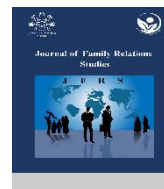




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Research Paper

Comparing the Effectiveness of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy and Self-Regulation Couple Therapy in Ego Strength in Couples on the Verge of Divorce



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The increase in divorce rates has led to many studies on divorce prevention. The present study was conducted with the objective of comparing the effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy in the ego strength of couples on the verge of divorce.

Methods: The design of this quasi-experimental study was pretest-posttest with a control group and a three-month follow-up. The statistical population included all the couples on the verge of divorce in martyr Mottahari family court complex in Mashhad in 2019. Sixty couples who referred to Bahar Divorce Counseling Center in Mashhad were selected. They were randomly assigned to two experimental groups (i.e., emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy) and a control group. There were 20 couples in each group. The instrument included Ego Strength Questionnaire (Markstrom & Marshall, 2007). In addition, one-way analysis of variance and Bonferroni post hoc test were used to analyze the data using SPSS software (version 25).

Results: Both intervention methods were effective in strengthening the ego of the couples on the verge of divorce ($P < 0.0001$). Furthermore, the effectiveness of both methods sustained over time. Moreover, there was no significant difference between the two methods in terms of the effectiveness.

Conclusion: According to the results of the study, it is suggested that counselors and psychologists in the field of couple and family therapy use the two methods of emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy in order to strengthen the ego of the couples with challenges.

1. Introduction

Divorce is a social phenomenon and a problem which strongly affects people's lives due to its negative consequences (Zaitov & Teshayev, 2022). Divorce is associated with a range of negative consequences; it endangers the level of mental health in families, leads to emotional and psychological problems of family members, leads to various crimes, and leaves many children homeless (Raley & Sweeney, 2020; Sands et

al., 2017). The prevalence of divorce has increased in the world in recent decades (Turner et al., 2022). Iran is not exempt from this situation. According to the statistics published by Iranian Statistics Center, in the first half of 2021, divorce in the country has grown by 16.4 percent compared to the same period in the first half of 2020 (Iran Statistics Center, 2021).

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These statistics indicate that the phenomenon of divorce is a fundamental issue which deserves lots of attention.

Researchers believe that various factors at the levels of individual, family and society, both independently and in interaction with each other, affect couples' relationships and lead to divorce (Amato, 2010). Ego strength is one of the individual factors. It refers to one's capacity to manage the conflicting demands of the id, the superego and the requirements of the external reality; to the extent that ego is not able to create a functional balance, one's personality would be disturbed (Frederick & McNeal, 2013). According to Stafrace and Evans (2004), ego strength is the ego's ability to face external reality when the ego balances the demands of the id, the superego, and the external reality.

One of the factors affecting mental health from the perspective of psychodynamic approach is ego strength. Ego plays an important role in the psychological functioning of the mind. Health and illness are functions of the ego's ability to properly handle the pressure of the desires aroused by the instincts, in such a way that it does not come into sharp conflict with the constraints of the real world and the superego. This capacity of the ego to manage the conflicting demands of the id, the superego, and the external reality is called ego strength. In addition, to the extent that the ego cannot create a functional balance, the personality would engage in dysfunctional functioning. Psychopathology can also be understood based on both the created conflicts and the inability of the ego to establish a balance between the personality levels, and the way an individual controls the conflicts (i.e., the ego's defense mechanisms) (McNeal, 2020; Yeates, 2014).

Considering the negative consequences of divorce, it seems that couples can be helped to improve their relationships through developing ego strength, organizing behavior and paying attention to intrapsychic dynamics, communication and systemic context. In the field of psychology, there are many therapeutic approaches which help couples improve their life quality. Emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy are among the therapies which have been receiving the attention of therapists in recent years to solve the couples' problems. The main concern of emotionally focused therapy is that emotion is a fundamental part of an individual's structure and is a key factor for self-organization. The most basic levels of emotional functioning are the adaptive form of information processing and the individual's preparation, which give

direction to his behavior and lead to psychological well-being (Furrow et al., 2022; Greenman & Johnson, 2022; Hosseinzadeh Taghvaie, 2022)

Emotionally focused therapy is a combination of experiential therapy and systemic therapy; it is closely related to the reduction of psychological problems in couples who are on the verge of divorce (Timulak & Keogh, 2020). In emotionally focused therapy, it is believed that the way individuals organize and process emotional experiences and the interactional patterns which they created and strengthen leads to their marital helplessness (Qiu et al., 2020). Emotionally focused therapy causes satisfaction and reduces cognitive distortions through creating constructive interactions between people and identifying secure attachment patterns. This approach focuses on changing the attachment behaviors as a tool to improve problematic relationships (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008).

Research studies (Kian et al., 2020; Saberi, 2019; Zarbi Qala Hamami, 2019) showed that emotionally focused couple therapy improved couples' coping styles and empathy, decreased emotional abuse, increased cognitive emotion regulation, quality of attachment and marital happiness, and decreased the desire for divorce. Wittenborn et al. (2019) showed that couples receiving emotionally focused couple therapy had greater improvement in depression and more satisfaction in their relationship; they showed significant and encouraging results in terms of depression and change mechanisms. Welch et al. (2019) and Beasley and Ager (2019), in independent studies, concluded that emotionally focused couple therapy was an effective therapeutic approach to reduce distress and to increase the couples' marital satisfaction. No study on this topic which was conducted in the context of Iran was found. Following behavioral, cognitive and emotional methods, self-regulation couple therapy, which was introduced by Halford et al. in 1994 (Mansouri, 2015), enables couples to achieve change in their relationships; it has an enduring effect on improving the quality of the couples' relationships. This method of couple therapy emphasizes self-regulation for two reasons. First, most troubled couples mistakenly attribute all relationship problems to their spouse's negative behaviors. Thus, since they have no direct control over their partner's behavior, this makes couples feel helpless to make changes in their relationships. Second, the emphasis on self-regulation increases higher-level competencies which not only allow couples to change interactions common in the relationship problems, but also help them create self-changes which strengthen the relationship in the future (Halford, 2003).

Arianfar and Hosseinian (2018) concluded that self-regulation couple therapy was effective in increasing the vitality and controlling the emotions of disturbed couples. Moreover, Yousefi and Karimipour (2017) and Sepahrian and Dukanei Fard (2017) showed that self-regulation couple therapy significantly improved the couples' coping strategies and behavior control, and reduced the conflicts and burnout of couples. Knapp et al. (2015) and Hardy et al. (2015) also found that self-regulation couple therapy was effective in the compatibility of male-female relationships and the enrichment of marital relationships of spouses.

According to the literature and the upward trend of divorce, the motivation of researchers to find suitable solutions to deal with divorce has increased. In fact, paying attention to divorce is important not only from the individual's point of view, but also from the point of view of society, culture, economy and even the population (Khairollahi et al., 2019). On the other hand, since the ego is responsible for managing the psychological system, all psychological problems appear when the ego cannot fulfill its responsibilities. In general, the ability to cope with life (i.e., our psychological balance) depends on the ability and the strength of the ego to overcome various imposed pressures (Narimani & Parnian Khooy, 2021).

It seems that it is possible to help couples to improve their relationships through the transformation of ego strength in couples by organizing behaviors and paying attention to intrapsychic dynamics, communication and system's contexts. Although various research studies have confirmed the effect of these interventions on different areas of marital relations, no study has investigated the effect of these approaches on couples on the verge of divorce. Thus, the present study was conducted with the objective of comparing the effectiveness of emotionally focused therapy and self-regulation couple therapy in ego strength of couples on the verge of divorce. It sought to find out whether emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy were effective in the ego strength of couples on the verge of divorce, and whether there were any differences between them in terms of their effectiveness.

2. Materials and Methods

The design of the current quasi-experimental study was pretest-posttest with a control group and a three-month follow-up. The statistical population included all couples on the verge of divorce who were introduced to Bahar Counseling Center in Mashhad by the Martyr Motahari Family Court Complex (under the supervision of Welfare Organization) in 2019. Sixty

couples were selected through available sampling method and were randomly assigned to two experimental groups and one control group. There were 20 couples in each group (i.e., 10 males and 10 females). The inclusion criteria were age range of 20-40 years, duration of marriage of 5-10 years, simultaneous presence of husband and wife until the end of the sessions, no history of prior divorce, and the educational level of at least diploma. In addition, the exclusion criteria were suffering from acute psychological disorders, taking psychiatric drugs, and the absence of more than two sessions from the training sessions.

In order to conduct the research study, first, a letter of introduction offered by the university was given to Martyr Motahari Family Court Complex in Mashhad, and the permission to carry out the research study in Bahar Counseling Center was obtained. Second, the objectives and the process of the study were explained to the manager of the center. Then, an announcement was made regarding the therapy sessions with the desired topics and the registration conditions. One hundred and thirty-two volunteers were registered. The participants who met the basic inclusion criteria (i.e., 124 individuals) were asked to fill out Ego Strength questionnaire with the objective of screening the sample. Finally, 60 couples who both (male and female) gained lower scores in the questionnaire were selected and were randomly assigned into three groups (i.e., two experimental groups and one control group).

Research instruments:

Ego Strength Questionnaire: Ego Strength Questionnaire was developed by Markstrom et al. (1997). The final version of this questionnaire includes 64 items scored on a Likert scale ranging from five (entirely true) to one (completely false). It also has a short form of 32 items; this short form was used in this study. Markstrom and Marshall (2007) supported the internal consistency of the scale (Cronbach alpha = 0.94). The validity and the reliability of the 32-item questionnaire were also confirmed. Its internal consistency was confirmed in various studies; its concurrent validity was shown by examining its relationship with self-esteem, goal-orientation in life, internal control, and sexual roles ($r = 0.70$). Moreover, its divergent validity was confirmed by the negative correlation among ego strength and despair, identity disorder, and helplessness ($r = 0.73$). Markstrom and Marshall's (2007) research study also showed the internal consistency of this scale. They reported the Cronbach's alpha of this scale as 0.94. In Iran, Haghghat et al. (2013) reported the Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for the short form scale. The Cronbach's alpha

of the short form used in this study was 0.89, obtained based on the research findings. In the present study, the internal consistency of this questionnaire was calculated through Cronbach's alpha; it turned out to be 0.73.

After selecting the sample, the participants in the experimental groups received emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy interventions. However, the participants in the control

group did not receive any intervention. Following the plan and Johnson's (2019) emotionally focused protocol, emotionally focused couple therapy sessions were held by a researcher who was certified in emotionally focused couple therapy at Bahar Counseling Center during eight 90-120 minute sessions (from February to March 2019). The summary of emotionally focused couple therapy sessions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Johnson's Protocol of emotionally focused therapy (2019) for married women

Session	Content
1	Introducing oneself and establishing support, welcoming couples, familiarizing group members with each other and the consultant, reviewing the goals of emotionally based couple therapy, explaining the rules and the principles of the sessions
2	Accepting and reflecting on the couples' interactive and emotional experiences, discovering problematic interactions and identifying disturbing negative interaction cycles, identifying the relationship between the couples' emotional responses and their attachment levels, evaluating the problems and the attachment barriers
3	Creating a safe space for couples to communicate, discovering and identifying the underlying and unexpressed feelings, expressing pure feelings and emotions, observing the way of couples' interactions, discovering the basic fears and insecurities in couples' relationships, helping couples to re-experience emotions
4	Encouraging each couple to have an emotional conflict with each other, reshaping the cycle of interactions, building key emotional responses, coordinating the diagnosis of treatment and the couple, accepting the interaction cycle of the couple
5	Deepening the conflict through emotional experiences, focusing on oneself and not others, promoting new ways of interaction, expressing desires and wishes in the presence of the spouse
6	Expanding the experienced acceptance of each partner by his spouse, symbolizing desires (especially the repressed ones)
7	Facilitating the expression of needs and desires to rebuild the interactions based on new perceptions, changing the behavior of the damaging spouse, reconstructing and facilitating new solutions to old problems, and answering the couples' questions
8	Strengthening the current created cycle, engaging the couples, accepting new situations, reviewing the main lessons of treatment, discussing the positive and the negative points concerning the implementation of the educational plan

Following the plan and the theoretical backgrounds of self-regulation couple therapy (Halford, 2003), the self-regulation couple therapy sessions were held by a researcher who was certified in self-regulation couple

therapy at Bahar Counseling Center during eight 90-120 minute sessions (from February to March 2019). The summary of self-regulation couple therapy sessions is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The summary of self-regulation couple therapy sessions

Session	Content
1	Establishing support, identifying the factors which threaten the couples' relationship, committing the couples to the relationship
2	Evaluating, creating a shared understanding, reviewing positive memories and supporting the spouse
3	Changing the couples' cognitions, reformulating the relationship to empathize with the spouse, identifying destructive beliefs
4	Negotiating, presenting the relationship's strengths and weaknesses, providing feedback, setting goals, celebrating a day of love
5	Informing couples about the effect of negotiation factors in the relationship, the collaborative model of communication, self-change and revision, negotiating about the applied model of the relationship
6	Setting communication goals, negotiating therapeutic structure, introducing unassisted self-change
7	Evaluating the effectiveness of short-term couple therapy, asking motivational questions and evaluating self-management, thinking about the issues learned in interaction with the spouse.
8	Summarizing the meetings, specifying the changes made after participating in the sessions, applying the instructions to everyday life

In this research study, ethical considerations including observance of scientific honesty and trustworthiness, conscious consent to participate in the study, observance of anonymous right to protect the laws and confidentiality of other information were taken into

account. Moreover, statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS (version 24.0 IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA, 2016). Descriptive statistics summarised the participants' characteristics. The significance level was $p < 0.05$ for all tests.

3. Results

The investigation of the demographic characteristics of the participants in the three groups showed that the means of the age range were 34.12 ± 2.23 in the emotionally focused couple therapy group, 36.02 ± 2.75 in the self-regulation focused couple therapy group, and 35.08 ± 2.67 in the control group. The results of one-way analysis of variance showed that the three groups were homogeneous in terms of age mean ($F = 0.78, P = 0.80$). Moreover, regarding the

educational level, in emotionally focused group, 30% had a diploma, 50% had a bachelor's degree, and 20% had a master's degree. In the self-regulation couple therapy group, 35% had a diploma, 40% had a bachelor's degree, and 25% had a master's degree. In the control group, 20% had a diploma, 40% had a bachelor's degree, and 40% had a master's degree. Chi-square results showed that the three groups were homogeneous in terms of education level ($X^2 = 0.47, P = 0.66$).

Table 3. The mean and the standard deviation of the ego strength and the result of one-way analysis of variance examining the significance of the pretest

Variable	Group	Pretest		Posttest		Follow up		F	P
		Mean	Std deviation	Mean	Std deviation	Mean	Std deviation		
Ego strength	Emotionally focused couple therapy	72.80	5.80	80.85	6.64	81.70	7.18	1.8	.71
	Self-regulation couple therapy	75.35	5.56	83.40	6.60	82.65	6.31		
	Control group	71.40	5.38	72.75	5.64	71.47	5.36		

According to Table 3, there was a difference between the mean of ego strength in the three phases of the test. The results of one-way analysis of variance investigating the significance of ego strength in the pretest of the three groups showed that the pretest scores in the three groups were not significant ($P < .05$). It should be noted that prior the inferential analysis, the assumptions of analysis of variance or repeated measurement were checked. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was found to be significant ($Z = 0.15, P = 0.15$). Thus, the condition of normal distribution of scores was met. The results of Levene's test showed the

equality of error variances in the three groups ($F = 0.37, P = 0.68$), and the results of Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the equality of the variance/covariance matrices and the assumption of sphericity were valid in ego strength variable ($F = 0.85, P = 0.01$). Therefore, Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used. In addition, the results of Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices were not significant ($F = 20.56, P = 0.08$). Thus, the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables were equal in different groups.

Table 4. The results of intra-group and inter-group effect test which compared emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy in terms of the couples' ego strength

		between-group effect					
Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.	Effect size	
Time	1121.344	1.736	654.921	113.872	0.005	0.66	
Time* group	519.356	3.47	149.58	26.37	0.005	0.48	
error	738.63	60.63	12.18				
		withingroup effects					
Intercept	1059073.60	1	1059073.60	11730.78	0.001	0.99	
Group	2573.34	2	1286.67	14.25	0.001	0.33	
Error	5146.05	57	90.282				

As Table 4 shows, the effect size of time ($F = 113.872, P < 0.01$) was significant. Therefore, it is concluded that ego strength score was different in the three phases of pretest, posttest and follow-up. As the eta value (effect size) showed, 66% of the changes in the ego strength score was explained by the intra-group factor. The intra-group interaction effect between time and the two experimental groups and the control group was also significant ($F = 26.37, P < 0.01$). Furthermore, the eta value (effect size) shows that

48% of the changes could be explained by the interaction of time and group. Moreover, the results of Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that in the emotionally focused couple therapy group, the difference between the pretest and the posttest was significant ($\Delta\bar{x} = 8.50, P \leq 0.001$), but the difference between the posttest and the follow-up was not significant ($\Delta\bar{x} = 0.15, P = 1$). In addition, in self-regulation couple therapy group, the difference between the pretest and the posttest was significant

($\Delta\bar{x} = 7.94, P \leq 0.001$), but the difference between the posttest and the follow-up was not significant ($\Delta\bar{x} = 0.84, P = 0.93$). Moreover, in the control group, the differences between the pretest and the posttest ($\Delta\bar{x} = 0.35, P = 1$), and the posttest and the follow-up ($\Delta\bar{x} = 0.30, P = 1$) were not significant.

Furthermore, the inter-group effect was significant ($F = 14.25, P \leq 0.05$). Thus, it is concluded that there was a difference between the groups. The results of Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that there was not a significant difference between the emotionally focused couple therapy group and self-regulation couple therapy group in the posttest ($\Delta\bar{x} = 2.55, P = 0.55$) and follow-up ($\Delta\bar{x} = 1.90, P = 0.93$) phases in terms of ego strength. However, there were significant differences between the emotionally focused couple therapy group and the control group, and self-regulation couple therapy group and the control group in terms of ego strength. In other words, in the three groups, the difference was in favor of the emotionally focused couple therapy group and the self-regulation couple therapy group.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of the present study was to compare the effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy in ego strength of couples on the verge of divorce. The results of the study showed that both methods of couple therapy were effective in improving the ego strength of couples on the verge of divorce, and there was no significant difference between the two methods in terms of effectiveness. In addition, both methods of couple therapy sustained over time. It should be noted that no research study has compared the effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy. However, the results of this study were consistent with those of [Saber \(2019\)](#), [Zarbi Qala Hamami \(2019\)](#), [Kian et al. \(2019\)](#), [Wittenborn et al. \(2019\)](#), [Welch et al. \(2019\)](#), and [Beasley and Ager \(2019\)](#) regarding the effectiveness of emotionally focused couple therapy.

The results concerning the effect of emotionally focused couple therapy on ego strength can be explained by referring to the fact that in emotionally focused couple therapy group in the initial sessions, the issue of couple's attachment became an obvious part of the dialogue between couples for the first time. This method assisted couples in understanding each other's sources of stress, needs and desires, and helped them in the conflict resolution process through relieving stress in the following sessions along with deepening the couples' emotional connection, being

aware of attachment needs and responding to them. As key emotional responses became clear and emotional engagement began, couples began a new level of engagement; they showed more desire for closeness and non-avoidance. Moreover, rebuilding interactions and mutual accountability reduced the couples' self-centeredness. The strength and the flexibility of the new positions of the couples also improved the availability and the responsiveness. Turning the relationship into a safe base where couples facilitated and strengthened the expression of constructive behaviors improved the positive approach's strategy. By reframing the problem in the form of textures and cycles, the general and the usual formulations of the couple's problems changed. This change could lead to the improvement of perspective development as an adaptive strategy. During the sessions, the emotional experience (through integration into communication interactions) was used to restructure the relationship, and it turned into a new interactive event which led to redefinition, control and acceptance of the relationship. These effects resulted in the improvement of acceptance strategies and positive re-evaluation strategies in marital interactions. Through keeping the blaming couple calm, re-participating the reclusive partner (instead of focusing on each other's faults) and deepening the emotional connection, the awareness of the couples about the cycle of negative interaction between the blaming couple and the reclusive couple would increase, and the couples would stop blaming each other. In the following sessions, facilitating new solutions to old problems set the ground for improving the ego strength. In fact, the couples' sincere engagement with their spouses and their responsiveness turned the relationship into a safe one where thinking about pleasant and happy topics replaced negative thoughts which increased the ego strength. The last part of the findings showed that emotionally focused couple therapy maintained its effectiveness after three months. It seems that stabilizing the changes in the last phase helped the sustainability of the results obtained in the follow-up phase.

The results of this study considering the effectiveness of self-regulation couple therapy are in line with those of [Jafari \(2019\)](#), [Arianfar and Hosseinian \(2018\)](#), [Yousefi and Karimipour \(2017\)](#), [Sepahrian and Dukanei Fard \(2017\)](#), [Knapp et al. \(2015\)](#), and [Hardy et al. \(2015\)](#).

Regarding the effect of self-regulation couple therapy on improving ego strength, it can theoretically be stated that in self-regulation couple therapy the degree of openness of each couple to observe the problems in

a new way was evaluated through raising problems in a new format. Finally, the problems of the couple's relationship were discovered jointly in a beneficial way, which improved the positive approach strategy. Furthermore, during the sessions, the possibility of creating defensive reactions, hostility and conflict was reduced by setting goals and reducing chasing and avoiding patterns in conflict control. Moreover, following the agreement of the couples and the therapist on the goals, the evaluation and the relationship's applied model, more participation and attentiveness replaced self-centeredness and avoidance. The prerequisite for success at this stage was the engagement of the couple in the course of treatment and in their relationship. In sum, it can be stated that self-regulation couple therapy provided each couple with a basis to identify changes in themselves and to improve their relationship by developing skills for self-evaluation of behaviors in a relationship, choosing and implementing changes in themselves. In addition, conducting individual and joint interviews at the beginning of the sessions helped couples to reduce blame and anger associated with negative interactions through considering the role of contextual factors in shaping their interactions. This change led to the reduction of the spouse' blame strategy. In the first step, one of the advantages of interactive tasks was recalling positive memories. Talking about positive memories and recalling them increased self-confidence and self-esteem. By creating a balance between the strengths and the weaknesses of the relationship in the fourth step, mere focusing on the negative aspects of the relationship was reduced. This issue could improve the concentration on positive thoughts; the ego strength would improve by evaluating the strengths and the weaknesses of the relationship and paying more attention to the positive aspects of the relationship. In general, self-regulation helped couples developed a sense of intimacy; it prevented them from avoiding others and their spouse. In addition, managing the source of control and self-change in people with an external source of control (which caused self-incapacity) and helping people during the sessions towards the internal source of control improved the ego strength. After three months, self-regulation couple therapy maintained its effectiveness. Basically, the generalization and the maintenance of change, especially in the last sessions, were implicit parts of self-regulation couple therapy during the treatment, which helped the sustainability of the results in the follow-up phase.

This research finding (i.e., insignificant difference between the effectiveness of emotionally-focused

couple therapy and short-term self-regulation couple therapy in ego strength of couples on the verge of divorce) can be explained through referring to the fact that in emotionally-focused couple therapy, the emotional experiences of individuals are identified, and the interaction patterns which lead to the couples' frustration in their relationships are removed and improved through processing and reorganizing. This therapeutic approach improves constructive interactions of couples through creating empathy. Furthermore, by identifying safe attachment patterns, it repairs the attachment-related injuries and improves the couples' intimacy. Moreover, it focuses on changing attachment behaviors as a tool to improve couples' troubled relationships. On the other hand, self-regulation couple therapy also makes couples more familiar with each other's needs. It helps them understand each other, face each other's positive emotions, request their inner desires from their spouse instead of being aggressive, understand the differences in tastes, learn shouldering responsibility and making decisions on important issues in their lives, improve the way of interaction, communication, speaking and listening to each other, and improve their ability to solve their problems and conflicts. As a result, this treatment is helpful as much as emotionally-based couple therapy considering couples' ego strength.

The present study suffered from several limitations. The participants of this study were selected in a limited period of time, place and conditions (e.g., age range and duration of marriage). Moreover, the use of available sampling method was another limitation of the present study. Thus, it is necessary to be cautious in generalizing of findings. It is suggested that further research studies investigate similar statistical population without time and place limitations through other sampling methods. According to the obtained results, couples and family counselors and therapists under the supervision of psychology and counseling organization, welfare organization, family courts and NAJA counseling unit are suggested that they use the two methods of emotionally focused couple therapy and self-regulation couple therapy in order to improve the ego strength and to reduce the conflicts.

5. Ethical Considerations **Compliance with ethical guidelines**

All ethical principles were considered in this article. The participants were informed about the objective of the research and its implementation phases. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and were allowed to leave the study whenever they wished. Moreover, if they desired, the research results would be available to them.

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Authors' contributions

All authors participated in the design, implementation and writing of all sections of the present study.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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