



## The Influence of A Cognitive-Behavioral Counselling Program on Marital Adjustment in Sudan

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# THE INFLUENCE OF A COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL COUNSELLING PROGRAM ON MARITAL ADJUSTMENT IN SUDAN

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the effects of a cognitive behavioral therapy counseling program on couples' adjustment and their relationship to variables such as their marital status, age, and number of children. In a semi-experimental design, a purposive sampling procedure was used to select a sample of ten couples attended counseling centers in Khartoum State who ranged in age from 20 to 50 years. T-tests, Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson's correlation coefficients in SPSS were used to analyze data collected by the basic information sheet, marital adjustment scale, and counseling program. Based on the study's most important findings, the program proved significantly effective at improving marital adjustment, and there was no significant correlation between its effectiveness and the length of the marriage, age, or number of children of the couples. As a result, it can be applied to couples of any age or marital status as well as couples with different numbers of children and marital durations. To minimize marriage problems and reduce the sensitivity or reluctance to visit counseling centers, the researcher recommends raising society's awareness about the importance of attending counseling centers.

Keywords: Marital problems; Self-concept; Positive communication; Sudanese couples; Adjustment.

عائشة البلولة حسونة، عبد الباقي دفع الله أحمد

## المخلص

تهدف الدراسة إلى معرفة أثر برنامج إرشادي سلوكي معرفي في التوافق الزوجي لدى الأزواج. كما هدفت لاختبار العلاقة بين فاعلية البرنامج الإرشادي وعلاقته ببعض المتغيرات مثل: مدة الزواج، عمر الأزواج، وعدد الأطفال. استخدمت الباحثة المنهج شبه التجريبي كما تبنت الطريقة القصدية لاختيار عينة تكونت من (١٠) أزواج يعانون من مشاكل زوجية تراوحت أعمارهم ما بين (٢٠ — ٥٠) عاماً من المتردين على مراكز الإرشاد النفسي بالخرطوم. جمعت البيانات بواسطة استمارة البيانات الأساسية، مقياس التوافق الزوجي، وبرنامج التوافق الزوجي. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية وذلك بتطبيق اختبار (ت)، ومعامل ارتباط بيرسون وسبيرمان، والفا كرون باخ. من أهم النتائج التي توصلت إليها الباحثة أن البرنامج الإرشادي الزوجي المبني على الإرشاد السلوكي المعرفي فعال بدرجة دالة إحصائية في تحسين التوافق الزوجي بين الأزواج الذين يعانون من المشكلات الزوجية من المتردين على مراكز الإرشاد النفسي بولاية الخرطوم. كما توصلت إلى عدم وجود علاقة دالة إحصائية بين فعالية برنامج الإرشاد الزوجي وعدد سنوات الزواج، أعمار الأزواج، وعدد الأطفال. وعليه يمكن تطبيق البرنامج الإرشادي مع الأزواج من مختلف الأعمار، مدة الزواج، وعدد الأطفال. توصي الباحثة برفع الوعي عن أهمية الإرشاد النفسي لتقليل مشاكل التوافق الزوجي، وتخفيف حساسية الإحجام عن زيارة مراكز الإرشاد النفسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المشاكل الزوجية؛ مفهوم الذات؛ التواصل الإيجابي؛ الأزواج السودانيون؛ التوافق.

## Introduction

The institution of marriage is as old as the creation of man. It dates back to the time of Adam and Eve. It is an essential phenomenon in human life irrespective of race, society, and religious affiliations. Marriage is described by Munroe as a religious duty and is consequently a moral safeguard as well as a social necessity. With marriage, people engage in a long-term relationship with a strong commitment to a mutually rewarding exchange (Munroe, 2003). Spouses expect some benefits from the partner's expressed love, gratitude, and recognition as well as from security and material rewards (Alois & Bruno, 2006).

Previous literature maintains that the field of marriage and pre-marriage counseling, as a precursor to family therapy, is based on the concept that psychological disturbances arise as much from conflicts between persons as from conflicts within a person (Broderick & Schrader, 1991) In the same vein, Goldenberg states that each partner enters marital therapy with different experiences, expectations, and goals and with different degrees of commitment to the marriage. Both partners are probably somewhat invested in staying married or they would not seek professional help, but the strength of the determination to stay together may vary greatly between them (Goldenberg, 2008). Studying psychosocial variables associated with depression, Alisha & Dana found that the lack of a confiding relationship is a vulnerability factor in the development of depression in women. Specifically, low intimacy with husband was associated with depression (Alisha & Dana, 2010).

### Study problem:

Sudan is a big country with hundreds of tribes and ethnic groups, each having their own beliefs, values, and practices regarding marriage and the structure of the family. With this cultural diversity, many views have emerged about the role of each partner in the family, regarding different obligations and child rearing. Nowadays, marital problems are widespread in Sudanese society, and they eventually affect couples' relationships, psychological well-being as well as marriage stability, which sometimes leads to divorce. According to the Judiciary of Sudan (Personal Status Department in Khartoum), the statistics of divorce have increased rapidly in Sudan, the annual

percentage of divorce documents that were issued in Sudan during the period from 2017 to 2019, in comparison to marriage documents issued within the same period show that in 2017 the percentage of divorce was 27%, while in 2018 the percentage was 30%, and in 2019 it was 28%). Regarding the statistics of Khartoum State (comprising the three grand cities of Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman), the divorce percentages per year came as follows: 2017: 32%, 2018: 31%, and 2019: 37%. These figures indicate that almost 1/3 of married couples get divorced. Therefore, there is a critical need for a well-developed and systematic program in counseling couples to help lessen this rate.

### Study questions:

1. Is the marital counseling program based on CBT effective in improving marital adjustment? 2. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the program efficacy in the post-test and the duration of the marital relationship?
2. Is there a significant correlation between the dimensions of marital adjustment in the post-test and the ages of couples?
3. Is there a correlation between the dimensions of marital adjustment in the post-test and the number of children?

### Significance of the study:

This study according to the researcher's knowledge is the first one conducted in the Sudanese context. . In addition to helping to raise children, marriage adjustments increase productivity in the workplace and in the social world. Therefore, the study may contribute to the development of a comprehensive and standardized program for marital counseling based on cognitive behavioral therapy that can improve marital adjustment in the entire society. Based on counseling theories utilizing problem-solving techniques, anger management, and improving communication skills, Sudanese couples might be able to minimize marriage conflicts with the help of a counselor through the study

### Objectives:

1. To determine the efficacy of a proposed program of cognitive behavioral counseling for marital adjustment.

2. To examine the relationship between the duration of the marital relationship and the effectiveness of the program in improving marital adjustment.
3. To identify the relationship between the efficiency of a program and the age of the couple.
4. To investigate the relationship between program effectiveness and the number of children.

**Study terminology:**

**Cognitive behavioral therapy:**

The cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT) is an empirically supported way to help couples resolve relationship distress and address individual problems within a relationship. (Fischer M, Baucom D, Cohen M, 2016).

**Procedural definition:** A group of sessions developed and implemented by the researcher for distressed couples to help them improve their communication and overall adjustment.

**Marital adjustment:** The process during which partners in a marriage adapt and change to their new roles complementing each other and acting as a team as opposed to two separate units. (Sam Ms. 2013)

**Procedural definition:** The couple’s ability to achieve satisfaction, maintain marital harmony and successful communication within the marriage as well as deal with conflicts.

**Literature review:**

**Marriage** is defined as “formally-written, verbal, or traditional long-term agreement between a man and a woman for the production of children, food and other commodities in a domestic context” (Becker, 1981, p. 27). Marriage in Islam is treated as the basis of social life and the beginning of family life. (Doi, 1992). It is compulsory (Wajib) for a man, and also obligatory for a woman who does not have any other legal way of maintaining herself. (Doi, 1992). It protects society and safeguard human beings from foulness and un-chastity (Akter; Rahman, & Dolon, 2012). The objective of marriage in Islam is to save humankind and let couples feel comfortable and stable in their life. Hinchliff, & Gott showed that long marriage duration improved sexual intimacy among some older couples since they were able to know each other better, knew about each other’s likes and dislikes more, and had a closer relationship as a couple (Hinchliff, &

Gott, 2004). In contrast, a group of other researchers believes that depression has been found to negatively affect older marriages (Sandberg; Miller, R. B., & Harper, 2002).

**Adjustment:** In its general sense, adjustment is defined by Dhingra, Manhas & Thakur as “a continuous process through which one changes to be in proper adjustment with his environment, others, and himself. The basic objective of adjustment is to set a balance between one’s wishes and social expectations that affects all aspects of one’s life. As a result, the person can respond properly to all environmental stimuli to acquire his favorable stimuli and reinforcement”. Rogers argues that when one has positive self-concept one feels more valuable for having high self-esteem and behaves confidently and enjoys high social adjustment (Rogers, 1951). Marital adjustment is defined by another scholar as the state in which there is an overall feeling of husband and wife of happiness and satisfaction with their marriage and with each other (Seema, 2018).

**Equity of rights and duties in Islam:** A Muslim researcher (Ahmed, 1988) maintains that “There is no discrepancy in Islam between men and women as far as their relationship to Allah is concerned as both are promised the same reward for good conduct and the same punishment for evil conduct. Allah says: “*And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women.*” (2: 228)

The life of Aisha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad {PBUH}, is a good proof that a woman can have more knowledge than men and that she can be the teacher of scholars and experts. Aisha also proved that a woman can exert influence over both men and women, thereby providing inspiration and leadership. Her life is also proof that a woman can be both a source of knowledge and of pleasure, joy, and comfort to her husband. Aisha’s utterances are studied in faculties of literature, her legal pronouncements are analyzed in colleges of law, and her life and works are studied and researched by students and teachers of Muslim history (Allam, 2008). Women’s work and participation in production and development is not adequately recognized. Moreover, they are not sufficiently compensated to enable their economic independence. The persistent gender gap stems from a variety of historical and other factors, including, if not because of, the misunderstanding

and misapplication of Islam. Many women nowadays play a role in ensuring this negative image by passively following customs and traditions that devalue females relative to their male counterparts.

**Marital conflicts:** The fact that two people agree or plan to live together as husband and wife calls for different expectations and hopes, some of which might be fulfilled while others remain unfulfilled (Tolorunleke, 2014). The most frequently cited marital problems as mentioned by a number of researchers in the field (Burns, 1984; Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Kitson, 1992; Patz, 2000) involve communication difficulties, general incompatibility, infidelity, not spending enough time at home, and disagreements over money. Extramarital sex was prominent in eight of the nine studies summarized by a specific relevant study (Kitson, Babri, & Roach, 1985), making it the most commonly cited cause of marital dissolution.

**Marital therapy:** It is stated in the previous literature that couple therapy has been first suggested more than forty years ago as an approach for couples with a depressed spouse. Also known as couple therapy which is a form of psychological intervention, with the twofold aim of modifying negative interactional patterns and promoting supportive aspects of a close relationship (Friedman, 1975 cited in Barbato, 2018). The main focus of intervention is always on mutual relationship aspects (Lebow, 2012). In the first Annual Review of Psychology chapter on marital interaction, it is noted that distressed couples emit statements that are more negative and fewer positive statements and show greater reciprocation of negative behaviors during problem-solving interactions (O'Leary, & Smith, 2010). One of the greatest challenges for couples locked into negative exchanges is to find an adaptive way of exiting from such cycles (Weiss, & Hayman, 1997). This is usually attempted through responses designed to repair the interaction (e.g., Meta communication, "You're not listening to me") that are typically delivered with negative affect (e.g., irritation, sadness). Distressed couples tend to respond to the negative effect, thereby continuing the cycle. In contrast, non-distressed couples appear to be more responsive to the repair attempt and are thereby able to exit from negative exchanges early on (Weiss, & Hayman, 1997). Numerous studies have found relationships between how conflict is handled and the level

of satisfaction with the relationship. Kurdek (1994) reported that frequent conflicts about power and intimacy was more indicative of relationship satisfaction levels than any of the other studied content areas (i.e., social issues, personal flaws, distrust, personal distance) It is also argued that while some conflicts resulted in reduced satisfaction at the time of the altercation it did not necessarily equate to overall dissatisfaction with the relationship (Gottman, & Krokoff, 1989 cited in Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008). Results presented by a previous relevant study illustrate that, rather than avoiding conflict or withdrawing, couples who openly discussed conflictual topics in a positive way were more satisfied with their relationships than couples who avoided conflict or reacted negatively to conflict (Noller, & White, 1990). There, communication between spouses causes a series of problems and may decrease marital satisfaction (Gur-Aryeh, 2010). This result is further consolidated by a result of another study which found that communication between spouses causes a series of problems and may decrease marital satisfaction (Gur-Aryeh, 2010). According to (Bischoff, 2008). Consequently, it could be safely concluded that constructivist communication is a key component of satisfaction and adjustment in relationships.

**Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):**In a survey conducted within the past decade by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), marriage and family therapists were asked to report "their primary treatment modality" (Northey, 2002, p. 448). Of the 27 different modalities that were mentioned, the most frequently identified modality was cognitive-behavioral family therapy (ibid, 2002). More recently, an additional survey, partnered with Columbia University, reported that of the 2,281 responders, 1,566 (68.7%) stated that they most often use CBT in combination with other methods (Psychotherapy Networker, 2007). This data is telling and reflects the utility and effectiveness of CBT with couples and families. There is substantial empirical evidence from treatment outcome studies with couples to indicate the effectiveness of CBT with relationships. (Dallitio F.M, 2012).

**Techniques of CBT:** Epstein, & Baucom provided a summary of the findings of a number of investigators, with three important sets of factors in problem solving with couples (Epstein, & Baucom, 2002). These

factors involve instrumental, task-oriented issues. The authors noted the following:

1. Specific communications, such as accepting responsibility or expressing contempt.
2. Patterns of interaction, or the ways that partners respond to each other, with constructive discussions by both partners indicating more satisfied relationships.
3. Incorporation of the preferences and desires of both individuals into solutions. (Epstein & Baucom, 2002, p. 39). C.B.T. also uses verbal and written instructions, modeling, and behavioral rehearsal and coaching to facilitate effective problem-solving (Dattilio, 2002; Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

For some patients, it is helpful to use the activity chart, to monitor their moods while engaged in various activities, and to look for patterns of occurrence. Using such a scale is particularly useful for patients who either do not seem to notice small to moderate shifts in affect, or patients who chronically over- or underestimate degrees of emotion (Judith, 2011).

Contingency Contracts is another technique developed by Stuart (1969), focusing on the interpersonal endorsement in which couples and family members respond to one another. This strategy was based on the principle of reciprocity, introduced earlier by Wolpe (1977). The use of reciprocity was designed to achieve a balance in behavioral exchange. An example is the use of the *quid pro quo*.

The pioneering family therapist Don Daveson (1965) had suggested a similar strategy, using the medical and social analogies of homeostasis and *quid pro quo*. The *quid pro quo*, as suggested by Stuart, was aimed at building up the status of a spouse or family member to serve as a mediator of reinforcement in order to influence the behavior of the other spouse or other family members.

There are a number of steps that can help to ensure against relapse. Much of the program for relapse prevention with marital couples suffering from alcohol abuse proposed by O'Farrell (1993) can also be used with any couple or family members. They need to be mindful that the triggers that contribute to a relapse also contribute to the deterioration of the relationship.

### Method:

This study uses a quasi-experimental design with pre-tests and posttests. As defined by Dinardo (2008), a quasi-experimental study is "an empirical interventional study used to estimate the causal impact of an intervention on its target population without random assignment". The quantitative method will be carried out through constructing a questionnaire/ scale that aims at revealing and measuring a couple's marital adjustment. **Population:** After a survey conducted in psychiatric hospitals records in Khartoum State and feedback of psychologists who work there, couples are not attending these hospitals, mostly because of stigma, and most of the family centers did not practice working with couples so it is not possible to collect the actual number of the clinics which practice couple counseling. The researcher chooses five clinics to select the sample from, those clinics are: Ahfad Trauma Center, Dr. Amal Jaberalla clinic, Dr. Azza Al Nowrani clinic, Dr. Saud Musa Clinic, and Al Zahir Center for Training and Family Counseling. **Sample:** The sample was collected purposely due to the sensitivity of the topic of marriage. Once the researcher got sufficient knowledge about the population of study, she chose (40 couples) to apply the survey to them. After calculating the coefficients of validity and reliability, the researcher selected couples who meet the criteria; educated couples whose ages are between 25 – 60 years, have relationship problems, attend counseling centers in Khartoum state, and give consent to participate in the study. The number of couples who met the criteria was 10 couples to represent the sample, the participants had the following characteristics: **average age:** - 30 – 35(10%) 41 – 45(30%) 46 – 50 (20%) 51 – 55(15%), **Educational level,** Secondary (10%) University (75%) Post-graduate (15%), **marital duration** 1 -5y (20%) 6 – 10y (10%), 11 – 15y (40%) 16 – 20y (30%), **Occupations:** Businessman (15%) Employee (65%) Housewife (20%). **Number of children** 1 – 2 (20%) 3 – 4 (60%) 5 – 6 (20%), **type of the problem** Communication (70%) Economic problem (5%) Family in-laws' problems (25%) Infidelity problem (0 %).

### Study tools:

**Marital Adjustment Scale and Marital Counseling Program:** Marital adjustment scale is a scale that measures marital adjustment according to the needs of the research, which consists of three main domains;

adjustment, communication skills, and family in-laws' involvement. This scale is one of the most common standards that is used to measure adjustment of couples in the Arab environment; it was developed by Dr. Mohammed Bayoumi Khalil (1998). It was applied to the Sudanese environment by Dr. Sulaiman Ali Ahmed (2004) and used in previous research as the study of Salwa Babiker (2009) and (Suheir Hamed (2017). In the area of in-law's involvement, the extended family in the Sudanese culture is a crucial part of any marital relationship. Moreover, it is also mentioned in the Noble Quran that *"And if you fear dissension between the two, send an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both desire reconciliation, Allah will cause it between them. Indeed, Allah is ever knowing and Acquainted [with all things]"* (Q: 4:35).

The scale consists of 61 paragraphs in its initial form distributed as follows: Adjustment: 23 Paragraphs; communication skills: 29 Paragraphs; and family in-laws' involvement: 9 Paragraphs. It used a five-point Likert-type scale (Macleod, 2019). It was stratified to a sample of 40 purposively selected couples from the current study population. Pearson correlation coefficient was applied (**Table 1**) and Cronbach alphas (**table 2**) for ensuring validity (0.889) and reliability (0.9428) for the scale which shows that all coefficients of validity and reliability are high. **Marital Counseling Program:** is aimed to improve marital adjustment for couples who have marital problems, as well as to gain mutual satisfaction with their emotional and physical needs. The program involves 12 sessions (**table 3**), which consist of 1 session to fill the pretest and give an overview of the program, 1 session for defining the aim of the marriage and the meaning of marital adjustment, another session for introducing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and negative thought with the relation to marital problems. One session was allocated for the definition of rights and duties between spouses in Islam, in addition to a session for CBT techniques like problem solving techniques and anger management. One session was dedicated for classifying marital problems, 3 sessions for practicing communication skills, one session for in-laws' involvement and the last two sessions were allocated for application and revising strategies, and relapse prevention.

These tools were presented to a group of specialists in psychology and counseling for the purpose of determining their appropriateness. The statistical methods used in the analysis of data include T-test for paired groups and T-test for independent groups.

**Procedures:** After ensuring the validity and reliability of the tools, and after the researcher decided what needed to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge and experience, A two-hour weekly meeting was held with the participants for three months in Alzahir Centre (they offer to help in carrying out this study). The time and venue were settled after an agreement between the researcher and the participants. The researcher introduced herself and the aim of this work when she applied the pre-test for the target group and took their consent to be part of this research. Then, she distributed copies of the summary from the book *Men are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* for each couple to help in understanding the nature of each other. She asked them to highlight each sentence or word that they benefit from by getting a new positive understanding of their partner's behavior, then she applied the program.

#### **Result and Discussion:**

The first study question seeks to know whether the proposed marital counseling program based on CBT is effective in improving marital adjustment. **Table 4** shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the marital adjustment dimensions in favor of the post-test of the program, which indicates that the program achieved its objectives of improving marital adjustment for couples.

Previous studies in the reviewed literature state that marital counseling has the twofold aim of modifying negative interactional patterns and promoting supportive aspects of a close relationship. The main focus of intervention is always on mutual relationship aspects (Lebow, 2012). Counselors and other allied professionals provide premarital and marital counseling work to ameliorate marital discord and improve marital satisfaction. Given the positive benefits of successful marriages and the negative impact of divorce, the program attempts to establish preventative efforts to both reduce the likelihood of experiencing divorce and to find ways to establish improved com-

munication, specifically in terms of dealing with couples' conflicts.

In the Sudanese context, men rarely express their inner selves and feelings toward their wives. This seems to be a prevalent cultural issue, as men expressing their emotions are generally viewed as being weak in Sudanese culture. Sudanese men generally show strong attitudes and determination in meeting their obligations and supporting their families, but unfortunately, most of them couldn't offer emotional support and availability to their wives. Weak communication between spouses causes a series of problems and may decrease marital satisfaction (Gur-Aryeh, 2010). According to Bischoff (2008), constructivist communication is a key component of satisfaction and adjustment in relationships.

This creates an emotional gap between couples, the majority of women respondents in the study complain feeling of disregarded and unloved by their husbands, as one of them stated *"I feel I am not as important as his work and his family; when he comes home at night, I often stay awake waiting for him to have a little chat, but he just goes to his room and doesn't even look at me when I'm talking. I feel so lonely and sad"*. This attitude creates negative communication channels between them. In this regard, Weiss & Hayman (1997) stated: "This is usually attempted through responses designed to repair the interaction (e.g., Meta communication, "You're not listening to me") that are typically delivered with negative affect (e.g., irritation, sadness)." Results presented by Noller & White (1990) demonstrated that couples who were able to openly discuss conflict topics in a positive way experienced higher levels of relationship satisfaction than couples who withdrew or avoided conflict and who were more negative than positive during conflict. During the sessions, communication problems clearly appeared between the couples included in the program applied by our study. In a nutshell, it is not easy for men to express their love and care to their wives, but with new skills through the program but by training in using some of the program techniques like pad and pencil; give to take with the aid of the researcher; they showed improvement in the way they communicate with their wives which, in turn, helped in improving the overall adjustment. Couples counseling programs could help in refining marital stability. Suhair (2017)

concluded that the counseling program is significantly effective in the development of some strategies for problems-solving in marital conflicts at Abasiyya quarter in Omdurman Locality. Mastering problem-solving skills is crucial, the researcher worked thoroughly with couples to master such skills within sessions as well as through homework. The post-test shows the effectiveness of the program in improving communication skills, adjustment, and family/in-laws' involvement for couples with marital problems.

Identifying a model of therapy is essential in any treatment; cognitive behavioral therapy is the most useful in developing the counseling program for couples. It has different useful techniques, which could accelerate improvement of couples' relationships. Data from previous studies found that in a survey conducted within the past decade by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), marriage and family therapists were asked to report "their primary treatment modality" (Northey, 2002, p. 448). Of the 27 different modalities that were mentioned, the most frequently identified modality was cognitive-behavioral family therapy (Northey, 2002).

Rogers (1951) indicated that when one has positive self-concept one feels more valuable for having high self-esteem, behaves confidently and enjoys high social adjustment. Most women respondents underestimated themselves and had negative self-concepts; this is closely relevant to and dictated by the cultural issues which construct the domination of men. The persistent gender gap stems from a variety of historical and other factors, including, if not because of, the misunderstanding and misapplication of Islam. (Alalm, 2018). Like many men in Arab countries, Sudanese men are full of culturally dictated manly chauvinism. They are insensitive, egocentric, and stubborn; this is due to their upbringing in a patriarchal society. Along with this state of affairs, since childhood girls are reared to respect men and give them priority in every domain of life as they grow up, they formulate their life for the pleasure of men, and many women nowadays play a role in assuring this negative image by passively following customs and traditions that devalue females relative to their male counterparts. Alalm noticed that (2018) they ignored themselves and gave up many of their rights to their husbands; they started to fight for their rights, which is often unaccepted by



the husbands. Consequently, their marriage starts to hang by tension and wives develop negative feelings about themselves as well as their husbands, a thing which affects their abilities to adjust.

Through the application of the program, this is one of the exceptional issues that emerged and was addressed in the sessions. The researcher applied training on assertiveness skills, which was not included in the program but for the emergence of its urgent need. The outcome of the program was marvelous, as stated by one female respondent: *“when I started these sessions, I was weak, fragile, didn’t trust myself, and was distressed. I didn’t know what to do. I often ask myself: am I doing the right things in my life? And now thanks Allah I feel strong, know my duties and rights, feel peace inside and I am able to deal with my husband and understand him better”*

Although there are some social changes in the Sudanese society pertaining to the women’s rights movement and gender gap fulfilling issues, it seems it is an artificial change so far and has no significant effect on women’s self-concept.

The second study question attempts to find the correlation between the program efficacy in the post-test and the duration of the marital relationship variable. **Table 5** shows that the correlation between the dimension of the test and the duration of the marital relationship, in the post-test of adjustment, is (-0.012) with the p-value = (0.480), which is not statistically significant. In post-test communication the correlation is (0.159) the p-value is (0.252) which is still not statistically significant. As for family and in-laws’ involvement, the correlation is (0.486) and the p-value is (0.252) which is statistically significant with a positive correlation. (0.015), this indicates there is no significant correlation between the dimension of marital adjustment and the duration of the marital relationship in the post-test. Dhingra, Manhas & Thakur (2005) assert that the basic objective of adjustment is to set a balance between one’s wishes and social expectations that affects all aspects of one’s life. As a result, the person can respond properly to all environmental stimuli to acquire his favorable stimuli and reinforcement”. As long as couples live together, they become accustomed to and know each other better, understand and alter some of their behavior and need to gratify each other, a thing which helps in improv-

ing their adjustment. The findings show that there is no relation between the duration of the marital relationship and marital adjustment. Mohammed. W, (2012) found that there were no differences in marital adjustment among married women in relation to the duration of the marriage. So, as long as no other party interferes with them, they develop techniques and skills to minimize conflict. Literature in the area showed that “long marriage duration improved sexual intimacy among some older couples since they were able to know each other better, knew about each other’s likes and dislikes more, and had a closer relationship as a couple” (Hinchliff, & Gott, 2004). This result is consolidated by a result of another relevant study which revealed that the length of marriage is positively associated with marital satisfaction (Bookwala, Sobin, & Zdaniuk, 2005). This result could be attributed to the assortment of techniques used in the program like give-to-take and the self-monitoring schedule for each spouse to measure his development in adjustment. In addition, the book helps them to deepen their understanding of each other to provide couples with the needed skills for marital adjustment and to reduce their marital problems. In addition, self-monitoring schedules were developed for each spouse to measure his/her development in adjustment.

It is possible that these factors could contribute to the dropping of the effect of the duration of marriage on marital adjustment.

Pearson correlation coefficient was applied to measure the correlation between the scale in post-test and the age of the couples, which indicated there is non-existence of a significant correlation between the dimensions of marital adjustment and the age of the couples before and after the program. This lack of a significant correlation indicates that age may not be a strong predictor of marital adjustment (**See Table 6**). Data from previous studies disclose that “there is no statistically significant correlation between the marital adjustments of the couple and their age” (Suliman, 2004. Gaiballa, & Hassan, S, 2006). Another relevant study (Gaiballa, & Hassan, S, 2006) found that there is no correlation between marital adjustment and other variables (age of the couples, duration of marriage, couples’ educational level). The study of Onsy, E., & Amer, M (2014) revealed that “concerning other factors that predict higher marital quality, none of the

socio-demographic factors (age, gender, highest education) was significant". On the other hand, some studies found there is a relationship between them. This hypothesis developed based on studies like that of Al Fazari, & Amir (2017) which came up with the result that "gender, age, and number of children were the main predictors of marital adjustment among the study sample". As well from working with couples, older couples are more adjusted to their marital problems than younger and newly married ones. As they get older, they are more prone to avoid conflicts and frequent arguments with their spouses. They become wiser and want to live in peace. This view was stated by one of the respondent husbands: *"Now I'm trying to live in peace and as age goes, I learned that arguments with my wife are not useful"*. Another wife reported, *"I notice my husband has stopped doing things that used to make me nervous as he gets old."* It is possible that with a larger sample size, there will be more diversity in ages represented, which, in turn, lead to different results.

The fourth question tries to examine whether there is a significant correlation coefficient between the dimensions of marital adjustment post-test and the number of children. Results from **Table 7**, indicated that; there is no correlation between the number of children and the dimensions of marital adjustment attributed to the application of the program". In the study of Al-Fazari, & Amir cited above, a number of variables, including gender, age, and number of children, were found to be "the main predictors of marital adjustment among the study sample" This finding concurs with what Husein (2012) found that "there is a statistically significant correlation between the couples' communication, education, sex, residence, self-reported health, family size, and religiosity and marital happiness of married couples The family size, in households including many children has also been found as one of the predictors of marital happiness. The number of children was the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction even when compared to other variables like wealth and education". Therefore, the number of children could be a good reason for adjustment to couples, as most of the participants mentioned they wanted to raise their children in a healthy atmosphere, so they try to avoid conflicts. Consequently, they ignore minor hassles from each other

and work hard to keep harmony in their relationship. Depending on each couple's orientation about child rearing, a source of great satisfaction and joy can be found in their relationships with children through bringing up; so, a spouse could sacrifice some of his/her rights in order to keep the family connected and living in peace. Gradually, they learn to adjust with each other even if they are not in agreement about some issues but they do it for the sake of their children, especially in Sudanese culture, where numerous similar stories are common.

#### **Limitations and recommendations:**

There is a limitation to the study in that the sample size was relatively small, which limits the generalizability of its findings. Based on the results of this study, the researchers recommend that this program could be implemented by the ministry of social welfare across the centres in Khartoum that deal with marital problems for couples of different ages, marital years, and number of children. It is important to raise society's awareness about the importance of attending counselling centres, as this would minimize the likelihood of marriage problems and lessen the sensitivity of reluctance to attend counselling sessions. Furthermore, for young people approaching marriage, offer specialized courses in rehabilitation with certificates as a prerequisite to obtaining a marriage contract.

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**Table (1):** Pearson’s correlation coefficient for the scale’s item

Dimensions	No. of items	Correlation coefficient	No. of items	Correlation coefficient	No. of items	Correlation coefficient	No. of items	Correlation coefficient
<b>Adjustment</b>	1	0.466	9	0.533	17	0.542	25	0.412
	2	0.531	10	0.710	18	0.632		
	3	0.425	11	0.463	19	0.745		
	4	0.366	12	0.724	20	0.523		
	5	0.523	13	0.471	21	0.412		
	6	0.412	14	0.632	22	0.325		
	7	0.623	15	0.423	23	0.145		
	8	0.412	16	0.852	24	0.253		
<b>Communication</b>	30	0.495	36	0.436	42	0.436	48	0.645
	31	0.788	37	0.676	43	0.826		
	32	0.512	38	0.523	44	0.352		
	33	0.325	39	0.236	45	0.412		
	34	0.523	40	0.142	46	0.342		
	35	0.452	41	0.236	47	0.463		
	52							
<b>Family/in-laws involvement</b>	53	0.423	56	0.625	59	0.423		
	54	0.645	57	0.362	60	0.641		
	55	0.634	58	0.221	61	0.643		

**Resource:** Researchers’ result for linear correlation between items

**Table (2):** Cronbach alphas validity coefficient for dimensions of marital adjustment scale.

Dimensions	No. of the statements	Validity	Reliability
Adjustment	29	0.799	0.8936
Communication	23	0.859	0.9268
Family/ in-laws involvement	09	0.882	0.9391
Total	61	0.889	0.9428

**Resource:** Validity and reliability of the scale as determined by the researcher

**Table (3):** Sessions content of the Marital Counseling Program

NO.	Session Name	Method
1	Introducing the program	Icebreaking and discussion
2	Marriage and marital adjustment	Psychoeducation about marital goals and marital adjustment with group discussion
3	Cognitive behavioral model	Psychoeducation about the common cognitive distortions in relation to marital problems & Homework
4	Categorize Marital problems	Group discussion, psychoeducation, and homework
5	Rights and duties between couples in Islam	Group discussion and group work
6	Cognitive behavioral therapy techniques	Training about anger management, relaxation, and problem-solving techniques + Homework
7	Improving communication	Training about contingency contract, pad and pencil, give-to-take techniques + Homework
8	Family reconciliation court	Psychoeducation about the role of the family in marital conflicts
9	Models of strategies	Couples' discussion and self-exploration about aligning conflicts with a suitable strategy+ homework
10	Application of strategies	Revision of home works, each couple work on a specific problem with the chosen suitable strategy.
11	Relapse prevention	Psychoeducation, relapse, and the red flags
12	Conclusion, revision, and evaluation	Revision of program, discussion, and post-test

**Resource:** The content of the program sessions.

**Table (4)** T-test for paired groups to test the effectiveness of the program in improving marital adjustment

Groups	No. cases	Mean	SD	T-value	Sig.	Conclusion
Pre-adjust. Post adjust.	20	73.8 77.8	16.3 14.7	6.16	0.001	The program is significantly effective
Pre-comm. Post comm.	20	52.1 59.2	16.6 15.3	8.23	0.001	The program is significantly effective
Pre family Post family	20	19.9 22.9	3.85 3.80	8.17	0.001	The program is significantly effective
Pre total Post total	20	145.8 160.0	33.9 30.0	9.79	0.001	The program is significantly effective

**Resource:** Researchers' T-test results for program effectiveness.

**Table (5):** Pearson correlation coefficient to test the relationship between the dimensions of marital adjustment and the duration of marital relationship. (N=20)

Dimensions	Correlation	Significance (P-value)	Conclusion
Post adjust	-0.012	0.480	There is no significant correlation between two variables
Post comm.	0.159	0.252	There is no significant correlation between two variables
Post family	0.486	0.015	There is a significant positive correlation between two variables
Post total	0.136	0.283	There is no significant correlation between two variables

**Resource:** Result of Pearson Correlation between duration of marital relationship and the program dimensions.

**Table (6):** Pearson correlation coefficient to test the relationship between the dimensions of marital adjustment and the ages of the couples. (N=20)

Dimensions	Correlation	Significance (p-value)	Conclusion
Post adjust	0.113	0.317	There is no significant correlation between two variables
Post comm.	0.292	0.106	There is no significant correlation between two variables
Post Family	0.007	0.489	There is no significant correlation between two variables
Post total	0.205	0.193	There is no significant correlation between two variables

**Resource:** Result of Pearson Correlation between couple age and program dimensions.

**Table (7):** Pearson correlation coefficient to test the relationship between the dimensions of marital adjustment and the number of children. (N=20)

Dimensions	Correlation	Sig.	Conclusion
Post adjust	0.068	0.389	There is no statistically significant correlation between two variables
Post comm.	0.096	0.344	There is no statistically significant correlation between two variables
Post family	0.183	0.219	There is no statistically significant correlation between two variables
Post total	0.105	0.329	There is no statistically significant correlation between two variables

**Resource:** Result of Pearson Correlation between number of children and program dimensions.