

## **Effectiveness of Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy on Marital Satisfaction among Iranian Married Students attending the Tehran University**

**Dr. Shahnaz NazarAli., Prof. Gholam Ali Afrooz., Prof. Alfred Pritz., Ass. -Prof Martin Jandl**

\* Shahnaz NazarAli, Ph.D. (Pth). Dr.

Responsible author: Dr. Shahnaz NazarAli

Email: [nazarali110.sh@gmail.com](mailto:nazarali110.sh@gmail.com)

Tehran University, Tehran-Iran

Sigmund Freud University, Vienna-Austria

\*\* Gholam Ali Afrooz, Univ.-Distinguished Prof. Ph.D. Dr.

Tehran University, Tehran-Iran

President, Asian Federation of World Council for Psychotherapy

\*\*\* Alfred Pritz, Rector. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult.

Sigmund Freud University, Vienna-Austria

President of the European Federation of the

World Council Psychotherapy

\*\*\*\* Martin Jandl, Ass. -Prof. MMag. Dr.

Sigmund Freud University, Vienna-Austria

### **Abstract**

This study examined the effectiveness of Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy on the marital satisfaction of Iranian married students attending the University of Tehran in Iran. The quasi-experimental research work was based on qualitative and quantitative, mixed methods. The

participants in the study included 40 couples (n=80). They were selected by applying a simple random sampling method, and they were randomly divided into two groups, a control group, and an experimental group. The data collection was conducted by applying Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMSS, 1998), clinical semi-structured interviews, and demographic questionnaires. The results indicated the effectiveness of Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy in the enhancement of marital satisfaction in Iranian married students who participated in the experimental groups. No increment in marital satisfaction was noticed in the control groups.

Considering the importance of the issue, a deeper assessment of the effectiveness of the couple therapy with the integrative approach in the enhancement of marital satisfaction in Iranian married students, and a qualitative analysis applying the Mayring methodology was additionally performed. the result was shown that the attitude and behavior of the participants in the experimental groups really and deeply changed after Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy.

**Keywords:** married students, marital satisfaction, Integrative marriage, Couples Therapy, mixed-method, clinical semi-structured interview.

## Introduction

The pursuance of graduate studies can involve a substantial amount of personal effort, especially for married students having to balance the demands of work, commitment, financial resources, and parenting, as well as a relationship with their spouse. Studies by Gerstein and Russell (1990. pp, 128-138) indicated that “graduate school has been regarded as a major life event which can result in marital problems”. For example, Carter & McGoldrick (2005. pp, 436-454) showed that “The stresses of graduate school in general such as financial strain, limited sexual relations, communication problems, lack of leisure, and restricted social life impacts both partners in the relationship”. Tian (1996. p. 1-12), reported that “the divorce rate is positively related to women’s enrollment in higher education in the United States. In addition, there has been concern among educators regarding the causes of high dropout rates of doctoral students”.

According to Scheinkman (1988. pp. 351-368), “divorce is highly likely among graduate students, also, he proposed a model of separation, which is believed to be typical among graduate students. This model shows the couple moving from an initial sense of adventure and cohesion to an increasingly unsatisfied life during graduate school, and oftentimes to divorce, which coincides with graduation.

Psychologists and researchers believe the relationship between spouses to be the most important relationship in the family. According to Brannock, Litten, & Smith (2000. pp, 123-130) have defined; “While personal characteristics, academic history, financial support, and area of study are important considerations, the family is one

influence that may have a significant relationship to success in graduate school. From this perspective, graduate education becomes a family task rather than an individual endeavor”. Quinn (2002. p, 6), has identified five patterns that contribute to divorce during graduate school; “1) level of spousal support and emotional unavailability, 2) communication skills of both partners, 3) adaptability to change in the relationship, 4) sense of autonomy and personal satisfaction, and 5) the need to be involved. The most common stressors are related to money, time spent away from the spouse, and work. The lack of support or emotional availability can be covert or overt”.

The study by Sokolski (1995, p. 5-35) has shown; “stressors such as finances, children, gender roles, housework, leisure, and communication are likely to contribute to low marital adjustment among married graduate couples

According to Osterlund, L., (2012. p, 1-12), “Students in graduate counseling programs have the unique stress of counseling work, which requires the student’s own personal and emotional resources impacting their personal relationships. Madanian (2013. p, 987)By utilizing a qualitative approach (Inductive thematic analysis) four themes have emerged from the data. These themes orderly revealed that financial issues, intimacy, commitment, and children's education were significant factors that influence the level of marital satisfaction for Iranian female students in Malaysia”. According to (Afrooz, 2007, p.59); “The main reasons for problems in common life are mental and sexual dissatisfaction. Here is

a high rate of divorce in our Islamic society, according to the official reports of the government, it is about 20% in some bigger cities such as Tehran. It means that on the side of every 100 marriages, 20 divorces are registered”.

According to Wells, B. (2004, p, 59-80), “marital group counseling is a window of opportunity that couples get the best possible advantage from marriage preparation.

Bills. Shawn. A., (2013) “the study suggests the importance of couple therapists being aware of attachment Issues, especially among women, as they relate to the establishment of a strong therapeutic”. According to Glenn (1990, pp. 818-831); “more qualitative research is needed for the advancement of understanding marriage, if this study can uncover just one important new idea concerning factors that lead to greater marriage satisfaction, it will have been worthwhile. It is important to identify variables that correlate with more or less satisfying marriages”.

## Research Design

Psychotherapy is a procedure taught by a person a face planned for the treatment of a disorder of an emotional nature and the feeling is done. Psychotherapy to reduce mental suffering and anxiety, and strengthen his / her personality adjustment through a process planned tries. The research is quasi-experimental and based on qualitative and quantitative, i.e. mixed met The studied community includes all Iranian married students studying at the University of Tehran in Iran. Participants in the study included 40 couples (N=80), who were selected using a

(Pritz. A, 2002. P, 7-30) “Psychotherapy is the systematic application of defined methods in the treatment of psychic suffering and psychosomatic complaints as well as of life crises of various”.

“Integrative psychotherapy is an attempt to combine concepts and counseling interventions from more than one theoretical psychotherapy approach” (Stricker, 2000. p, 587).

“Integrative psychotherapy is not a particular combination of counseling theories, but rather it consists of a framework for developing an integration of theories that you find most appealing and useful for working with clients” (Norcross, Norcross, J. S., & Goldfried, 2005. p, 587).

The purpose of this research was to prospect the stressors that married students experience in their education programs, how the challenging environment of the study affects their marital relationships, and examine the effectiveness of integrative marriage and couple therapy on increasing their marital satisfaction.

simple random sampling method and were randomly divided into two groups, a control, and an experimental group, each containing 20 couples. Considering the importance of the issue, for more assessment of the effectiveness of couple therapy with the integrative approach on the enhancement of marital satisfaction in married Iranian students attending the University of Tehran. qualitative analysis by Mayring methodology was performed as well. Before starting the couple therapy in the experimental group, 5 couples (n=10) were selected randomly from Iranian married students at the University of

Tehran. They underwent a semi-structured interview in Farsi which was recorded and typed immediately. After finishing the therapy in the experimental group, again the selected couples in the experimental and control groups underwent a semi-structured interview which was recorded and typed immediately.

### **Measurement Instruments**

#### **Enrich Marital Satisfaction**

ENRICH (Olson, 1998) questionnaire, "ENRICH has roots in ecological system theories" (Lavee & Olson, 1993). "It was designed as a multidimensional inventory which assesses theoretically valuable and clinically useful dimensions of marital relationships" (Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 1983). "The instrument has been shown to be theoretically and empirically based with good psychometric properties" (Olson, 1998).

Since its inception, ENRICH has been administered to thousands of couples, most in the United States. "In the United States thousands of individuals, usually professional counselors, psychologists, and clergy, have been certified to administer ENRICH" (Olson & Olson, 1999). "Data analysis is based on qualitative and quantitative and reliability of ENRICH category scores is .80 to .85" (Larson & Olson, 1989). Additionally, in Iran, Soleymanian (1997) has confirmed the high reliability and validity of this scale. (Mahdavian, 2000) "Quoted was reported 97.3% reliability on ENRICH questionnaire for men and 99.4% for women and 94% for both men and women". Also, the correlation coefficient of this questionnaire in Iran is 92% and the correlation coefficient of marital

satisfaction ranging from 41% to 60% distinguish satisfied couples from unsatisfied ones. The questionnaire is consistent of 47 questions with a spectrum of five-point Likert, from completely agreed to absolutely disagreed, which can assess the following 9 components: EMSS Subtests: A- Idealistic thinking of couples, B: Marital Satisfaction, C: Personal behavior, D: Communication and social behavior, E: Problem-solving, F: Financial and economic activity, G: Religious feeling and behavior, H: Parenting method, I: Leisure.

#### **Demographic Questionnaire**

The Demographic Questionnaire was self-made and was approved by the Professors and the experts in order to gather the necessary information for the study.

The Demographic Questionnaire included the following questions: age, sex, marital information, educational information, occupational information, economic status, and social conditions.

#### **Clinical semi-structured interview**

Considering the importance of the issue, a Clinical semi-structured interview was conducted, for more assessment of the effectiveness of couple therapy applying the integrative approach to the enhancement of marital satisfaction in Iranian married students attending the University of Tehran. Qualitative analysis using the Mayring methodology was performed as well.

#### **Responsibility to Research Participants**

Obtain informed consent of participants, respect participants' right to withdraw from research, and maintain the confidentiality of participants.

### **Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy**

- For therapeutic intervention applying Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy the researcher utilized four theoretical approaches and the technic was based on "why and how to change" in Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy.

### **Process of Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy:**

- Identify symptoms and their functions.
- Perceive new and previously unknown perspectives.
- Gain an understanding of the attitudes of spouses.

- Analyze patterns of communication and interaction.
- Cognition and understanding of negative and positive aspects of their own personality.
- Cognition and understanding of negative and positive aspects of spouse's personality.
- Participate in appropriate intervention measures for change.
- Accept responsibility for their own actions.
- Develop a holistic hypothesis.

These objectives guide the actual therapeutic process, which aims at strengthening resources and bringing about change.

## Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 1

Categories\_T1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tolerable	5	13,9	13,9	13,9
	Intermediate	31	86,1	86,1	100,0
	Total	36	100,0	100,0	

*Distribution of frequency and percent of the experimental group Before Integrative  
Marriage and Couple Therapy*

Table 2

Categories\_T2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	31	86,1	86,1	86,1
	Excellent	5	13,9	13,9	100,0
	Total	36	100,0	100,0	

*Distribution of frequency and percent of the experimental group After Integrative  
Marriage and Couple Therapy*

The statistical analysis of the pre-test and post-test administration of the marital satisfaction scale to the experimental group before and after the

psychotherapy attending the University of Tehran are shown in table 1 and table 2. ( $F(1, 67) = 56.01, p < .001$ ).

**Changes in EMSS subtests in the Experimental Group:**

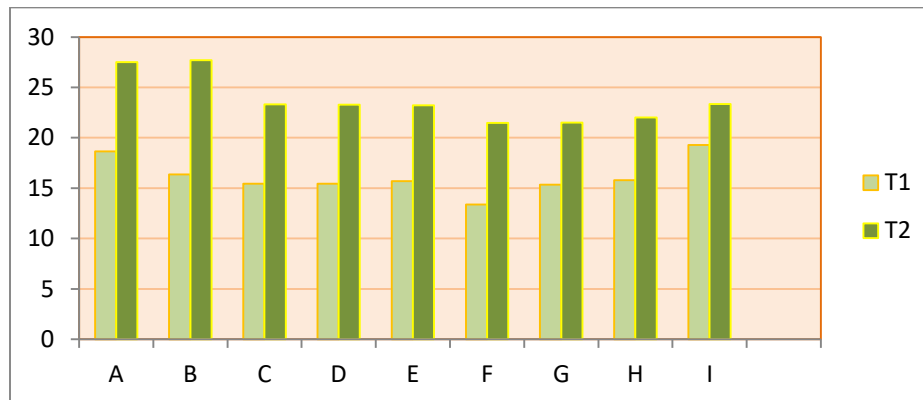
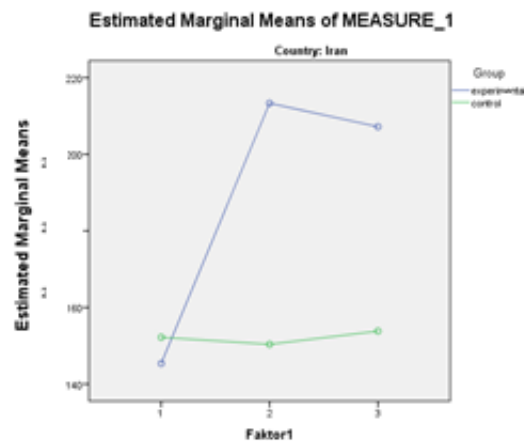


Chart (1): Experimental Subtests group, compare before and After Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy



**Chart (2):**



## **Results:**

As the graph shows, the experimental and control groups have low marital satisfaction in pre-

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Considering the importance of the issue, for more assessment of the effectiveness of Couples Therapy with the integrative approach to the enhancement of marital satisfaction in married Iranian

students studying at the University of Tehran, this research followed qualitative and quantitative methods. (Stiles. 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2015) “Both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used to provide quality control on therapy”. Before starting the couple therapy in the experimental group, 5 couples (N=10) were randomly selected from each group, control and experimental. They were conducted in a semi-structured interview in Farsi which was recorded and typed immediately. After finishing the therapy in the experimental group, again the selected couples in the experimental and control groups were

psychotherapy. But after the Integrative couple’s therapy, marital satisfaction in the experimental group significantly increased. This increase was also preserved in a 3-month follow-up.

conducted in a semi-structured interview which was recorded and typed immediately. Qualitative data analysis: was conducted with the Mayring method and the results were evaluated by a specialist in qualitative analysis.

**Result:** The interpretation of the qualitative data corroborated the quantitative research results. It was shown that their attitude and their behavior actually deeply changed after therapy.

### **The following two open-ended questions were asked of all interviewees:**

1. How do participants specify, their marital (satisfaction or dissatisfaction)?
2. Which factors do participants determine to express their marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction?



The table shows the categories as found in the interpretation of the interviews made with the

experimental group in Iran before and after psychotherapy.

<b>Experimental – IR Before Psychotherapy</b>	<b>Experimental – IR After Psychotherapy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-separation and lost motivation of being together</li> <li>-very stressful</li> <li>-no more time for studying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- togetherness in everyday life</li> <li>- improved management of time and money</li> <li>- improved mutual understanding</li> <li>- useful psychotherapy</li> <li>- retrieve their attitude</li> <li>- enhanced satisfaction in marriage</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-no shared time because of economic pressure.</li> <li>-can't focus on studying</li> <li>-not satisfied with married life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Togetherness in everyday life.</li> <li>- improved mutual understanding</li> <li>-effectiveness of marital therapy</li> <li>- improvements in study and work</li> <li>- marital satisfaction</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-feel tired and anxious, because of education and childcare.</li> <li>-husband does not cooperate</li> <li>-don't have enough time to be togetherness</li> <li>-don't have a good relationship with each other</li> <li>-no organized</li> <li>-thinking about quitting studying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improved coordination</li> <li>- improved communication</li> <li>- enhanced confidence</li> <li>- improved cooperation and emotional feeling</li> <li>- the disappearance of negative thoughts concerning the husband</li> <li>- enhanced satisfaction in marriage</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the situation is cluttered</li> <li>-marital life is not satisfied</li> <li>-no cooperated</li> <li>-lost motivation to be together.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improvement in togetherness</li> <li>- useful psychotherapy</li> <li>- wish to spend time with family</li> <li>- normalization</li> <li>- deepened self-knowledge</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-low marital satisfaction</li> <li>-no cooperated</li> <li>-no togetherness in everyday life</li> <li>-do not understand each other</li> <li>-no focus on the study</li> <li>-her husband wanted to quit education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improved togetherness</li> <li>- improved feelings of being understood</li> <li>- enhanced trust in husband</li> <li>- improved focus on the study</li> <li>- enhanced caregiving to child</li> <li>- eagerness to a positive change through therapy</li> <li>- satisfaction in marriage</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-no satisfaction of marriage</li> <li>-ask his wife to quit studying</li> <li>-not organized</li> <li>-not cooperative</li> <li>-worried because his wife is pregnant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- positive changes in common life</li> <li>- relationship improvement</li> <li>- the enhanced feeling of togetherness</li> <li>- improved work concentration</li> <li>- enhanced respect in communication</li> <li>- effectiveness of couple therapy</li> <li>- high marital satisfaction</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-less satisfied with married life after gradually</li> <li>-no more time for studying</li> <li>-worried about the future, that no more time to be together.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improved confidence in husband</li> <li>- improved cooperation</li> <li>- good marital satisfaction</li> <li>- 'energy' charge</li> <li>- improved focus on the study</li> <li>- improvement in attitude and behavior</li> <li>- loss of anxiety</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-no shared time because of economic pressure.</li> <li>-no more time for studying</li> <li>-no pay attention to wife's interests</li> <li>-student couples should receive more support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-deepened mutual understanding</li> <li>- loss of anxiety</li> <li>- acceptance of economic problems</li> <li>- improved relationship</li> <li>- enhanced focus on work matters</li> <li>- improvements in intimate life</li> <li>- loss of negative attitudes against wife</li> <li>- improvement in the study focus</li> <li>- high satisfaction</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-not happy and don't have marital satisfaction</li> <li>-lost self-confidence a lot</li> <li>-no time to study</li> <li>-no shared time because of economic pressure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- positive changes in attitude about marriage</li> <li>- positive re-interpretation of problems as challenges</li> <li>- improved cooperative problem-solution strategies</li> <li>-enhanced confidence</li> <li>-improved focus on studies and work</li> <li>-working on negative self-aspects</li> <li>-improved sympathy with wife</li> <li>- high satisfaction with psychotherapy</li> <li>- improved time management for children</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-no satisfaction in married life</li> <li>-separation and relationship are getting cold of being together</li> <li>-very stressful</li> <li>-worried about the economy.</li> <li>-no more time for studying</li> <li>-no more time to spend with her daughter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- deepened knowledge about married life</li> <li>- new perspective in relation to the proper interactions</li> <li>- deepened self-understanding</li> <li>- insights into the extinction of negative behaviours</li> <li>- improved cooperation</li> <li>- improvements in relationship</li> <li>- enhanced feelings of togetherness</li> <li>- improved focus on the study</li> </ul>

Once more, the table shows impressing the effectiveness of psychotherapy. The Iranian couples improved on all scales as well expressed high marital satisfaction after therapy – compared to their worries and problems before therapy, the

changes are of importance. In sum, it can be stated that the results of the qualitative research corroborate the results found in the quantitative survey.

## Discussion & Result

The main aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Integrative couples' therapy on Marital Satisfaction in Iranian married students at the University of Tehran - Iran.

Results of this study are indicating the effectiveness of Integrative Couples Therapy on the enhancement of marital satisfaction in Iranian married students studying at the University of Tehran participating in the experimental group. No increment is noticed in the amount of marital satisfaction in the control group.

A comparative study was performed between the results of this study and the

findings of other researchers, despite the cultural differences that exist between them.

“Some researchers have indicated that students in graduate programs may experience relationship difficulties” (Gerstein & Russell, 1990, pp. 128-138), and “may have a higher rate of divorce than the general population” (Scheinkman. M, 1988. p, 351-368).

Students in graduate programs experience significant stressors, such as financial strain, adjustment to role changes, and lack of time and energy available for their personal relationships.

This study supports; (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, p. 483-507) “the idea that working with

a professional and skilled family therapist enables couples to discover and learn how to deal with their children, personal and emotional behaviors and find new and more satisfying ways to live and love with hope and confidence". Factors Contributing to Divorce for Counselors and Their Partner Relationships, specific behavioral patterns have been identified in marital relationships which could contribute to divorce for counselors in training.

According to Wells, B. (2004, p, 59-80), "marital group counseling is a window of opportunity that couples get the best possible advantage from marriage preparation.

As illustrated in research by (NazarAli. 2007, p. 5) "the assertiveness training group counseling was effective on academic achievement and improvement of the social and human skills of students". According to (Perl, 1998. P, 12-14) "Participants in marital group counseling expected to have decreased thoughts of separation and increased thoughts of togetherness.

According to (Jandl, 2015. p, 21) Adler, believed "lifestyle develops, every individual development is directed by the fundamental strive for superiority – leaving the minus situation, gaining mastery of it and the fellow human being in at least one aspect and being superior in the end".

"The term integrative comes from the integration of change and acceptance, in a balance which would be found for each couple, very succinctly, it could be said That Integrative behavioral couple therapy suggests that acceptance is promoted as an essential step toward improvement in couples with problems, whereas Traditional

behavioral therapy would postulate that behavior exchange

and the development of effective skills is the path for Solving difficulties" (Cordova et al., 1998. P, 437-455).

(Blow, Adrian. J., 2001. P, 400) "With the qualitative research indicate The Delphi methodology was used to explore common factors across theories of marriage and family therapy. The study was supportive of integrative psychotherapy in general and marital and couple therapy in particular". The research study by, Gottman, Schwartz Gottman, & DE Claire, (2006. p, 7.) has shown that; "small, positive behaviors, frequently repeated, can make a big difference in the long-term success of a marriage and awareness is vital if we are to recognize some behavior as a wake-up call. Perhaps as couples, educators, and counselors become more aware of what makes a marriage succeed, we can begin to increase marital satisfaction and longevity".

Considering the importance of the issue, for more assessment of the effectiveness of couple therapy with the integrative approach on the enhancement of marital satisfaction in Iranian married students attending the University of Tehran, qualitative analysis by Mayring methodology was performed as well.

Results indicated; the interpretation of the qualitative data corroborated the quantitative research results. It was shown that the attitude and behavior of participants in the experimental groups

actually and deeply improved after Integrative couples' therapy.

Research is limited only to the University of Tehran, which is extensible to other Universities in Iran. Marital satisfaction is the function of complicated variables, such as; economic status, culture, family, intelligence, etc. In this study, marital satisfaction was examined and interference with other factors was out of the control of the researcher.

According to the findings of this study, which showed the positive effect of Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy on marital satisfaction of Iranian married students attending the University of Tehran:

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- it is recommended to expand using the Integrative Marriage and Couples Therapy, in the counseling centers of Universities, for enhancement of students' marital satisfaction. According to the results of this study and a review of the literature that was conducted in other countries, it seems that students' problems are almost identical. With respect to the multilateral responsibilities of married students, they need more attention. Regarding the importance of marital satisfaction in married students. it seems more investigations are necessary for creating a guideline to enhance and improve the marriage.
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