prepared by Sanaei, Barati and Boustanipour in order to evaluate the conflicts between husbands and wives. It evaluates and measures 8 dimensions of marital conflicts including reduced cooperation, reduced sexual relation, increased emotional reactions, increased support on the part of the children, increased individual relation with relatives, decreased family relations with the spouse's relatives and friends,

separation of financial affairs from each other and decreased effective relations [24]. Responding to the questions had been prepared on a 5-alternative basis (always = 5 to never = 1). Therefore, maximum and minimum scores of the questionnaire are 270 and 54, respectively. Questions of subscales include questions 4, 12, 18, 25 and 34 for reduced cooperation, questions 5, 13, 19, 35 and 40 for reduced sexual relation, questions 6, 14, 20, 27, 36, 42, 51 and 49 for increased emotional reactions, questions 9, 22, 31, 38 and 44 for the support on the part of the children, questions 8, 15, 21, 29, 37 and 43 for increased individual relation with relatives, questions 1, 23, 32, 46, 50, 53 for decreased individual relation with spouse's friends and relatives, questions 2, 10, 17, 24, 33, 39 and 48 for separating financial affairs from each other, questions 3, 7, 11, 16, 26, 28, 30, 41, 45, 47, 52 and 54 for reduced effective relation. The maximum score of each subscale is equal to the number of its questions multiplied by 5. In this questionnaire, higher scores means greater conflicts and lower scores means a better relation and less conflicts with each other [24]. The total validity of the questionnaire was reported 0.96 via Cronbach's alpha method on a 270 member group. Its 8 subscales were reported 0.81 for reduced cooperation, 0.61 for reduced sexual relation, 0.70 for increased emotional reactions, 0.33 for increased support on the part of the children, 0.86 for increased individual relation with relatives, 0.89 for decreased family relations with the spouse's relatives and friends, 0.71 for separation of financial affairs from each other and 0.69 for reduced effective relations [24].

Findings

The findings of the study in two descriptive and inferential levels were analyzed through SPSS21 software in a way that the mean and standard deviation were applied in the descriptive statistics section and the MANOVA was at an inferential level.

At the first step, the descriptive findings of the study variables are addressed.

Table 1. descriptive findings of the study variables in the experimental and control groups at the pretest, posttest and follow-up stages

variables	group	pretest		posttest		Follow-up	
		mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD
resilience	Olson experimental group	45/60	7/36	61/0	7/94	61/9	7/72
	Walsh experimental group	46/20	7/61	07/30	0/70	08/80	7/37
	Control group	40/30	7/08	40/00	7/0	44/2	7/93
Marital conflicts	Olson experimental group	139/9	9/13	123/60	10/41	122/70	10/08
	Walsh experimental group	140/7	10/14	129/60	7/20	129/1	7/21
	Control group	141/9	9/42	140/10	10/0	141/40	9/38

Before presenting the results of the MANOVA test, the presuppositions of parametric test were assessed. Accordingly, the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the presupposition of the normality of data sample distribution exists (p>0.05). Furthermore, the

presupposition of variance homogeneity, too, was assessed through the Levin test. Results showed that presupposition of variances of homogeneity was observed (P>0.05).

The results of inferential tables are addressed bellow.

Table 2. summary of the results of MANOVA with intra-group and inter-group factors in the variable of resilience

factors	Change sources	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Eta
Intra-group factor	Time stages	3387/233	1/37	2473/186	166/200	0/001	0/740
	Stages interaction #group	2100/467	2/739	786/906	02/898	0/001	0/60
Intra-group factor	group	4767/1	2	2383/00	22/2	0/001	0/438
	error	6119/9	07	107/367			

The results of table 2 show that regarding intra-group factor, the amount of the calculated F for the stages effect (pretest, posttest and follow-up) is significant (P<0.001). Consequently, there is a significant difference between mean scores of pretest, posttest and follow-up of the resilience (P<0.001). Moreover, for the inter-group factor, the amount of the calculated F is significant too (P<0.001).

Therefore there is a significant difference between the general mean of resilience in three groups (two experimental groups and a control group (p<0.001). The results of the Bonferroni follow-up test (multiple comparison) are presented to investigate the mean differences.

Table 3. summary of the Bonferroni follow-up test (multiple comparison) in the variable of resilience

Stages/ groups	Means difference	Standard error	Sig
stages	Pretest- posttest	0/668	0/001
	Pretest- follow-up	0/681	0/001
	Posttest- follow-up	0/331	1/00
groups	Walsh-Olson	1/892	0/020
	Walsh-control	1/892	0/001
	Olson-control	1/892	0/001

The results of table 3 show that there is a significant difference between resilience scores at the pretest and posttest as well as follow-up (P<0.001); however, the difference between posttest and follow-up scores is not significant (P>0.05). Moreover, results showed that there

is a significant difference between the methods taught through the Olson's Circumplex Model as well as the Walsh Integrated Approach and the control group (P>0.05).

Table 4. summary of the results mixed ANOVA with intra-group and inter-group factors in the variable of marital conflicts

factors	Change sources	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Eta
Intra-group factor	Time stages	3232/1	1/008	2010/207	98/804	0/001	0/734
	Stages interaction* group	2011/677	3/116	806/004	39/616	0/001	0/082
Intra-group factor	group	6161/33	2	3080/867	18/062	0/001	0/388
	error	9722/00	07	170/071			

The results of table 4 show that regarding the intra-group factor, the amount of calculated F for the effect of stages (pretest, posttest, and follow-up) is significant (P<0.001). Consequently, there is a significant difference between pretest, posttest and follow-up scores in the marital conflicts in three groups (P<0.001) and also the

amount of calculated F is significant for the inter-group factor (P<0.001). There is a significant difference between the general mean of marital conflicts in the three experimental and control groups (P<0.001). The results of the Bonferroni follow-up test (multiple comparison) are presented to investigate the differences in the means.

Table 5. summary of Bonferroni follow-up test (multiple comparison) in the variable of marital conflicts

Stages/ groups	Means difference	Standard error	Sig
stages	Pretest- posttest	0/801	0/001
	Pretest- follow-up	0/833	0/001
	Posttest- follow-up	0/499	0/414
groups	Walsh-Olson	2/384	0/466
	Walsh-control	2/384	0/001
	Olson-control	2/384	0/001

The results of table 5 show that there is a significant difference between marital conflicts scores at the pretest and posttest as well as follow-up ($P < 0.001$); but the difference of the posttest and follow-up scores is not significant ($P > 0.05$). Furthermore, the effect of experimental groups is significantly different from teaching Olson's Circumplex Model (multiple coordinate) and so is Walsh Integrated Approach with the control group ($P < 0.001$). Moreover, results revealed that Olson's Circumplex Model as well as the Walsh Integrated Approach did not significantly differ in the degree of effectiveness on marital conflicts ($P > 0.05$).

Discussion and conclusion

The present study was conducted aiming to determine the comparison of the effectiveness of Olson's Circumplex (multiple coordinate) Model and Walsh Integrated Approach on the couple's resilience and conflicts. Generally it can be pointed out that the results achieved from the present study showed that Olson's Circumplex Model (multiple coordinate) and Walsh Integrated Approach are effective on the increase of couples' marital resilience and their increase of conflicts ($P < 0.001$). Furthermore, the results of the Bonferroni follow-up test showed that there is no significant difference between the degree of these two approaches on the increase of resilience and decrease of the couples' marital conflicts ($P > 0.05$). The results of the present study in a more general scale are consistent to the results of the study by Khal'atbari and Bahari [25], Motahhari, Behzad Pour and Sohrabi [26], Kalvandi [27], Vandeleur *et al.* [28] and also the study by Adebayo & Oganlaye [29] who proved that there is a relationship between the family coherence and the adults' relationships. It should be mentioned that in order to compare the effectiveness of Walsh Integrated Approach with other carried out studies, there has not been any conducted studies.

In explaining the reason of the effect of Olson teaching Circumplex Model (multiple coordinate) and Walsh Integrated Approach on the couples' marital conflicts through referring to theoretical issues, it can be stated that Olson Circumplex Model concentrates on three major dimensions of familial and marital systems, i.e. family cohesion, family flexibility and family communication. Olson believes that the presence of medium degree of coherence and flexibility between the spouses or the family is necessary for their function efficiency.

When the coherence is high, family members want each other's development, happiness and welfare and when one gets entangled in a problem, they are ready to try their best to remove that problem. The other dimension of coherence from the viewpoint of Lingern is spending time and being with each other in the family. Families which do good in this regard, often plan for programs for the family members. Though it seems simple, it is actually quite hard, since family members usually allocate their "free time" to each other and when the members are busy doing the activities related to them or they are tired it is difficult for them to spend useful time for each other. Through teaching they can be assisted to be able to

control extravagance in these two grades. When the degree of coherence is very high (spun systems), agreement is very high in the family and independence is very low. In another degree of extravagance (separated), family members do their activities with the lowest dependence or commitment to their families. From the viewpoint of flexibility in the family, democratic family management causes all family members to participate in decision making. Balanced marital and familial systems (structured and flexible) tend to become more efficient in time.

A flexible relationship has an equalitarian leadership and a democratic approach for decision making. Negotiation is allowed and children are actively included. The roles are divided and changed when necessary. The multiple coordinate model shows a dimension of the family relation too. The existence of this dimension which is called the facilitating dimension is critical in facilitating the couples and families' movement in two dimensions of coherence and flexibility [30].

However, in explaining the effect of teaching the Olson Circumplex Model (multiple coordinate) and the Walsh Integrated Approach on the couples' resilience, it can be stated that in the patternistic approach the people are presented useful teaching about the methods of coping with relatives and modifying attitudes and the people's perception from relatives' speech and behaviour. Structural-therapeutic family interventions address creating change in doing homeworks in each family subsystem, from one hand, and modifying the status of family borders, from the other. Modifying the status of family borders is done in a way that in addition to information and feeling exchange, each spouse's individual identity is maintained. The therapist evaluates the change made in the organization and family regulations and attempts to enact flexible and suitable codes at the final stages of therapy and in case of the existence of coalition between family members employs different tactics to disturb coalitions. All in all, it can be stated that the changes are achieved from renovation interventions such as border-making, strengthening marital, parental and children subsystem; and teaching along with creating regulations appropriate for the life cycle of the family. According to the structural theory in the first years of marriage, conflict is made since each couple tries to transfer regulations, principles and models of his/her family border to the new family while they should have this skill and ability to alter their regulations, expectations and behavioral models in a way to be independent from their basic family and appropriate to the spouse's needs, expectations and regulations.

According to it, each time one spouse is placed in an undesirable condition due to high tension, weakness or the need to getting empowered, he/she decreases his/her tension through engaging a third person (children) who supports him/her. Family children, are more at the risk of such wills [31]. Patternistic family therapy helps the couples manage and resolve the conflict through creating rational relationship in coping with conflicts and making reconstructive communication instead of triangulation

and making coalition with their children.

Using reconstructive stages to solve the problem and applying affection, feelings and controlling negative emotions and their reciprocal effect on each other have an important role in decreasing conflicts and their dimensions and decreasing emotional reactions. Based on patternistic family therapy, each spouse's emotional reactions against the other can be timed in a way that they are also able to discharge their emotions. This act causes both destroying in-family hierarchy and avoiding expressing violence and other hostile activities and presenting rational and acceptable behaviors to replace these activities.

The present study faced geographical limitations (doing the study in Tehran), limitation of educational range (researching on people with diploma and above) and limitation of age range (researching on the people with an age range of 30-40 years).

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