ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Journal of Emergency Health Care. 2026;15(1): 3
https://doi.org/10.22034/jehc.15.1.3

Studying the Effectiveness of Relationship Enrichment Training Based on the Olson Method on Marital Conflicts, Conflict Resolution Strategies, and Relationship Quality in Women Experiencing Emotional Divorce

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Article history:

Received: 18 Feb 2025
Accepted: 28 Mar 2025
Available online: 1 Apr 2025

Keywords:

Relationship enrichment
Olson method
Marital conflicts
Conflict resolution strategies
Relationship quality
Emotional divorce

Abstract

Purpose: The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of relationship enrichment training based on the Olson model on marital conflicts, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship quality in women experiencing emotional divorce.
Method: This quasi-experimental study was conducted in the form of a pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical population included married women experiencing emotional divorce in Hamadan in 2024 who had referred to counseling centers. Among them, 40 people were selected through convenience sampling and were randomly divided into two experimental and control groups. The instruments used in this study included marital conflict questionnaires (Sanaei, 2000), conflict resolution strategies (Rahim, 2004), and relationship quality (Braginsky, 2011). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (mean, standard deviation, variance), and analysis of covariance.
Findings: The results of the main hypothesis indicated that relationship enrichment training had a significant effect on the three dependent variables and its greatest effectiveness was observed on conflict resolution strategies. In the first sub-hypothesis, a 64% reduction in marital conflicts after training indicated a significant effect of the intervention. In the second hypothesis, a 77% increase in conflict resolution strategies confirms the greatest impact of education on this variable. Finally, the third hypothesis also showed that the quality of relationships improved significantly with a 75% increase.
Conclusion: This training can be used as an effective intervention in improving mental health and marital relationships.

Cite this article as: Aleyasin SA, Torabi Nozar R. Studying the Effectiveness of Relationship Enrichment Training Based on the Olson Method on Marital Conflicts, Conflict Resolution Strategies, and Relationship Quality in Women Experiencing Emotional Divorce. J Emerg Health Care. 2026;15(1):3. https://doi.org/10.22034/jehc.15.1.3.

Introduction

Marriage, as a fundamental social and emotional institution, plays a very important role in mental health, individual well-being, and family stability. Marital relationships that are based on love, understanding, and mutual cooperation can be a source of comfort and emotional support for couples (1). However, the presence of ongoing conflicts and problems in these relationships can lead to a decrease in quality of life, increased psychological stress, and even family breakdown. Marital conflict means the existence of differences and incompatibilities that arise in the process of living together, and if not managed properly, it gradually leads to coldness of relationships, decreased

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marital satisfaction, and ultimately emotional divorce or emotional separation between couples (2). Emotional divorce is a situation in which couples become emotionally distant from each other and the intimate and supportive connection between them is severely reduced, without necessarily leading to a formal divorce (3).

One of the most important factors in reducing conflicts and improving the quality of marital relationships is conflict resolution strategies, which are referred to as the set of behaviors, skills, and methods that individuals use to manage differences and problems in their relationships (4). Conflict resolution strategies can be constructive or destructive; constructive strategies include active dialogue, honest and nonviolent expression of feelings, seeking shared solutions, and mutual respect that help improve the relationship. However, destructive strategies such as avoidance, verbal attacks, or ignoring the other party's needs exacerbate conflicts and reduce couple satisfaction. Therefore, teaching and reinforcing constructive conflict resolution strategies plays a key role in improving marital relationships and reducing the negative consequences of conflicts (5).

In this context, relationship enrichment training, as a targeted psychological approach, is designed to improve the communication, emotional, and behavioral skills of couples, so that they can increase their satisfaction and mental health by improving the quality of interactions and reducing conflicts (6). The Olson method is one of the most popular models in relationship enrichment training, which is based on family systems theories and family therapy, and has a special focus on improving communication skills, increasing emotional self-awareness, and strengthening problem-solving abilities. This model, through structured and comprehensive training, helps couples identify and correct maladaptive interaction patterns and significantly improve the quality of their relationship with new skills (7).

Given the importance of this issue, women who are emotionally divorced, as a group that is exposed to psychological and social harm due to emotional distance from their spouses, need special interventions that can bridge existing communication and emotional gaps and enable the reconstruction and strengthening of relationships. Relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method can help these women improve the quality of their relationships and prevent the negative consequences of emotional divorce by increasing their knowledge and skills in conflict resolution and emotion management. These trainings can be provided individually or in groups and implemented in the form of workshops and specialized counseling sessions.

Saadati Shamir et al. (2018) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of Gottman-based couple therapy on family functioning and marital adjustment in couples seeking divorce. This was a quasi-experimental study with a pre-test and post-test design. The statistical population of the study was couples seeking divorce who referred to counseling centers in Qarchak in the spring of 2018. The findings showed that couples therapy using the Gottman method increased family functioning and marital adjustment in couples seeking divorce (8).

Davoodvandi et al. (2018) conducted a study comparing the effectiveness of Gottman's and emotion-focused couple therapy approaches on couples' adjustment in the family. The results showed that in the pre-test, post-test, and post-test phases, Gottman's approach to couple therapy was more effective in increasing the level of couples' adjustment than the emotion-focused approach. In addition, no significant difference was observed in the follow-up post-test phase, which indicates the stability of the intervention changes (9).

Moore (2018) conducted a study examining employees' perceptions of the positive effects of marriage enrichment training in the workplace. This qualitative study provided insights into how the training impacts couples' work environments in addition to their families. Semi-structured interviews with participants in these trainings confirmed that the effects of training also manifest themselves in the workplace. (a) professional communication and (b) conflict management are two essential skills that were influenced by marital enrichment training (10).

Davis (2015) conducted a study to examine the effect of a couples empowerment program on relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. The participants included 49 couples. The results showed that after participating in empowerment sessions, relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution improved in couples, and this effect persisted until follow-up (11).

The Method of Research

The present study is applied in terms of purpose. And its nature is quasi-experimental. Which was conducted using a pre-test-post-test method with a control group. The statistical population of the present study consisted of all women who experienced emotional divorce in 2025. The sampling method is available in a non-random manner. The following questionnaires are the measurement tools in the present study:

- Marital Conflict Questionnaire: 42 questions and 8 subscales: decreased cooperation, decreased sexual relationship, increased emotional reaction, increased seeking of child support, increased essential relationship with one's relatives, decreased personal

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relationship with spouse's relatives, separating financial affairs from each other, decreased effective communication, and was developed by Sanaei in 2000 with the aim of measuring marital conflicts. The subject's responses are set on a 5-point Likert scale from always = 5 to never = 1. The minimum score is 42, the average is 126, and the maximum score is at least 210. If the scores are above 126, the variable is very good. To determine the Cronbach's alpha for the entire questionnaire, it was obtained on a group of 270 people, and its 8 subscales out of 270 people were equal to 0.960, reducing sexual intercourse, as follows: Decreased cooperation by 81%, increased attraction by 0.61, increased emotional reactions by 70%, increased personal relationships with relatives, support for children by 33%, decreased family relationships with relatives of one's spouse by 86% and 89%, separated finances by 71%, friends by 89%, and this questionnaire also has a good validity of reducing effective communication by 69%.

- Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire: The Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire was developed by Strauss in 2002. It has 15 questions and 4 forms. This 15-question instrument was developed to measure conflict resolution, reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence. The validity and reliability of the Murray-Strauss Parental Conflict Tactics Questionnaire (CTS) have been confirmed. The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess conflict tactics (13).
- Quality of Relationships Questionnaire: The Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI) was developed by Pierce et al. (1991). It has 25 items. It is scored on a 4-point Likert scale as none, low, moderate, and high, and has 3 subscales: Perceived social support (7 items), interpersonal conflicts (12 items), depth of relationships (6 items), and in each of the 25 items, the individual must evaluate the quality of their relationships with parents, friends, and spouse (14).
- Emotional Divorce Questionnaire: This scale was developed by Gottman in 2008 and has 24 questions that are answered as yes or no. Yes is scored as 1 and no is scored as 0. The range of this scale is 0 to 24, with a higher score indicating high emotional divorce and a lower score indicating low emotional divorce. The cut-off score for this scale is 8. The reliability of this questionnaire has been reported to be 70% using Cronbach's alpha method, which in Iran has been reported to be 83% using Cronbach's alpha method (15).
- Relationship enrichment training protocol based on the Olson method: includes training sessions and practical exercises designed to improve communication skills, increase mutual understanding, and reduce marital conflicts. 10 sessions (two sessions per week) were implemented, each session lasting 2 hours. After completing the library procedures and in order to conduct the research, the Pirbakran City Education Department was referred and the student counselors of the two schools that had the highest incidence of academic failure and behavioral problems were introduced as the research subjects. After visiting these schools, participants were selected in the junior high school classes. Among 60 male and female junior high school students, 20 students with the highest anxiety levels were selected as samples for the research work. The same method was used to select girls in another school with 73 junior high school students, and 20 samples were selected for the research work and randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups.

Data analysis in this study was performed using SPSS version 26 software. Two methods of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics are used to describe and summarize the main characteristics of the data. Inferential statistics are used to test research hypotheses and determine relationships between variables. In this study, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine the research hypotheses.

Findings

In Table 1, the mean, standard deviation, and variance of marital conflicts, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship quality are reported in the two stages of pretest and posttest.

Table 1: Descriptive indices of the main variables of the study

Main research variables	State	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
Marital conflicts	Per test	124.25	6.331	40.09
	Post test	94.97	31.248	976.478
Conflict resolution strategies	Per test	44.3	2.795	7.805
	Post test	57.17	13.143	172.763
Relationship quality	Per test	60.33	2.494	6.225
	Post test	77	16.484	271.744

Table 1 shows that the mean marital conflicts decreased significantly after the intervention (from 124.25 to 94.97), indicating a positive effect of training on reducing conflicts. Also, the mean conflict resolution

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strategies increased from 44.3 to 57.17, indicating a significant improvement in the participants' conflict resolution ability. Relationship quality also increased from 60.32 to 77, indicating a significant improvement in marital satisfaction and interactions. The significant increase in standard deviations at the post-test may also indicate greater individual differences in response to training.

Now, according to the multivariate analysis of covariance test, the main hypothesis of the research is examined in Table 2.

Table 2: Examination of the main hypothesis of the research

Independent variable	Dependent variables	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F-statistic	Significance level	Effect size
Relationship enrichment training based on the Oslon method	Marital conflicts	0.589	1	0.589	0.854	0.001	0.639
	Conflict resolution	0.483	1	0.403	0.147	0.001	0.779
	Relationship quality	210.994	1	210.994	109.34	0.001	0.757

Table 2 shows that based on the significant levels, all of which are less than 0.05, the independent variable has an effect on the dependent variables with a 95% confidence level. Also, since the effect size of the dependent variable of conflict resolution strategies is greater than other dependent variables, then the independent variable of relationship enrichment training based on the Oslon method has a greater effect on this dependent variable of conflict resolution strategies.

Therefore, in general, it can be said that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method has an effect on marital conflicts, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship quality in women experiencing emotional divorce. Therefore, hypothesis H0 is rejected and hypothesis H1 is confirmed, so the main hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

The first sub-hypothesis of the research: Relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on marital conflicts in women experiencing emotional divorce.

To confirm the first sub-hypothesis of the research, the univariate analysis of covariance or ANCOVA test is used.

In Table 3, the first sub-hypothesis of the research is examined.

Table 3: Examination of the first sub-hypothesis of the research

Independent variable	Dependent variables	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F-statistic	Significance level	Effect size
Relationship enrichment training based on Olson method	Marital conflicts	798.179	1	798.179	65.84	0.001	0.064

Table 3 shows that based on a significance level of less than 0.05, with a 95% confidence level, the independent variable has an effect on the dependent variable. Also, based on an effect size of 0.64, the independent variable of Olson-based relationship enrichment training has an effect of 64% on the dependent variable of marital conflicts.

Therefore, in general, it can be said that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on marital conflicts in women experiencing emotional divorce. So, hypothesis H0 is rejected and hypothesis H1 is confirmed, so the first sub-hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

Second sub-hypothesis of the research: Relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on conflict resolution strategies in women experiencing emotional divorce.

To confirm the second sub-hypothesis of the research, the univariate analysis of covariance or ANCOVA test is used.

In Table 4, the second sub-hypothesis of the research is examined.

Table 4 shows that based on a significance level of less than 0.05, with a 95% confidence level, the independent variable has an effect on the dependent variable. Also, based on an effect size of 0.775, the independent variable of relationship enrichment training based on the Oslon method has an effect of 77% on the dependent variable of conflict resolution strategies.

Therefore, in general, it can be said that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on conflict resolution strategies in women experiencing emotional divorce. Therefore, hypothesis

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H0 is rejected and hypothesis H1 is confirmed, therefore, the second sub-hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

The third sub-hypothesis of the research: Relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on the quality of relationships in women experiencing emotional divorce.

To confirm the third sub-hypothesis of the research, the univariate analysis of covariance or ANCOVA test is used.

Table 4: Examination of the second sub-hypothesis of the research

Independent variable	Dependent variables	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F-statistic	Significance level	Effect size
Relationship enrichment training based on the Oslon method	Conflict resolution strategies	538.253	1	538.253	174.127	0.001	0.775

In Table 5, the third sub-hypothesis of the research is examined.

Table 5 shows that based on a significance level of less than 0.05, with a 95% confidence level, the independent variable has an effect on the dependent variable. Also, based on the effect size of 0.747, the independent variable of relationship enrichment training based on the Oslon method has an effect of 75% on the dependent variable of relationship quality.

Table 5: Examination of the third sub-hypothesis of the research

Independent variable	Dependent variables	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F-statistic	Significance level	Effect size
Relationship enrichment training based on the Oslon method	Quality of relationships	445.214	1	445.214	178.109	0.001	0.747

Therefore, in general, it can be said that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on the quality of relationships in women experiencing emotional divorce. Therefore, hypothesis H0 is rejected and hypothesis H1 is confirmed, therefore, the third sub-hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method on marital conflicts, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship quality in women experiencing emotional divorce.

Based on the research findings, it was determined that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method has an effect on marital conflicts, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship quality in emotionally divorced women. In fact, it can be said that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method has a greater effect on the dependent variable of conflict resolution strategies, and the main hypothesis of the research has been confirmed. In this regard, we can refer to the theoretical study by Nazari et al. (16) who concluded that structured training based on relationship enrichment increases the quality of couples' interaction and reduces conflicts. This result is consistent with the result of the main hypothesis of the study. The reason for this consistency is that both studies used scientific models based on improving communication and emotional skills that are rooted in systemic and family therapy theories.

Based on the research findings, it was determined that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on marital conflicts in women experiencing emotional divorce. Therefore, in more detail, it can be said that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method has a 64 percent effect on the dependent variable of marital conflicts. Therefore, the first sub-hypothesis of the study has been confirmed. In this regard, we can mention the research conducted by Zarchi et al. (12) which is consistent with the results of the first sub-hypothesis of the study. The reason for this consistency is that both trainings help to increase emotional self-awareness and interaction skills in women.

The results of the experiment and statistical analysis showed that relationship enrichment training based on the Oslon method has a 77% effect on the dependent variable of conflict resolution strategies. Therefore, the second sub-hypothesis of the study has been confirmed. In this regard, we can mention the theoretical research of Tazari et al. (6), which is in line with the results of the second sub-hypothesis of the research, because both emphasize teaching the components of dialogue, situation analysis, and conscious responding.

According to the research findings, it can be said that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method is effective on the quality of relationships in women experiencing emotional divorce. In other words, relationship enrichment training based on the Olson

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method has a 75% effect on the dependent variable of relationship quality. Therefore, the third sub-hypothesis of the research has been confirmed. In this regard, we can mention the research of Sadr Maleki and Hemmati Rad (14, 17), which is in line with the third sub-hypothesis of the study. The reason for this alignment is that both interventions focus on effective interaction, mutual understanding, and improving the emotional quality of the relationship (18).

Conclusion

The present study showed that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method plays an effective role in reducing marital conflicts in women experiencing emotional divorce. By emphasizing the improvement of cognitive and emotional skills, these trainings help women to better understand the roots of conflict and, by increasing self-awareness and regulating emotions, see conflicts as opportunities for constructive interaction and problem-solving rather than as threats to the relationship. From a theoretical perspective, these results are well-aligned with the principles of systemic and family therapy models that emphasize improving communication processes and interpersonal interactions. These findings are also consistent with previous research showing that structured, targeted training can increase the quality of couple interactions and reduce conflict. The importance of this achievement is that marital conflicts are considered one of the key factors in creating and intensifying emotional divorce, and therefore educational interventions that can effectively manage conflicts can play an important role in preventing the collapse of emotional relationships (19, 20).

On the other hand, the results indicate a significant impact of relationship enrichment training on conflict resolution strategies, which indicates the improvement of communication skills, problem solving, and conscious responsiveness in women undergoing training. These educational interventions have enabled women to adopt more constructive strategies in dealing with marital problems, have more effective conversations, and be more emotionally flexible, and distance themselves from ineffective patterns and negative emotional reactions. Such skill strengthening is especially important in situations of emotional divorce, as this stage of the relationship requires rebuilding and modifying interactive and emotional strategies that have previously been disrupted.

These findings are also consistent with studies that have emphasized the role of training based on problem-solving skills and relationship analysis, and show that enrichment training can systematically and purposefully increase individuals' ability to manage conflicts and prevent escalation of tensions and emotional distancing (18).

Finally, the positive and significant impact of relationship enrichment training on the quality of marital relationships indicates that these trainings have gone beyond reducing conflict and have been able to improve the level of satisfaction, emotional closeness, and mutual understanding between couples. The quality of relationships, as one of the important indicators of mental health and marital satisfaction, is influenced by factors such as empathy, effective interaction, and emotional support, which have been well considered in these trainings. Increasing the quality of relationships, in addition to strengthening the sense of belonging and satisfaction, can reduce the destructive effects of emotional divorce and pave the way for rebuilding trust and commitment between couples. This highlights the importance of training that comprehensively targets the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of relationships. Overall, the findings of this study emphasize that relationship enrichment training based on the Olson method can play a role as an effective and multifaceted intervention in improving the mental health and quality of life of women experiencing emotional divorce, and create a new direction for future research and interventions in the field of family therapy and marital relationships.

Funding

None

Authors contribution

Authors conceptualized the study objectives and design.

Acknowledgment

None

Ethics

The research data and literature have not been copied from any worksauthor upon reasonable request.
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