Clinical Trial Protocol
Iranian Registry of Clinical Trials

08 Nov 2026

The comparison of the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment-Based Couple Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy on emotional empathy, sexual self-esteem, relationship quality, and trust in couples with emotional divorce

Protocol summary

Study aim
Comparison of the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment-based Couple Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy on emotional empathy, sexual self-esteem, relationship quality, and trust in couples with emotional divorce.

Design
A controlled clinical trial with parallel groups, double-blind, selected using purposive sampling. The sample size consists of 45 couples who are assigned by simple randomization into three groups of 15 couples each.

Settings and conduct
This study will use a field experimental research method and an extensive pre-test and post-test design with a follow-up phase. All participants, clinical caregivers, and evaluators who interpret the data will be kept confidential and all participants will be given pseudonyms

Participants/Inclusion and exclusion criteria
Inclusion criteria Be at least 25 and at most 45 years old. Have been married for at least 5 years. Have at least a high school diploma. Be willing to cooperate and participate in couple therapy sessions. Exclusion criteria Have psychiatric disorders and use psychiatric medications. Have physical problems that interfere with the intervention process.

Intervention groups
Intervention Group 1: Acceptance and Commitment-Based Couple Therapy based on the therapeutic package of Eifert and Forsyth (2005), implemented in 8 sessions of 90 minutes over one month. Intervention Group 2: Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy sessions based on the approach of Epstein and Baucom (2002; cited in Salehi et al., 2021), implemented for the experimental group in 10 sessions of 90 minutes. Control Group: Receive no intervention.

Main outcome variables
Emotional empathy; sexual self-esteem; marital relationship quality; trust in marital relationships

General information

Reason for update
Acronym
IRCT registration information
IRCT registration number: **IRCT20260429069210N1**
Registration date: **2026-05-04, 1405/02/14**
Registration timing: **prospective**

Last update: **2026-05-04, 1405/02/14**
Update count: **0**
Registration date
2026-05-04, 1405/02/14

Registrant information
Name
Jafar kardooni
Name of organization / entity
Country
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
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Recruitment status
Recruitment complete
Funding source

Expected recruitment start date
2026-06-05, 1405/03/15
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 comparison of the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment-Based Couple Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy on emotional empathy, sexual self-esteem, relationship quality, and trust in couples with emotional divorce

Public title
Comparison of the effectiveness of couple therapy
Purpose
Education/Guidance
Inclusion/Exclusion criteria
Inclusion criteria:
Be at least 25 and at most 45 years old. Have been married for at least 5 years. Have at least a high school diploma. Be willing to cooperate and participate in couple therapy sessions.
Exclusion criteria:
Have psychiatric disorders and use psychiatric medications. Have physical problems that interfere with the intervention process.
Age
From **25 years** old to **45 years** old
Gender
Both

Phase
N/A
Groups that have been masked

- Care provider
- Investigator
- Outcome assessor
- Data analyser

Sample size
Target sample size: **90**
More than 1 sample in each individual
Number of samples in each individual: **2**
Each sample consists of a couple (wife and husband).
Randomization (investigator's opinion)
Randomized
Randomization description
In this research, to achieve completely random allocation and eliminate any researcher interference or bias, a simple randomization method will be used. First, a complete list of couples referring to the counseling center who meet the inclusion criteria of the study will be prepared. Then, an initial numerical identification code will be assigned to each of these couples. These codes will be entered into the Random Number Generator software. The software will generate a unique random number for each couple. After the numbers are generated, the participants will be listed in ascending order based on the value of the random number. Then, sequentially, the first to fifteenth couples in the list will be assigned to the first experimental group, the sixteenth to thirtieth couples to the second experimental group, and the thirty-first to forty-fifth couples to the control group. This process will be designed in such a way that the order of entry or the researcher's knowledge of the participants will have no role in the allocation, and it will not be possible to predict each individual's group before the completion of randomization.
Blinding (investigator's opinion)
Double blinded
Blinding description
In this study, the researchers, clinical caregivers, outcome assessors, and data analysts will be blinded to the allocation of the study groups.
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
Ahvaz
Province
Khouzestan
Postal code
6134937333
Approval date
2026-02-23, 1404/12/04
Ethics committee reference number
IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1405.006

Health conditions studied

1

Description of health condition studied
Marital problems of couples
ICD-10 code
Z63.0
ICD-10 code description
Problems in relationship with spouse or partner

Primary outcomes

1

Description
Emotional empathy
Timepoint

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

Method of measurement

Mehrabian and Epstein Emotional Empathy Questionnaire (1972)

2

Description

Sexual self-esteem

Timepoint

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

Method of measurement

Snell et al. Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire (1989)

3

Description

Marital relationship quality

Timepoint

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

Method of measurement

Busby et al. Marital Quality Scale (1995)

4

Description

Trust in marital relationships

Timepoint

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

Method of measurement

Interpersonal Trust Questionnaire (Rempel & Holmes, 1985)

Secondary outcomes

empty

Intervention groups

1

Description

Intervention group: Acceptance and Commitment-based Couple Therapy is a novel therapeutic approach in the field of couple psychotherapy that focuses on the acceptance of emotional and cognitive experiences, psychological flexibility, and acting based on individual and shared values in the relationship. This approach helps couples, by reducing experiential avoidance and impulsive reactions to negative emotions and thoughts, to have mindful presence in the moment and focus on relational values and goals, shifting their interactions from maladaptive and emotionally distant patterns toward constructive, empathic, and committed behaviors. In this framework, the main goal of the therapy is not to change the content or intensity of thoughts and emotions, but rather to change the individual's relationship with these experiences and to enhance effective functioning in the marital relationship (Forman & Herbert, 2018). The sessions in this study are based on the book "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy" (based on the Acceptance and Commitment therapeutic package) designed by Eifert & Forsyth (2005). The intervention will be conducted in 8 sessions, each 90 minutes long, over the course of one month. In addition, this protocol was translated by Feyzi et al. (2020)

Category

Behavior

2

Description

Intervention group: Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy is an advanced and integrative approach that provides empirical strategies for treating marital distress and also individual psychopathology within a distressed relationship (Epstein & Dattilio, 2020; cited in Salehi et al., 2021). In this study, the intervention will be implemented as Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy sessions (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; cited in Salehi et al., 2021) in 10 one-and-a-half-hour sessions for the experimental group.

Category

Behavior

3

Description

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

Category

N/A

Recruitment centers

1

Recruitment center

Name of recruitment center

Shahid Baghaei Hospital Counseling Center

Full name of responsible person

Jafar kardooni

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Sponsors / Funding sources

1

Sponsor
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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
Private
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

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Person responsible for updating data

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Sharing plan

Deidentified Individual Participant Data Set (IPD)
Undecided - It is not yet known if there will be a plan to make this available

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