

# Effectiveness of Emotion-focused Therapy-based Enrichment Program on Psychological Well-being, Marital Relationship Quality and Marital Satisfaction in Mothers of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities

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**Received** 2020 July 28; **Accepted** 2020 December 05.

## Abstract

**Background:** Since learning disability is a shortage in general educational skills and the mothers of children with such a defect should be aware of the skills to deal with incoming issues.

**Objectives:** Present study aimed to investigate effectiveness of emotion -focused therapy-based enrichment program on psychological well-being, marital quality and marital satisfaction in mothers of children with specific learning disabilities.

**Methods:** This study was a semi-experimental work with pretest-posttest design and control group. The statistical population included mothers of children with specific learning disability referring to Talas hClinic in District 1 of Tehran in 2017-2018. 30 mothers of children with specific learning disability were chosen as samples and randomly were divided into 2 groups (control and experimental). Initially, the pretest was conducted on the two groups. The experimental group was exposed to 8 sessions of emotion-focused therapy-based enrichment program. Then, post-test was carried out. For data collection, Ryff's psychological well-being scale, Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Marital Satisfaction questionnaire were used. Data analysis was conducted using MANCOVA.

**Results:** Statistical data analysis indicated positive effectiveness of the enrichment program on psychological well-being, and marital quality and satisfaction of experimental group compared to the controls ( $P < 0/05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The enrichment program can be an efficient way to increase psychological well-being, and marital quality and satisfaction among mothers of children with specific learning disability.

**Keywords:** Couples' relationships enrichment, Emotion-focused therapy, Marital relationships quality, Marital satisfaction, Psychological well-being, Specific learning disabilities

## 1. Introduction

Learning disability is a shortage in general educational skills, which appears in reading, mathematics and written expression, and causes a significant problem in academic achievement, career performance in future, or daily life activities. In the fifth version of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5), learning disability has been renamed to "specific learning disability" and disability in reading, writing and mathematics- which are individually considered as an independent and single disability- are now known as a specifier (some metrics provided in DSM-5 for identification of individuals with similar characteristics, and these characteristics can present similar aspects in the disorder formation process, family history, test results) in specific learning disabilities (1).

Children's learning disabilities provide them harmful impacts on their families, especially their mothers who experience more compromise problems compared to normal mothers (2). Additionally, this disability makes

some psychological and emotional problems for parents particularly mothers. These mothers show a higher rate of aggression and have lower psychological well-being. This affects their children's educational performance and exacerbates the problems (3).

Accordingly, psychological well-being serves as a protective factor against social isolation and depression and is a multi-dimensional concept containing environmental mastery, self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, personal growth and autonomy (4).

The psychological well-being and life satisfaction are influenced by level of self-consciousness, optimism and spirituality (5). The higher psychological well-being, the better psychological health and prospective (6). Also, in Ryff's model, psychological well-being plays an important role in compatibility and life satisfaction (7).

Similarly, psychological well-being and marital satisfaction are correlated while the latter is a general aspect of life satisfaction and is so effective on personal

and family health (8). Meanwhile, a satisfied couple mostly feels happiness, satisfaction of marriage and satisfaction of one another. Marital satisfaction is the general evaluation of marital relationship and achievement level of needs, requests, and personal and paired wishes (9). It leads to stronger communication skills in couples' public and social relationships (10).

Besides, marital relationships quality is resulted from the way married people systematically organize themselves into this triangle- i.e. psychological well-being, marital satisfaction and marital relationships quality- (11). It is an internal evaluation of the couples' relationship in some aspects and values (a range of values reflecting a broad range of marital interaction and functionality) and leads to favorable adaptation, good communication and a high level of marital satisfaction (12). The potential effects of marital relationships quality on mental and physical levels present a compelling reason for studying this variable. Studying the relationships between couples helps to clarify the structural frameworks in which couples relationships are formed. In most societies, marital relationships quality plays a crucial role for assessment of family relationships quality. It is a multidimensional concept including various types of relationships among couples such as compatibility, satisfaction, happiness, coherence and commitment (13). Along with above mentioned factors, family is one of the most natural groups satisfying human needs. The birth of a child with learning disabilities in a family can deeply be an undesirable and challenging event. This leads to some unsuitable subjectivities and beliefs affecting quality of the parents' marital relationships and satisfaction (14).

Furthermore, psychology is full of the concepts for improvement of mental health, methods of emotional and thinking processing, and psychotherapy systems. One of the psychiatric and couple-therapies which can help mothers of impotent children is emotion-focused therapy-based enrichment program for couples' relationships. Enrichment training leads to increase the marital relationships quality and improve the family's performance (15).

Couples' relationships enrichment is an educational approach to improve couples' relationships and helping them to get aware of themselves and their spouses, exploring the spouses' emotions and thoughts, expanding empathy and intimacy, developing effective communication and problem-solving skills (16).

Moreover, emotion-focused therapy points to the important role of emotions and emotional relationships in organizing interactive patterns and clear key experiences in close relationships, and considers the emotion as a change factor. It aims to process essential emotional reactions in couples' interactions (17). Relying on emotion focused therapy, an enrichment program has been designed to promote and enrich the relationships between close and intimate people, especially family members. These programs increase the psychological and emotional well-being of trained people and can have a great impact on individuals, this effect is due to the fact that the power and stability of life and mental health of

individuals are greatly influenced by the quality of their interpersonal relationships with the most important people of their lives, in particular their spouse. The skills of couples' relationships enrichment are the skills that are used to satisfy the most intense family's desires, and are applicable in almost all cultures. These tendencies include love, compassion, belonging, trust, loyalty, security and pleasure that are more important than other tendencies, and satisfaction of them leads to mental health promotion (psychological well-being) (18).

In doing so, present study investigates this hypothesis: emotion-focused therapy-based enrichment program is effective on psychological well-being, marital relationships quality and marital satisfaction of mothers having children with specific learning disabilities.

## 2. Objectives

Present study aimed at investigation of effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy-based enrichment program on psychological well-being, marital quality and marital satisfaction in mothers of children with specific learning disabilities.

## 3. Methods

This study was a semi-experimental work with pretest-posttest design and control group. The statistical population included mothers of children with specific learning disabilities referring to Talash learning disabilities Clinic in Tehran in 2017-2018. Initially, based on convenience sampling and following to initial call in mentioned center, a total number of 56 mothers responded the questionnaires. Then, from those with the scores of psychological well-being, marital relationships and marital satisfaction lower than mean, 30 ones were divided into experimental and control groups (15 persons per group). The experimental group was exposed to 8 sessions of emotion-focused therapy-based enrichment program, while the control group received no intervention. Inclusion criteria included literacy, diagnosis of their children's learning disabilities according to learning disability questionnaire, lack of drug abuse, lack of divorce experience, and lack of physical and psychological disease. In contrast, exclusion criteria included other medical and educational programs during the training, special medicine usage and absence for more than two sessions (these criteria were assessed by clinical interview based on DSM-5). The details of these sessions can be seen in Table 1 according to (17).

### 3.1. Data collection tools

#### 3.1.1. Ryff's Psychological Well-Being scale (PWB):

This scale has 18 questions (19). Meanwhile, its convergence validity is reported acceptable with a significant Pearson's coefficient of 0.92 for life satisfaction (4). Moreover, re-test coefficient of PWB scale is reported 0.81 (20). Additionally, the reliability of this questionnaire was obtained by internal consistency according to Cronbach's alpha coefficient as 0.86, indicating a desirable and high reliability of this scale (4). In present study, the internal consistency (reliability) of 0.81 was obtained as per Cronbach's alpha.

#### 3.1.2. Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (R-DAS)

This scale is a 14-item measure of marital quality in three

**Table 1.** Marital enrichment sessions based on the emotional-focused therapy

Session	Title	Objective
1	An introduction to members and communication skills of the mothers.	Group and member referrals with each other and pre-test implementation, familiarity with the sessions' method and structure, understanding effective communication skills, identifying good and bad communication, and learning the skills of providing and receiving feedback.
2	Familiarity with cycles of concern	Looking the relationship from a new angle, recognizing interactive cycles and naming them, understanding how these mothers affect each other and how these get united to create a cycle
3	Attachment links	Developing emotional links, identifying the fears and confronting negative emotions.
4	Couples' attachment history.	Identifying the participants' attachment history, expectations and beliefs, and the corresponding impact on their behavior
5	Emotions training	Identifying emotions, distinguishing between the main and reactive emotions, identifying the emotional relationships
6	Listening to main emotions of each spouse	Couples' behavior and thoughts in negative cycles, identifying the main emotions of each wife/husband, identifying deep reactions to the main emotional business and understanding how deep emotions are created towards the spouse
7	Attachment needs and attachment link improvement	Identifying the participants' attachment needs, decreasing the sensitivity and reactivity of the relationship, and strengthening the attachment link.
8	Intimacy maintenance and sexual life recovery	Understanding the importance of having sex in marital life, familiarity with sexual dysfunction and misconceptions about that, talking about sexual issues and problems and posttest implementation

dyadic subscales: consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion (21) with the reported reliability of 0.79, 0.80 and 0.90, respectively (22). Face and content validity of R-DAS was determined by specialists (family counselors). Also, the internal consistency of this scale with Cronbach's alpha for all questions was obtained 0.86 (23). In present study, the internal consistency (reliability) of 0.89 was obtained as per Cronbach's alpha.

### 3.1.3. ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale

The ENRICH (Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication, and Happiness) Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) is a 10-item single-factor measure (24). The construct validity of the questionnaire with item-scale correlation showed the significant correlation scores range of 0.21-0.50, indicating the construct validity (25). Also, Cronbach's alpha range of questions is reported 0.81-0.85, indicating suitable reliability of this scale (26). Moreover, internal consistency of EMS with Cronbach's alpha is reported 0.93 and 0.86 for females and males, respectively (27). In present study, the internal consistency (reliability) of 0.86 was obtained as per Cronbach's alpha.

### 3.1.4. Colorado's Learning Difficulties Questionnaire (CLDQ)

It is a 20-item parent-report rating scale that was developed to provide a brief screening measure for learning difficulties/disabilities. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses showed five relevant but separated aspects as reading, math, social cognition, social anxiety, and spatial difficulties. Discriminant validity and construct validity of CLDQ have been reported to be desirable. Also, the convergent validity of the questionnaire components with the standard academic achievement questionnaires was calculated as 0.64, 0.44, 0.64, 0.46 and 0.30 for reading, math, social cognition, social anxiety, and spatial difficulties, respectively (28). In present study, A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.73 was obtained in order to examine internal consistency

(reliability) of the questionnaire.

## 4. Results

The mean values, Standard Deviation (SD) and normality of variables are seen in Table 2 separated by group and stage. As it can be seen, distribution of variables' scores is natural with a confidence of 95%. Table 3 presents a summary of multivariate tests for posttest. As it can be seen, Wilk's Lambda's distribution is significant at the level 0.99 [ $F=27.572$ ]. Hereafter, it should be examined that whether each dependent variable is individually affected by independent variable or not. For comparison of posttest scores of PWB, R-DAS and EMS of participants, Multivariable Analyze of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used after pretest effect controlling. The results are presented in Table 4.

From Table 4, a significant difference exists between mean posttest score of PWB, R-DAS and EMS of discussed mothers and pretest scores. In other words, enrichment program significantly led to enhance environmental mastery [ $F=46.463$ ], Self - acceptance [ $F=12.425$ ], Positive relations hips with others [ $F=6.932$ ], Purpose in life [ $F=25.882$ ], Personal growth [ $F=43.463$ ], autonomy [ $F=16.763$ ], Dyadic consensus [ $F=27.688$ ], Dyadic satisfaction [ $F=28.929$ ], Dyadic cohesion [ $F=6.790$ ] and marital satisfaction [ $F=14.231$ ] in posttest step ( $P<0.01$ ).

## 5. Discussion

Present study aimed to examine effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy-based enrichment training on the psychological well-being, marital relationships quality and marital satisfaction of mothers of children with specific learning disabilities. Given the results, our hypothesis regarding effectiveness of the enrichment program on psychological well-being, marital relationships quality and marital satisfaction of mothers of children with specific learning disabilities is approved. This finding is in line with (15-17).



**Table 2.** The mean values, standard deviation and normality of variables separated by group and stage

Dependent Variable	Measurement	Mean±SD		Normality	
		Experimental	Control	Z Statistics	Sig
Environmental mastery	Pretest	0.743±14.53	1.014±14.20	0.535	0.776
	Posttest	1.302±17.47	0.986±14.40	0.704	0.553
Self-acceptance	Pretest	0.862±12.20	0.834±12.87	0.495	0.890
	Posttest	0.961±16.07	2.042±13.80	0.817	0.645
Positive relations with others	Pretest	10.060±15.47	0.941±15.20	0.213	0.189
	Posttest	1.751±18.07	1.404±15.60	0.146	0.139
Purpose in life	Pretest	0.884±12.27	0.915±12.47	0.200	0.117
	Posttest	0.990±15.53	1.246±12.87	0.199	0.188
Personal growth	Pretest	0.976±15.33	0.986±15.40	0.173	0.185
	Posttest	1.846±17.87	1.387±15.93	0.138	0.159
Autonomy	Pretest	1.033±15.27	1.047±15.33	0.904	0.763
	Posttest	1.373±17.20	1.187±15.47	0.695	0.361
Dyadic consensus	Pretest	0.926±15.00	0.915±14.87	0.919	0.355
	Posttest	1.207±16.80	0.862±15.20	0.886	0.576
Dyadic satisfaction	Pretest	0.743±17.53	0.816±17.67	0.753	0.931
	Posttest	1.234±19.67	1.163±18.27	0.731	0.683
Dyadic cohesion	Pretest	1.387±11.93	0.724±11.33	0.483	0.963
	Posttest	1.302±13.87	1.246±11.87	0.828	0.466
Marital satisfaction	Pretest	1.187±27.47	0.884±27.93	0.434	0.778
	Posttest	1.134±31.00	1.146±28.20	0.770	0.271

**Table 3.** A summary of multivariate tests for posttest of PWB, R-DAS and EMS of mothers having children with specific learning disabilities

Test	Values	F	Sig	Impact factor	Statistical power
Pillai's Trace	0.768	27.572	0.001	0.768	0.999
Wilks' Lambda	0.032				
Hotelling's Trace	30.636				
Roy's Largest Root	30.636				

**Table 4.** MANCOVA results for posttest scores of PWB, R-DAS and EMS of mothers having children with specific learning disabilities

Dependent variables	Sum of squares	Degree of Freedom	F Test statistics	Sig	Impact Factor	Statistical power
Environmental mastery	49.569	1	46.463	0.001	0.721	0.999
Self-acceptance	10.526		12.42	0.002	0.408	0.915
Positive relations with others	7.290		6.932	0.017	0.278	0.702
Purpose in life	14.211		25.882	0.001	0.590	0.998
Personal growth	43.099		43.463	0.018	0.707	0.999
Autonomy	31.951		16.763	0.00	0.482	0.972
Dyadic consensus	32.253		27.688	0.001	0.606	0.999
Dyadic satisfaction	38.324		28.929	0.001	0.616	0.999
Dyadic cohesion	12.445		6.790	0.018	0.274	0.693
Marital Satisfaction	13.366		14.231	0.001	0.442	0.946

The enrichment program can be argued to strengthen the relationships through making goals and directions for marriage. In this approach individuals learn some skills which lead to change their-own and their spouse's behavior and they will be gradually able to create new life-style generation. Since this style is adopted as per agreement with the spouses, they will learn how to gradually remove their unsuitable communication styles and behaviors with their assistance, enhancing their quality of life (29).

Meanwhile, couples' relationships enrichment training is a family therapy with a psychological and skill-based approach. It helps individuals to strengthen their intimate relationships while maintaining quality of these relationships over time (16). This training employs a psychological approach to decrease symptoms and solve interpersonal problems, emphasizing on construction and strengthening the skills (30).

Enrichment training is an effort for marital relationships growth and strengthens the relationships by creating

goals and directions for marriage. Moreover, this mainly involves communication skills, creating satisfaction of communication, active listening, conflict control skills, problem-solving skills, daring behavior, emotions control, understanding of couples from oneself and each other and strengthening the emotional relationships between them. In many training programs, the relationships enrichment based on the emotion-focused therapy emphasizes importance of communication exercises, clarification of disagreed environments, increased satisfaction among couples, concept of couples' expectations from life and impact of these expectations on their relationships, increasing the quality of marital relationships (31).

The skills that are taught in the enrichment program lead to positive changes in couples' relationships, the ability to solve a problem in a two-sided and fair way, the ability to maintain a careful atmosphere during the discussion and problem solving, the ability to adopt another's perspective, the ability to reduce the negative-negative interaction cycle and aggression, and the ability to change

the expected behavioral patterns. The skills learnt in the enrichment training session play an important role to promote couples' relationships and marital satisfaction. Negotiation/expressions skills enable participants to better understand the sources of stress, needs and desires with the least likelihood of defensive reactions, anxiety, hostility, and conflict, and the maximum likelihood of empathic understanding, collaboration, and support. These skills help people to quickly and successfully handle problem solving with less anxiety, provide a more compassionate understanding of the opposite party's emotional, psychological and interpersonal and others' aspirations and more quickly call for open, honesty, respectful and trustworthy behaviors. The skills are taught to couples to maintain a positive emotional atmosphere, so that when discussing controversial issues, these skills will prevent anger in marital relationships and the marital satisfaction will improve (30).

## 6. Conclusion

Combination of the edges of a triangle including well-being, marital relationships' quality and marital satisfaction to be assessed on the disabled children's mothers is a strength of present study. Also, as per other studies, this work had some weaknesses and limitations including lack of sufficient generalizability due to composing the samples merely by mothers referring to Talash center. Also, lack of tracing the results in terms of durability of enrichment training can be considered as another limitation. The author was in charge of all steps, thus, the mothers' responses may be somewhat oriented. The coming similar studies are proposed to follow up treatment results and employ the enrichment program for reduction of other psychological problems of the mothers having children with specific learning disabilities. Also, the therapists are recommended to consider the enrichment program -requiring the least equipment, facilities and cost- in addition to medical treatments.

Finally, the enrichment program can be an efficient way to increase psychological well-being, and marital quality and satisfaction among mothers of children with specific learning disabilities.

## Acknowledgments

Hereby, we announce our deep down appreciation to mothers of children with specific learning disabilities referring to Talash learning disabilities Clinic in Tehran, who played the main role in conducting present study.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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