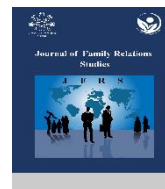




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## Research Paper

# The Effectiveness of Couple Care Program Training Based on Halford Guidelines on Intimacy and Trust of Couple Referred to Counseling Centers in Isfahan



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Couple Care Program (CARE), emotional behaviors, intimacy, supportive behaviors, aggressive behaviors, trust

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The purpose of this paper was to examine the effectiveness of the training couple care program (CARE) based on Halford's instructions on intimacy and trust of couples referred to counseling centers of Isfahan in 2021.

**Methods:** The research methodology of this study was semi-experimental divided into two groups of experiment and control with 16 participants in each group. The statistical population of this research included all couples who have referred to the counseling centers of Isfahan in the first 6 months of 2021. Subjects of experimental group participated in 7 sessions of the training program which each session took 90 minutes. Research data was collected by Alavi's questionnaire. For evaluating of the content validity of this questionnaire was utilized experts' propositions. Findings showed that the training approaches of the couple care program (CARE) are effectiveness on the intimacy, emotional, supportive, and aggressive behaviors, and trust of couples.

**Results:** when the emotional experience of love and intimacy in couples' relationships becomes less important and less valuable, the life atmosphere definitely becomes unstable and unreliable. Therefore, by implementing the care training program, it is possible to create a calm psychological atmosphere in couples' relationships and provide the way for a more productive conversation. In this way, intimate relationships become stable with the ability to communicate and agree on interests in a relationship.

**Conclusion:** the beliefs and expectations of couples affect the perception of couples, marital life, relationships and interactions. So that they can form stable relationships between couples or lead intense love to divorce; which can be improved with the help of rich programs such as CARE couple care program, communication, and care in couples.

## 1. Introduction

Family is the essence of life and as a stream of water is constantly changeable, and with the help of its members lead a strong, permanent, and interactive relationship among them can lead to a big family over time. A family is an emotional unit and a tangled web of relationships has generated from marriage and

satisfaction of each individual with married life gives them satisfaction to the whole family. The family has a vital role in society, but it's still bearing the destruction of society. One of the effective elements of couples' relationships is self-differentiation.

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According to Bowen's Systematic Review (Calatrava et al., 2022), the nature of family which there is a strong and emotional bond among the members and all experience the same life; in this system "me" represents a family. The most important element in this theory is self-differentiation. The quantity of differentiation represents how an individual can separate his thoughts from feelings, and how much he can bear the temporary feelings. On the other hand, how an individual can be away from exciting behaviors (Pezard et al., 2017).

Recently, helping married couples is worth mentioning to build and boost their emotional intimacy, such as marriage enrichment which is an educational approach led in relationship enhancement and aimed to help couples understand themselves. This approach also enables couples to identify their emotions and thoughts and to enhance their intimacy and expand Problem-Solving Approach (Edalati Shateri et al., 2010). On the other hand, another comprehensive way of relationship enhancement is Olson Enrichment Program. In his view, Capable families include some criteria enabling them to maintain their emotional health and happiness. Many researchers believe that disciplined behaviors found in intimate relationships determined their emotional intimate relationship (Coontz, 2015). From the point of view of communication skills, having no emotional relationship and marriage adversity is only possible when negative relationships occur and couples are involved in predicted samples cause unsafety through their relationships (Falconier et al., 2015). Couples' disorders are a mutual interaction determined by both of them, and they are enhanced by repetitive responses influenced by their attempts to change the relationship into a peaceful one without any direct involvement of their needs and excitement. Their attempts to handle these disorders can only strengthen fears which can increase negativity (Javadi et al., 2021). Therefore, one of the solutions of Mental Health specialists is to inform and train the couples; in this way couples will get informed the primary needs of their partners, verbal and non-verbal skills and the therapist guides them via illustrating and discovering the needs of them (Pop & Rusu, 2015).

Couple Care Program (CARE) tries to enhance the romantic relationship among the families and helps to solve the issues among them. This program not only educates the relationship skills, but also supports and improves social criteria, it also comprises three sections of Training of Social Support, Training of Conflict Management, and raining of Forgiveness. Marriage enrichment is an educational approach to enhance

couples' relationships aimed to help them to understand themselves and their partners, to analyze thoughts and emotions of each other, to improve empathy, intimacy and to enhance effective relationships and skills of problem-solving (Bowling et al., 2005). Since most of the marital discord comes from cognitive and behavioral therapy of couples and this therapy can be learned from communication skills, marriage enrichment, concentrating on the training of intimacy skills, the art of listening and sexual intercourse, anger management, conflict, pudency, recognition and problem-solving, conversation, economic management, learning the skills of relationship enhancement, building trustworthy and respect among couples, leisure time activities, religious beliefs, marriage expectations, interpersonal relations, and learning courageous behaviors and controlling excitement (Edalati Shateri et al., 2010).

Therefore, the CARE first gives some practice to couples to train them to be good supporters and to understand negative feelings of each other and to value their needs and answer them. Then, couples are being taught to have a logical analysis of their conflict without any judgment and punishment to achieve a better comprehension of their behaviors towards each other with a better feel of compromise and safety of their relationship. Finally, they will be introduced to the concept of forgiveness, and they will be encouraged to sympathize and rebuild trust to forget the past and previous discord. As a result, the Couple Care Program has been established by relying on social support and the sympathy that has been built through the comprehension of this program and mutual acceptance of couples, this program also builds a sense of security which leads to establishing a positive view towards each other and helps couples to have a long-term satisfaction of intimate relationship (Halford et al., 2010). Rahmati et al. (2021) found marital enrichment training program based on Time for better marriage (TIME) was effective in increasing marital adjustment. Also Shakouri (2020) resulted that relationship enrichment training affected on marital commitment, significantly (Rahmati et al., 2021). The results of Holmes' (2020) research showed that 52% of the participants improved their forgiveness and 39.3% of participants reported increased faith or increased dependence on God after relationship enrichment training. Couples explained the intention and awareness is the main category in effectiveness of enrichment relationship program and helps to clarify the effects of this program on marital relationship (Joshua, 2018).

Therefore, following the aforementioned, most issues of couples arise from couples' personalities after they got married such as expectations and emotional-behavioral beliefs. Postnuptial beliefs and expectations affect their way of thinking of the nature of marriage, matrimony, emotional relationship, and intimate relationship; such that it can last the relationship between the couple or lead them to divorce. These are postnuptial criteria can enhance the CARE with help of enrichment programs. Notwithstanding the importance of CARE, a quantitative study has been done. Accordingly, the key question of the researcher in this study was "does the Couple Care Program affect the emotional relationships or not?"

**2. Materials and Methods**

The research methodology was a semi-experimental method included two groups with pre-test and post-test which the variables were examined before and after the intervention of the training program. This is an available sampling was selected from the couples who have referred the counseling centers of Isfahan city in the first 6 months of 2020. 32 individuals were divided into two experimental and control groups. Subjects of experimental group received 7 training session (90 minutes). Data was collected by emotional relationship performed in questionnaire.

Emotional Behaviors Questionnaire: This questionnaire was designed by (Alavi et al., 2008).

The questionnaire included 23 questions of five components: intimacy (1,2,12), emotional behaviors (3, 7, 11, 20), supportive behavior (6, 8, 9, 10, 17, 23), aggressive behavior (13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22), and trust (4, 5, 16). It is a multiple-choice question questionnaire that the choices included never, rarely, sometimes, and totally. It also comprises 23 multiple choice questions of emotional relationships, and questions from 1 to 23 including never, rarely, sometimes, and choices ordering from 0 to 3 points, and questions from 13 to 15 and 15 to 23 have 0 to 3 points. As a result, the score range of emotional relationships of the family is between 0 and 69 and lower scores indicate adverse emotional relationships, and higher scores indicate better emotional relationships in the families. Face validity questionnaire has been done by sigma numerical validity designed by four professors of the Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. Following this face validity questionnaire, emotional behaviors of family and the questionnaire reliability was calculated 98% and 94.60%, respectively.

Training the Couple Care Program (CARE): The couple care program (CARE) is derived from the PREP program and other samples of couple care are designed by Halford in 2004. This program is designed in 7 sessions of 90 minutes has been trained the experimental group as follows:

**Table 1. Training Protocol**

sessions	Goal	Content
1	Self-modification	Focusing on the special role of each couple in the quality and life compromise
2	interaction	Speaking and listening, self-assessment of interactions
3	Care and intimacy	Care experiences, individual balance
4	Giving meaning to difference	Effective interaction of conflict, conflict management
5	Sexual intercourse	Sex myths, interaction about the sexual intercourse
6	Looking forward	Prediction of changes, planning for the changes
7	Building insight and awareness	Reviewing previous session's assignment, training exploratory listening and speaking, training to speak clearly and to listen attentively, giving assignments, and receiving feedback

**3. Results**

40% subjects were male and 60% were female with mean age of under 30 (21,875) and 31-40 (50) and over 40 (28,125). According to the self-reported

information of subjects, the duration of marriage was 2 years (18.75), 3 years (18.75), 5 years (43.75) and 8 years (18.75) with bachelor (59,375) and senior and higher (40,625) education degrees.

**Table 2. Results of Covariance Analysis Scores Intimacy**

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Eta
<b>Modified model</b>	6/113	2	3/056	5/424	0/038	0/646
<b>Pre-test</b>	4/954	1	4/954	6/155	0/041	0/702
<b>Group</b>	1/104	1	1/104	4/452	0/007	0/499
<b>Error</b>	12/171	27	0/450			

According to the results of Table 2, the value-p test for (0/007) was less than value-p of  $\alpha=0/05$ . It means that the difference between the experiment and control groups and it showed that the training approach of the Couple Care Program (CARE) had a direct impact on the emotional behaviors of couples. Since the Eta coefficient indicates the effect of group variables on

research variables; therefore, following the results, the effect of the experimental group on the intimacy of post-test is (0/499). Hence, 49% of changes in post-test scores result from couple care training. As a result, the training approach of the Couple Care Program (CARE) has a direct impact on the intimacy of couples with 95% assurance.

**Table 3. Results of Covariance Analysis Scores of Emotional Behaviors**

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Eta
<b>Modified model</b>	5/063	2	2/531	6/995	0/007	0/533
<b>Pre-test</b>	3/008	1	3/048	3/048	0/028	0/455
<b>Group</b>	2/063	1	2/063	3/990	0/021	0/855
<b>Error</b>	10/134	27	0/375			

According to the results of table 3, the value of the significance level of the test for the group (0.021) was less than the value of the significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ . As a result, the difference stated in the hypothesis is

significant. That is, the difference between the scores of the control and the test showed that the training of the care program for couples (CARE) had an effect on the emotional behaviors of couples.

**Table 4. Results of Covariance Analysis Scores of Supportive Behaviors**

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Eta
<b>Modified model</b>	8/425	2	4/212	31/620	0/000	1
<b>Pre-test</b>	8/324	1	8/324	62/484	0/000	1
<b>Group</b>	1/165	1	1/165	8/743	0/006	0/813
<b>Error</b>	3/597	27	0/133			

According to the results of table 4, the value of the significance level of the test for the group (0.00) was less than the value of the significance level of  $p=0.5$ . The difference between the scores of the control and

the test showed that the training of the care program for couples (CARE) was effective on the supportive behavior of couples.

**Table 5. Results of Covariance Analysis Scores of Aggressive Behaviors**

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Eta
<b>Modified model</b>	9/412	2	4/706	38/285	0/000	1
<b>Pre-test</b>	9/121	1	9/121	67/014	0/000	1
<b>Group</b>	2/072	1	2/072	9/516	0/000	0/847
<b>Error</b>	20/605	27	0/763			

According to the results of table 5, the value of the significance level of the test for the group (0.00) was less than the value of the significance level  $p=0/05$ . The difference between the scores of the control and

the test indicates that the training of the Care of Couples Program (CARE) approach was effective on the violent behavior of couples.

**Table 6. Results of Covariance Analysis Scores of Couple's Trust**

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Eta
<b>Modified model</b>	14/248	2	7/142	44/162	0/000	1
<b>Pre-test</b>	12/006	1	12/006	70/913	0/000	1
<b>Group</b>	3/916	1	3/916	12/117	0/000	0/891
<b>Error</b>	30/206	27	1/118			

As seen in table 6, the value of the significance level of the test for the group (0.00) is less than the value of the significance level of  $p=0.05$ . The difference

between the scores of the control and the test indicated that the training of the care program for couples (CARE) was effective on the trust of couples.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of Couple Care Program Training Based on Halford Guidelines on emotional behaviors of couples referred to Counseling Centers of Isfahan City. Findings indicated that the training approach of the CARE leads in increasing in the emotional behaviors of couples.

According to these findings and in Pezard et al. (2017)'s view, friendship and intimacy behavior with the spouse is one of the significant factors in the quality of married life. Based on this, it can be said that in Iran, based on the strong role of traditions and cultural factors, many marriages need the approval of parents, and if there is no such approval and consent, either the marriage will not take place, or the young couple will face problems after marriage, and this intellectual and behavioral inconsistency Parents/spouses will most likely lead to separation. Intimacy is like a mirror that reflects whatever is in the mind. Therefore, in the enrichment training groups of relationship, excluding the style of communication that participants have had with their spouse before, and the amount of adversity had a direct effect on the improvement of couple life, amount of intimacy, and satisfaction of them, and it leads to an enhancement of trust between the couple. As a result, the training approach of the couple care program (CARE) has direct effects on a couple's intimacy. In the opinion of intimacy, it depends on the level of recognition and trust, and if the opportunity for recognition and trust is not provided due to side preoccupations or the interference of others, the emotional relationship will be incomplete and as a result emotional separation will take place. The restorative or enrichment training will be very helpful in family therapy. According to Raezadeh's (20<sup>۲۰</sup>), findings represent that intimacy among couples who have received the training skills of relationship enrichment is more than the control group and also the skills of relationship enrichment have a positive effect on dimensions of emotional self-assessment, assessment of others' emotions, utilizing adjustment of emotions (Rahmati et al., 2021). On the other hand, Nazari et al. (2019) presented that the enrichment training of couple's relationship in Olson's method has an increasing effect on the married life of couples in Farsan.

Training approach of couple care program (CARE) affected on couple's emotional behaviors. According to these findings and in Satir's view (1998), love between two persons is the most significant reward and the best feeling that every individual can experience. Without love and interest and others'

interest, our soul and body are going to be withered and destroyed. Hence, the training approach of the CARE included cognitive, excitement, and behavioral changes that can lead to enhancing the skills and insight of couples about emotional behaviors. The purpose of the training program is to help people to increase interpersonal competence, life satisfaction, an improvement in married life, and interactional and communicational skills among couples. As a result, the training approach of the couple care program has a direct impact on the emotional behaviors of couples because the enhancement of couples' emotional behaviors leads to putting the spouse in a way of functional interactions towards each other. In our society, we witness cases where many people become completely dependent on each other before marriage and are unable to see the facts, especially the negative aspects of their personality, and with this approach, they enter the shared life. Therefore, one of the reparative or enriching aspects of marriage is training to show appropriate and sufficient emotions at the appropriate time and in a correct and logical manner, which youngest couples are unaware of and go to marriage with only emotions. As a result, they need counseling interventions.

The training approach of the couple care program (CARE) affected on the couple's supportive behaviors. According to these findings and in Claramita et al.'s view (2016), intimacy is a kind of benevolent and philanthropy love and is an aspect of supportive behavior of couple on the other hand. The in-common feeling is paying attention to the wife or husband. To achieve more love in life, we need someone who we can share our feelings and words with them, without facing any blame, criticism, or rejection. Since expressing supportive behavior using some ways such as an encouragement to express feelings with words and to enhance the amount of positive interaction towards negative interaction which plays a key role in intimate relationships. In the current competitive real world, due to the dominance of selfishness and positioning, even though it is false, and the poisonous competition of humans, in some cases we witness the competition between couples not as life partners, but as two rivals of destiny. In such conditions, regardless of their existential capacities and social opportunities, they not only deprive of support each other, rather conflicts happen. In our current society, men even leave their wives out of the scene to receive social support and they cause irreparable damage to each other. Of course, individual support is tied to social situations in many cases, and in the conditions of social unrest and crises,



personal lives also become unbalanced and couples use avoidance behaviors. Following the approach of couple care program, the importance of honest expression of emotions in married life is of the essence and according to this approach expressing supportive behavior can lead to an improvement in the relationship of couples. As a result, the training approach of couple care programs have a direct impact on the supportive behavior of couples because the enhancement of couples' emotional behaviors leads to an increase in mutual relationships and success in life. Jalali et al. (2019)'s findings showed that the enrichment approach is more than Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) based on the couple's supportive behavior. According to the results, we can use both approaches specifically Gottman's Relationship Enrichment Approach to improve the communicational samples of couples and finally to enhance the supportive behavior of couples and the quality of married life.

The training approach of couple care program (CARE) affected on aggressive behaviors of couples. According to these findings and in Bradshaw et al.'s view (1999), conflict is an inevitable factor and the manner of behaving and solving these conflicts affect the aggressive behavior of couples. Joshua (2018) made a proposition that human considers their outcomes and perception as real truth and do not regard them as hypotheses that should be examined. To put it another way, this approach emphasizes how others interpret their behavior and they give meaning to them by cognitive content and finally, they predict the behavior of their spouse. Therefore, a probable effective result of relationship enrichment on aggressive behavior of couples was the change of false beliefs and creeds of participants. Thanks to the training couple care program of participants, a change in beliefs, and judgment about spouse's behavior at the early stages of life, and avoidance of mind-reading lead to misunderstanding, they probably figured out that the main reason for these problems was the misunderstanding leads to a decrease in aggressive behaviors of couples. Here, we can talk about the role of negative schemas and cognitive distortions, which are common among couples, and when there is no preparation, correct interaction, and openness in behavior, it leads to mind reading and personal inference. As a result, violent behaviors occur directly and indirectly. In couple therapy, we often see violent behaviors that are probably caused by the lack of anger management and conflict resolution in times of differences, and this should be addressed in the educational program of couple therapy and family

therapy.

The training approach of the couple care program (CARE) affected on the trust of couples. According to these findings and in Hofmann (2006) view, married life without trust leads to worry, anxiety, pessimism, and eventually disorganization. If there's no confidence and trust in family, life will be mentally disorganized. Therefore, behaviors that may cause couples to lose their trust should be controlled to ensure that couples have complete trust in each other. Following the approach of couple care program, one of the skills that couples should learn is communication skills and trust in the spouse. Solving the issues among couples can lead to establishing and make couple's resistance and a normal relationship towards each other. In such cases, couples should be helped to express their expectations and at the same time talk about their special sensitivities without censorship. The ways of gaining trust and rebuilding trust in order to return to normal life should be investigated and presented as an assignment. The factors that cause damage to mutual trust should be known, they should be available, when necessary, a good investment should be made emotionally, health and the satisfaction of the parties is important for each other. This approach tries to train the couples to establish a relationship based on trust.

One of the main limitations of this study was not using of observation and interview. This study has been investigated in some counseling centers of some areas of Isfahan, hence the generalizability of this study's result should be done cautiously. According to the effects of excitement skills and emotional security on emotional behaviors and to enhance the emotional behaviors and married life, it's suggested carrying out some training activities by Welfare Organization. On the other hand, it's recommended for couples and family therapists to pay attention to this approach and train it to students.

## 5. Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

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

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### Authors' contributions

All authors have 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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