

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BOWENIAN FAMILY THERAPY IN FORGIVENESS AND FAMILY FUNCTION AMONG INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED BY EXTRAMARITAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE SPOUSE

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ARTICLE INFO

Received:

03th Jun 2017

Accepted:

29th Nov 2017

Available online:

14th Dec 2017

Keywords: *Family system therapy, forgiveness, family function*

ABSTRACT

This research is a semi-experimental study (pretest-posttest design with a nonequivalent control group) which has been conducted with the aim of investigating the effectiveness of family system therapy in forgiveness and family function among the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse. The research statistical population consisted of all the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse who referred (during March 2015 to March 2016) to psychological services clinics in Mashhad. The research sample comprised 30 people from these women who were selected voluntarily and through available sampling method. The research tools included Forgiveness Scale (Pollard, Anderson, Anderson & Jennings, 1998) and Family Assessment Device [3]. To analyze the data, analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was applied. The results obtained from data analysis demonstrated that family system therapy has been effective in forgiveness and family function among the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse in the experimental group compared to the control group ($P < 0.05$).

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To Cite This Article: Mohammad Mohammadipour, Reyhaneh Hashempour Mofasali, (2017), "Investigating the effectiveness of Bowenian family therapy in forgiveness and family function among individuals affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse", *Pharmacophore*, **8(6S)**, e-1173354.

Introduction

Family life cycle has been known as a continuous phase and each stage embraces a set of tasks that should be completely done by family members to enter the next phase of growth. Failure to perform the tasks leads to creating compatibility problems. Thus, paying attention to family and trying to resolve the problems of this fundamental organization can promise a valuable and transcendental society. Meanwhile, children as elements that have little influence on family interactions compared to their parents are more vulnerable than others to the damages caused by the lack of healthy relationships in the family [1].

Walsh (2003) describes family function as reactions and actions of the family that provide financial and emotional support for the family. He states that different kinds of family have different functions. For example, family structure (both working, family with remarriage), socio-cultural concept (ethnic difference of social class) and evolutionary concepts (such as a serious illness) are important in understanding how the family function is. Families have functions that are essential for the health growth of members [2]. Family members experience stress when faced with stressful and difficult situations. This stress causes discomfort, pressure or disappointment in them. Stressful situation disrupts the family system unless the family

can adapt to the new situation. In order for the family to return to its normal function, great efforts are needed to remove or solve the problem [3].

Family function is also affected by power and control in the family system. Positive and negative control and influence function in the entire family and rules determine how power takes shape, who applies it and with what firmness and proportion the power to exert control should be applied [4]. Minouchin [5] defines the efficient family as follows: "A family where there is the feature of completing each other between the members. Among other features are the mutual externalization of members with the needs of each other, clear and flexible boundaries and the power to resolve the conflict and make the changes tailored to the family life cycle" [5].

In McMaster's model, special attention has been paid to family adaptive skills that lead to its evolution and survival. According to the results obtained by Epstein, Baldwin and Bishop (1983), McMaster's model has focused on those family function dimensions which have shown the greatest impact on the physical and emotional health of family members. The mentioned dimensions include basic tasks domain, developmental tasks domain and critical tasks domain. With such a perspective, designers of this model consider six dimensions in FAD for major areas of family function: problem-solving, communications, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement and behavior control [6]. Minouchin [5] views family as an open socio-cultural system that is constantly changing. In his opinion, being natural (healthy) does not mean the absence of problems. But it is the clear reflection of natural problems that occur and are needed to be overcome in family life. Six dimensions of family function assessment based on the structural model are family structure, flexibility, intensification, solving family problems, stages of family development and practices used by the family to determine the signs of disease [7]. In their multi-coordinates model, Olson, Sprenkle and Russell (1979) primarily focus on family typology and emphasize three dimensions of coherence, flexibility and communication. This model also describes family functioning in six dimensions of task performance, role-playing, communication, emotional involvement, control and values and norms [8].

Studies have shown that marital satisfaction has a strong relationship with feelings of happiness and prosperity (Sinha & Mckercher, 1990; Wilson & Oswald, 2005), well-being (Diener, Gum, Su & Ushi, 2006) and general health of couples (Lamp, Lee & Demarys, 2003) and plays an important role in continuation of the family, doing parental tasks and the upbringing of children [9]. In a study on the relationship between family functioning, self-confidence and perfectionism with exposure to chaotic behaviors, significant direct and indirect effects were shown. In another study, family function, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction and mental health function were investigated among women. The research findings suggest that there is difference between women in monogamous and polygamous marriage. Also, they have so far had more significant problems in family functioning, marital relationships and life satisfaction. Johns (2010) examined problem-solving training to improve family function and suicide. The results indicated that a significant relationship exists between family function and problem-solving and also between family function and suicidal thoughts. However, no significant relationship was found between problem-solving and suicidal thoughts [10].

Another important variable in extramarital relationships is family forgiveness. Forgiving oneself and others can help individuals in facing the negative consequences of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts and facilitate psychological well-being and meaningful social relationships. Considering these instances, it is clear that both features of self-compassion and forgiveness have a strong cognitive component and are influenced by individual attitudes toward oneself and others. Non-forgiveness of oneself and others leads to mental rumination and evokes depressive symptoms. Further, it has been evident that some depressive symptoms associated with compassion and forgiveness including sense of guilt, self-blame and most importantly, suicidal thoughts and actions are further observed in depressed youths rather than depressed children and elderly people.

The tendency to forgive others can protect the individual against negative interpersonal experiences and depression-related perceptions. Studies have revealed that people who do not forgive are more likely to become depressed. However, the causal direction of this phenomenon is not clear and it has been demonstrated in some cases that individuals with a tendency for rumination about unpleasant and negative experiences of the past are less likely to forgive others and also are more likely to become depressed. Moreover, research has shown that depressed people quickly recall the harassment by others. They are also likely to interpret events in a negative and distorted way. These individuals tend to judge their social relations based on the past negative experiences. In the study by Chow (2007), it was found that depression makes a great impact on forgiveness. In this study, depressed people relative to non-depressed people were less willing to forgive a slight error of a familiar person.

DiBlasio and Benda (2008) conducted a study and compared forgiveness in three groups of normal people and people with clinical and non-clinical depression. They demonstrated that normal people have more forgiveness compared to depressed individuals. In this research, no difference was found between people with clinical and non-clinical depression in terms of forgiveness rate. The variable of forgiveness as another component of Positive Psychology has been the focus of attention in the field of health. Thus, almost in the earliest investigations about forgiveness, its relationship with health has been addressed. Forgiveness like psychological and physical well-being is of great importance and aims to improve the quality of interpersonal and emotional relationships.

McCullough and Witvliet (2002) have defined forgiveness as a motivational desire that leads people to avoiding unpleasant communication responses and behaving positively towards who has treated them negatively. Maltby, Day and Barber (2004) consider forgiveness as a positive adaptation process which is displayed by the release of hateful emotions, cognitions and behaviors towards the aggressor so that it develops compassion, generosity and satisfaction for that person. Forgiveness has a historical and archetypal meaning which has been encouraged and sanctified as a divine attribute in religious literature. Gambaro, Enright, Baskin and Klatt (2008) argued that individuals who forgive more than others less report physical and mental health problems. Witvliet, Ludwig and Vander Laan (2001) observed that those who were trained to give the wrongdoer responses without forgiveness compared to people who have learned to provide responses along with forgiveness showed faster heart rate, higher blood pressure and more skin responses.

Extramarital relationships are considered as one of the most important threats to the stability of marital relationships and among the major reasons for divorce in different cultures. Marital infidelity is one of the issues which couples therapists regularly face in their clinical practice. Marital infidelity refers to any relationship (sexual or emotional) outside the framework of a committed relationship between couples, which has a strong effect on the performance and stability of the marital relationship. Emotional reactions such as depression, anger, embarrassment and distress in many individuals referring to psychotherapy and counseling centers resulted from exposing the spouse's infidelity. With the occurrence or disclosure of infidelity, physical, psychological and emotional well-being of both partners is threatened and violence, murder and suicide have been reported in these cases. From the perspective of therapists, extramarital relationships mostly emphasize two concepts of disloyalty or betrayal. Disloyalty includes all the behaviors and performance of a married person with the opposite sex outside the framework of the family so that it leads to a friendly, intimate, emotional and romantic relationship and this relationship has certain excitements for the spouse committing infidelity. Betrayal includes the establishment of a sexual relationship by a married person with the opposite sex outside the framework of the family (other than the spouse) [1].

A special issue in any intimate relationship is the negative reaction to real or imaginary attraction of life partner to someone else. Some believe that men are further threatened by sexual attraction of their partner to a male rival whereas women are more threatened by emotional attraction of their partner to a female rival. Infidelity in marital relations is one of the main reasons for divorce and damages the couples (Lin et al., 2004). Secret relations outside the scope of marriage always deliver a severe emotional blow to the parties. This type of relationship causes the incidence of symptoms similar to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and also feelings such as depression, anger, despair, lack of self-confidence, loss of identity and feeling of worthlessness in the spouse who has been betrayed. Marital infidelity also leads to a sense of uncertainty, depression and guilt in the spouse who has betrayed.

Family is the oldest social institution and has existed since the dawn of mankind and begins with marital relations or the bond between husband and wife and depending on the quality of this relationship, its stability or instability is determined [11]. On the other hand, people usually undertake to get married with high hopes and tend to be optimistic about the chance of success of their marriage. Studies have shown that there are high expectations from any romantic relationship and it seems that the issue of fidelity is an essential component of any long-term relationship.

Regarding the treatment of family function and forgiveness problems in the family, different treatments have been offered. Family therapy approaches are separable despite their common factors. Theories and approaches of family therapy have different types, which on one end of this spectrum are psychodynamic approaches, individual processes and systemic approaches and on the other end are systemic, postmodern and system-oriented approaches. Murray Bowen and Michael Kerr were the principal architects of Bowenian family therapy. However, the main originator of this approach was Murray Bowen who from the beginning formulated ideas that led to a prominent theory in family therapy [12]. Murray Bowen's approach which is called family systems theory was proposed by him in 1960. Family therapy pioneers acknowledged that individuals are products of their social background, but they limited their attention to the nuclear family [13]. Bowen found that emotional intensity of mother-child interaction is more important than he thought. More importantly, emotional intensity of mother-child interaction affects the entire family relations; not only the relationship between mother and child. Father, brothers and sisters also play an important role in the creation and perpetuation of family problems. Bowen realized that these relationships assume a form of triangular alliance and continue and are resolved between different sets of family members. Interoperability of family members was so obvious that Bowen developed the concept of mother and child coexistence so that he viewed the whole family in an unbalanced emotional unit consisting of members who cannot successfully separate themselves from each other.

In Bowen's approach, therapists have goals whose importance is in the fact that they cause the families to achieve their goals more quickly. According to Bowen's theory (1988), the main objectives of treatment are as follows: reduced anxiety in the family and that family members are allowed to improve their ability to function independently and reduce their morbid behaviors; increased level of differentiating oneself in each family member and that the members become able to effectively respond to intense emotional situations; Bowen's theory is based on the concept of differentiation [14]. At the core of Bowen's theory, there are three systems and he believes that each individual possesses three main systems: emotional system, affective system and rational system. Emotional system is associated with automatic responses that we make. It is the initial system of humans over which we have no control and this system is always beyond human consciousness.

Affective system is our internal and private reaction. However, it can be said that this system evaluates and controls our emotional system. Rational system is the intellectual system of our existence where established talents decide how to take action.

Bowen's current theory about family in the form of an affective communication system comprises eight interlocking concepts. Considering that these concepts in Bowen's idea are interconnected is of crucial importance since each concept helps to describe other concepts and is itself defined by other concepts. Therefore, Bowen's theory indicates the systemic nature of human behavior. Six of its concepts are devoted to emotional processes of nuclear and extended family and the last two concepts, i.e. emotional cutoff and societal regression, are related to intergenerational emotional processes in the family and society. The underlying premise connecting these eight concepts is that chronic anxiety appears in various forms and its intensity varies according to different family situations and cultural considerations. Based on Bowen's theory, the following eight forces form the family function: differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, family projection process, emotional cutoff, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position and societal regression. What makes Bowen's theory so beneficial is that this theory describes emotional forces that regulate how we communicate with others. The single biggest obstacle to understand others is our willingness to be reactive emotionally. This state of being emotional like all the matters relating to relationships is a two-way street.

Many research findings have confirmed the effectiveness of family therapy interventions in reduced behavioral problems and improved forgiveness and family functioning. Steven (2009) carried out a study and demonstrated that family therapy measures improve forgiveness and family functioning. Findings achieved by Hofts et al. (2009) suggest that there is a relationship between poor family functions and performance of children. In this respect, the results showed that ways of thinking, attitudes and schemas of family members are of crucial importance. The content of the perception of family members influences the quality and severity of daily interactions and emotional problems in the family [15]. Luiz [16] investigated the impact of family therapy on behavioral problems, forgiveness and family functioning. The results revealed that after implementing family therapy, the rate of behavioral problems has decreased and the level of forgiveness and family function has significantly increased. Haward (2005) examined the effectiveness of family therapy in life quality and family function and indicated that family therapy can influence life quality and family function. Steven (2009) in a study evaluated the effectiveness of family therapy in family functioning of hyperactive children. According to the obtained results, the treatment program led to enhanced family function.

Research Methodology

This research is a semi-experimental study (pretest-posttest design with a nonequivalent control group) which has been performed with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of family system therapy in forgiveness and family function among the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse. To this end, a pretest was initially taken from the statistical population. Then, the experimental group received family system therapy based on Bowen's approach. But the control group received no intervention. At the end of the treatment period, both groups took a posttest.

Statistical population

The research target population comprised all the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse who referred (during March 2015 to March 2016) to psychological services clinics in Mashhad.

Statistical sample

The research sample included 30 people from the above-mentioned women who were selected voluntarily and through available sampling method and were randomly assigned into two experimental and control groups, each containing 15 subjects.

Research Tools

Family Forgiveness Questionnaire: This scale has been developed by Pollard, Anderson, Anderson and Jennings [14]. It is composed of 40 items and two sections. The first 20 items are related to the main family and other 20 items are associated with current marital relations. Scoring of this questionnaire is done on a five-point Likert scale. Earning a high score in this test represents a high level of forgiveness. Magyar (2001) estimated the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire to be 0.93. Seif and Bahari [14] obtained the reliability of the whole test to be 0.85 using Cronbach's alpha method. Naderi and Azadmanesh [17] also reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire to be 0.85.

Family Assessment Device (FAD): This tool has been developed by Epstein, Baldwin and Bishop (1983) and its purpose is to evaluate family functioning. Family Assessment Device is a 60-item questionnaire which has been designed to measure family functioning based on McMaster's model and determines six dimensions of problem-solving, communications, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement and behavior control of family function and besides, a seventh subscale related to overall family functioning has been also added to it [5]. Alpha coefficient of the subscales of this questionnaire has been reported to be between 0.72 and 0.92. Further, this tool with the power to differentiate between the members of clinical and non-clinical families has good validity in each of the seven subscales for the known groups [18].

Data analysis method

In the descriptive section, descriptive statistical indices such as mean and standard deviation were used to examine the demographic characteristics of the subjects.

In evaluating the research hypotheses, analysis of covariance test and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) were applied.

Research Findings

The first research hypothesis indicated that “training based on Bowen family system therapy can enhance the forgiveness of the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse”. To examine this hypothesis, analysis of covariance test was used.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores in Family Forgiveness Questionnaire and Family Assessment Device of the experimental and control groups

Group	Variable	Pretest		Posttest	
		Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Experimental	Forgiveness	108.6	13.96833	114.8	13.54464
Control	Forgiveness	107.5333	17.12503	108.9333	16.81184

As can be observed in Table 1, the mean score of the control group in the posttest compared to the pretest shows no significant difference while in the experimental group, the scores of variables in the posttest compared to the pretest have changed and this change suggests the effectiveness of Bowen family system therapy in increased marital forgiveness and family function of the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse.

Table 2: Summary of the results of analysis of covariance test to compare forgiveness of the experimental and control groups in the posttest

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean Square	F	Significance level	Effect size
Pretest	6396.672	1	6396.672	1342.361	0.001	0.576
Group	175.107	1	175.107	36.747	0.001	
Error	128.661	27	4.765			
Total	6783.467	29				

As seen in Table 2, the obtained F value is equal to 36.74 and its significance level is also less than 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Accordingly, with regard to higher mean score of the experimental group in the posttest, it can be concluded that training based on Bowenian family system therapy has been effective and improved forgiveness among the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse.

The second research hypothesis indicated that “training based on Bowenian family system therapy is effective in improved family function of the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse”. To investigate this hypothesis, analysis of covariance test was applied.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the scores of family function components in two stages of measurement for each of the experimental and control groups

Group	Variable	Pretest		Posttest	
		Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Experimental	Problem-solving	29.20	7.27226	32.4667	8.06993
	Communications	28.1333	8.69209	31.60	7.52899
	Roles	29	7.60639	33.5333	7.67060
	Affective responsiveness	28.8667	7.48204	32.8667	7.40527
	Affective involvement	30.9333	7.37241	34.5333	6.56687
	Behavior control	27.1333	8.55125	31.1333	8.40805
Control	Problem-solving	29.0667	7.34328	30.0667	7.29449
	Communications	29.80	10.00143	30.7333	9.87397
	Roles	27.3333	7.99702	28.9333	7.49730
	Affective responsiveness	31.1333	8.19291	31.6667	7.48968
	Affective involvement	31.3333	7.88005	32.2667	8.03089
	Behavior control	26.80	8.64540	27.5333	8.67564

Table 4: Results of multivariate analysis of covariance to compare the family function of the experimental and control groups

Effect	Tests	Values	F	DOF of the effect	DOF of the error	Significance level	Effect size
Group	Pillai's trace	0.844	15.322	6	17	0.01	0.844
	Wilks Lambda	0.156	15.322	6	17	0.01	0.844
	Hotelling's trace	5.408	15.322	6	17	0.01	0.844
	Roy's largest root	5.408	15.322	6	17	0.01	0.844

As shown in Table 4, the significance level of all the four related multivariate statistics, i.e. Pillai's trace, Wilks Lambda, Hotelling's trace and Roy's largest root, is lower than 0.01 ($P < 0.01$). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is revealed that there is significance difference between the participants of the experimental and control groups at least in terms of one of the components related to family function in the posttest. Accordingly, it can be mentioned that training based on Bowenian family system therapy has been effective in improved family function of couples. In order to examine the difference between the experimental and control groups in each of the components related to family function, between subject effects test was used.

Table 5: Between subject effects test to compare the components of family function in the experimental and control groups in the posttest

Variable	Source	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean Square	F	Significance level	Effect size
Problem-solving	Between-group	43.322	1	43.322	16.342	0.001	0.426
	Within-group	58.321	22	2.651			
	Total	1699.867	29				
Communications	Between-group	40.302	1	40.302	11.949	0.002	0.352
	Within-group	74.200	22	3.373			
	Total	2164.167	29				
Roles	Between-group	44.510	1	44.510	21.966	0.001	0.500
	Within-group	44.579	22	2.026			
	Total	1769.367	29				
Affective responsiveness	Between-group	33.307	1	33.307	17.731	0.001	0.446
	Within-group	41.327	22	1.878			
	Total	1563.867	29				
Affective involvement	Between-group	26.983	1	26.983	10.188	0.004	0.317
	Within-group	58.269	22	2.649			
	Total	1545.200	29				
Behavior control	Between-group	27.214	1	27.214	14.601	0.001	0.399
	Within-group	41.005	22	1.864			
	Total	2140.667	29				

Given the results provided in Table 5, F value obtained for all the components including problem-solving, communications, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement and behavior control is significant at the level of 0.01. So, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. With regard to the reduced mean score of the experimental group in the posttest, it is concluded that training based on family system therapy has been effective and leads to the improvement of family function.

Discussion And Conclusion

The first research hypothesis indicated that “training based on Bowenian family system therapy has been effective in improving the marital forgiveness of the couples affected by extramarital relationship of the spouse”. With regard to reduced mean score of the experimental group in the posttest, it is concluded that the difference between the two groups is significant in terms of family forgiveness. Thus, training based on Bowenian family system therapy has been effective in family forgiveness and leads to its improvement in couples.

Findings of the present research are consistent with the results obtained by Daghighaleh, Asgari and Heidari [19] and Ehteshamzadeh (2009) who demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction and happiness. Findings of the present study are consistent with the results obtained by Patrick [19] and Finchman et al. (2004) who showed a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and intimacy with forgiveness. Findings of the studies by Brown and Phillips (2005), Freedman and Knupp (2008), Neff, Kirkpartkl and Rude (2007), DeSantis (2014), Chow (2007), DiBlasio and Benda (2008), McCullough and Witvliet (2002), Maltby, Day & Barber (2004), Enright and Fitzgibbons (2002), Gambaro, Enright, Baskin and Klatt (2008) and Witvliet, Ludwig and Vander Laan (2001) are also congruent with the results of this study indicating the effectiveness of the treatment based on Bowen’s approach in family forgiveness.

In explaining this hypothesis, it can be stated that forgiveness as a positive interpersonal and social change is considered against the error that is placed in the interpersonal domain. Hargreaves (1994) has regarded forgiveness as an attempt to maintain love and trust in relationships and bring an end to harmful biases. According to what was said about family therapy training and the results obtained from this study, it can be explained that after training Bowen family system therapy, individuals reinforce the possibility that they have more control over their lives through increasing the knowledge and understanding of this issue and changing their attitude and decide to forgive while increasing a sense of security and decreasing negative emotions and gradually eliminate the hatred that has turned into hostility and anger.

As previously mentioned, forgiveness is very important in families and extramarital relationships. Forgiving oneself and others can help individuals in facing the negative consequences of extramarital relationships and intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts and can facilitate psychological well-being and meaningful social relationships. With regard to these cases, it is clear that forgiveness has a strong cognitive component and is affected by individuals’ attitudes towards themselves and others. Non-forgiveness of oneself and others leads to mental rumination and evokes depressive symptoms. Further, it has been revealed that some depressive symptoms associated with compassion and forgiveness including feelings of guilt, self-blame and most importantly suicidal thoughts and actions are further observed in depressed youths rather than depressed children and elderly people. Family system therapy based on Bowen’s model reduces mental, interpersonal, intrapersonal, social and emotional injuries and thus increases forgiveness in individuals.

Another explanation which is related to the approach of Freedman and Knupp indicates that the tendency to forgive others can protect the individual against negative interpersonal experiences and depression-related perceptions. Studies have demonstrated that people who do not forgive are more likely to become depressed. However, the causal direction of this phenomenon is not clear and it has been shown in some cases that individuals with a tendency for rumination about unpleasant and negative experiences of the past are less likely to forgive others and also are more likely to become depressed. Besides, research has shown that depressed people quickly recall the harassment by others. They are also likely to interpret events in a negative and distorted way. These individuals tend to judge their social relations based on the past negative experiences.

Another explanation is based on the approach of McCullough and Witvliet. They (2002) have defined forgiveness as a motivational desire that leads people to avoiding unpleasant communication responses and behaving positively towards who has treated them negatively. Maltby, Day and Barber (2004) consider forgiveness as a positive adaptation process which is displayed by the release of hateful emotions, cognitions and behaviors towards the aggressor so that it develops compassion, generosity and satisfaction for that person. Gambaro, Enright, Baskin and Klatt (2008) observed that individuals who forgive more than others less report physical and mental health problems. Witvliet, Ludwig and Vander Laan (2001) argued that those who were trained to give the wrongdoer responses without forgiveness compared to people who have learned to provide responses along with forgiveness showed faster heart rate, higher blood pressure and more skin responses.

The second research hypothesis suggested that “training based on Bowen family system therapy has been effective in improving the family function of the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse”. With respect to reduced mean score of the experimental group in the posttest, it is concluded that the difference between the two groups is significant in terms of family function. Hence, training based on Bowen family system therapy has been effective in family function and has led to its improvement in couples.

Findings of the present research are congruent with the results achieved by Whisman and Wagers (2005), Drigotas, Safstrom and Gentilia (1999), Cano and O'Leary (2000), Lin et al. (2004), Allemand et al. (2007), Walsh (2003), Graham (2008), Johns (2010), Alizadeh Mohammadi and Malek Khosravi [3], Alizadeh Sahraei, Khosravi and Besharat [4], Qamari [6], Dehqani and Dehqani (2009), Dahganpour and Mohammadi [9], Sohrabi and Rasouli [1] and Hosein Shahi, Naqshbandi and Arjmand [10] who showed the effectiveness of treatment based on Bowen's approach in family functioning.

In explaining this hypothesis, it can be stated that family function as a positive interpersonal and social change is considered against the error that is placed in the interpersonal domain. Family has been considered as a process that has a set of tasks. Failure to do the family tasks leads to creating functional problems in the family. Meanwhile, family members are more vulnerable than others to the damages caused by the absence of healthy relationships in the family [1]. According to Walsh (2003), different kinds of families have different functions. For example, socio-cultural concept and evolutionary concepts are important in understanding the family function. Families perform functions that are essential for the health growth of members [2]. It is believed that family members experience stress when faced with stressful and difficult situations. This stress causes discomfort, pressure or disappointment in them. Stressful situation disrupts the family system [3]. Family function is also affected by power and control in the family system. Positive and negative control and influence function in the entire family [4]. In Minouchin's [5] view, structures are the basis for family function. Family functioning is not appropriate in a family in which members cannot complete each other, mutual externalization of members is disproportionate to the needs of each other, clear and flexible boundaries do not exist and the power to resolve the conflict and make the changes tailored to the family life cycle is absent [5].

In Bowen's approach, therapists aim to reduce anxiety in the family and make the family members improve their ability to function independently and reduce their morbid behaviors; another purpose is to increase the level of differentiating oneself in each family member and that the members become able to effectively respond to intense emotional situations; as a result, family function will be improved [14]. Based on Bowen's theory, it can be said that through changing the eight main forces of the family functioning (differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, family projection process, emotional cutoff, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position and societal regression), family therapy has been able to improve the family function.

Findings of the present study are consistent with the results achieved by Steven (2009) who demonstrated that family therapy measures can enhance family functioning. Findings of the studies by Hofts et al. (2009), Kimiyayi and Beigi [15] and Zinat [16] also confirm the results obtained in this research. It can be explained that after training Bowen family system therapy, individuals reinforce the possibility that they have more control over their lives through increasing the knowledge and understanding of this issue and changing their attitude and decide to forgive while increasing a sense of security and decreasing negative emotions and gradually eliminate the hatred that has turned into hostility and anger.

As previously mentioned, forgiveness is very important in families and extramarital relationships. Forgiving oneself and others can help individuals in facing the negative consequences of extramarital relationships and intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts and can facilitate psychological well-being and meaningful social relationships. Thus, it is clear that individual attitude towards the function of self and other family members leads to the family structure. Further, it has been revealed that some depressive symptoms associated with poor functioning including feelings of guilt, self-blame and most importantly, self-harm thoughts and actions are further observed in troubled families. Family system therapy based on Bowen's model reduces mental, interpersonal, intrapersonal, social and emotional injuries and thus improves the family function in individuals.

Results of the present study are congruent with the findings achieved by Naderi and Azadmanesh [17] and Ghaffari, Rafiei and Sanaei Zaker [11] who showed that Bowen family system therapy can increase differentiation and improve family functioning in individuals. Family function is a reflection of flexibility and survival of borders, relationship patterns, relational-empirical patterns of the main family and current context. Family adaptive functioning includes a good relationship among family members and low levels of family conflict. Important component of a good relationship is the degree to which family members are open, noble and frank with themselves and orient one another. The rate of family openness in expressing emotions such as anger and conflict represents their self-expression. Families that have flexible patterns and express their emotions within a limited scope are considered unhealthy.

When betrayal occurs in a family by one of the spouses, this betrayal dramatically changes the family system and brings the family to the brink of disintegration. According to what has been stated, it can be generally mentioned that to have healthy relationships and prevent marital unfaithfulness which leads to divorce, we can refer to four important rules that can be important in guiding and improving the married life after the occurrence of infidelity: Protection rule in order to avoid angry behavior, disrespectful judgment and selfish demands; attention rule which means to meet the emotional needs of the spouse; time rule which means the allocation of some time to unconditional attention to the spouse; and finally, honesty rule. Alongside addressing the issues related to family system therapy especially the issue of differentiation, family affective system and so on, these rules can help to improve the family function in the couples affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse.

Overall, family system therapy based on Bowen's model causes to increase forgiveness and improve family functioning in individuals through decreasing mental, interpersonal, intrapersonal, social and emotional damages and increasing the

motivational desire of individuals towards avoiding unpleasant communication responses and releasing hateful emotions, cognitions and behaviors towards the aggressor. Further, this model helps to reduce marital boredom and enhance forgiveness and family function through creating positive interpersonal experiences and correcting depression-related perceptions, reducing the tendency for rumination about unpleasant and negative experiences of the past, decreasing negative processing, reducing the rate of harassment by others in depressed individuals, reducing misjudgments about one's social relations on the basis of past negative experiences, releasing positive emotions, cognitions and behaviors and having balanced relationships with others and the environment.

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