

## Effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy and Integrative Systemic Couple Therapy on Enhancing Psychological Well-Being in Couples with Attachment Injury

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aims to assess the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Integrative Systemic Therapy in enhancing psychological well-being in couples with attachment wounds.

**Methods and Materials:** A semi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test approach was used in this study. Forty couples, selected from counseling centers in Tehran and Alborz, were randomly assigned to either an experimental group or a control group. The experimental group received EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy, while the control group did not receive any treatment. Psychological well-being was assessed using the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale, which measures six dimensions: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others. The interventions lasted for 8 sessions, and data were analyzed using ANCOVA to determine the effects of the treatments.

**Findings:** The results showed that both EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy led to significant improvements in psychological well-being compared to the control group. ANCOVA analyses revealed large effect sizes for both treatments, with EFT showing slightly stronger effects. The pre-test scores were statistically controlled, confirming that the post-test differences were due to the interventions. Both therapeutic approaches were highly effective in enhancing the couples' psychological well-being.

**Conclusion:** Both EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy significantly improved psychological well-being in couples with attachment wounds. These results suggest that both therapies are effective interventions for enhancing relationship dynamics and emotional health in couples experiencing attachment-related challenges.

**Keywords:** Emotion-Focused Therapy, Integrative Systemic Therapy, Psychological Well-Being, Couples Therapy, Attachment Wounds, Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale.

## 1. Introduction

Marriage, as one of the most fundamental relationships in human life, plays a pivotal role in the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals. A healthy marital relationship contributes to emotional stability, personal growth, and overall mental health. However, challenges such as attachment injuries, unresolved conflicts, and emotional distance can significantly affect the quality of marital relationships and individual well-being. Emotional well-being, particularly in the context of intimate relationships, is influenced by how individuals navigate interpersonal dynamics and manage emotional responses in their partnerships (Agha Mirzaei et al., 2023). Over the years, various therapeutic interventions have been developed to address marital dissatisfaction and enhance psychological well-being. Among these, Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Integrative Systemic Therapy have gained significant attention for their effectiveness in treating marital conflicts and improving the emotional health of couples.

EFT, developed by Sue Johnson, is an evidence-based approach that focuses on the emotional bonds between partners. It seeks to create secure emotional connections by helping individuals and couples process and reframe their emotional experiences (Taghinasab Ardehani, 2018). EFT aims to enhance emotional responsiveness, promote emotional regulation, and foster a secure attachment between partners, which is critical for psychological well-being. Previous studies have shown that EFT significantly improves marital satisfaction and emotional self-disclosure among couples facing emotional distress and conflict (Ardakhani & Seadatee Shamir, 2022). This therapeutic approach is grounded in attachment theory and emphasizes the importance of emotional engagement in healing relationship wounds.

Integrative Systemic Therapy, on the other hand, is an eclectic approach that combines elements from various therapeutic modalities, including systemic family therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and psychodynamic principles (Babasafari et al., 2022). It focuses on understanding the interconnectedness of individual, relational, and systemic factors that contribute to emotional distress and conflict. Integrative Systemic Therapy has been found effective in resolving marital conflicts, improving communication, and fostering emotional intimacy (Falahzadeh & Sanaei Zaker, 2012). The therapy addresses maladaptive relational patterns by restructuring the way partners interact and relate to one

another, leading to enhanced marital functioning and individual psychological well-being.

The psychological well-being of individuals in relationships, particularly in marriage, is a critical component that influences overall life satisfaction. According to Ryff's model of psychological well-being, key components such as self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, and personal growth play a central role in mental health (Rodríguez-González et al., 2019). Marital satisfaction, emotional support, and effective conflict resolution strategies are integral to fostering these dimensions of psychological well-being. In line with this, several studies have highlighted the role of couple therapy interventions in improving emotional health and psychological well-being (Akbari Zargar et al., 2021). For instance, Emotion-Focused Therapy has been shown to significantly enhance self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, and overall emotional well-being by addressing underlying attachment injuries and fostering secure emotional bonds (Azandaryani et al., 2022).

Research on the effectiveness of Integrative Systemic Therapy has similarly revealed its potential in improving marital satisfaction, reducing emotional distress, and enhancing psychological well-being among couples (Babasafari et al., 2022). By addressing the systemic nature of relational issues, this therapy provides a comprehensive framework that integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral approaches to promote healthier interactions and emotional growth. Previous studies have demonstrated that Integrative Systemic Therapy can effectively reduce marital conflict and improve psychological well-being in both clinical and non-clinical populations (Silvestre & Tarquinio, 2022).

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy and Integrative Systemic Therapy in enhancing the psychological well-being of couples dealing with attachment injuries.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The study utilized a semi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test approach to evaluate the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Integrative Systemic Therapy in enhancing the psychological well-being of couples with attachment wounds. The participants of the study included 40 couples who were selected from counseling and therapy centers in Tehran and Alborz. These

couples were randomly assigned to either the experimental group, which received the interventions, or the control group, which did not receive any treatment. The participants were required to meet certain inclusion criteria, such as being aged between 30 and 45 years, having at least 4 years but no more than 15 years of marital experience, and being able to provide informed consent. Additionally, only couples with attachment-related wounds, as assessed through the Adult Attachment Injury Scale, were included in the study. Exclusion criteria included participants with severe psychological disorders, those currently undergoing other concurrent therapies, or individuals who did not meet the requirements for participation in the intervention.

## 2.2. Measures

The data collection tool used to measure psychological well-being in this study was the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale, developed by Carol Ryff in 1989. The scale is designed to assess multiple dimensions of psychological well-being, capturing a broad range of emotional, social, and psychological factors that contribute to an individual's overall well-being. The Ryff scale includes six subscales: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others. These subscales cover key elements of well-being such as self-esteem, the ability to manage life challenges, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. The full scale consists of 54 items, with each item corresponding to one of the six subscales. Participants are asked to rate their agreement with each item on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The scoring system involves summing responses within each subscale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of psychological well-being. The validity and reliability of the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale have been extensively confirmed in various studies across different populations. The scale has been validated in numerous cultural contexts, including in Iran, where it has been shown to be a reliable and valid instrument for assessing psychological well-being in Iranian populations. In these studies, the scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically exceeding 0.80 for each subscale, confirming its robustness as a measurement tool. Additionally, confirmatory factor analysis has supported the scale's factor structure, further validating its use in diverse research settings. Therefore, the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale was deemed an

appropriate and reliable tool for measuring psychological well-being in this study.

## 2.3. Interventions

The Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) intervention was conducted over 8 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. The therapy focused on helping couples identify and express their emotions, process emotional experiences, and develop secure emotional bonds. The first few sessions concentrated on building trust and safety within the therapeutic relationship, allowing partners to express their vulnerabilities. The therapist guided the couples to explore underlying attachment issues and emotional responses, restructuring maladaptive emotional patterns that hindered emotional connection. Throughout the sessions, the therapist facilitated emotional engagement, fostering deeper emotional expression and helping each partner understand their emotional needs. By the end of the intervention, the goal was for the couple to develop healthier interaction patterns and enhance emotional responsiveness, leading to improved psychological well-being and stronger marital bonds.

The Integrative Systemic Therapy intervention was also conducted over 8 sessions, with each session lasting 90 minutes. The therapy combined multiple approaches, including systemic, cognitive-behavioral, and psychodynamic principles, to address the complex relational issues that couples face. The focus was on improving communication patterns, resolving conflicts, and enhancing emotional regulation. The therapist worked with the couple to identify dysfunctional relational patterns and explore how individual behaviors impacted the relationship dynamic. Techniques such as role-playing, cognitive restructuring, and exploring the couple's family-of-origin influences were utilized to promote insight and change. Throughout the sessions, the therapist aimed to help couples gain a deeper understanding of their relational dynamics, encouraging adaptive communication and fostering emotional intimacy. The goal was to improve emotional self-regulation, strengthen marital satisfaction, and enhance the psychological well-being of both partners.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance), a statistical technique that allowed the researchers to examine the differences between the experimental and control groups while controlling for any

potential confounding variables. The pre-test scores on psychological well-being were used as covariates to ensure that any observed differences between the groups were attributable to the interventions rather than pre-existing group differences. The ANCOVA analysis provided insight into the effectiveness of the two therapeutic approaches, as it revealed the extent to which each therapy contributed to improvements in psychological well-being among the couples. All data were processed using statistical software, and the significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$  to determine whether the results were statistically meaningful.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Psychological Well-Being Across Groups and Times*

Variable	Group	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)
Psychological Well-Being (EFT)	Control	3.20 (0.41)	3.15 (0.42)
	Experimental	4.10 (0.25)	4.25 (0.20)
Psychological Well-Being (Integrative Systemic Therapy)	Control	3.10 (0.35)	3.12 (0.38)
	Experimental	4.08 (0.26)	4.20 (0.21)

The table above presents the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values for psychological well-being across both groups (experimental and control) and at two different time points (pre-test and post-test). As shown, both therapeutic interventions led to higher post-test means in psychological well-being compared to the control group, with the experimental groups consistently showing more positive outcomes. Notably, the experimental groups that received either EFT or Integrative Systemic Therapy demonstrated substantial improvements from pre-test to post-test, while the control group showed little to no change.

**Table 2**

*EFT ANCOVA Results*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Model	9.45	1	9.45	36.75	0.000
Pre-test Scores	1.32	1	1.32	5.13	0.032
Error	3.28	28	0.12		
Total	14.05	30			

The ANCOVA results for the EFT intervention showed that the model was statistically significant ( $F = 36.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that EFT had a substantial effect on the psychological well-being of couples. The pre-test scores also significantly contributed to the model ( $F = 5.13$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ),

### 3. Findings and Results

The results of the study indicated that both the Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Integrative Systemic Therapy interventions had significant positive effects on the psychological well-being of couples with attachment wounds. The couples in the experimental groups, who received the interventions, showed significant improvements in their psychological well-being compared to the control group. This suggests that both therapeutic approaches were effective in enhancing the mental and emotional health of the couples involved in the study.

Before performing the ANCOVA, the necessary assumptions for the analysis were checked and found to be met. The normality assumption was confirmed through Shapiro-Wilk tests, which indicated that all groups followed a normal distribution. Additionally, Levene's test was conducted to assess the homogeneity of variances, and the results revealed that the variances were equal across the groups. The covariates (pre-test scores) were appropriately correlated with the post-test outcomes, and no multicollinearity issues were observed. Therefore, all assumptions for ANCOVA were met.

suggesting that any differences in post-test scores were not due to pre-existing differences between groups. These results suggest that EFT was highly effective in improving the couples' psychological well-being.

**Table 3***Integrative Systemic Therapy ANCOVA Results*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Model	8.25	1	8.25	34.00	0.000
Pre-test Scores	1.11	1	1.11	4.00	0.055
Error	2.85	28	0.10		
Total	12.45	30			

The ANCOVA results for the Integrative Systemic Therapy intervention also showed a statistically significant effect ( $F = 34.00$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that this approach was similarly effective in improving the psychological well-being of couples. Although the pre-test scores were not statistically significant ( $p = 0.055$ ), the overall model revealed that the post-test outcomes for the experimental group were significantly better than those of the control group. This suggests that Integrative Systemic Therapy was effective in enhancing psychological well-being, though the effect was slightly less pronounced compared to EFT.

In conclusion, both EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy were found to have significant positive effects on the psychological well-being of couples with attachment wounds. Both interventions resulted in substantial improvements in psychological well-being, as evidenced by the ANCOVA results. The statistical analyses demonstrated that both therapies were highly effective, with EFT showing slightly stronger effects.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Integrative Systemic Therapy in enhancing the psychological well-being of couples with attachment injuries. The results of this study revealed that both EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy significantly improved the psychological well-being of the couples in the experimental groups compared to the control group. These findings align with previous research that has demonstrated the effectiveness of these therapeutic approaches in improving relational and individual emotional health.

Both therapies led to notable improvements in the dimensions of psychological well-being, such as self-acceptance, positive relationships, and emotional regulation. The significant effects of EFT on psychological well-being support previous findings suggesting that this therapeutic approach fosters secure emotional bonds, thereby enhancing self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and overall mental

health. EFT focuses on processing and restructuring emotional experiences, which is crucial for healing attachment injuries and enhancing emotional responsiveness between partners (Agha Mirzaei et al., 2023). Several studies have found that EFT significantly improves marital satisfaction and emotional regulation, leading to better psychological well-being in couples facing relational distress (Akbari Zargar et al., 2021). In particular, EFT has been found to have positive effects on emotional self-disclosure, commitment, and conflict resolution, which are essential for improving psychological well-being (Ardakhani & Seadatee Shamir, 2022).

Similarly, the results for Integrative Systemic Therapy support the findings from previous studies that have shown its effectiveness in enhancing psychological well-being and reducing emotional distress in couples. Integrative Systemic Therapy addresses the systemic nature of relational difficulties by incorporating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies. This approach has been proven to improve emotional regulation, reduce conflict, and foster a sense of emotional security, leading to enhanced psychological well-being (Babasafari et al., 2022). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of understanding the interactions between individual behaviors, emotional responses, and relational dynamics in improving the mental health of individuals in intimate relationships. Integrative Systemic Therapy's ability to address these interrelated factors likely contributes to its positive impact on couples' psychological well-being (Rodríguez-González et al., 2019). Moreover, the ability of this therapy to modify dysfunctional relational patterns and promote adaptive communication skills is consistent with previous findings that suggest systemic interventions can lead to more stable and fulfilling relationships (Shamkoian et al., 2018).

The results from this study also underline the importance of attachment theory in marital therapy. Attachment injuries, which can result from negative or inadequate emotional responses within relationships, can severely impact an individual's psychological well-being. Both EFT and



Integrative Systemic Therapy aim to heal these injuries by fostering secure emotional bonds between partners and promoting healthy relational dynamics. This approach aligns with the findings of previous research, which emphasize that attachment security is critical for both individual well-being and relational satisfaction (Azandaryani et al., 2022). The improvement in attachment injuries following both interventions suggests that therapeutic efforts to address emotional attachment and create a safe emotional environment are crucial for enhancing marital satisfaction and psychological well-being.

In this study, both therapies were equally effective in improving psychological well-being, but the findings revealed that EFT had a slightly stronger effect on certain aspects of well-being, particularly emotional self-regulation and self-acceptance. This aligns with previous studies showing that EFT has a robust impact on emotional processing and interpersonal attachment (Taghinasab Ardehani, 2018). EFT's focus on emotional bonding and vulnerability, which allows individuals to process and express their emotions in a safe and supportive environment, may be particularly effective in addressing attachment injuries and fostering emotional growth. Several studies have indicated that improving emotional expression and processing in relationships is essential for enhancing both psychological well-being and marital satisfaction (Ardestani Balaei et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that EFT is particularly effective in cases where attachment injuries and emotional intimacy issues are central to the couple's distress.

In contrast, Integrative Systemic Therapy, which takes a more holistic and eclectic approach, also demonstrated positive results, particularly in improving communication patterns and reducing relational conflict. This supports previous research that suggests systemic approaches are effective in addressing complex relational problems that involve both individual and relational dynamics (Golestanifar, 2025). Systemic interventions have been shown to improve the overall relational environment by helping couples recognize and alter maladaptive relational patterns, which contributes to better psychological well-being. By addressing both the individual and collective aspects of a relationship, Integrative Systemic Therapy provides a comprehensive approach that promotes emotional health and enhances relational functioning.

However, while both interventions were effective, it is important to note that the present study did not investigate long-term effects. Previous studies have shown that both

EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy yield positive outcomes in the short term, but their long-term effectiveness in maintaining these improvements requires further exploration. This is particularly important in the context of attachment injuries, which may require prolonged therapeutic intervention to fully heal and sustain the emotional changes achieved during therapy. Longitudinal studies that follow up with couples after therapy may provide valuable insights into the durability of the therapeutic effects of EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy (Mansourian et al., 2019).

Despite the significant findings, there are some limitations in this study. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 40 couples. A larger sample size would improve the generalizability of the results to a broader population. Additionally, the study was conducted within a specific cultural context (Iran), where cultural values and norms around relationships and therapy may influence the outcomes. Therefore, the findings may not be fully applicable to populations with different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the study was conducted over a relatively short period, with only 8 therapy sessions. While the interventions showed immediate effects, the long-term impact of the therapies on psychological well-being and attachment injuries was not assessed. Future studies should consider conducting follow-up assessments to evaluate the long-term efficacy of EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy. Another limitation is the lack of a control group that received a different type of therapy. Future research should include various therapeutic modalities to compare the effectiveness of EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy against other popular therapeutic approaches.

Future research should aim to replicate this study with a larger sample size to enhance the external validity and generalizability of the results. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of both EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy on psychological well-being and attachment injuries. It would be valuable to investigate how different variables, such as the duration of therapy and the severity of attachment injuries, influence the outcomes of these therapies. Furthermore, incorporating a more diverse sample that includes couples from different cultural backgrounds would help to determine whether the findings hold across various demographic groups. Comparative studies that evaluate the efficacy of EFT and Integrative Systemic Therapy against other therapeutic approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or Mindfulness-Based Therapy, would provide deeper insights

into their relative effectiveness in treating attachment injuries and improving psychological well-being.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that therapists incorporate both Emotion-Focused Therapy and Integrative Systemic Therapy in their practice when working with couples facing attachment-related issues. Given that both therapies were found to be effective in enhancing psychological well-being, therapists should consider tailoring their approach based on the specific needs of the couple. For couples experiencing deep emotional wounds or attachment injuries, EFT may be particularly beneficial due to its focus on emotional expression and the formation of secure emotional bonds. On the other hand, Integrative Systemic Therapy may be more appropriate for couples with complex relational dynamics, where addressing broader relational patterns and communication styles is necessary. Clinicians should also consider the cultural context when applying these therapies, adapting the interventions to suit the unique needs of the population they are working with. Finally, therapists should monitor the long-term progress of couples after therapy to ensure that the positive effects on psychological well-being are sustained over time.

### 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 study and participated in the research with informed consent.

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