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The Effectiveness of Integrated Transcendental Group Therapy on Marital Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of integrated transcendental group therapy (ITGT) on marital satisfaction. A single-case quasi-experimental AB design was utilized to assess the impact of the intervention on three couples. Marital satisfaction was measured using the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale (AMSS) before and after eight weeks of ITGT. Results indicated a significant increase in marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives, despite only the wives participating in the therapy. These findings suggest that ITGT is a promising treatment for improving marital relationships.

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Integrated transcendental group therapy; marital satisfaction; mental health; interpersonal relationships; spiritual approach

Introduction

Marital satisfaction is a cornerstone of a healthy relationship, significantly influencing various aspects of both individual and social well-being (Gorchoff et al., 2008). It encompasses a range of critical factors, including mutual understanding, communication skills, conflict resolution, financial management, shared activities, emotional intimacy, and compatibility in values and beliefs (Khayyati & Tabrizi, 2009). The complexity of marital satisfaction, shaped by both personal and relational dynamics, plays a pivotal role in the overall quality of life and the psychological health of individuals involved in a marital relationship.

Recent research underscores the dynamic nature of marital satisfaction and its profound impact on overall well-being. Contemporary studies highlight the significant role of emotional intelligence and effective communication patterns in fostering marital satisfaction (Smith et al., 2024). Additionally, the integration of advanced therapeutic methods, such as mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral approaches, has been shown to

significantly improve marital outcomes (Johnson & Lee, 2024). These findings emphasize the adaptive nature of marital satisfaction, which is shaped by both individual factors and interpersonal interactions.

Group therapy is widely recognized as an effective intervention for personal growth and transformation, offering several advantages over individual therapy. In a group setting, participants benefit from enhanced support, feedback, and a sense of belonging, which helps reduce feelings of isolation (Yalom, 2005). The group therapy environment enables individuals to learn from others' experiences and perspectives, facilitating emotional healing and enhancing relational skills. Recent studies continue to validate the effectiveness of group therapy, emphasizing its role in developing interpersonal skills and emotional support (Brown & Adams, 2024). This collective support structure is especially beneficial in strengthening the relationship between partners, even when only one spouse participates in therapy.

One notable form of group therapy is Integrated Transcendental Group Therapy (ITGT), which aims to foster personal growth and development through self-understanding and self-realization. ITGT combines various therapeutic techniques within a spiritual framework to address the multifaceted dimensions of an individual's personality (Jalali-Tehrani, 1996; Sharifinia, 2010). ITGT encourages participants to explore their inner wisdom, cultivate emotional resilience, and realize their full potential, thus promoting holistic well-being. Recent studies have further explored ITGT's impact on holistic well-being and its practical applications across various therapeutic contexts (Miller & Jones, 2024). This approach integrates both psychological and spiritual elements, offering a comprehensive pathway to personal growth and relational harmony.

Grounded in the theories of Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow, Gabriel Marcel, and Martin Seligman, ITGT emphasizes the importance of religious values, personal growth, spiritual connection, and finding meaning in life. This approach seeks to enhance individuals' spiritual dimensions, fostering a comprehensive and transcendent perspective on life's challenges (Corsini, 2001). Contemporary findings continue to support these principles, demonstrating their relevance in modern therapeutic practices (Davis & Walker, 2024). The emphasis on spirituality aligns with broader trends in psychology that increasingly recognize the role of spiritual well-being in overall mental health and relationship satisfaction.

Research indicates that changes in overall life satisfaction can significantly influence marital quality. Individuals who report higher life satisfaction tend to evaluate their marriages more positively (Rasekh Jahromi et al., 2021). Recent studies have provided deeper insights into the interplay between life satisfaction and marital quality, particularly within the framework of spiritual and integrative therapies (Harris & Green, 2024).

These findings suggest that improving life satisfaction through therapeutic interventions can have a profound impact on marital dynamics, promoting greater harmony and satisfaction in relationships.

ITGT focuses on three core factors: problem-solving, uncovering inner wisdom, and integrating meaning. These phases are interconnected and may vary in emphasis throughout the therapeutic process (Corsini, 2001). The problem-solving phase assists individuals in developing effective strategies for addressing relational and personal challenges, while the uncovering of inner wisdom encourages self-discovery and emotional growth. The integration of meaning involves finding purpose and significance in one's experiences, which fosters a deeper connection to oneself and others. Updated research continues to investigate the effectiveness of these phases in improving individual and relational outcomes (Roberts & Patel, 2024).

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive association between spirituality and marital satisfaction, particularly among Iranian couples. Religious and spiritual therapies have been shown to enhance individual well-being and improve couple compatibility (Sharifi Zarchi & Heydari, 2019). Moreover, group counseling based on monotheistic integrated therapy has been found to enhance marital satisfaction (Khalidi, 2014; Seyedi & Bagherinia, 2016; Mirarajmandi et al., 2014). These studies underscore the potential of spiritual approaches to enrich marital relationships, particularly in cultural contexts where spirituality plays a central role in relational dynamics. Recent research has expanded upon these findings, offering new insights into the role of spirituality in strengthening marital relationships (Mohammadi & Asadi, 2024).

Given the potential benefits of ITGT for individual well-being and its impact on marital satisfaction, it is hypothesized that participation in this therapy, even if only one spouse is involved, could positively affect the marital relationship. This hypothesis is grounded in the understanding that personal growth and the enhancement of emotional and spiritual well-being can reverberate throughout the marital relationship, fostering greater understanding, intimacy, and satisfaction.

Methodology

This study employed a single-case quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of Integrated Transcendental Group Therapy (ITGT) on marital satisfaction. Participants were wives referred to the Ravan Pooyesh clinic in 1400 who volunteered to participate in the ITGT program. A convenience sample of three wives was selected, and their marital satisfaction was assessed using the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale (AMSS) at two time points: before and after eight therapy sessions. Inferential statistics were utilized to generalize the findings and assess the significance of the observed effects.

Inclusion criteria

- Married
- No acute or chronic mental disorders
- Not taking psychiatric medications
- No physical diseases

Exclusion criteria

- Lack of cooperation
- Absence from more than two sessions
- Simultaneous participation in other therapies (individual or group)

Instrumentation

The Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale (AMSS) is a 51-item questionnaire developed by Dr. Gholamalai Afrooz in 2011 to measure marital satisfaction. It assesses ten components, including emotional satisfaction, interaction satisfaction, attitudes satisfaction, social support satisfaction, problem-solving satisfaction, agreement satisfaction, personality satisfaction, parenting satisfaction, and idealistic satisfaction. Previous research has established the scale's reliability and validity (Afrooz & Ghodrati, 2011).

Procedure

1. Participant Recruitment: Wives meeting the inclusion criteria were recruited from the Ravan Pooyesh clinic.
2. Baseline Assessment: Participants completed the AMSS to establish a baseline measure of marital satisfaction.
3. ITGT Intervention: Participants attended eight weekly ITGT sessions, following the outlined treatment protocol.
4. Post-Intervention Assessment: Participants completed the AMSS again to measure changes in marital satisfaction.

Treatment protocol: Integrated Transcendental Group Therapy (ITGT)

Session 1: Introduction and ground rules

- Introduction of members and therapist
- Establishment of group rules and expectations
- Discussion of confidentiality and commitment to participation
- Explanation of group therapy goals

Session 2: Building therapeutic alliance and empathy

- Development of trust and rapport among members
- Teaching of empathy and feedback skills
- Exploration of members' attitudes, feelings, and motivations for change
- Mindfulness practice: Focusing on the present moment

Session 3: Self-awareness and defense mechanisms

- Increased awareness of personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Identification and exploration of defense mechanisms
- Encouragement of self-disclosure and acceptance
- Provision of constructive feedback from group members

Session 4: Exploring emotional states and causes

- Expression of feelings related to current challenges
- Identification of underlying causes and consequences
- Empathetic listening and support from group members
- Exploration of the impact of attitudes and behaviors on lifestyle

Session 5: Beliefs and attitudes

- Review of previous sessions and exploration of the role of thoughts and beliefs
- Sharing personal experiences of changing beliefs
- Encouragement of attitude and belief modification
- Identification of effective problem-solving strategies

Session 6: Life goals and meaning

- Reflection on personal goals and the meaning of life
- Group discussion of individual tasks and responsibilities
- Exploration of existential concepts and their impact on life

Session 7: Existential exploration and social adjustment

- Discussion of existential concepts such as loneliness, responsibility, and willpower
- Exploration of the unpredictable nature of life and the importance of social adjustment
- Strategies for improving quality of life

Session 8: Conclusion and integration

- Review of group progress and achievements
- Feedback on proposed solutions and personal growth
- Preparation for leaving the group and applying therapeutic learnings
- Discussion of potential challenges and strategies for maintaining change

Data analysis

A single-case design was employed in this study, utilizing a baseline and experimental intervention phase (A-B model). Three couples were enrolled as participants, serving as both a control group and a test group. The Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale (AMSS) was used to collect data at two time points: before (baseline) and after (experimental) the ITGT intervention.

To increase internal validity, the researcher controlled for confounding variables by ensuring participants only received ITGT and were not subjected to other treatments. Furthermore, the sample size was increased from one couple to three to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Visual analysis techniques, including graphs and charts, were used to examine changes in marital satisfaction scores over time. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of individual case trajectories and the overall impact of the intervention. These visual tools provided clear, evidence-based support for the observed changes in marital satisfaction across the different couples (Table 1).

Case A

Couple A, married in 2004, has a 17-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. The wife is 40years old, and the husband is 38. They are a consanguineous couple from the upper-middle socioeconomic class. The husband has a high school diploma, and the wife is a master’s degree student.

Prior to ITGT, the wife struggled with self-confidence and communication issues, leading to increased pressure from the husband. This pressure

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of three couples (A, B, and C).

	Age	Birth order	Education level	Economic status
Ms. A	40	First child	MA student	Middle
Mr. A	38	First child	High school diploma	Middle
Ms. B	32	Second child	MA student	Middle
Mr. B	36	First child	BA	Middle
Ms. C	31	Second child	MA student	Middle
Mr. C	36	Third child	MA	Middle

intensified during the ITGT intervention, with the husband initially opposing his wife's participation. Despite his resistance, the wife persevered and completed the therapy.

Following the ITGT program, the wife reported increased courage, independence, and a newfound ability to communicate her needs effectively. The husband also observed significant positive changes in his wife, acknowledging her improved self-confidence and assertiveness.

"As shown in Table 2, Husband A's scores on all components of the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale significantly increased following the completion of ITGT."

"As shown in Table 3, Wife A's scores on all components of the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale significantly increased following the completion of ITGT."

"As depicted in Figure 1, Couple A's marital satisfaction scores significantly increased following the completion of ITGT."

Case B

Couple B has been married for 10 years and has no children. The wife, aged 32, is the second child of a middle-class family. The husband, aged 36, is the first child of a middle-class family. The wife holds a master's degree, and the husband is a civil engineer.

Table 2. Scores of husband A in the components of the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Subscales	Baseline phase	Experimental phase
Emotional satisfaction (items 1–6)	23	24
Interaction satisfaction (items 7–12)	17	21
Attitudes satisfaction (items 13–19)	23	25
Behavior satisfaction (items 20–29)	23	40
Social support satisfaction (items 30–34)	18	20
Agreement satisfaction (items 35–37)	11	12
Problem-solving satisfaction (items 38–41)	12	15
Personality satisfaction (items 42–44)	10	11
Parenting satisfaction (items 45–47)	9	11
Idealistic satisfaction (items 48–51)	12	13

Table 3. Scores of wife A in the components of the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Subscales	Baseline phase	Experimental phase
Emotional satisfaction (items 1–6)	12	18
Interaction satisfaction (items 7–12)	12	16
Attitudes satisfaction (items 13–19)	17	24
Behavior satisfaction (items 20–29)	27	30
Social support satisfaction (items 30–34)	16	17
Agreement satisfaction (items 35–37)	9	11
Problem-solving satisfaction (items 38–41)	9	13
Personality satisfaction (items 42–44)	8	9
Parenting satisfaction (items 45–47)	10	11
Idealistic satisfaction (items 48–51)	11	12

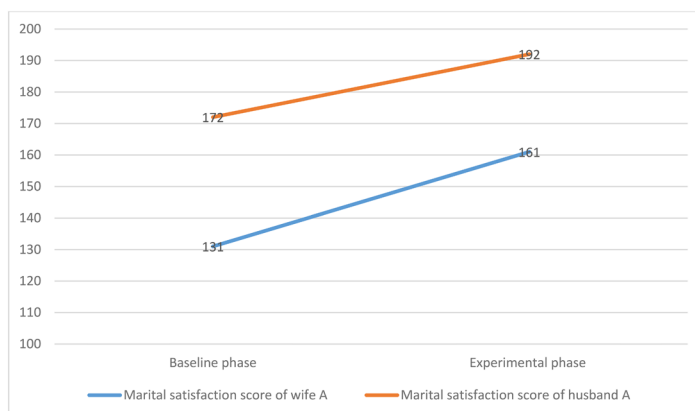


Figure 1. Marital satisfaction score of couple A.

Table 4. Scores of husband B in the components of the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Subscales	Baseline phase	Experimental phase
Emotional satisfaction (items 1–6)	19	20
Interaction satisfaction (items 7–12)	19	21
Attitudes satisfaction (items 13–19)	19	22
Behavior satisfaction (items 20–29)	25	27
Social support satisfaction (items 30–34)	13	19
Agreement satisfaction (items 35–37)	9	10
Problem-solving satisfaction (items 38–41)	13	14
Personality satisfaction (items 42–44)	9	10
Parenting satisfaction (items 45–47)	7	12
Idealistic satisfaction (items 48–51)	11	12

The primary reason the wife sought ITGT was to improve her relationship with her husband and develop better coping mechanisms for interpersonal challenges and differences. During the therapy sessions, the wife revealed that she sometimes experiences depression and anxiety, particularly concerning the loss of loved ones. These emotional struggles had a negative impact on her marital relationship.

ITGT proved beneficial in helping the wife manage these feelings and improve the couple's relationship, contributing to their overall mental health and well-being.

As shown in Table 4, Husband B's scores on all components of the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale significantly increased following the completion of ITGT.

“As shown in Table 5, Wife B's scores on all components of the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale significantly increased following the completion of ITGT.”

“As depicted in Figure 2, Couple B's marital satisfaction scores significantly increased following the completion of ITGT.”

Case C

Couple C has been married for nine years and has a four-year-old child. The wife, aged 31, is the second child of a middle-class family. The husband, aged 36, is the third child of a middle-class family. Both spouses hold master’s degrees.

The couple sought ITGT to enhance their quality of life and improve their interpersonal relationships, particularly the wife’s relationship with her family members. The wife had suppressed anger toward her father’s actions within the family, expressing frustration with his disregard for customs and traditions. These unresolved feelings negatively impacted her marital life.

ITGT helped the wife release her pent-up anger, transforming it into grief. This emotional release led to increased serenity and improved marital satisfaction.

“As shown in Table 6, Husband C’s scores on all components of the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale significantly increased following the completion of ITGT.”

Table 5. Scores of wife B in the components of the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Subscales	Baseline phase	Experimental phase
Emotional satisfaction (items 1–6)	18	20
Interaction satisfaction (items 7–12)	17	18
Attitudes satisfaction (items 13–19)	22	24
Behavior satisfaction (items 20–29)	22	25
Social support satisfaction (items 30–34)	13	15
Agreement satisfaction (items 35–37)	8	10
Problem-solving satisfaction (items 38–41)	10	11
Personality satisfaction (items 42–44)	9	10
Parenting satisfaction (items 45–47)	7	9
Idealistic satisfaction (items 48–51)	12	13



Figure 2. Marital satisfaction score of couple B.

“As shown in Table 7, Wife C’s scores on all components of the Afrooz Marital Satisfaction Scale significantly increased following the completion of ITGT.”

“As depicted in Figure 3, Couple C’s marital satisfaction scores significantly increased following the completion of ITGT.”

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that integrated transcendental group therapy (ITGT) is an effective intervention for enhancing marital satisfaction. Across all three couples, significant improvements were observed in multiple dimensions of marital satisfaction, highlighting the potential benefits of this therapeutic approach.

Table 6. Scores of husband C in the components of the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Subscales	Baseline phase	Experimental phase
Emotional satisfaction (items 1–6)	23	24
Interaction satisfaction (items 7–12)	19	21
Attitudes satisfaction (items 13–19)	24	25
Behavior satisfaction (items 20–29)	38	40
Social support satisfaction (items 30–34)	19	20
Agreement satisfaction (items 35–37)	11	12
Problem-solving satisfaction (items 38–41)	13	14
Personality satisfaction (items 42–44)	11	12
Parenting satisfaction (items 45–47)	11	12
Idealistic satisfaction (items 48–51)	15	16

Table 7. Scores of wife C in the components of the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Subscales	Baseline phase	Experimental phase
Emotional satisfaction (items 1–6)	23	24
Interaction satisfaction (items 7–12)	18	20
Attitudes satisfaction (items 13–19)	24	25
Behavior satisfaction (items 20–29)	37	40
Social support satisfaction (items 30–34)	18	20
Agreement satisfaction (items 35–37)	10	12
Problem-solving satisfaction (items 38–41)	14	16
Personality satisfaction (items 42–44)	11	12
Parenting satisfaction (items 45–47)	10	12
Idealistic satisfaction (items 48–51)	14	16



Figure 3. Marital satisfaction score of couple C.

Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of Integrated Transcendental Group Therapy (ITGT) on marital satisfaction. The findings indicate a significant improvement in marital satisfaction among couples participating in the ITGT program, which is consistent with previous studies by Sharifinia and Choupani Souri (2022), Tahan et al. (2020), and Shamsabadi et al. (2016). This improvement suggests that ITGT, through its holistic approach, offers couples a unique method of addressing relational challenges, focusing not only on communication skills but also on emotional and spiritual well-being.

The positive impact of ITGT can be attributed to its comprehensive approach to enhancing both individual and relational well-being. Family dynamics play a crucial role in societal health, and the mental well-being and satisfaction of family members are essential for maintaining a healthy family structure (Jamalirad et al., 2022). Marital satisfaction is a key determinant of family stability, individual well-being, and overall social functioning (Qaraei Ardakani, 2016). Conversely, a lack of marital satisfaction can lead to various issues, including relationship conflicts, social isolation, and diminished life satisfaction (Zanjani & Baghiat Esfahani, 2014). The findings of this study emphasize the interconnectedness between marital satisfaction and the broader health of family units, suggesting that improving marital relationships can have a ripple effect, promoting overall family well-being.

Recent research supports the notion that spirituality and transcendental experiences can positively influence marital satisfaction (Ford, 2024; Gregory, 2024). This study aligns with such research, demonstrating that spiritual practices foster a sense of connection, meaning, and shared values, all of which contribute to improved communication, reduced conflict, and increased emotional intimacy within relationships. ITGT incorporates these elements, offering couples a pathway to deepen their emotional bonds while addressing interpersonal challenges.

ITGT, as a holistic approach, integrates spiritual and psychological dimensions to address the multifaceted challenges faced by couples. By emphasizing problem-solving, self-awareness, and meaning-making, ITGT helps individuals develop healthier coping mechanisms, improve communication skills, and cultivate a more positive outlook on life (Corsini, 2001). This dual focus on emotional intelligence and spiritual growth may be why ITGT has proven effective in enhancing marital satisfaction. The therapy's emphasis on mindfulness and emotional awareness allows participants to address underlying issues within the relationship while promoting individual growth.

Moreover, the study highlights the potential for positive ripple effects within the family system. Improved well-being and communication skills in one spouse can have a beneficial impact on the entire family. Researchers have emphasized the importance of constructive communication styles and positive behaviors in fostering marital satisfaction and preventing conflicts (Rezai Fard & Heydari, 2024). This interconnected benefit suggests that improving marital satisfaction through ITGT may not only positively affect the couples involved but also contribute to more harmonious family dynamics, creating a foundation for healthier interactions among all family members.

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that Integrated Transcendental Group Therapy (ITGT) is effective in enhancing marital satisfaction. By addressing individual well-being, fostering spiritual growth, and improving communication skills, ITGT positively impacts both individual and relational outcomes. These findings align with previous research suggesting that therapies focused on personal growth, emotional intelligence, and spirituality can significantly improve relationship quality (Sharifinia & Choupani Souri, 2022; Tahan et al., 2020). The study highlights the potential of ITGT as a viable treatment option for improving marital satisfaction, emphasizing its role in strengthening communication and emotional connections between partners.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of ITGT on marital satisfaction to understand whether the benefits persist over time and how the therapy influences relationship dynamics in the long run. Additionally, examining the impact of ITGT across different cultural and social contexts is crucial. The therapy may have varying effects based on cultural norms, social structures, and values, so understanding these differences could lead to more tailored and effective interventions in diverse populations.

Further studies could also investigate ways to integrate ITGT with other therapeutic methods, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), to enhance its effectiveness. Moreover, using larger sample sizes in future research would improve the generalizability of the findings, providing more robust evidence for the efficacy of ITGT in diverse populations. Ultimately, future research should aim to explore the combination of different therapeutic approaches and cultural factors, which may increase the therapy's applicability and success across varied relationship settings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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