

Effectiveness of training the McMaster model on mindfulness and marital conflicts of couples

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Abstract

Introduction: This research was conducted with the goal of determining the effectiveness of training the McMaster Model on mindfulness and marital conflicts of couples.

Method: In this quasi-experimental method, among those couples who had referred to Iran Social Work Clinic due to marital conflicts during 2014 (70 couples), 20 couples who met the requirements were selected as the research sample on a randomly substitution basis and were placed in two groups (test and witness). The experimental group was trained under the McMaster training model during 10 sessions each 90-120 minutes. The Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) scale and Marital Conflicts Questionnaire (MCQ) were used as the research tool in three stages, namely pretest, posttest and follow-up.

Results: The findings of this research showed that there is a significant difference between the marks of test and control groups in immediacy and marital conflicts as compared to control group; i.e., training the McMaster model has increased mindfulness and decreased marital conflicts between the couples and this effect is durable over time.

Conclusion: Therefore, considering the research findings, it can be concluded that McMaster model can be used as an intervention method by couple therapists and family therapists.

Keywords: McMaster Model, Mindfulness, Marital Conflicts

Introduction

Marriage is the origin of the family life cycle creation [1] and indicates the creation of man and woman for each other. This is while sometimes, due to some reasons couples tend to separate from each other. In fact in the process of family life cycle, some problems and challenges would come up that could prevent peace, even for a period of time. Such issues in micro levels is related to the family structure and function and in macro levels is to social structures [2]. Regardless of the reasons to deprive peace in the family, the couples in current societies are facing many problems to make close relations and realize the feeling on behalf of each other, so one of the common problems in the family is the marital conflict [3]. Conflict is natural and inevitable and the process for conflict solution includes various directions which may lead to appropriate or destructive results [4]. During the growth of the marriage relation, the couples face conflicts that evaluate the stability of their marriage [5]. Marital conflict usually occurs in terms of the conflict between wife and husband which indicates different concerns. It originates when one of the spouses decides to achieve the goal of the other[6]. The quality of the relationship between a wife and husband is the most predictive factor for family strength and it helps in maintaining the

relations between the couples. Nowadays, decrease or lack of marital satisfaction or in the other words, marital conflicts is one of the most prominent reasons of couples' referral to the consultants or family therapists [7]. It seems that one of the effective factors in the occurrence of conflicts between the couples includes the subjects and contents of their thoughts. In other words, since each of the spouses has his/her own thoughts and mental models, they may face conflicts in their relations. This issue will be discussed in the present research as mindfulness.

Mindfulness defined as special and unbiased attention to the present [8]. In another definition by *Kabat Zin* 1995, mindfulness is considered as a balanced and unbiased judgment from the awareness which helps to clarity and accept the physical phenomena and acceptance of excitements [9]. *Sigal, Williams, Mark and Tesdel* [10] define mindfulness as the status in which we are with what exists, without any judgment and comments on what happens; i.e.: experiencing the absolute truth without any explanation. According to *Segal, Williams and Tizdels* point of view [11], mindfulness needs a growth in three qualities of "judgment prevention", "purposeful awareness" and "focus on current moment"; and leads to concentration on the present moment and processing all the aspects of immediate experience including cognitive, physiological or behavioral activities.

Cognitive, health and mental health disorders are considered to be affiliated to the method of perception and interpretation of individuals from the world or particularly to the surrounding environment [12]. The more the perception of individuals from the surrounding environment and its reflection in the mind is closer to reality, the closer the relations of individuals will be with the surrounding environment. This is while their reactions would become much more logical towards events and mental health. Irrespective of the extent of optimism or pessimism, individuals' feedbacks to themselves or to the world play an important role in their vulnerability to psychological stresses. Emotional responses are significantly influenced by the perception of individuals. The perception through cognitive distortions may result in orientation towards evaluation and judgment about events [13]. It can be said that this also applies to the relation between the spouses and can result in their satisfaction or conflict [14]. There are several couples who have no other way except divorcing thanks to insignificance issues, inability to understand the problems or to solve them, negative or illogical perception of happenings in life or even due to inability to come along with the thoughts or problems of their lives. If these problems are understood and removed, couples can better understand life realities and can protect their life from divorce. Several models have been developed and have been widely used in parallel with providing a mental integration in the treatment of families and couples. In general, the approach of integrated family therapy emphasizes the increase of self-awareness in family members through acting in the present time and place. Basic presumptions of these approaches includes the fact that individuals of families are not aware of their

excitements or if they are aware, they suppress them. Thanks to such tendency, they have no feelings or otherwise they do not show their feelings and therefore, an atmosphere of emotional death emerges which results in disease signs in one or more family members [15]. One of the integrated theoretical approaches seeking to explain and solve marital conflicts is the systematic approach. Based on this approach, one of the variables in which family is reviewed in different fields is the family function which is one of the causes of marital conflicts and results in divorce [16]. The *McMaster* model is one of the experimental approaches which is based on a systematic approach and has been evaluated in family therapy to evaluate family function and its role in marital conflicts. In this model, the structure, organization and transactional patterns of family are reviewed. The basic principles of this model include the relation between the sections and elements of family, the non-understandable nature of an element separated from other elements of the family, the important role of structure and transactional patterns of family in determining and forming the behavior of family members and the fact that the family function is something more than the function of its total elements. The *McMaster* model classifies family function into three classes, namely basic tasks, developmental tasks and the issues related to family stages and risky events. According to the *McMaster* model, the important aspects of family function include problem solving, relations, roles, emotional responding, emotional involvement and behavior control [17]. All families with weak functions have problems in emotional subjects and most of them are not able to pass through the stage of problem-solving. In these families, relations are neglected or are considered as without any competency, specialty and response of role are not clear, the range of emotional reactions are limited and the quality and quantity of these reactions are abnormal proportional to the context and environment. At the same time, family members do not like each other and they do not enter any emotional relationship with each other [18]. The studies conducted on discordant couples show that low function of family is also effective in the emergence of marital conflicts. Evidence shows that the quality of family relations is different in divorce and non-divorce families, in the manner that marital conflicts in divorce families are one of the factors of divorce [19]. Therefore, relying on the above subjects and also considering the increasing rate of divorce, statistics show that divorce is increasing per year and since appropriate relations and function of family are necessary for the health of individuals, family and community [20], the present research was conducted with the goal of determining the effectiveness of training the *McMaster* model on mindfulness and marital conflicts.

Method

The present research was an experimental survey (pretest-posttest type) with a witness group which was conducted to study the effectiveness of training the *McMaster* model on mindfulness and marital conflicts. For this purpose, among those couples who had referred to

Iran Social Work Clinic due to marital conflicts during 2014 (70 couples), 20 couples who met the requirements were selected as the research sample on a randomly substitution basis and were placed in two groups (test and witness). The conditions required in this research included: Age range of 30-45; Marriage duration of 7- 20 years; Bachelor’s degree and higher; Lack of any personality and metal disorders; Capability and interest in regularly participation in the sessions

The mindfulness and marital conflict questionnaires were executed for each of the

couples. Considering the average marks of couples in the questionnaire, the sample group of the research was selected and its members were randomly placed in test and witness groups (10 couples in each group). The experimental group was trained in the Iran Social Work Clinic within ten sessions each for 90-120 minutes.

The summary of educational sessions is as following (Table 1):

Table1. Summary of Educational Sessions

Sessions	Content
The first session (familiarization and making relation):	familiarization of the members with the teacher and the others, making good relation and creating a trusty , security, collaboration and intimacy, specifying the importance of the issue for the members, the goals of holding the sessions and familiarization with the regulations of the group, familiarization with the general framework of work and family functioning pattern (Mcmaster) and signing a contract and creating commitment for the regular cooperation and attendance in the sessions.
The second session (problem solving):	familiarization with the effect of attitude in self in solving issues, recognizing the process of problem solving , the process of problem solving, the preventing elements of problem solving and educating the methods to face the financial problems and issues(for an example of issues, attention to the opinion of other members in the sample group)
The third session (relation):	familiarization with the importance of an effective marital relation, the obstacles and errors for an effective relation, explaining the different types of problems in three fields of (issue, personal and occasional), familiarization with the responsibilities of men and women in the creation of intimacy and also the familiarization with the effect of different contacts (Verbal, visual and tactile) and their role in creating intimacy.
The fourth session (relation):	familiarization with the styles of negotiation skills and the effect of each style on intimacy, familiarization with negotiation skills, familiarization with the laws related to the speaker and the listener and also familiarization with the effective factors on the quality of the negotiation.
The fifth session (the roles):	training how to react the sexual roles (fair), training to make behavioral contracts, training how to react the Family-of-Origin main families and managing the family system.
The sixth session (the emotional responsiveness):	observing the goal and the importance of sexual relation and the role in the intimacy of the couples, the familiarization with different sexual desires of men and women, the familiarization with different types of relation and its importance, training the practical techniques to express affection, familiarization with the responsibility of men and women and familiarization with the common responsibilities in the marital relation.
The seventh session (the emotional responsiveness):	training how to recognize and predict irritating occasions, training how to think about the consequences of irritation before expressing or in proper occasion, the familiarization with the main reasons of irritation among the couples, presenting some strategies to react to an aggressive spouse and also presenting some recommendations to the partner of an aggressive spouse.
The eighth session (the emotional conflict):	training and improving the empathic conflict among the couples, moving to life freely but by cooperation and sympathy, cooperation in the activities and recognition of privacy and enjoying it.
The ninth session (the behavior control):	familiarization with acceptable behavioral standards, creating flexibility or tolerance for adherence to standards and termination of verbal and psychological violence and relationship based on respect.
The tenth session (closing):	observing the rate of efficacy and the effectiveness of trainings, recognizing the practical obstacles of teachings, presenting the general strategies and recommendations for the couples and the implementation after the test.

FFMQ and MCQ questionnaires were used to review the effectiveness of training the McMaster model on mindfulness and marital conflicts of couples.

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ): Is a 39-item self-assessment scale which has been developed by Baer *et al.*(2006) through the incorporation of the items of the FMI questionnaire (Walach *et al.*, 2006), MAAS scale (Brown and Rian, 2003), *KIMS*scale (Baer and Smith, 2004) and FFMQ questionnaire (Baer *et al.*) by using factor analysis approach. The questions were answered through a 5-grade scale from (Never and/or quite rarely) to 5 (often or always). The range of marks in this scale is 39-195 and by summing each subscale up a general mark is

achieve which indicates that the higher the mark is, the higher mindfulness will be. Based on the results, internal similarity of factors is appropriate and alpha coefficient is within a range of 0.75 (in non-reflexive factor) to 0.91 (in description factor). The correlation between factors was average and it was significant in all cases in a range of 0.15 to 0.34 [21]. Moreover, in a study conducted on the validity and reliability of this questionnaire in Iran, the correlation coefficients of test-retest of FFMQ questionnaire in the Iranian sample were seen to be between $r=0.57$ (for the non-judgmental factor) and $r=0.84$ (observation factor). Also, alpha coefficients were obtained in a reasonable level (between $a=0.55$ for the

non-reflexive factor and $\alpha=0.83$ for the descriptive factor) [22].

Marital Conflicts Questionnaire (MCQ): A 54-question instrument that has been prepared by *Sanaei, Barati* and *Boostanipour* to evaluate marital conflicts. This questionnaire evaluates and measures 8 aspects of marital conflicts which include decreased cooperation, decreased sexual relation, increased emotional reactions, increased attraction of children's support, increased individual relation with relatives, decrease in family relations with relatives of spouse and friends, separation of financial affairs and decrease of effective relation. Answers to the questions have been prepared in five options (always=5 to never=1). Therefore, the total maximum score of the questionnaire is 270 and minimum score is 54. In this questionnaire, higher marks indicate more conflicts and lower marks indicate a better relation and fewer conflicts. The general validity of the questionnaire was reported 0.96 by using Cronbach's alpha for a group with 270 members and its subscales have been reported as follows: 0.81 for decreased cooperation, 0.61 for decreased sexual relation, 0.70 for emotional reactions, 0.33 for the increase in attracting the support of children, 0.86 for increased individual relation with relatives, 0.89 for decreased family relation with relatives and friends, 0.71 for separating financial affairs and 0.69 for decrease of effective factor [23]. Upon completion of training sessions and 3 months after that, the intended questionnaires were executed for each group once again. At the end, the data collected from pretest-posttest and follow-up test (3-month) was analyzed by using variance analysis test with repeated measurements.

It is clear that in order to observe the moral principles of the research, after explaining the goals of research in the field of secrecy of information, the subjects were pointed to collect their data just for the study, so there would be no need to consider their names and surnames above the questionnaire and the subjects were specified by codes.

Also the subjects were pointed that any question related to the method of working would be answered and they were free to cancel their satisfaction and lack of cooperation during the sessions in each section.

Results

In the present research, after collecting and extracting data, the results were analyzed by using descriptive statistics (calculation of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics methods (variance analysis with repeated measurements).

In this section, some of the results are presented in the following tables.

The results in table 2 show that in the McMaster model, the mean of mindfulness in experimental group is 100.7, 119 in posttest and 118.2 in follow-up. Moreover, it is 108 in the pretest of control group, 107.2 in the post test and 107.4 in follow-up. The mean of marital conflicts is 139.6 in pretest of experimental group, 120 in posttest and 115 in the follow-up and 139.2 in the pretest of control group, 138.2 in posttest and 108.3 in follow-up.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to review the normality of mindfulness and marital conflicts in training the McMaster model and *Fieldman* approach. Results are presented in table 3.

Z in Kolmogorov-Smirnov test related to normality of distribution of mindfulness and marital conflicts show that distribution of marks is not different with normal distribution of these aspects ($P>0.05$).

Having in mind the results of the above table, F meaningful level is smaller than 0.01 alpha in two variables (mindfulness and marital conflict) Therefore, it can be concluded that after omission of pretest effect, there is a significant difference between test and control groups. In other words, training the McMaster function model was effective on mindfulness and marital conflict of the couples and it increased mindfulness and decreased marital conflict in the subjects of the experimental group.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of pretest, posttest and follow-up of mindfulness and marital conflicts of subjects in test and control groups

Variables	Group	Pretest		Posttest		Follow-up		
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
McMaster Model	Mindfulness	Test	100.7	9.16	119	11.38	118.2	9.63
		Control	108	13.27	107.2	11.97	107.4	11.52
	Marital Conflicts	Test	139.6	5.08	120	11.37	115.5	9.77
		Control	139.2	4.04	138.2	5.32	138.3	3.97
Flamen Model	Mindfulness	Test	101.9	7.93	109.3	7.21	108.6	7.77
		Control	108	13.27	108	11.97	107.4	11.52
	Marital Conflicts	Test	139.2	7.36	130.1	8.84	130.7	8.28
		Control	139.2	4.04	138.2	5.32	138.3	3.97

Table 3. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for mindfulness and marital status

	Scale	Z	Significance
McMaster	Mindfulness	0.126	0.200
	Marital Conflicts	0.186	0.069

Table 4. Summary of the results of covariance analysis related to training the McMaster function model on mindfulness and marital conflicts of the couples

variable	Source of Changes	Total Squares	Freedom Degree	Mean Squares	F	Effect Size	Test Strength
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Mindfulness	Posttest	1409.453	1	1409.453	26.105**	0.606	0.99
	Error	917.870	17	53.992			
	Total	258986	20				
Marital Conflicts	Posttest	328.050	1	328.050	27.693**	0/62	0/99
	Error	201.383	17	11.846			
	Total	361213	20				

**P<0.01

Table 5. Summary of variance analysis with repeated measures in variables of mindfulness and marital conflict

variable	Source of Changes	Total Squares	Freedom Degree	Mean Squares	F	Effect Size
Mindfulness	Trial Operation (Pretest, Posttest, Follow-up)	2139.267	1.218	1756.31	32.519**	0.706
	Remaining	592.067	10.962	54.01		
Marital Conflicts	Trial Operation (Pretest, Posttest, Follow-up)	518.067	2	259.033	25.341**	0.797
	Remaining	131.933	18	7.33		

**P<0.01

Table 6. Homogenous Subgroups (Mindfulness)

Variable	Test Execution Turn	Qty.	Subgroups (Difference of Means)	
Mindfulness			1	2
	Pretest-Posttest	10	*-18.3	
	Pretest-Follow-up	10	*-17.5	
	Posttest-Follow-up	10		0.80
Marital Conflicts			1	2
	Pretest-Posttest	10	* 9.1	
	Pretest-Follow-up	10	*8.5	
	Posttest-Follow-up	10		-0.6

* P<0.05

Since index F calculated both variables of mindfulness and marital conflict in a level of 0.01 is significant, there is therefore a significant difference between means of subjects in three turns of execution.

Considering the extracted subgroups, in both variables of mindfulness and marital conflict it can be concluded that the means of test marks between two turns of execution (posttest and follow-up) after training McMaster function model have no statistical differences, but the mean of these two execution turns is statistically different from the means of pretest marks. This means that training the McMaster model increases (this increase is durable over time) mindfulness and decreases the conflicts of the couples.

Discussion

Today, the increasing outbreak of marital incompatibilities and its connection with physical and mental helath of couples and their children from one hand and extensive evidence of family therapy and couple therapy in removing marital problems on the other hand have caused family therapy to be considered as one of the main elements of treatment services[24]. The importance of health in different fields of family function and the establishment of safe and perfect relations between the couples and children in parallel with enhancing an emotional space and agreement of exchange parties are to such extent that they will guarantee safe marital relations and survival and stability of the family [25]. On this basis, the present study was conducted with the goal of determining the effectiveness of the McMaster model on mindfulness increase and marital conflicts decrease between the spouses. The results obtained from the

research data showed that training the McMaster model increases mindfulness and decreases marital conflicts of the spouses and this effect remain over time.

The results of the present study have a meaningful relation with the results gained from *Bakhshi-poor et al's* study [26] between the function of family (based on the pattern of McMaster) and the elements of marital conflicts. The study of *Jahangir* [27] indicated the relation between family functioning (based on the McMaster) and marital satisfaction of women. The studies of *Erkister* and *Stivenson* [28], *Ports et al.*[29] indicated the relation between the family roles and emotional cooperation, behavioral control and emotional cooperation in McMaster pattern with divorce and social compatibility. Results gained from *Yusefi and Sohrabi* [30], *Lorent et al.*[31], *Ma et al.*[32], *Burpee and Longer* [33], *Kim and Martin* [34] and *Namchak and Olson's* [35] study revealed a meaningful relation between mindfulness and the quality of sexual relation and the sexual satisfaction of couples.

Family function is the reflection of flexibility and survival of borders, communication models, experience of the main family and the current texture including cultural and value-based orientations of family adaptive function including good relations between family members with low levels of family conflicts [36]. Efficiency of the couples in different aspects of family such as problem solving, establishment of normal relations, explicit exchange of emotions, determination, allocation and agreement on the assigned roles, satisfaction of emotional needs and concerns of family members for each other, supervision and control on the behaviors of a member requires a sincere atmosphere free from threats and full of

agreement and coordination between the exchange parties in the aforesaid subjects, an issue which in turn results in more efficiency of family in different aspects of life, provides a normal and elevating cycle towards growth and development of family and finally results in decreased conflicts between the couples and family members [25].

Conclusion

The present study was conducted in line with the expansion and increasing the mindfulness of the couples and decreasing the marital conflicts of them. Results show that couples therapy based on the McMaster treatment protocols could increase mindfulness and reduce marital conflict with a lasting effect over time. The McMaster model reveals family adaptive skills leading to its evolution and functions realization, and the aspects of this pattern show optimum status of family in solving a problem, relation, roles, emotional reactions and emotional intercourse. Therefore, the families with the optimum level of these aspects, enjoy more efficiency and this status decreases the strength of family conflicting factors and so, the couple move to more positive and efficient interactions and do not face conflicts. In the present study, by educating the McMaster model based on each of the available structures, an obstacle against the factors causing conflict between the couples was created. Therefore, the results of the present study have validated the efficacy of McMaster's model.

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