The Effectiveness of Positive Psychotherapy on Reducing Marital Burnout among University Political Activists

Somayeh GHARIBBLOUK1

1Department of Literature, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamadan, Iran, Siamakrakeimd@gmail.com

Abstract: Objective: The present research was aimed to investigate the effect of positive group psychotherapy on reducing marital burnout among university political activists.

Methods: The research was conducted by semi-experimental method. The statistical population of the present research included all married university students who were active in political groups of University of Tehran, Iran. The sample was composed of 20 political activists who were selected by purposeful and available sampling method among university political activists with inclusion criteria. The sample individuals were randomly assigned into experiment and control groups. Questionnaire was used gathering the required data.

Results: The covariance analysis test was used for analyzing the data. Research results indicated that positive group psychotherapy is effective on reducing marital burnout in political activists (p > 0.01). Results show that the individuals’ capacity and ability to change their attitude towards themselves, life and environmental events are effective on reducing physical burnout, emotional burnout, and mental burnout, and positive thinking plays an important role in adjusting with stressful life events.

Conclusion: Overall, with a review of the results of the present research, it can be said that, according to the effect of positive group psychotherapy on this variable in married university political activists, it is better that special trainings for these couples and preventive actions would be considered. Therefore, these methods of psychotherapy can be of great help in providing better support and more appropriate treatment for this specific population.

Keywords: Positive group psychotherapy; Marital burnout; Political activists.

Introduction

Political behaviors include conscious actions which are done for the purpose of individuals’ or groups’ infiltration in order to gain or protect their own interests while there are contradicting solutions (Rezaiyan, 2014). Politics is the use of power in order to leveraging the process of decision-making for obtaining a result (Daft, 2013). Leveraging is used for obtaining purposes which are not approved (Rezaiyan, 2014). Hence, political activists’ actions are of particular position in such conditions.

Due to their activity in above actions, political activists are prone to reduced health in different domains of their personal, familial, and career life (Fani, Danaie Fard, & Zakiani, 2013). In this regard, one determining factor of family health is marital burnout. Marital burnout is the gradual reduction of emotional attachment with spouse which is associated with feelings of alienation, apathy, and indifference in couples towards one another, and replacing positive emotions with negative ones (Kayser, 1996).

Burnout is defined as a state of physical, emotional, and mental fatigue which is created in conditions of long-term struggle along with emotional demands (Pines, 2013). Huston (Houston, 2009) believes that since marital burnout is followed by reduced love and affection and increased hostile behaviors, it can lead to marital dissatisfaction and undermine the family foundation. Marital burnout is a gradual process which is created when a person is exposed to long-term stress, pain, physical, mental and emotional pressure, separation from work and other significant relationships, and its result is reduction of productivity power (Gorkin, 2009).

In fact, burnout is initiated by an imbalance between resources and demands; by an incongruence between expectations and ideals of individuals in one hand, and realities in the other hand. The result of incongruence is stress. Stress can be observed consciously or it can exist unconsciously in long term. In the second stage, individuals gradually start to feel emotional tension, burnout and fatigue. The third stage includes changes in attitudes and behaviors, and in this stage individuals change their attitudes towards marital life and spouse. at last, the result would be burnout (Schaufeli & Bunk, 2003).

Various training approaches have been used in the fields of education and improving interactions and mental health in individuals. One approach which can play an important role in reducing marital burnout is positive thinking-based training. Positive psychology is an approach that stresses on increasing human capabilities and virtues, and creates the
possibility for individuals and communities to achieve success (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive emotions of life have an important role in psychological and physical wellbeing of humans (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In practice, positive psychotherapy has been designed based on scientific-traditional methods for understanding psychopathology (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2003). This approach emphasizes positive processes and capabilities of individuals and recommends psychotherapists to pay attention to the positive processes which rarely happen in the lives of their clients (Seligman et al., 2003).

Various researches have investigated the effect of positive psychology on improving psychological problems. Research evidence shows that positive therapy has been effective on increasing health ((Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Hariri & Khodami, 2011; Seligman et al., 2003), increasing positive emotions and relationships (Rashid, 2015), self-respect and happiness (Donaldson, Dollwet, & Rao, 2014), and reducing anxiety symptoms (Mansoori, 2005). Since positive psychotherapy can be effective on improving various mental and marital components, therefore, the aim of the present research is to examine the following question: is positive group psychotherapy effective on reducing marital burnout in political activists?

Material and Methods

The present research was conducted by semi-experimental method in which a group pretest-posttest with control group design. The statistical population of the present research included married students of University of Tehran who were active in political groups in the second half of 2017. In the present study, 20 political activist students who, after researcher call for a training course for reducing marital problems, volunteered to participate in the research and had inclusion criteria (that is, they obtained high scores in marital burnout), were selected by purposeful and available method and they were assigned into experiment and control group (10 individuals per group).

The experiment group received 10 session of positive group psychotherapy (one 90-minute session per week), while the control group waited in the waiting list. One week after the end of intervention, a posttest was completed by both groups and, after 3 months, a third assessment was conducted as follow-up. Group sessions were conducted based on a predetermined schedule in table 1.

Table 1: Contents of training sessions with positive group approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Session content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Goals: introduction of the goals and psychotherapy process,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Session 2

**Goals:** Establishing a group cohesion and members’ trust to one another and to the group

**Methods:** Encouraging the members to talk about themselves and their children, encouraging them expressing their emotions as a mother.

### Session 3

**Goals:** Investigating ideology of the world and life, reframing the notion that having disabled children is a problem which is part of worldly life

**Methods:** Encouraging members to express their feelings towards their ideology of the world, encouraging members to discuss their children’s disability as a normal problem vs as an unbelievable problem.

### Session 4

**Goals:** Familiarity with the role of positive thinking towards their children’s activities in their psycho-behavioral health, explaining the association of happiness and hope with attitude towards life, explaining the effect of happiness and hope in life as positive processes

**Methods:** Encouraging members to express their experiences in relation to hopefulness, its effect on life and attitude towards life, positive analysis of happiness and hope experiences among members and others.

### Session 5

**Goals:** Introducing patterns which have enriched their life with hope, happiness, and positive thinking, familiarity with the concept of hopefulness and its importance for life

**Methods:** Encouraging members to discuss these examples and these two positive concept in life in the group, introducing patterns which have enriched their life with hope, happiness, and positive thinking playing video clips.

### Session 6

**Goals:** Discussing sense of responsibility towards children regardless of their disorder, understanding the importance of helping the children and accepting the responsibility and mother role as one of the most positive roles an individual can undertake, understanding the association of sense of responsibility towards children and indiscrimination between children with children’s and one’s own health

**Methods:** Encouraging members to express their feelings towards accepting their responsibility for their children, analyzing the relationship between lack of responsibility and feelings of guilt and frustration.
Session 7

Goals: focusing on goal instead of avoiding the problem, understanding the importance of focusing on goal and accepting the problem in life satisfaction and happiness.
Methods: psychological analysis of focusing on goal and accepting the problem and its relationship with mental health, analyzing the relationship of happiness with focusing on goal and accepting the problem, encouraging members to express their feelings and thoughts about accepting the problem and focusing on goal.
Assignment for next session: write down three good events which happen in the upcoming week, and explain why this event happened (it is better that at least one problem would be about the child with special needs)

Session 8

Goals: familiarity with the effect of gratitude and appreciation on personal feelings/behaviors and social relationships, gaining the habit of gratitude, awareness of the effects of appreciation.
Methods: psychological analysis of gratitude, psychological analysis of the role on appreciation in increasing happiness and improving social relationships, group discussion on gratitude and teaching them to children.
Assignment: gaining pleasure from routine activities such as eating, going to work, shopping (don’t perform these tasks with haste and try to be quite aware of them)

Session 9

Goals: investigating the assignment of gaining pleasure from daily activities, group discussion on the feelings during routine tasks.
Methods: expressing their feelings towards the meaning of life, preparing members for ending the group therapy.

Session 10

Goals: integrating the material and processes of prior session, explaining the experience of group therapy and its effects, getting feedback from members about their feelings and comments about the group, members’ feedback about ending the session, preparing members to leave the group and using its achievements, summing up and ending the group therapy.
Methods: reviewing prior material and group processes, expressing feelings and attitudes of members about the experience of group therapy, explaining future challenges, emotional and reflective feedback of members about the group and its ending.

In the present research, Pines’ self-report marital burnout questionnaire (MBQ) was used for gathering the data. This questionnaire includes 21 items and three scales, namely, physical burnout, mental burnout, and emotional burnout; 17 items include negative statements such as fatigue, sadness, and worthlessness, and 4 items include positive statements such as happiness and being energetic. The questions presented...
in this questionnaire are scored in a 7-point Likert range from never (Rezaian, 2014) to always (Gorkin, 2009). The assessment of validity coefficient of marital burnout questionnaire showed that this scale has an internal consistency between variables in the range of 0.84 and 0.90. Validity of this scale has been confirmed by negative correlation, between negative characteristics and positive characteristics; for example, positive opinion about relationship, quality of conversation, sense of security, self-actualization, purposefulness, emotional attraction towards spouse, and the quality of their sexual relationship. In Iran, Navidi (2005) obtained the Cronbach alpha of this questionnaire for a 240-individual sample, including 120 nurses and 120 teachers, which equaled 0.86. In a research for obtaining validity, this questionnaire was correlated with Enrich marital satisfaction questionnaire and the correlation coefficient between them was -0.40 (Sodani, Dehghani, & Dehghanzadeh, 2013).

**Result**

The data obtained from demographic characteristics of the subjects indicated that mean age of subjects in the experiment group was 29.87 years and it was 29.93 years for the control group. Table 2 shows the descriptive data for the scores of experiment and control groups in pretest and posttest of marital burnout and its subscales.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores of marital burnout in terms of group membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>groups</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>posttest</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical burnout</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>19.82</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>13.53</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>14.01</td>
<td>6.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>control</td>
<td>17.75</td>
<td>8.66</td>
<td>17.47</td>
<td>7.46</td>
<td>16.90</td>
<td>7.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental burnout</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>28.67</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>24.73</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>24.83</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>control</td>
<td>26.33</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>25.20</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>25.44</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional burnout</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>23.20</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>17.73</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>17.70</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>control</td>
<td>18.87</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>18.90</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital burnout</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>control</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For investigating the presumptions of the covariance analysis, Levin test was used for examining equality of variance of error for both groups.
Results of this test indicated that this presumption is established in posttest and follow-up stages ($F_{2.39}=1.11$, $p>0.05$). Results of covariance analysis for comparing marital burnout of both groups in the posttest, after controlling the effect of pretest, is presented in Table 3. As can be observed, the difference between the groups is significant in posttest ($p>0.01$).

**Table 3: Results of covariance analysis for comparing marital burnout of the groups in posttest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variance</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean of squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>82.714</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>82.714</td>
<td>13.81</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>93.493</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>93.493</td>
<td>11.91</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>170.781</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2784.05</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the one-way analysis of covariance in the follow-up stage. Accordingly, it can be said that the difference between the groups has been significant in follow-up, as well ($p>0.01$).

**Table 4: Results of covariance analysis for comparing marital burnout of the groups in posttest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variance</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean of squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>60.782</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60.782</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>68.023</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68.023</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>229.32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2127.1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The present research was aimed to investigate the effectiveness of positive group psychotherapy on reducing marital burnout in political activists. Results suggested that positive group psychotherapy has been effective on reducing the level of marital burnout, and this effectiveness has been consistent in the follow-up stage. Findings of the present research are consistent with prior research (Arieta, 2008; Bolghanabadi, Hasanabadi, & Asghari-Nekah, 2014; Henry, Berg, Smith, & Florsheim, 2007).

In explaining the result of the research, it can be said that marital burnout is a crucial challenge in the present society which exerts a very destructive effect on familial and couple systems. Among couples, this phenomenon occurs due to resentment, frustration, hopelessness, and
emotional-psychological distance between couples, and it is considered as one of the main reasons for emotional divorce. In other words, many couples experience marital burnout as a result of intense problems and conflicts caused by marital relationships, and this gradually leads to cold relationships and weakening of emotions between couples. In the training session, participants are asked to use positive thinking techniques for the purpose of improving their relationship with self, family, others, and the world; so that participants would know themselves better and recall their positive experiences, and finally, understand the role of these positive experiences in increasing and enhancing self-respect (Lee, 2015).

In the positive thinking approach, by focusing the attention of group members on their positive points and their precious possessions, their spouse and marital life, they will find capability and motivation to create positive changes in order to improve a relationship with enthusiasm and create a change accompanies by satisfaction. Encouraging group members to create these changes to improve their marital relationship and to give feedback to one another through challenging and struggling with automatic/irrational thoughts in the context of marital relationship plays a significant role in initiation of these changes. Empowering and encouraging members by necessary trainings for establishing efficient relationship with spouse and assigning home tasks and transforming this ability to an asset and a positive point in marital life of couples was an important step in this approach. Therefore, individuals step towards positive changes by focusing on their strengths.

Enhancing empathy, relationship kills, and reappraisal of negative thoughts and self-talks in each couple which leads to satisfaction of emotional needs and provocation of clear and intimate relationships between couples, can be among positive changes which brings about marital satisfaction and adjustment among couples (Rezaiee Ahvanuiee, Rajabi, & Farsi, 2018). Hence, focusing on self-expression and facilitating the expression of emotions can be effective on intimacy, closeness, expression of sexual and psychological needs among social activist couples, and it can facilitate the skills of discussion and negotiation about various issues among these couples.

Conclusion

This approach is more successful for those couples who want to reconstruct their relationship based on an intimate tie, and it is also successful for those couples one of which suffers from a specific stressful
stimulant. Therefore, according to the above mentioned points, training of positive thinking and skills and meaning making in life leads to the initiation of a positive change for improving marital relationship and reducing marital burnout.

References


