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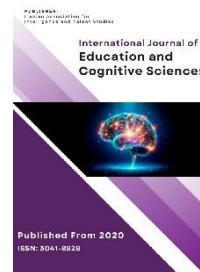
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## The Effectiveness of Group Marital Conflict Resolution Training Based on Choice Theory on Emotional Divorce and Hope for Life in Married Women

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The primary objective of this study was to examine the effectiveness of group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on emotional divorce and hope for life among married women in 2023.

**Methods and Materials:** A quasi-experimental research design was used, with a sample of 50 married women selected via convenience sampling from counseling centers in Alborz Province, Iran. Participants were randomly assigned to experimental ( $n = 25$ ) and control ( $n = 25$ ) groups. The experimental group received group training based on Choice Theory over 9 sessions, while the control group received no intervention. Data were collected using Gottman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (1997) and Snyder's Hope Scale (1991), administered during pre-test, post-test, and follow-up phases. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA).

**Findings:** The results indicated a significant negative effect of Choice Theory-based marital conflict resolution training on emotional divorce and a significant positive effect on hope for life ( $p < 0.05$ ). Specifically, the training led to significant reductions in two components of emotional divorce—need for attention and affection, and need for belonging—while no significant changes were observed in feelings of loneliness and restlessness. Regarding hope for life, the training significantly improved the strategic thinking component, but no significant effect was found for the agency thinking component.

**Conclusion:** Group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory effectively reduces emotional divorce and increases hope for life among married women.

**Keywords:** Choice Theory, emotional divorce, hope for life, marital conflict resolution, married women.

## 1. Introduction

The family is one of the most important institutions in society and plays a key role in shaping human personality. The well-being, satisfaction, contentment, quality, and optimal functioning of the family significantly contribute to the flourishing, growth, and development of its members (Godarzi & Khojaste, 2020; Mollajafarloo et al., 2022). The foundation of a family is built upon marriage, and the opposite pole—divorce—leads to the disintegration of the family (Evans et al., 2018). Today, the increasing divorce rates worldwide are a matter of great concern. Divorce has risen for various reasons over the past two decades globally, with the rate reaching 0.51 in the United States, 0.48 in Sweden, and 0.47 in South Korea (Chung, 2014). Although Iran is still classified as a country with relatively low divorce rates based on official statistics, the divorce rate has steadily increased annually over the past decade. According to the Iranian Civil Registration Organization, the number of divorces between 2011 and 2015 followed a sharp and concerning upward trend. The ratio of marriages to divorces has also significantly changed during the same period. In 2011, this ratio was 6:1 nationwide, meaning that for every 6 legal marriages, 1 divorce was recorded. However, by the end of 2015, this ratio had shifted to 4:2, meaning that for every four legal marriages, two divorces were recorded (Jafari et al., 2023). According to official statistics, in 2014, approximately 16,000 divorces were registered in the country each month (Deldadeh & Mo'aven-e-Islami, 2020). Furthermore, current statistics indicate that in Iran, one in three marriages leads to divorce, with divorce rates increasing by 28% between 2011 and 2020 (Fallahi et al., 2022). Emotional divorce accounts for approximately twice the rate of legal divorce (Deldadeh & Mo'aven-e-Islami, 2020). Emotional divorce is one of the serious problems in Iran, for which precise statistics are unavailable (Mollajafarloo et al., 2022). Most marriages start with love, but over time, some conflicts lead to emotional divorce—a marriage without feeling and love, where couples continue their shared life but refrain from formal separation for various reasons (Hajjani et al., 2013). Divorce rates require greater consideration, especially given the cultural and social conditions of Iranian society and the religious beliefs that view divorce as undesirable. The crisis resulting from divorce leads to mental, physical, and spiritual imbalance and disharmony. However, a more common feeling during this period is a sense of despair and hopelessness about life (Fallahi et al., 2022).

Marriage is one of the most significant decisions a person faces in life (McCarthy, 2016). Marriage begins with a world of hope: hope for understanding, acceptance, belonging, care, security, intense affection, and lasting bonds. Yet, this hope soon fades with the realities of marriage: desires and needs are not aligned, anger and frustration create distance between couples, judgments make acceptance difficult, and loneliness replaces intimacy and togetherness. The importance of hope for life and its role in achieving a good and happy life is undeniable (Law & Guo, 2015). A lack of hope for life and a life devoid of purpose reduces the quality of life and fosters hopeless beliefs (Hernandez & Overholser, 2021). Hope for life is a statistical indicator reflecting the average life expectancy in a society, or, in other words, the expected years of life for each member of that society (Nikkhu et al., 2020; Ofem, 2023; Sadat Mousavi & Ebrahimi, 2024). Despite the advancement of societies and industrialization in the information age, a prevalent characteristic among the general public is a weakness in hope for life, which has been addressed in positive psychology (Khosravi et al., 2020).

The growing despair among couples and the rise of emotional divorce in Iran have prompted various organizations, such as the Social Harm Prevention Deputy, the Welfare Organization, the Iranian Psychological Association, and even the Ministry of Education, to devise and implement preventive programs to reduce emotional divorce and increase hope for life among couples. These organizations seek the assistance of psychologists and marriage and family counselors, who explore effective methods for reducing marital conflict and its negative consequences for couples (Jafari et al., 2023).

In this context, Choice Theory represents a novel approach to the study of marital relationships and the stability of marriages. It benefits couples who face challenges in their marital relationships. Over time, this theory evolved from reality therapy to control theory, and finally to Choice Theory (Holland & Walker, 2018; Robey et al., 2011; Stoye, 2015). According to Glasser, the problems and difficulties in marital life arise from each partner's attempts to control the other to satisfy their own needs and desires. The goal of reality therapy is to reduce external control and foster internal control among couples. The aim is to help couples reduce their need to control their spouse and focus more on controlling their own behavior. Instead of trying to control their spouse, they should aim to control their own behavior. Furthermore, each spouse should evaluate their behaviors and assess how these behaviors

contribute to strengthening and solidifying their marriage (Stoye, 2015). Another component of reality therapy is responsibility. Choice Theory asserts that only the individual can act on their own behalf, and no one can do so without their permission (Holland & Walker, 2018). Moreover, Glasser argues that most couples who fail in their marriages exhibit signs of external control and a mismatch in the intensity of their basic needs. If couples understand that they act under the influence of their basic needs and try to meet these needs from the beginning of their marriage, their marital relationships will improve significantly (Stoye, 2015).

It seems that group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory helps married women improve their relationships and increase their hope for life, allowing them to foster intimate relationships with their spouses without feelings of control. Consequently, with increased trust between spouses, they express their desires and needs without fear of judgment or rejection. This mutual respect allows them to enjoy being together without emotional divorce (Fallahi et al., 2022).

A review of the literature reveals that studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of reality therapy based on Choice Theory on marital conflict and hope for life in couples. However, there has been limited research on the effectiveness of group conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory, particularly among married women. Currently, the rise in emotional divorce and the decline in hope for life among married women are significant issues in Iran. Therefore, in this study, we aim to examine the impact of group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on emotional divorce and hope for life in married women. To this end, the following hypotheses are proposed:

a) Group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory affects the components of emotional divorce in married women.

b) Group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory affects the components of hope for life in married women.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study is applied in terms of its goal and quasi-experimental in terms of its method. It is considered applied because the research results have practical applications. The study is quasi-experimental because, although the independent variable was manipulated and its effect on the

dependent variable was observed, the sampling was not completely random; only the assignment of participants to the experimental and control groups was done randomly. This research utilized a pre-test, post-test design with a control group and a follow-up phase, which is a quasi-experimental design.

The selected sample group consisted of 50 married women (25 in the experimental group and 25 in the control group) who were chosen through random selection, considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study. The participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups (25 in the experimental group and 25 in the control group). Then, three questionnaires—Gottman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (1997) and Snyder's Hope Scale (1991)—were administered to the participants as a pre-test. Following that, the experimental group received group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory in 9 sessions of 90 minutes each (one session per week), while the control group did not receive any training. Two weeks after the last training session, a post-test was administered to both groups, and the emotional divorce and hope for life scores of the two groups were compared. Additionally, two months after the post-test, a follow-up test was conducted, and the emotional divorce and hope for life scores of both groups were compared again.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) a minimum of 4 years of marriage, 2) at least a high school diploma, and 3) the presence of marital conflicts and problems.

The exclusion criteria were as follows: 1) any apparent physical or psychological illness, 2) substance abuse based on self-report, and 3) age below 30 years or above 60 years.

Given the nature of the study and to measure the impact of the educational program, a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test, and control group was used. That is, the two questionnaires—Gottman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (1997) and Snyder's Hope Scale (1991)—were administered as a pre-test to both the experimental and control groups. Subsequently, the experimental group received 9 sessions of 90-minute group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory (one session per week). Each session began with a review of the previous session's material and related activities, followed by the introduction of a new stage. The content of the 9 sessions included: introducing the therapeutic program and its underlying logic, introducing the group leader, group members, group rules, and goal-setting (1 session); introducing how and why individuals exhibit behaviors and presenting Glasser's basic psychological needs—love and

belonging, freedom and autonomy, achievement and power, fun, and the physiological need for survival (1 session); explaining Choice Theory and its main components, and the responsibility for one's behaviors (1 session); introducing total behavior and familiarizing participants with its four components—thoughts, actions, feelings, and physiology—using clinical examples to show how changing thoughts and actions can alter feelings and physiology (1 session); introducing the four types of conflict in interpersonal relationships and having group members assess which type of conflict is prevalent in their lives (1 session); introducing the seven destructive behaviors and the seven constructive behaviors in human relationships, with a homework assignment to practice constructive behavior in the following week (1 session); introducing internal control alongside the ten principles of Choice Theory, and encouraging group members to present personal examples (1 session); introducing the WDEP process (Wants, Doing and Direction, Evaluation, Planning and Action) and helping the group develop a concrete group plan to avoid external control, as well as training participants to create reminder cards and use them in real life (1 session); and summarizing and reviewing the skills taught and practicing them (1 session). Finally, the two questionnaires—Gottman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (1997) and Snyder's Hope Scale (1991)—were administered as post-test and follow-up tests to participants in both the experimental and control groups. The mean scores of the two groups were then compared to assess the effectiveness of the educational program.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Emotional Divorce

The Emotional Divorce Questionnaire, developed by Gottman (1997), was used to measure emotional divorce. This questionnaire consists of 24 closed-ended questions with "Yes" or "No" responses and includes four components: feelings of loneliness, feelings of boredom and restlessness, the need for attention and affection, and the need for belonging. A "Yes" response is scored as 1 point, and a "No" response is scored as 0 points. The total score of the questionnaire is obtained by summing the "Yes" responses. Feelings of loneliness are measured by questions 1, 9, 14, 15, 23, and 24; feelings of boredom and restlessness are measured by questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7; the need for attention and affection is measured by questions 11, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 22; and the need for belonging is measured by questions

2, 8, 10, 13, 16, and 18. Overall, a score of 8 or higher on the scale indicates that the individual's marriage is at risk of separation and that signs of emotional divorce are present. The higher the number of "Yes" responses, the greater the likelihood of emotional divorce. The cut-off point for this questionnaire is 8, meaning that if an individual's score exceeds this number, they are at risk of emotional divorce. The validity of Gottman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire was evaluated using factor analysis in Bayat Mokhtari's (2013) research, and its content validity was reported as satisfactory. The scree plot and the examination of factor loadings supported the presence of a general factor that explained 70% of the variance in the variable. Salehpour, Aghghar, and Navabinejad (2019) also reported that the face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha in Bayat Mokhtari's (2013) study, yielding a coefficient of 0.87. Additionally, Khodabakhshi Kolaei and colleagues (2019) reported an overall reliability of 0.93 for the Persian version of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha (Salehpour et al., 2019). Mousavi and Rahiminejad's (2015) research obtained an overall reliability of 0.93 using Cronbach's alpha (Mousavi & Rahiminejad, 2015). In the study by Khodabakhshi Koolaei et al. (2019), the questionnaire's reliability was calculated to be 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha (Khodabakhshi Koolaei et al., 2019). Kamari Sangar-Abadi and Fath-Abadi (2012) reported internal consistency coefficients between 0.74 and 0.84, and the test-retest reliability was found to be 0.80, with even higher levels in periods longer than 8 to 10 weeks. Additionally, they reported internal consistency of subscales between 0.71 and 0.76 and of the strategic subscale between 0.63 and 0.80 (Kamari Sangar Abadi & Fath-Abadi, 2012). Mami and Asgari (2013) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 83% for the questionnaire (Mami & Asgari, 2013).

### 2.2.2. Hope

Snyder's Hope Scale was developed by Snyder et al. (1991) to measure the level of hope for life in adults (over 15 years old). It consists of 12 questions. The 12-item Snyder Hope Scale is scored using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true). The scale includes two subscales or components: agentic thinking and pathways thinking. Of the 12 statements, 4 items assess agentic thinking (items 2, 9, 10, and 12), 4 items assess pathways thinking (items 1, 4, 7, and 8), and 4 are filler items



(items 3, 5, 6, and 11), which are not scored. Therefore, the scale measures two subscales: agency and pathways. Snyder and colleagues (1991; as cited in Fallahi et al., 2023) confirmed the construct validity of the Hope Scale using exploratory factor analysis. They reported the test-retest reliability of the scale as 0.81 after three weeks. Kermani, Khodapanahi, and Heidari (2011) reported satisfactory validity of this scale using confirmatory factor analysis (Kermani et al., 2011). Hernandez and Overholser (2021) reported a construct validity of 0.72 for this test, based on precision, intensity, and satisfaction, and its reliability was 0.74 and 0.78 using Cronbach's alpha (Hernandez & Overholser, 2021). Snyder et al. (1991) reported the reliability of the Hope Scale as 0.86 using Cronbach's alpha and 0.80 using test-retest, and they reported a correlation of 0.44 between this scale and the Beck Depression Inventory (Fallahi et al., 2022). Khozaymeh and Safariyan Toosi (2018) obtained a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.89 for the scale (Khozaymeh & Safariyan Toosi, 2018). Kermani, Khodapanahi, and Heidari (2011) reported a correlation of the Snyder Hope Scale with the Beck Suicidal Thoughts Scale of -0.53, perceived social support of 0.40, and meaning in life of 0.57 (Kermani et al., 2011). Nik Anjam, et al. (2023) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.89 for the agentic thinking component and 0.91 for the pathways thinking component of the Hope Scale (Nik Anjam et al., 2022).

### 2.3. Intervention

#### 2.3.1. Group Marital Conflict Resolution Training Program Based on Choice Theory

The group marital conflict resolution training program based on Choice Theory is structured into nine sessions. The program is designed to help married couples understand and manage their marital conflicts by recognizing the psychological needs underlying their behaviors. Each session builds upon the principles of Choice Theory, focusing on the importance of taking personal responsibility, understanding the dynamics of control, and learning constructive behaviors. The participants will engage in discussions, exercises, and self-reflection, while applying new strategies to improve communication and conflict resolution in their marital relationships. Homework assignments will reinforce the skills learned in each session, with feedback provided at the beginning of the next session (Fallahi et al., 2022).

#### Session 1: Introduction to the Program

In the first session, the group is introduced to the overall framework of the training, the underlying principles of Choice Theory, and the goals of the program. The session also involves the introduction of the group leader and participants, the establishment of group rules, and the setting of individual and group goals. Participants will gain an understanding of what to expect from the training and how to work collaboratively toward improving their marital relationships.

#### Session 2: Understanding Human Behavior and Basic Psychological Needs

This session focuses on explaining why and how people behave, emphasizing that all behavior is purposeful and aimed at satisfying basic needs. Participants will learn about Glasser's five basic psychological needs—love and belonging, freedom and autonomy, achievement and power, fun, and physiological survival. They will also be guided in identifying their own need profiles, allowing them to better understand how unmet needs contribute to marital conflict.

#### Session 3: Marital Conflicts and Choice Theory

In this session, participants will be assessed on their current marital conflicts and the effects these conflicts have had on their relationships. The connection between marital conflicts and Choice Theory will be introduced, along with a detailed explanation of the core components of Choice Theory and how it influences couples' behaviors. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how their choices impact their marital relationships.

#### Session 4: Total Behavior and Its Four Components

This session introduces the concept of total behavior, which comprises four components: thinking, acting, feeling, and physiology. The group will explore how changing one's actions and thoughts can influence emotions and physical responses. Clinical examples and metaphors will be provided to illustrate these effects, and participants will engage in a group exercise to experience the impact of altering actions and thoughts on their emotional and physiological states.

#### Session 5: Understanding Marital Conflicts Through Choice Theory

Participants will be introduced to the four types of marital conflicts from the perspective of Choice Theory: 1) You want your spouse to do something they do not want to do, 2) Your spouse wants you to do something you do not want to do, 3) Both spouses try to force each other to do things they do not want to do, and 4) You force yourself to do something you do not want to do. Participants will assess which types

of conflict are present in their relationships and rate the intensity on a scale of 0 to 10.

#### Session 6: Destructive and Constructive Relationship Behaviors

In this session, participants will learn about the seven destructive behaviors in marital relationships—criticism, blame, complaining, nagging, threats, punishment, and bribing for control. These behaviors will be contrasted with seven constructive behaviors—listening, encouraging, supporting, respecting, trusting, accepting, and discussing differences. Participants will identify destructive behaviors in their own relationships and practice the constructive behaviors as homework.

#### Session 7: Internal Control and the Ten Principles of Choice Theory

This session introduces the concept of internal control, along with the ten principles of Choice Theory. Participants will be asked to provide personal examples of how external control has negatively affected their relationships and explore ways to apply internal control in their marriages. The session will include group discussions on how to replace external control with more autonomous, self-directed behavior.

#### Session 8: The WDEP Process and Group Planning

Participants will be introduced to the WDEP process (Wants, Doing and Direction, Evaluation, Planning and Action), which helps individuals clarify what they want, assess their current behaviors, evaluate their effectiveness, and develop concrete plans for change. The group will work together to create a practical plan aimed at avoiding external control and practicing self-responsibility in their relationships. Participants will also create reminder cards to use in real-life situations.

#### Session 9: Summary and Skill Reinforcement

In the final session, the skills and techniques learned throughout the program will be reviewed and consolidated.

Participants will engage in practice exercises to reinforce these skills. At the end of the session, participants will discuss how they have applied the skills in their relationships, and feedback will be provided. Each participant will leave with a solid understanding of how to continue using the principles of Choice Theory to improve their marital relationships and reduce conflict.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

To compare the mean scores of the groups and analyze the research data, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, descriptive graphs, frequency tables) were used. The data obtained were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). ANCOVA is essentially a form of hierarchical regression analysis aimed at removing the influence of certain variables from the dependent variable before analyzing the remaining variance in scores.

### 3. Findings and Results

To assess the impact of the educational program and to analyze the research data, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, descriptive graphs, and frequency tables) were used. Additionally, the data were analyzed using the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). ANCOVA is a form of hierarchical regression analysis designed to remove the effect of certain variables from the dependent variable before analyzing the remaining variance. In the present study, after controlling for pre-test scores (emotional divorce and hope for life scores in the first phase as a covariate), the post-test scores (emotional divorce and hope for life scores in the second phase) were adjusted for both groups, and the experimental and control groups were compared using ANCOVA.

**Table 1**

*Mean (SD) of Emotional Divorce, Hope for Life, and Their Components by Group Across Three Phases*

| Variables                       | Experimental Group (Mean, SD) | Control Group (Mean, SD) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Pre-test Emotional Divorce      | 1.48 (0.71)                   | 1.72 (0.79)              |
| Post-test Loneliness            | 1.64 (0.70)                   | 1.64 (0.64)              |
| Follow-up Loneliness            | 1.64 (0.64)                   | 1.68 (0.69)              |
| Pre-test Restlessness           | 1.44 (0.71)                   | 1.60 (0.71)              |
| Post-test Restlessness          | 1.44 (0.58)                   | 1.52 (0.51)              |
| Follow-up Restlessness          | 1.56 (0.51)                   | 1.52 (0.59)              |
| Pre-test Attention & Affection  | 1.52 (0.59)                   | 1.68 (0.69)              |
| Post-test Attention & Affection | 1.28 (0.46)                   | 1.76 (0.60)              |
| Follow-up Attention & Affection | 1.24 (0.44)                   | 1.60 (0.58)              |

|                             |              |              |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Pre-test Belonging          | 1.76 (0.77)  | 1.68 (0.75)  |
| Post-test Belonging         | 1.20 (0.50)  | 1.48 (0.65)  |
| Follow-up Belonging         | 1.44 (0.51)  | 1.60 (0.71)  |
| Pre-test Hope for Life      | 15.32 (4.11) | 15.56 (4.03) |
| Post-test Agency Thinking   | 15.68 (3.38) | 15.24 (3.63) |
| Follow-up Agency Thinking   | 15.32 (3.53) | 15.12 (3.36) |
| Pre-test Pathways Thinking  | 15.84 (3.78) | 15.44 (4.03) |
| Post-test Pathways Thinking | 16.96 (3.09) | 15.36 (4.13) |
| Follow-up Pathways Thinking | 16.32 (3.05) | 15.48 (3.73) |

As shown in Table 1, the control group's mean scores for the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up on emotional divorce components were: loneliness (1.72, 1.64, 1.68), restlessness (1.60, 1.52, 1.52), need for attention and affection (1.68, 1.76, 1.60), and need for belonging (1.68, 1.48, 1.60). In contrast, the experimental group's mean scores for the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up were: loneliness (1.48, 1.64, 1.64), restlessness (1.44, 1.44, 1.56), need for attention and affection (1.52, 1.28, 1.24), and need for belonging (1.76, 1.20, 1.44). Thus, the control group's mean scores across the emotional divorce components (loneliness, restlessness, need for attention and affection, and need for belonging) showed little change, while the experimental group's post-test and follow-up mean scores for two components of emotional divorce (need for attention and affection, and need for belonging) were lower than their pre-test scores. Similarly, the control group's pre-test, post-test, and follow-up mean scores on hope for life components were: agency thinking (15.56, 15.24, 15.12) and pathways thinking (15.44, 15.36, 15.48). However, the experimental group's mean scores for agency thinking were (15.32, 15.68, 15.32) and for pathways thinking (15.84, 16.96, 16.32), indicating that the experimental group's post-test and follow-up mean

scores for the pathways thinking component were higher than their pre-test scores.

Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. The assumptions of homogeneity of covariance matrices and homogeneity of error variances were tested. Box's test for the homogeneity of covariance matrices ( $F = 0.872$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and Levene's test for homogeneity of error variances in the post-test for emotional divorce components, including loneliness ( $F = 0.015$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), restlessness ( $F = 0.205$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), need for attention and affection ( $F = 1.689$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), need for belonging ( $F = 3.315$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and hope for life components, including agency thinking ( $F = 1.153$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and pathways thinking ( $F = 0.035$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), as well as in the follow-up for emotional divorce components, including loneliness ( $F = 0.082$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), restlessness ( $F = 0.074$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), need for attention and affection ( $F = 2.823$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), need for belonging ( $F = 1.202$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and hope for life components, including agency thinking ( $F = 0.931$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and pathways thinking ( $F = 0.012$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), all indicated that the assumptions of homogeneity were met. Therefore, multivariate analysis of covariance was used to compare the mean scores of emotional divorce and hope for life components, with the results presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Multivariate Analysis of Covariance for Emotional Divorce and Hope for Life Components*

| Test               | Value | F     | p     | Effect Size |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Pillai's Trace     | 0.704 | 1.676 | 0.048 | 0.352       |
| Wilks' Lambda      | 0.384 | 1.844 | 0.025 | 0.381       |
| Hotelling's Trace  | 1.377 | 2.009 | 0.013 | 0.408       |
| Roy's Largest Root | 1.184 | 3.649 | 0.001 | 0.542       |

As shown in Table 2, the results of the multivariate analysis of covariance indicate that all four statistics—Pillai's trace ( $F = 1.676$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Wilks' lambda ( $F = 1.844$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Hotelling's trace ( $F = 2.009$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and Roy's largest root ( $F = 3.649$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )—were significant. This suggests that the linear combination of the dependent variables, after adjusting for initial differences, was

influenced by the independent variable. In other words, the multivariate analysis of covariance shows that the intervention (group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory) significantly affected the linear combination of the dependent variables, and there were significant differences between the groups. Therefore,

univariate analysis of covariance was conducted to examine the specific differences, as presented in [Table 3](#).

**Table 3**

*Univariate Analysis of Covariance for Emotional Divorce and Hope for Life*

| Source of Variance | Dependent Variables             | SS     | df | MS    | F    | p     | Effect Size (Eta) |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------|----|-------|------|-------|-------------------|
| Group              | Post-test Loneliness            | 0.32   | 2  | 0.16  | 0.36 | 0.701 | 0.015             |
|                    | Follow-up Loneliness            | 0.35   | 2  | 0.18  | 0.40 | 0.676 | 0.017             |
|                    | Post-test Restlessness          | 0.74   | 2  | 0.37  | 1.26 | 0.292 | 0.051             |
|                    | Follow-up Restlessness          | 1.62   | 2  | 0.81  | 2.97 | 0.061 | 0.112             |
|                    | Post-test Attention & Affection | 3.11   | 2  | 1.56  | 5.47 | 0.007 | 0.189             |
|                    | Follow-up Attention & Affection | 2.13   | 2  | 1.06  | 4.15 | 0.022 | 0.150             |
|                    | Post-test Belonging             | 2.30   | 2  | 1.15  | 3.62 | 0.035 | 0.133             |
|                    | Follow-up Belonging             | 3.06   | 2  | 1.53  | 4.66 | 0.014 | 0.165             |
|                    | Post-test Agency Thinking       | 28.20  | 2  | 14.10 | 1.05 | 0.360 | 0.043             |
|                    | Follow-up Agency Thinking       | 30.73  | 2  | 15.36 | 1.34 | 0.272 | 0.054             |
|                    | Post-test Pathways Thinking     | 125.27 | 2  | 62.63 | 5.40 | 0.008 | 0.187             |
|                    | Follow-up Pathways Thinking     | 97.47  | 2  | 48.74 | 4.88 | 0.012 | 0.172             |

As shown in [Table 3](#), after adjusting for pre-test scores, the differences between the experimental and control groups in the post-test and follow-up, at the alpha level of 0.05, were significant for two components of emotional divorce (need for attention and affection, and need for belonging). Therefore, hypothesis "a" of the study, which proposed that group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory would reduce emotional divorce in married women, was confirmed. Additionally, the difference between the experimental and control groups in the post-test and follow-up for one component of hope for life (pathways thinking) was significant. Thus, hypothesis "b," which proposed that group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory would increase hope for life in married women, was also confirmed.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The main objective of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on emotional divorce and hope for life in married women in 2023. The sample consisted of 50 married women who sought counseling services at centers in Alborz Province, selected through convenience sampling (25 for the experimental group and 25 for the control group). Data were collected using Gottman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (1997) and Snyder's Hope Scale (1991). Descriptive and inferential statistics (multivariate analysis of covariance) were used for data analysis. The results showed that group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory had a significant negative effect on emotional

divorce and a significant positive effect on hope for life in married women.

In comparative analysis, the findings of this study are consistent with prior studies ([Elsayed & Elyas, 2016](#); [Jafari et al., 2023](#); [Robey et al., 2011](#); [Sharifi & Asgardoost, 2021](#)), which also suggest that group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory affects emotional divorce in couples. Choice Theory is grounded in learning and posits that the past is not the absolute determinant of our current problems. Regardless of what has happened in the past, what we need now is effective functioning and planning in the here and now, focusing on actions that improve our interpersonal relationships ([Fallahi et al., 2022](#)). The goal of reality therapy is to help clients evaluate themselves, determining whether their actions, reactions, decisions, and behaviors are helping them achieve their desires, and to assist them in identifying alternative approaches that increase the likelihood of success ([Cardos et al., 2017](#)). Therefore, the impact of group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on emotional divorce in married women is not unexpected.

In explaining the positive impact of group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on emotional divorce, it can be argued that, although various factors such as domestic violence, life skills, and perfectionism are related to emotional divorce in married women, the influence of this training is logical due to its emphasis on holding individuals accountable for their choices in response to marital conflict. According to the results of the current study, Choice Theory is one of the factors influencing emotional divorce in married women. The training's focus



on recognizing and fulfilling participants' basic psychological needs likely led to reductions in two dimensions of emotional divorce (the need for attention and affection and the need for belonging). However, the training had no significant effect on two other dimensions (feelings of loneliness and restlessness).

In the comparative analysis regarding the effectiveness of group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on hope for life in married women, the findings align with prior studies (Keshavarz et al., 2016; Law & Guo, 2015; Nik Anjam et al., 2022), which indicate that Choice Theory positively influences hope for life. In this regard, Sharf (1996; as cited in Firoozbakht, 2014) notes that Choice Theory training reduces anxiety and increases responsibility, self-esteem, and resilience. Choice Theory is based on control theory and assumes that individuals are responsible for their lives, actions, feelings, and behaviors. Thus, the impact of marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on hope for life in married women is not unexpected.

In explaining the positive impact of group marital conflict resolution training based on Choice Theory on hope for life, it can also be noted that the women in the experimental group engaged in discussions, reflections, and expressions of their thoughts on the issues raised during the sessions. This process enabled them to develop the skills necessary for analyzing and evaluating their own and others' ideas (Evans et al., 2018). Consequently, they were better equipped to choose appropriate coping strategies when faced with marital conflicts and challenges, thereby enhancing their sense of empowerment in managing difficult situations and increasing their hope for life. Based on the present findings, it can be concluded that Choice Theory is a significant factor affecting hope for life in married women. The training focused on enhancing the participants' intellectual and emotional capabilities, which strengthened their strategic thinking in handling marital conflicts and increased their hope for life. However, the training did not have a significant effect on the component of agency thinking in the participants.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that organizations involved in divorce prevention, such as the Social Harm Prevention Deputy, the Welfare Organization, family counseling centers, and all institutions concerned with promoting stable marriages and healthy, happy families, consider incorporating group training based on Choice Theory into their programs and workshops aimed at reducing emotional divorce and preventing marital

conflict. Finally, it should be noted that, like other studies, this research faced limitations such as a non-representative sample, reliance on closed-ended questionnaires, and a lack of interest among some participants. Future research should explore the topic among married men as well and compare the results with the present findings. Additionally, future studies could use different tools to measure emotional divorce and hope for life to compare the results and further generalize the findings.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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