

Original Research



Comparing the effectiveness of sexual skills training and communication skills training on the sexual attitudes of married women

Azra Ghaffari¹ , Ayda Feizollahi Vahid^{1*} 

¹Department of Psychology, Ardabil Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran

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Abstract

Background: The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of sexual skills training and communication skills training on the sexual attitudes of married women. The statistical population of the present study consisted of all married women aged 18 to 45 years old in Tabriz in 2014.

Methods: The quasi-experimental research design consisted of three groups (pre-test and post-test) using a comparative method. Individuals were randomly placed into three groups with 15 individuals each: a sexual skills training group, a communication skills training group and a control group. All individuals were tested before starting the training sessions. The two experimental groups received educational interventions consisting of eight sessions of 60 to 90 minutes, while the control group did not receive any training. Following the training sessions, all groups completed a post-test. The Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes Scale (SKAS) was used to collect the data; covariance analysis (ANCOVA) was used to analyze the results.

Results: Based on the analysis, the results of a consequential least significant difference (LSD) test indicated a significant difference between the communication skills training method and the sexual skills training method in their roles in affecting women's sexual attitudes positively. The P value for the communication skills group was 0.014 and 0.914 for the sexual skills group, indicating the communication skills training method was more effective. Differences are considered statistically significant at $P > 0.05$.

Conclusions: Communication skills training can have a positive impact on sexual attitudes and may be a preferred training option to reduce couples' sexual problems.

Introduction

Family is the basic unit in every society. Currently the institution of marriage, as the foundation of this important unit, faces a lot of challenges in modern societies.¹ The prevalence of sexual dysfunction is high around the world, and this disorder has a pronounced effect on couples' quality of life, mood, and social activities. Approximately 31.5% of women in Iran have at least one sexual dysfunction.² A high prevalence of sexual dysfunction is the result of inadequate knowledge or inappropriate attitudes toward the natural phenomenon of sexual desire.² Research shows that sexual attitudes, sexual knowledge, and comfort with sexuality demonstrated by professionals influences the way in which they address the sexual problems of those who seek their help.³ Sexual attitudes are affected by many factors, such as gender, age, previous experience, family background and current

family structure, immediate environment, various subcultures and social structures, traditions, religious beliefs, and moral attitudes.⁴ Knowledge, emotions, evaluations, and behaviors related to sexuality constitute sexual attitudes.⁴ The sexual attitude of an individual may manifest in positive or negative sexual behaviors formed in accordance with knowledge or lack of knowledge along with emotions, thoughts and beliefs about sexuality.⁴ One of the variables that affects couples' sexual attitudes is their communication skills. Adjusting the interpersonal relationship is a core need for a successful marital life; it can also be counted on to facilitate a stable and satisfying marriage.⁵ Lack of proper communication skills has been shown to be a major issue leading to dissatisfaction in couples' lives.¹

Communication skills have been among top three significant problems reported in distressed marriages,

*Corresponding author: Ayda Feizollahi Vahid, Department of Psychology, Ardabil Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran, Email: aydaf1983@yahoo.com

along with difficulties in sexual expression and personality factors.¹ Communication skills training has therefore been extensively studied in the context of couples' relationships and interactions.¹

Investigations have been carried out around the roots of marital relationships date back to the late 1960s. From 1971 on, more than 79 studies about the relationships between spouses have been conducted, consisting of 40 quantitative and 39 qualitative research studies.⁶ Rezazadeh concluded that communication problems are among the most common problems couples report. Over 90% of troubled couples consider communication the main problem in their relationships.⁷

In addition to communication, sexual problems are also common and can directly or indirectly affect many aspects of couples' relationships and lives.⁸ Research shows that attitudes, fears or memories are some of the factors affecting underlying sexual problems.⁹ One of the problems in Iranian society today is a lack of adequate information on sexual skills as well as incorrect attitudes and beliefs about this issue.¹⁰ In other words, there is often no precise understanding of sexual issues. Related to this, misunderstandings and social and cultural barriers to training concepts and positive expressions of sexual health leads to a lack or low levels in both the quantity and quality of available sexual health services and related issues.¹¹ Training for sexual skills is a process during which people acquire information and knowledge about their sexuality. This training can bring about intimacy and sexual satisfaction between couples and reduce the incidence of such problems, ultimately increasing their marital and life satisfaction.¹² Numerous studies have evaluated the effectiveness of sexual skills training on women's sexual attitudes and skills. In this regard, a study by Shahsiah and colleagues revealed that training for sexual skills has a significant effect on increased marital satisfaction.¹³ In another study, Karimi et al also found that sexual skills training improved marital satisfaction.¹⁴ In addition, the results of a study by Shams Mofararheh et al showed that marital counseling can increase sexual satisfaction.¹⁵ Dehghani et al investigated the effectiveness of sexual skills training on couple's sexual attitudes and concluded that teaching sexual skills has a significant positive influence on people's sexual attitudes.¹⁶

Materials and Methods

The number of studies conducted on the provision of training and awareness and its relation to changing attitudes reflect the importance of the training factor in creating a positive and healthy attitude towards sexual issues. Since sexuality and attitudes regarding sexual issues are integral parts of marriage, it is useful to determine whether sexual skills training or communication skills training can lead to changes in sexual attitudes, help create more positive attitudes in individuals, and whether training at the beginning of marital life reduces couples' problems in this

area. Considering the above issues, it seems that learning about sexual issues as well as communication skills can help prevent the occurrence of sexual disorders and help couples to deal with sexual issues and adopt more positive attitudes. Therefore, since there has been less attention given to the evaluation and comparison of the effectiveness of sexual skills training and communication skills training on women's sexual attitudes in previous research, this study aimed to compare the effectiveness of sexual skills training along with communication skills training on sexual attitudes of married women aged 18 to 45 years old in Tabriz.

Research Method

The research design was a quasi-experimental pre-post comparison study consisting of three groups: a sexual skills training group, a communication skills training group, and a control group. The statistical population of the current study consisted of all the married women aged 18 to 45 years old in Tabriz in 2014. The sample was composed of 45 women selected through cluster sampling from 4 regions of Tabriz from one clinic in each region (four clinics in total). These clinics provided couples therapy, sex training, communication services, etc. The 45 participants were randomly placed into one of three groups, with 15 individuals per group. The requirements for admission to the study were having a diploma, no specific history of mental illness, willingness to participate, and obtaining informed consent. Before starting the training sessions, all individuals filled out a pre-test based on the Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes Scale (SKAS). The subjects in the experimental groups (sexual skills training group, communication skills training group) then received training for eight sessions of 60 to 90 minutes each, while the control group received no training. After the sessions, all groups completed post-tests. The researchers had complete pre-post data for 36 participants in all, 12 in each group. The data were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The sexual skills training and the communication skills training programs are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Research Instruments

The SKAS was designed by Basharat and Kolagari to measure knowledge of and attitudes towards sexual issues in marital relationships. The scale includes 30 items that measure two variables of sexual knowledge and sexual attitudes via a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Each of the two subscales of this scale includes 15 items and the lowest and the highest scores in each of the subscales by participants will be between 15 and 75. Higher scores on the subscale of sexual knowledge indicate higher sexual knowledge and higher scores in the sexual attitudes subscale shows more positive attitudes towards sexual relationships. Basharat and Kolagari administered the SKAS to a sample of 837 (451 females, 386 males). The

Table 1. A summary of sexual skills training program

Session	Targets	Training program
Session1	Briefing	Test (pre-test), to discuss the rules of the group, the number of start date.
Session2	Familiarity with the Targets and education about sexual physiology	Check sexuality education Targets, agree on specific goals at the end of the period, providing information on sexual physiology of the human body, male and female sexual behavior, explanation about the sexual cycle.
Session3	Sexual skills Part I	Sexual skills first section includes a discussion of different scenarios sex (all kinds of favorable positions), transfer from clitoral pleasure G-spot area, teaching first touch focus.
Session4	Sexual skills Part II	Review and fix bugs before meeting participants, the second part of the training includes Kegel exercises to strengthen the G-spot training - Spartan women, focus training and provide sensory feedback to each other the second.
Session5	Check that inhibition of sex	Change believe clients about sexual arousal and inhibition study of sexual relations, attitudes and misconceptions, irrational fear and psychological factors also talk about sex and sex environmental inhibitors.
Session6	Correcting false beliefs and facilitate dialogue about sexual preferences	Correcting misconceptions about sex, talk about the interests and desires and sexual preferences of clients and facilitate dialogue and discussion about sexual preferences
Session7	Types of sexual dysfunction in women	Familiar with a variety of common sexual dysfunction in women include: 1 - sexual desire disorder, sexual arousal disorder 2-, 3- orgasmic disorders, sexual pain disorders 4-, 5- sexual dysfunction due to a general medical disorder, sexual dysfunction 6 caused by the material, 7- sexual dysfunction that is not otherwise specified
Session8	FAQ, performance test	Review what was learned, questions and answers, problem solving, enforcement and post-test

Table 2. A summary of communication skills training program

Session	Targets	training program
Session1	Referrals and pre-test	Join members of the group and explain the objectives and requirements of learning communication skills and motivation for learning skills and work as subsequent meetings and method of teaching
Session2	Active listening skills	Active listening includes obstacles to active listening skills, assessing barriers to active listening, the definition of active listening (including recitation, to clarify, provide feedback), class assignments
Session3	Assertiveness training	Browse previous meeting skills, skills feelings and express their wishes involves identifying your feelings, emotions, ways to express their feelings, express their wishes, demand guidelines for class assignments.
Session4	Anger Control Training	Browse learned skills, define anger, situations that cause anger, rage analysis provocative thoughts, ways of expressing anger, anger management techniques, hedging against stress, providing task.
Session5	Conflict management training	Browse learned skills, identifying eighth strategy, assess their abusive strategies, fundamental approach to conflict resolution
Session6	Problem solving skills	Review of previous skills, problem solving skills, including problem descriptions, set goals, is thought experiment: test solutions, evaluation results
Session7	Negotiation skills and healthy relationships	Review of previous skills, prepare for negotiations, talks, offer / counteroffer, disagreements, agreements, training of ten healthy relationship, assess, how to communicate using the full message
Session8	FAQ, performance test	Review what has been learned, problem-solving and implementation of the post-test

Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the subscales of sexual knowledge and sexual attitudes for the subjects' score were calculated as 0.88 and 0.87, respectively, indicating good internal consistency.¹⁷ Test-retest reliability of the SKAS was also calculated to be in the range of 0.76-0.87. All correlations were statistically significant. It was concluded that the SKAS can be considered as a reliable and valid scale to measure sexual knowledge and attitude in Iranian samples.¹⁷ It should be noted that in this study, the sexual attitudes subscale score was also used.

Results

The descriptive indicators for the variable of sexual attitudes for all three groups are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, the highest average was seen in the experimental group in sexual skills (42.7, SD 1.70) and the lowest average was seen in the control group (39.9, SD 2.05).

Given the administration of a pre-test and a post-test, the one-way ANCOVA was used as an inferential analysis of the data. In this regard, before the implementation of one-way ANCOVA, the homogeneity assumption of the error variance was evaluated whose results are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that the assumption for the homogeneity of error variance is achieved, since the calculated F values (1.67) at the level of $P < 0.05$ are not significant.

As shown in Table 5, the difference between the trainings is significant after the control and elimination of pre-test impact ($P < 0.05$). Thus, the communication skills training method appears to be more effective in increasing sexual attitudes in comparison with the sexual skills training method. In order to determine the difference between the two experimental groups, the consequential least significant difference (LSD) test was used and its results are presented in Table 6.

As shown in Table 6, the results of the consequential LSD test indicate a significant difference ($P < 0.05$) between the

group that experienced the communication skills training method and the group that experienced the sexual skills training method in affecting women's sexual attitudes positively.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare the effectiveness of sexual skills training and communication skills training on sexual attitudes of married women. The results of the present study showed that sexual skills training and communication skills training had differing impacts on the sexual attitudes of married women, with the greatest impact associated with communication skills training. The findings of the study were consistent with the results of studies by Sung and Lin,¹⁸ Rashid and Hosseini Nazarlou,¹⁹ Ghorbani and Khalaj,²⁰ Hajinia and Khalatbari,²¹ Mobredi et al.,²² Gunderson and McCary,²³ Nezami et al.²⁴ and Jamali et al.²⁵

Despite the fact that sexual relating is a complex web of emotions, attitudes, and behaviors, those members of society with various forms of visual, auditory, or physical challenges are often neglected in sexuality-related research.²⁶

Currently, there is a variety of therapies and interventions that target sexual attitudes, each of which has a different orientation.²⁷ Among the factors affecting sexual attitudes is communication skills, or the ability to communicate effectively and efficiently with others.²⁸ These are often required in the area of sexuality and sexual issues. Couples can learn and use communication skills to improve their relationships.

The results of some studies suggest that a chief cause of marital conflict is the inability and weakness in couples' skills to control and resolve their conflicts. Thus, many interventions are aimed at flaws in communication skills, and these can reduce marital conflict.²⁹ In addition, spouses' attitudes towards sexual issues are of critical importance for marital accord. Beliefs and non-adaptive attitudes play an important role in the arousal and the orgasm stages between spouses. Healthy attitudes towards sexual relationships can lead to more pleasurable sexual experiences and orgasm. Having sexual needs met plays a major role in relationship and personal health in reducing tension and stress and helps prevent harassment and violence, thus contributing to enjoyable and productive relationships. If one partner considers sexual activity unpleasant, they will be less inclined to desire sex; in some cases, dissatisfied partners may use adverse sexual behaviors against their partners, including physical or verbal aggression. This dynamic suggests that beliefs and attitudes about sex and sexual roles has a critical impact on violence and instability in marital relationships.³⁰

Conclusion

In explaining the findings of this study, it can be stated that ineffective communication brings about an interpersonal

Table 3. The descriptive indicators of sexual attitudes variable between control and experimental groups (n=36)

Variable	Group	Average	Standard Deviation	n
Sexual attitudes	Control	39.9	2.05	12
	Communication skills	42.2	2.42	12
	Sexual skills	42.7	1.70	12
	Total	41.9	2.23	36

Table 4. Levene's test for the homogeneity of error variance

Variable	F	Df1	Df2	Significance (two-tailed)
Sexual attitudes	1.67	3	32	0.180

*Significant at $P < 0.05$.

Table 5. The results of the one-way ANCOVA for the effectiveness of two types of training among experimental groups (n=24)

Variable	Source variance	MS	df	MS mean	F	Significance (two-tailed)	Ability test
Pre-test	Between groups	1.3974	1	1.454	4.457	0.034*	0.541
	Within group	10.110	32	0.314			
Groups	Between groups	2.847	2	1.451	4.454	0.150	0.714
	Within group	10.110	32	0.314			

*Significant at $P < 0.05$.

Table 6. Consequential LSD test results to determine the differences between the two types of training

Groups	Sexual skills		Communication skills		Control	
	Mean difference	Significance (two-tailed)	Mean difference	Significance (two-tailed)	Mean difference	Significance (two-tailed)
Sexual skills	-	-	0.614	0.012*	0.24	0.914
Communication skills	-	-	-	-	0.984	0.014*
Control	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Significant at $P < 0.05$.

distance which can be experienced in all aspects of life and across all sectors of society. Lack of skills necessary to start and maintain a pleasant married life can lead to loneliness, physical illness, mental stress, feelings of incompetence and job dissatisfaction, family problems and even death. Based on the research in the field, some studies have highlighted the theoretical importance of sexual attitudes and have advised therapists and consultants to address changes in incompatible attitudes and beliefs as one of the main tasks of treatment in couples and individual therapy. The significant correlation between sexual knowledge and sexual attitudes raises the point that as individuals' sexual knowledge increase, their attitudes towards sexual issues will be more flexible and positive.³¹ Both communication and sexual skills play an important role in marital life, and both are effective items in the relationship between couples and can have important effects on cohabitation. However, there is no study that examines which of these can play a more crucial role in affecting sexual attitudes. Therefore this study examined both types of skills training to evaluate the results in order to design couples' educational programs to impact their attitudes more effectively. Therefore, it is recommended that future research examine the role of sexual knowledge and provide the necessary training in order to increase this knowledge, with a special attention to couples. Due to the limited scope of this training for females, researchers are recommended to conduct this research in the future on both genders. Moreover, in the absence of follow-up, follow-up tests are suggested to be performed at different intervals after the intervention. Finally, because of group and public education, these trainings do not address the skills required of each individual, which is also one of the limitations of the present study along with the small sample size.

Ethical approval

This research is part of a master's thesis. Ethical aspects were considered in all steps of the study and texts belonging to other authors that have been used in any part of this study have been fully referenced and cited. This study was approved by the Islamic Azad University (Thesis code:11920701922003).

Competing interests

We had no conflicts of interest in this study.

Authors' contributions

AF designed the concept & framework, and collected the questionnaires' and data. Data were analyzed by AG. The manuscript was prepared by AF and edited by AG. The technical editing was done by AG. The article was reviewed and approved by all authors.

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