

## Comparison of the Effectiveness of Relationship Enrichment Training and Life Skills Training in Reducing Marital Conflict and Violence

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Conflict and violence are issues that couples experiencing continuous discord often suffer from, making it essential to implement effective interventions to reduce these problems. This study aims to compare the effectiveness of relationship enrichment training and life skills training in reducing marital discord and violence among couples. The research method was a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with a control group. The study population consisted of 18- to 40-year-old couples who visited family counseling centers in Sirjan in 1403 (Iranian calendar year). The sample size was 45, randomly divided into three groups of 15: a control group, an experimental group for relationship enrichment training, and an experimental group for life skills training. The first experimental group participated in eight 45-minute sessions of relationship enrichment training, while the second experimental group received life skills training in eight 45-minute sessions. Meanwhile, the control group did not receive any specific therapeutic intervention during this period. The tools used in this study included the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (2019) and the Senstock Domestic Violence Questionnaire (1991). Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) were used for data analysis. The results showed that both relationship enrichment training and life skills training significantly impacted the reduction of marital discord and violence ( $P < 0.05$ ). However, there was no significant difference between the effectiveness of relationship enrichment training and life skills training in reducing marital discord and violence ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Keywords:** Training, Couples' Relationship Enrichment, Life Skills, Conflict, Violence, Couples

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The formation of a family is one of the most significant issues in human life, with far-reaching effects on personal growth, character development, and the achievement of moral and human excellence. It also plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health and enhancing overall efficiency. The positive effects of marriage depend on conditions that lead to satisfaction in marital life, and ultimately in life itself. As a social unit, the family is a center for growth, healing, and transformation of damage and disorders, providing both a foundation for flourishing and a potential source of disruption in relationships among its members (Modarresi, 2019). Healthy marital interaction and relationships are key to an ideal family process; in other words, when there is compatibility between spouses, it enhances their communication and social participation (Ghodrzi, 2016). Marital compatibility refers to a situation in which a husband and wife feel the most happiness and satisfaction in most situations and enjoy being together. This compatibility is achieved through mutual care,

acceptance, understanding, and fulfilling each other's needs (Karas, 2011).

Marital discord and violence are significant psychological and social challenges that not only negatively affect the quality of life for couples but also have profound impacts on the structure of families and society. These issues manifest in various forms, such as decreased marital satisfaction, rising divorce rates, and psychological damage such as anxiety, depression, and stress among couples (Brown & Lewis, 2019). Domestic violence, which includes various forms of psychological, physical, and emotional abuse, is considered one of the most severe forms of marital incompatibility. This issue becomes more complex, especially in societies where marital relationships face cultural, social, and economic pressures (Campbell, 2021). With the increasing divorce rates and decreasing marital satisfaction globally, finding solutions to reduce these issues has become critically important.

One of the approaches used to improve marital relationships and reduce conflicts is relationship enrichment training. This type of training focuses on

improving communication skills and strengthening emotional bonds between spouses (Halford & Sanders, 2018). The emphasis of this approach is on helping couples manage conflicts more effectively by increasing mutual understanding and empathy. Research has shown that this kind of training can have a positive impact on marital satisfaction and reduce conflicts (Markman & Stanley, 2020). Relationship enrichment training provides practical tools, such as effective listening skills, anger management, and problem-solving techniques, to help couples deal with common problems that arise in married life. However, the question remains whether this type of training can directly and effectively reduce marital violence as well.

On the other hand, life skills training has also been proposed as another approach to reducing marital problems. This training is designed to strengthen individuals' skills in managing stress, solving problems, and controlling emotions (Dunn & Nilsen, 2019). The focus of life skills training is on providing tools for coping with everyday life challenges, enabling couples to reduce conflicts and pressures within their relationships. Especially in high-stress environments, this training can serve as a supportive resource for reducing marital violence and incompatibility (Fowers & Olson, 2018). The key difference between these two types of training is that relationship enrichment training is more focused on improving communication quality and emotional connection, while life skills training is a more comprehensive approach that empowers couples to face everyday challenges.

Despite the limited research directly applying life skills training to marital satisfaction and quality of life for couples with family conflicts, the effectiveness of this approach has been demonstrated in several similar studies involving other individuals. For example, a study by Khanzadeh, Riayi, Sahli-Vaisi, and Izadi (2023) on marital satisfaction among women concluded that life skills training was effective in improving their marital satisfaction. In another study, Pourheidari (2024) found that life skills training enhanced sexual and marital satisfaction among young couples. Additionally, Abedi and Kazemi (2023) demonstrated that life skills training significantly reduced anxiety among couples. Despite the extensive research in this area, there are still gaps in the studies. Most previous research has focused on the impact of these trainings on reducing conflicts and increasing marital satisfaction, and fewer studies have compared the effects of relationship enrichment training and life skills training on reducing marital violence (Campbell, 2021). Furthermore, most studies have been short-term, with less attention paid to the long-term effects of these types of training. These gaps necessitate further investigation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of these interventions in addressing marital problems.

One of the major challenges in marital interventions is the individual and cultural differences in couples'

responses to these training programs. For instance, couples who experience higher levels of conflict or violence may respond differently to various educational approaches. Moreover, social and cultural factors, such as environmental pressures and gender roles, can influence the success of these interventions (Fowers & Olson, 2018). In some cultures, patriarchal gender roles or societal expectations may lead couples to approach relationship enrichment or life skills training differently. These challenges indicate that marital interventions should be designed with cultural and social differences in mind.

Given the rising rates of domestic violence and declining relationship quality in recent years, it has become increasingly important to explore and compare different educational methods for reducing marital problems. This study aims to compare the effectiveness of relationship enrichment and life skills training in reducing marital discord and violence, contributing to a clearer understanding of which approach is more effective in improving relationships and reducing violence. As both methods are empirically supported, this research can offer practical solutions for marital interventions and contribute to designing programs to prevent domestic violence.

The main innovation of this study lies in the direct comparison of relationship enrichment and life skills training, examining their simultaneous effects on reducing marital discord and violence. Additionally, using advanced statistical methods and long-term data, this study will explore individual differences in responses to these interventions. By conducting this research, new insights are expected to emerge on how to effectively intervene in reducing marital violence and conflicts.

Considering the theoretical aspects of the study, family conflicts can be considered one of the most damaging components leading to family breakdowns and separation. Over time, family conflicts may escalate into physical altercations and lead to significant psychological harm, ultimately resulting in incompatibility and violence among spouses, which may end in separation. Therefore, by providing relationship enrichment and life skills training, we can eliminate these marital conflicts and reduce incompatibility and violence among couples. Given the above points, this study aims to examine and compare the effectiveness of relationship enrichment and life skills training, which each focus on different components, in reducing incompatibility and violence in couples with family conflicts. The researcher seeks to answer the following question: What differences exist between relationship enrichment training and life skills training in reducing marital discord and violence?

## **METHODOLOGY:**

The present research is applied in terms of its objective and is a quasi-experimental study in terms of data collection, using a pre-test – post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of the research

consisted of all couples aged 18 to 40 who were referred to family counseling centers in (from April 9th to June 19th) in the city of Zarand in 2024. To identify incompatible couples and those experiencing domestic violence, the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (2019) and the Havoc-Senstoke Domestic Violence Scale (1991) were administered to couples visiting family counseling centers in the city of Zarand. Then, 45 couples with the highest levels of marital incompatibility and domestic violence, who were willing to cooperate with the researcher, were selected. These 45 couples were randomly assigned into three groups of 15 people each. The experimental group 1 received relationship enrichment training for couples, and the experimental group 2 received life skills training. The control group did not receive any specific training or treatment during this time. After the training sessions ended, all three groups were post-tested on marital incompatibility and domestic violence using the aforementioned questionnaires, to assess the impact of these trainings on reducing marital incompatibility and domestic violence. The inclusion criteria for participants in the study were: couples experiencing family, marital conflict, or marital incompatibility; couples with marital incompatibility and domestic violence based on the scores obtained on the questionnaires; willingness to cooperate with the researcher and provide written consent; and the physical and mental ability of the couples to participate in the training courses. The exclusion criteria for the study were: absenteeism or non-attendance in more than two sessions of the training, or failure to cooperate in the research. To analyze the research hypotheses, Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used. Data collection was done using the following questionnaires:

**Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Questionnaire:**

This questionnaire was developed by Locke and Wallace (1998) to measure marital adjustment. This 15-item tool is one of the first short scales for assessing marital adjustment. The numerical value of the questions in this test varies. The score for question number 12 is 10 if both the husband and wife answer "stay in the family"; if both prefer "going out," the score for this question is 3; and if the husband and wife have different preferences, the score for this question is 2. The total score is the sum of the scores for each question, and the range is from 2 to 158. Yarmohammadian (2017) reported the validity of this questionnaire as 0.82 and the reliability coefficient as 0.87.

**Partner Violence Questionnaire:** This questionnaire is based on the model by Havoc-Senstoke (1991) and measures domestic violence in three dimensions: physical, psychological, and verbal violence. The scale uses a 5-point response format, ranging from "very low" (score 1), "low" (score 2), "moderate" (score 3), "high" (score 4), to "very high" (score 5). This

questionnaire consists of 20 questions on a Likert scale. Questions 1 to 7 measure physical violence, questions 8 to 13 measure psychological violence, and questions 14 to 20 measure verbal violence. The psychometric characteristics of this questionnaire have been studied and validated in Iran. For instance, Pourkhosravi (2024) reported the validity of this questionnaire using the Sigma counting method as 0.88, and its reliability using Cronbach's alpha as 0.965.

**Life Skills Training Protocol:**

The term "life skills training" refers to a summary of the educational package (Life Skills Training by the World Health Organization, 1993), as cited by Abedi and colleagues (2020). Life skills training for couples was conducted in groups over 8 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes, with two sessions per week, as follows:

- Session 1:** Self-awareness and empathy skills
- Session 2:** Coping with emotions
- Session 3:** Stress management skills
- Sessions 4 and 5:** Interpersonal and individual relationship skills
- Session 6:** Creative and critical thinking
- Session 7:** Decision-making skills
- Session 8:** Problem-solving skills

**Couple Relationship Enrichment Training Protocol**

The term "couples relationship enrichment training" refers to a summary of the educational package developed by Shari'at and colleagues (2020). Couples relationship enrichment training was conducted for couples in groups over 7 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes, with two sessions per week, as follows:

- Session 1:** Introduction and stating the objectives of the training course
- Session 2:** Teaching the cycle of couples' awareness of the role of effective communication in resolving conflicts
- Session 3:** Introduction to communication skills for couples to interact with each other
- Session 4:** Practical strategies for improving the relationship between couples
- Session 5:** Practical strategies for resolving conflicts and misunderstandings through direct communication
- Session 6:** Introduction to effective communication styles
- Session 7:** Summary of the learned material and practical exercises

**Descriptive Findings:**

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables for Control and Experimental Groups in Pre-test and Post-test**

Variable	Time Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation

Incompatibility	Couples Relationship Enrichment	52	8.5	82	12.18
	Life Skills	52.27	7.93	83.2	12.19
	Control	50.40	13.31	52.07	10.60
Violence	Couples Relationship Enrichment	60.87	6.36	53.6	7.97
	Life Skills	58.8	9.16	50.47	8.87
	Control	57.36	9.98	56.93	9.84

"Table 1 presents the descriptive findings of the variables of marital discord and violence in the pre-test and post-test for the control and experimental groups of relationship enrichment and life skills training. Based on the results, the experimental groups showed lower levels of violence and higher levels of marital compatibility after participating in the training sessions."

"Given that the hypothesis of this research involves more than one dependent variable in each hypothesis, three Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) tests were used for data analysis. Before analyzing the data related to each hypothesis, the underlying assumptions of multivariate covariance were examined. One of the main assumptions of multivariate analysis of variance is the presence of moderate correlation, which should be less than 0.90 (Nikla Brice et al., 2014). Accordingly, to examine this assumption, the correlation coefficient between the anxiety and academic enthusiasm scores in the post-test was examined using Pearson's correlation. The results showed that the correlation coefficient between the scores of these two variables was -0.404. Therefore, the assumption of moderate correlation between the dependent variables holds. To examine the homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix, Box's M test was used. Since the significance level was 0.773, which is greater than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), the null hypothesis was not rejected ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $F = 3.52$ ,  $df = (6, 43964.31)$ ), and thus, the assumption of homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix of the variables is supported. To test the equality of variances, Levene's test was used. Since the significance level for violence ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $F = 2.972$ ,  $df = (42, 2)$ ) and incompatibility ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $F = 1.65$ ,  $df = (42, 2)$ ) were both greater than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), it can be concluded that the variances between the control and experimental groups in both dependent variables

are approximately equal. To test the normality of the score distribution, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used. Since the significance levels for violence ( $p = 0.411$ ) and incompatibility ( $p = 0.6$ ) are both greater than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), it can be concluded that the score distribution for both variables is normal. Therefore, the assumption of normality of the distribution of the dependent variables holds. Given that all four assumptions of multivariate analysis of covariance are satisfied, MANCOVA was used to test the effectiveness of relationship enrichment and life skills training in reducing marital incompatibility and violence, and to compare the impact of these interventions."

**"Table 2: Results of the MANCOVA test for examining the effectiveness of relationship enrichment training and life skills training on marital incompatibility and violence."**

Effect	Test	مقدار	F	DF Hypothesis	DF Error	P	$\eta^2$
Group	Reliability effect	0.736	11.65	4	80	0.001 ≤ P	0.481
	Wilks' Lambda	0.269	18.11	4	78	0.001 ≤ P	0.481

"The results in Table 2 indicate that the null hypothesis is rejected ( $\eta^2 = 0.481$ ,  $\Lambda = 0.269$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ,  $F(4, 78) = 18.11$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that relationship enrichment training and life skills training have a significant effect on the linear combination of marital incompatibility and violence. The effect size of relationship enrichment training and life skills training on the linear combination of marital incompatibility and violence is 0.481."

**Table 3: Results of MANCOVA Test for Comparing Marital Incompatibility and Violence from Relationship Enrichment Training and Life Skills Training in Control and Experimental Groups**

	Variable	SS	DF	MS	F	P	$\eta^2$
Group	Incompatibility	851.294	2	425.647	37.82	≤0.001P	0.654
	Violence	438.78	2	219.39	7.08	≤0.001P	0.261

The results in Table 3 indicate that in the post-test, the mean scores for marital incompatibility ( $\eta^2 = 0.612$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $F(1,52) = 59.26$ ) and violence ( $\eta^2 = 0.584$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $F(1,52) = 77.13$ ) showed significant differences between the control and experimental groups. These results suggest that the relationship enrichment training and life skills training significantly affects both marital incompatibility and violence. The effect size of

relationship enrichment and life skills training on reducing marital incompatibility was 0.654, and on reducing marital violence was 0.261.

**Table 4: Post-hoc Tukey Test for Comparing Couples in the Control, Relationship Enrichment, and Life Skills Training Groups**

Post-test	Group	Mean difference	Standard Error	Significance	Confidence Interval 0/95	
					Lower level	Upper level
Incompatibility	Control and Life Skills	-31.13	4.26	0.001	-41.49	-20.77
	Control and Relationship Enrichment	-29.93	4.26	0.001	-40.29	-19.57
	Relationship Enrichment and Life Skills	1.2	4.26	0.957	-11.56	9.16
Violence	Control and Life Skills	6.47	3.25	0.127	-1.42	14.36
	Control and Relationship Enrichment	3.33	3.25	0.565	-4.55	11.22
	Relationship Enrichment and Life Skills	3.13	3.25	0.6.3	-4.75	11.025

The results obtained from the pairwise comparison of the three groups using the Tukey posthoc test in Table 4 show that the mean difference in incompatibility between the control group and the couple relationship enrichment group (29.93) and the mean difference between the control group and the life skills training group (31.13) was observed. The mean difference in incompatibility scores between the couple relationship enrichment group and the life skills training group was 1.2, with its significance being 0.957, which is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, there is no significant difference in incompatibility between the two educational groups, i.e., couple relationship enrichment training and life skills training, and the effectiveness of these two intervention methods on incompatibility was nearly identical.

Additionally, the mean difference in violence between the control group and the life skills training group (6.47) was greater than the mean difference between the control group and the couple relationship enrichment group (3.33). The mean difference in violence scores between the couple relationship enrichment group and the life skills training group was 3.13, with its significance being 0.957, which is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, there is no significant difference in violence between the two educational groups, i.e., couple relationship enrichment training and life skills training, and the effectiveness of these two intervention methods on violence was nearly identical.

**Discussion and Conclusion:**

The results of this research showed that training in relationship enrichment and life skills significantly impacts reducing marital conflict and violence. The effect of relationship enrichment and life skills training on reducing marital conflict (0.654) was higher than its effect on violence (0.261). There was no significant difference between the level of marital adjustment and

violence in the two educational groups, namely relationship enrichment and life skills training. The effectiveness of these two intervention methods in reducing conflict and violence was nearly identical. Relationship enrichment training focuses on improving the quality of the relationship through strengthening positive interactions and enhancing the couple's communication skills. This method often includes training in skills such as active listening, recognizing and expressing emotions and needs, increasing intimacy and empathy, and resolving conflicts constructively. According to previous studies, such as Fincham & Bradbury (2002), relationships where couples can express their feelings and needs correctly typically experience lower levels of conflict and violence. Research has also shown that using healthy communication skills can reduce violent behavior between couples. In this context, the findings of the present study align with similar research. For instance, the study by Karas et al. (2011) demonstrated that relationship enrichment training leads to significant improvements in relationship quality and reduces maladaptive behaviors. This research also confirmed that when couples develop effective and positive communication skills, the levels of conflict and violence decrease. The results of this study support the idea that relationship enrichment training helps reduce negative behaviors and strengthen constructive behaviors. Life skills training teaches essential skills such as problem-solving, stress management, anger control, empathy, and effective communication to couples. The goal of this training is to empower individuals to better manage their personal and interpersonal lives. In this context, life skills play an important role in improving marital relationships because these skills help individuals respond better to conflicts and daily life stressors. The findings of this study align with previous studies on the effectiveness of life skills in reducing violence and marital conflict.

For example, Gottman (1994) found that life skills training can reduce aggressive behaviors and enhance couples' ability to manage conflicts. Gottman discovered that couples with problem-solving and stress management skills are less likely to exhibit violent and maladaptive behaviors. Similarly, Hartman et al. (2018) found that life skills training can generally increase empathy and reduce misunderstandings in marital relationships. In line with these findings, the present study also showed that life skills training can help reduce conflicts and violence between couples. One significant finding of this research was the lack of a meaningful difference between the effectiveness of the two educational methods in reducing marital conflict and violence. This indicates that both approaches were equally effective in improving relationship quality and reducing conflicts. In fact, both approaches addressed marital improvement from different angles, but their practical results were similar. This finding may suggest that both methods ultimately affect the key factors influencing relationships and lead to similar outcomes. Previous studies have reported similar results. For instance, Bernstein et al. (2010) found that both life skills training and relationship enrichment training were equally effective in improving marital relationships. Bernstein believes that although these two methods are theoretically different, they yield similar results due to their focus on communication skills and conflict management. Also, the study by McKay et al. (2016) showed that both relationship enrichment and life skills training can create significant improvements in reducing violence and marital conflict. Based on the results of this study and its comparison with previous research, it can be concluded that both educational methods, relationship enrichment, and life skills, are effective tools for reducing marital conflict and violence. Despite their theoretical differences, these two approaches have led to similar results in practice. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study suggest to family counselors and mental health professionals that both methods can successfully be used to reduce tension and improve marital relationships. Therefore, the choice of one of these methods can be based on each couple's specific circumstances, individual needs, and counseling preferences. In situations where time and resources are limited, a combined approach of both methods can be used to maximize positive effects. Ultimately, this research reiterates the importance of education and psychological interventions in reducing family violence and improving marital relationships. Since marital violence and conflict can have widespread negative effects on individuals' mental and physical health, it is essential to prioritize educational and counseling programs as part of preventive and therapeutic solutions to these problems.

Based on the results of this research, which show that relationship enrichment and life skills training are

effective in reducing marital conflict and violence, several practical suggestions can be made:

- **Designing and implementing combined life skills and relationship enrichment training courses:** To increase the effectiveness of interventions, it is suggested that counseling centers and family institutions design and implement combined courses of life skills training (such as anger management, problem-solving, and stress control) and relationship enrichment programs (such as strengthening empathy, intimacy, and positive communication). These courses can be offered as in-person or online workshops.
- **Increasing access to psychological education for at-risk couples:** Couples living in high-stress environments or experiencing marital violence need access to free or low-cost educational programs. Creating public awareness campaigns through media and offering free or subsidized services by government and non-governmental organizations can help couples access effective training.
- **Integrating these trainings into pre-marital counseling programs:** It is recommended that these trainings be offered as part of pre-marital counseling programs and also during the early stages of marriage. These programs can help couples learn the necessary skills before facing marital challenges and prevent violence and conflict.
- **Expanding educational programs in workplaces and public institutions:** To support family mental health, it is suggested that training related to life skills and relationship enrichment be provided in workplaces, universities, and public institutions as workshops. This can raise awareness and improve communication skills on a larger scale.
- **Providing support programs for couples experiencing marital violence:** In addition to general education, it is suggested that support programs, including specialized counseling for couples facing marital violence, be designed and implemented. These programs may include individual and group counseling sessions, social support, and training specific skills for managing violence.
- **Increasing inter-agency collaboration:** To effectively implement these programs, it is suggested that collaboration between various agencies such as the Ministry of Health, family counseling organizations, social organizations, and the media be increased. These collaborations can help develop and expand education at the national and local levels.

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