Effectiveness of the I-Thou Communication Training on the Marital Communication of the Iranian Women

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/siti_hassan/19/
Effectiveness of the I-Thou Communication Training on the Marital Communication of the Iranian Women

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Abstract

Having a good and healthy marriage is what everybody longs for. Such a desire induces the counselling trainers to hold different workshops for the interested people, in order to increase their marital preparation and knowledge. In this regard, many counsellors have shown a great deal of concern to devise new models in favour of such people. Indeed, from the counselling perspective, creating efficient models to enhance the quality of life is a milestone. I-Thou communication model which is based on the Martin Buber’s philosophical premises has the potential capabilities of a model to be utilized for the couples. However, as far as the current findings are concern, there has not been any research carried out to evaluate the consequences of applying the I-Thou communication. Therefore, this study made use of I-Thou communication model as a training model over a sample of 50 Iranian women. During the course of 3 sessions where they received a training based on the principles of the I-Thou communication model. The findings of the current research have revealed that for those who had participated in the training, a significant increase in their marital communication was observed.

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Keywords: I-Thou communication Training, Marital Communication, Iranian Women;

1. Introduction

Marital health is considered as an important part of every social structure of a well-functioning community. Undoubtedly, increasing incidents of divorce and separation, single parent families, and remarriage bring fundamental problems such as juvenile delinquencies, familial or sexual abuse, and violence to the society as well as the family units. Although, there are so many factors influencing the divorce, but undesirable communication is generally regarded as a common factor (Sprajcar, 2004). Indeed, the quality of communication during a matrimonial state of living is the key factor for the persistence of a qualified marriage (Halford, 2003; Heffner, et al., 2006). Lamanna and Riedman (1994) have also pointed out that for most of the cases, an unhappy marriage is caused by...
the partners’ failure to manage their marital communication. Failure to do so has been regarded by Whisman, Uebelacker, and Weinstock (2004) as the typical source of stress and anxiety, lower levels of marital communication, and eventually divorce. Therefore, finding and providing reliable theories and models to increase the quality of marital communication is an essential concern among the family counsellors and psychologists. There are diversities of communication models applied to increase the quality of the marital communication. Virginia Satir (1916–1988) who is known as one the pioneer masterminds of the family therapy (Tam, 2006) has created a model in this regard (Satir, 1983). She has identified four distinct elements in her model as: self-esteem, congruency, responsibility, and decision making (Lum, 2002; Satir, 1983). Among them, she has given the self-esteem and congruency elements a special care. In her opinion, low levels of self esteem eventually lead to mental problems such as family dysfunction, personality disorder, and depression (Cheung & Chan, 2002; Tam, 2006). Congruency refers to a clear, direct, honest, and out of respect communication (Cheung & Chan, 2002; Loeschen, 1991; Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991).

Another well known model for marital communication is the one represented by Bowen (1913-1990) which is regarded as the differentiation of self. He believed that there are two levels of differentiation (Bowen, 1974). The ‘Intrapsychic’ level is the first level which enables a person to differentiate between the emotional and intellectual functionings and the realm of his/her choices to determine the type of appropriate behavior in any situation. The second level is the ‘Interpersonal’ one which enables a person to manage his/her individuality (separation) as well as companionship (connection) during the communication. Those who enjoy a stronger sense of differentiation are more capable of taking the I-positions, maintaining a sense of selfness during the interactions, compromising, and remaining calm (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). They are more intimate and autonomous and are more flexible during the transactions compared to those with less degrees of such a sense of differentiation (Gubbins, Perosa, & Bartle-Haring, 2010).

Regarding Buber (1878–1965), although there are some possibilities in his writings, as far as the human knowledge concerns, there exists no such model based on the Buber’s I-Thou communication theory to be applied for those who are interested to increase their quality of marital communication. It seems that couples, if using the I-Thou communication principles, are more likely to come across brilliant communications in regard with their livings and consequently continuing their marital lives successfully. Buber (1958) explained that the human beings have got two distinct types of communications; I-Thou communication, and I-It communication. I-You communication is a type of interaction forms between two human beings, and the I-It is the one appears between a human being and an animal, or a human being and an object. When using ‘I’, it refers to ‘It’ or ‘Thou’. Regardless of what goes after ‘I’, there has never been any uncertainty about the meaning of ‘I’. Therefore, either using ‘Thou’ or ‘It’, ‘I’ is represented as the one side of the two primary components (Buber, 1958). From this perspective, ‘It’ refers only to an essence, while ‘You’ similar to ‘I’ creates such an essence during one’s life when communicating with the others. Moreover, ‘You’ and ‘I’ are both unique, singular and irreplaceable, but ‘It’ can be changed and is neither singular nor unique, meaning that it is impossible to replace anyone with another (Heidegger, 1962; Macquarrie, 1972; Sartre, 1953). Furthermore, objects as referred by ‘It’, unlike human beings bear no willpower or aspiration. They may not try, hope, or wish to be anything other than what they are. Indeed, they barely possess a solid existence (Warmock, 1967), and hence, may never expect the human beings to pay attention to them when no such feelings are possesses by them. Indeed, ‘You’ values ‘It’ only insofar ‘It’ benefits from or serves the purposes of ‘You’. On the other hand, in case of an I-Thou type of communication, Buber (1958) described the essential attitude that human beings express towards each other; a respectful relationship in which the other person’s existence is regarded as a natural value. Additionally, I-You communication always relies on the intercommunication or dialogue between the individuals which is an impossible practice in an I-It relationship. Characteristics such as presenting for each other, disregarding each other as a proprietary being, believing in the others’ rights of having individual freedom, and admitting the others’ ideas which have important roles in the quality of the marital communication (Gubbins, et al., 2010; Rauer & Volling, 2005) have all been outlined in the I-Thou communication standards (Adams, 2007). Everyone should be highly valued and be granted to experience a joyful life (M Friedman, 1993). Additionally, as Buber (1958) described, from the I-Thou communication point of view, love may only be formed during an I-Thou relationship, and therefore someone who does not care about the relationship, might not comprehend the meaning of
love either. He pointed out that any couples instituting an I-It relationship in their life degrade their spouse since that type of relationship motivates them to ignore their charming relationships. Fitzpatrick and Noller (1993) stated that I-Thou communication is a kind of problem-solving technique. It involves the couples to openly and directly express their feelings, exploring the sources of the conflict, clarifying the misunderstandings and looking for a solution that satisfies both parties (Gubbins, et al., 2010). Furthermore, it has been stated that being totally present and open to each other leads to a highly positive apprehension (May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958). It means that human beings, during an authentic encounter are able to make a real communication and a brilliant relatedness to others. In this regard, existential needs such as love, finding the meaning of life, human relatedness, and freedom from deception are all highlighted during matrimonial as well as the individual states of life. In brief, this line of thought opens a new door where marital communication is concerned. Undoubtedly, the aforementioned opportunities in I-Thou communication can help the couples to change any dysfunctional patterns of interaction (Lantz, 1996).

It seems that it is the responsibility of the counsellors to help the couples to become informed about the existence of such a model of communication. Deurzen and Smith (1999) has eloquently expressed:

“The patient’s account of herself and her relation to others might be confused and incoherent, but it is for the therapist to clean it up and “reframe” it rather than impose explanatory systems that bear no resemblance to the patient’s world-view” (p. 220).

Nevertheless, some counsellors and psychologists have employed the principles presented by the I-Thou communication for other purposes apart from those of the communication model of the matrimony (See: Cooper, 2003b; Etzioni, 1999; Maurice Friedman, 2002; Lantz, 1999; Sloan, 2002; Ventimiglia, 2008). Cooper (2003a, p. 150) has emphasized that the Buber’s concept of the I-Thou approach has yet to be developed into a fully comprehensive therapeutic system. Indeed, the absence of the I-Thou communication model which mainly points out some of the key concepts of a successful marital life from a new point of view, has been observed among the various models concerning the improvement of the quality of the marital communication. That is why further research is required to be conducted in order to apply the model in the hope of the reduction of the divorce rates, and the elevation of the quality of the communication among the couples. Throughout the training sessions, since it was highly important to do and act in a manner to prevent the I-Thou relationship to be reduced to the I-It one, the participants were assisted to become aware of the criteria for differentiating between the two kinds of communication, namely the I-Thou and the I-It communications.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The aim of the current experimental research was to illuminate the effects of the I-Thou Communication Training on the marital communication among the Iranian women. The research is classified as an experimental one where a randomized control group of a pretest-posttest design was established by employing the same pretest and posttest for both the experimental and the control groups.
2.2. Participants

The population considered for the research was selected from the Iranian women assembled by the Marzdaran Health House Center’s running advertisement. The center is located in the second municipality area of Tehran. The samples used in this research were randomly selected from those who has earned below 4 out of 5 on the pretest of marital communication questionnaire. The sample was comprised of 50 women categorized into the experimental and control groups of 25 participants each which were assigned randomly.

2.3. Materials

Two types of questionnaires were included as the materials used in the study were. The first one was the demographics questionnaire including age, duration of the marital life, and the number of children. The second one was the marital communication subscale of ENRICH. The scale was first developed by Olson, Fournier and Druckman in 1985. The ENRICH scales have high levels of reliability and validity (Larsen & Olson, 1989; Olson & Olson, 1999). It has been validated in various researches and its solid reliability has been confirmed. The alpha coefficient of reliability of the scales is 0.68 for the Marital Communication (Olson & Fowers, 1993), while in the current research, it is 0.75.

2.4. Procedure

The study was conducted among the Iranian women assembled by the Marzdaran Health House Center which is located in the second municipality area of Tehran, Iran. The samples used in this research were randomly selected from those who has earned below 4 out of 5 on the pretest. The experimental and control groups encompassed 25 participants each. The training was held during the course of 3 sessions (70 minutes per session). Throughout the sessions, the experimental group was trained in the I-Thou communication principles, whereas those at the control group were intentionally left unattended. Following the training, a posttest was given to the control group as well as the experimental one, and the results achieved were analyzed to assess the effects of the training course.

2.5. Null hypotheses

H01) There is no significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test mean scores of the marital communication of the experimental group.

H02) There is no significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test mean scores of the marital communication of the control group

H03) There is no significant difference between the experimental and the control groups as to the post-test mean scores of the marital communication

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Findings of Demographics Questionnaire from both Groups before The Training

The participants average age in the experimental group was 33.40 years (SD = 7.62), ranged from 20 to 45 years old where it was 34.44 (SD = 4.46) in the control group, ranged from 21 to 44 years old. Furthermore, the number of children in the experimental and the control groups was from 0 to 4, similarly. Moreover, the samples in the experimental and the control groups had been married for 1-20 years (M = 8.44), and 2-19 years (M = 9.44), respectively.
3.2. Homogeneity Test of Marital Communication in the Experimental and the Control Groups

Levene’s Test was performed over the achieved pre-test scores of the groups to identify the homogeneity of the variables including the marital communication, age, elapsed time from the marriage, and the number of children.

The results derived by running the Levene's Test of Variances Equality in SPSS, were presented in Table 1. Since the significance level in the marital communication pre-test is greater than 0.05, then the group variances were treated equally in order not to violate the assumption of the homogeneity of the variances.

Table 1. Homogeneity Tests of Marital Communication, Age, Time Elapsed from the Marriage and number of children between the Experimental and the Control Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Experimental Group (n = 25)</th>
<th>Control Group (n = 25)</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Communication</td>
<td>2.86 ±0.453</td>
<td>2.85 ±0.470</td>
<td>0.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>33.40 ±7.62</td>
<td>34.44 ±7.46</td>
<td>0.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Elapsed from the Marriage</td>
<td>8.44 ±4.26</td>
<td>9.44 ±5.25</td>
<td>0.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>1.72±1.06</td>
<td>1.76±1.05</td>
<td>.878</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. Null hypotheses Tests

The results of the null-hypothesis testing are presented in Tables 2. The results of the t-test over paired-samples indicated that the experimental group’s post-test scores were significantly higher ($M = 3.18, SD = 0.379$) than the group’s pre-test ones ($M = 2.86, SD = 0.453$), $t (49) = 5.17, p < 0.05, d = 0.77$. Therefore the H01 null hypothesis was rejected. Furthermore, a paired-samples t-test results showed that the control group’s post-test as well as the pre-test scores were almost the same ($M = 2.82, SD = 0.533$; and $M = 2.84, SD = 0.541$, respectively), $t (49) = 0.639, p = 0.526$. As a result, the H02 null hypothesis was maintained, consequently. Additionally, an independent-samples t-test was resulted in the scores significantly higher for the post-test of the experimental group ($M = 3.18, SD = 0.379$) than that of the control one ($M = 2.82, SD = 0.467$), $t (48) = 2.95, p<0.05, d = 0.85$, and thus, it was concluded that the third null-hypothesis was turned down, as well.

Table 2: Mean Comparisons on Outcome the Variable between the Experimental and Control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre test $M±SD$</th>
<th>Post test $M±SD$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Communication</td>
<td>Experimental group (n=25)</td>
<td>2.86±.453</td>
<td>3.18±.379</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control group (n=25)</td>
<td>2.82 ±.533</td>
<td>2.84±.541</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td>.529</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental group (n=25)</td>
<td>3.18±.379</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control group (n=25)</td>
<td>2.82±.467</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Discussion and Conclusion

First of all, the research was aimed to make a model for the betterment of the marital communication based on the Buber’s scripts. The second aim was to make an effort to apply the model to evaluate the effect of the I-Thou communication training on the status of the marital communication. Informing the women about the contrasting features of the I-Thou communication and the I-It one was the main function of the training. The results showed that a training based on the I-Thou communication principles enhances the overall marital communication mannerisms. Indeed, such characteristics including uniqueness, singularity, equality, love and aspiration, attempt, hope, and wish are issues of great importance in the I-Thou communication. Additionally, one of the most significant elements throughout the training sessions was to help the participants to respect their spouses while at the same time stay free to express their feelings positively in their connubial life. Therefore, the findings were in association with the research objectives indicating that the positive expression of feelings out of respect is in close correspondence with an ideal marital communication (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 1998; Gubbins, et al., 2010; Rauer & Volling, 2005). Furthermore, the results showed a consistency between the I-Thou communication model and the Satir model (1983) which emphasizes on the congruency, meaning that a communication is required to be clear, direct, honest, and out of respect. Paying attention to the other party’s freedom is another concerning issue of the I-Thou communication model. It seems that there is a congruency between the freedom in the I-Thou communication model and the Bowen’s self–differentiation. That is because Bowen (1978) believed that those who have autonomy enjoy a higher level of marital communication status. Another point is that there are some similarities between the I-Thou communication standards and the Islamic culture of which the majority of the Iranian are the followers. From the Islamic perspective, couples become perfect through the mutual interaction. It means that both of the spouses stand at the same I-Thou communication level rather than the I-It one. Additionally, dialogue as highlighted by the I-Thou communication model has been emphasized on in the Islamic culture, as well. The Islamic culture states that the dialogue has to be in such a way that suits better. Therefore, on one hand, the results of the training were positive, and on the other hand, there are some similarities between the model and the Islamic culture which is followed by the Iranian. That is why it is suggested to apply the model not only for the marital counselling sessions, but for the pre-marriage ones in Iran, as well. As a final point, further research on the effectiveness of the I-Thou communication training sessions over more populated samples is suggested.

References


