

The Effectiveness of Gottman Model-Based Marital Skills Training on Marital Disillusionment, Emotional Empathy, and Relationship Maintenance Strategies in Women Applying for Divorce

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Gottman model-based marital skills training on reducing marital disillusionment and improving emotional empathy and relationship maintenance strategies among women applying for divorce.

Methods and Materials: The present study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest structure, a two-month follow-up phase, and a control group. The statistical population consisted of women applying for divorce who referred to family counseling centers affiliated with the judiciary in Hamedan during 2025. Using convenience sampling, 30 eligible participants were selected and randomly assigned into experimental and control groups (15 participants in each group). The experimental group participated in nine weekly 90-minute sessions of Gottman model-based marital skills training, whereas the control group received no intervention during the study period. Data collection instruments included the Marital Disillusionment Scale, the Emotional Empathy Scale, and the Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure. Data were analyzed using repeated-measures analysis of variance and Bonferroni post hoc tests in IBM SPSS Statistics.

Findings: The results of repeated-measures analysis of variance indicated that the interaction effect of time and group was significant for all dependent variables. Gottman model-based training significantly reduced marital disillusionment, $F(1, 28) = 19.404, p < .001, \eta^2 = .401$, and significantly increased emotional empathy, $F(1, 28) = 32.614, p < .001, \eta^2 = .529$, and relationship maintenance strategies, $F(1, 28) = 31.524, p < .001, \eta^2 = .521$. Bonferroni post hoc comparisons further demonstrated that participants in the experimental group showed significantly lower marital disillusionment and significantly higher emotional empathy and relationship maintenance strategies during the posttest and follow-up phases compared with the control group ($p < .05$). The stability of results at follow-up indicated the durability of the intervention effects over time.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that Gottman model-based marital skills training is an effective intervention for improving interpersonal functioning and reducing relational distress among women applying for divorce.

Keywords: *Gottman model, marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, relationship maintenance strategies, women applying for divorce*

1. Introduction

Marriage is regarded as one of the most significant interpersonal relationships in adult life and constitutes a central foundation for psychological well-being, emotional security, and social stability. Healthy marital relationships contribute substantially to individual mental health, family cohesion, and broader societal functioning. However, marital relationships may become vulnerable to persistent conflicts, emotional distancing, ineffective communication patterns, and psychological distress, all of which can ultimately increase the likelihood of separation and divorce. In recent decades, divorce has emerged as a major social and psychological challenge across many societies, particularly among women who often experience greater emotional, social, and economic consequences following marital dissolution (Elisetty & Datti, 2025). Women applying for divorce frequently report elevated levels of psychological strain, emotional exhaustion, hopelessness, interpersonal dissatisfaction, and reduced emotional connectedness within the marital relationship. These difficulties are often accompanied by marital disillusionment, diminished emotional empathy, and weakened relationship maintenance behaviors, which collectively undermine marital stability and adjustment (Faghihi et al., 2025).

Marital disillusionment is considered one of the most important predictors of relationship instability and emotional divorce. This construct refers to the gradual decline of positive perceptions toward the marital relationship and the replacement of affection, intimacy, and commitment with disappointment, frustration, and emotional detachment. Individuals experiencing marital disillusionment often perceive their marriage as emotionally unrewarding and inconsistent with their initial expectations and aspirations. Research has demonstrated that marital disillusionment is associated with increased conflict, emotional withdrawal, marital burnout, reduced communication quality, and a higher probability of divorce (Obi et al., 2026). Similarly, Taei et al. reported that women experiencing chronic marital stress and relational dissatisfaction demonstrate significantly higher levels of marital disillusionment and emotional estrangement from their spouses (Taei et al., 2024). Babaahmadi et al. also emphasized that emotional deprivation and ineffective interpersonal interactions contribute directly to the development of marital disillusionment and instability among couples (Babaahmadi et al., 2024).

Another important variable associated with marital quality and relational adjustment is emotional empathy. Emotional empathy refers to the capacity to understand, experience, and respond appropriately to the emotional states of another individual. Empathy facilitates emotional intimacy, enhances mutual understanding, and reduces destructive communication patterns between spouses. Couples characterized by higher levels of empathy generally demonstrate more effective emotional regulation, greater emotional support, and improved conflict resolution abilities. Conversely, low emotional empathy is associated with emotional disengagement, criticism, defensiveness, and reduced relational satisfaction. Nazemi et al. found that emotional empathy among divorce applicants is strongly influenced by communication patterns and emotional expression abilities, suggesting that deficits in empathy may intensify marital conflicts and dissatisfaction (Nazemi et al., 2022). Mirbagheri et al. further demonstrated that emotional empathy plays a critical role in couple functioning, adaptability, and compatibility, particularly among young couples experiencing relational strain (Mirbagheri et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of strengthening empathic capacities in interventions designed for couples at risk of divorce.

Relationship maintenance strategies also constitute an essential dimension of marital functioning and long-term relationship stability. Relationship maintenance strategies refer to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral efforts aimed at preserving relational quality, enhancing commitment, and reducing interpersonal tension. Such strategies include positive communication, reassurance, openness, conflict management, mutual support, and shared activities. Couples who actively engage in relationship maintenance behaviors generally report greater intimacy, trust, and marital satisfaction. In contrast, deficiencies in these strategies may contribute to relational instability, emotional distancing, and increased marital dissatisfaction. Ghezelsafrou and Hashemi identified relationship maintenance strategies as significant predictors of marital stability and emphasized their role in reducing relational vulnerability and strengthening emotional commitment between partners (Ghezelsafrou & Hashemi, 2018). Similarly, Karimi et al. demonstrated that conflict resolution training programs significantly improve relationship maintenance strategies and reduce covert relational aggression among couples experiencing interpersonal difficulties (Karimi et al., 2024).

Given the multidimensional challenges experienced by women applying for divorce, the need for evidence-based

couple interventions has become increasingly important. Contemporary couple therapies emphasize emotional regulation, communication improvement, conflict management, and enhancement of emotional intimacy as central components of marital intervention programs. Among the existing therapeutic approaches, the Gottman Method Couples Therapy has gained substantial empirical and clinical attention due to its structured, research-based framework and emphasis on emotional connection, conflict regulation, and relational friendship. Developed by John Gottman and colleagues, this model is grounded in decades of observational research on marital interactions and identifies both adaptive and maladaptive communication patterns that influence relationship stability and satisfaction ([Rajendrakumar et al., 2023](#)).

The Gottman model conceptualizes successful marital relationships as being characterized by emotional attunement, mutual respect, positive affect, constructive conflict management, and shared meaning. Central principles of the model include building love maps, expressing fondness and admiration, turning toward bids for connection, accepting influence, solving solvable problems, overcoming gridlock, and creating shared meaning within the relationship. In contrast, the model identifies criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling as destructive interaction patterns that predict marital dissolution. The therapeutic process aims to replace maladaptive relational patterns with healthier communication behaviors and emotional responsiveness ([Irvine, 2022](#)).

Numerous empirical studies have supported the effectiveness of Gottman-based interventions in improving marital functioning and reducing relational distress. Rajaei et al. reported that Gottman-based couples therapy significantly reduced marital conflicts and enhanced relationship satisfaction among Iranian couples experiencing relational difficulties ([Rajaei et al., 2019](#)). Jalalvand et al. similarly found that Gottman couple therapy improved marital intimacy and relationship quality among distressed couples, suggesting that the intervention effectively strengthens emotional connectedness and communication skills ([Jalalvand et al., 2023](#)). Naseri et al. demonstrated that Gottman cognitive-systemic couple therapy significantly reduced marital conflicts among divorce applicants by improving emotional awareness and communication effectiveness ([Naseri et al., 2023](#)). These findings suggest that Gottman-based interventions may be particularly effective for couples experiencing chronic interpersonal distress and emotional disconnection.

Additional research has highlighted the effectiveness of the Gottman model in addressing specific relational challenges and psychological difficulties. Masjedi et al. reported that Gottman couples therapy significantly improved relationship quality among couples experiencing emotional divorce and relational disengagement ([Masjedi et al., 2022](#)). Saffarpour et al. demonstrated that Gottman couple therapy improved quality of life and reduced marital burnout among distressed couples, indicating its beneficial impact on emotional functioning and relational resilience ([Saffarpour et al., 2022](#)). Likewise, Mehrabadi et al. found that Gottman therapy improved conflict resolution styles, reduced marital violence, and enhanced family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Mehrabadi et al., 2025](#)). These findings reinforce the clinical value of the Gottman approach in strengthening interpersonal functioning across various marital contexts.

The effectiveness of Gottman-based interventions has also been documented among couples facing highly stressful relational experiences. Brigance examined Gottman processes among couples navigating infertility and found that adaptive emotional responsiveness and constructive interaction patterns contributed significantly to improved couple outcomes and emotional adjustment ([Brigance, 2023](#)). Irvine et al. further reported that Gottman Method Couples Therapy was more effective than treatment-as-usual approaches in improving relational functioning among couples dealing with infidelity, particularly in rebuilding trust and emotional intimacy ([Irvine et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, Irvine's randomized controlled trial demonstrated that the Trust Revival Method based on Gottman principles effectively facilitated affair recovery and emotional repair among distressed couples ([Irvine, 2022](#)). These studies suggest that the Gottman approach may be highly applicable to couples experiencing severe relational crises and emotional disruption.

Research comparing the Gottman method with other therapeutic approaches has also yielded promising findings. Paydari Niam and Jadidian compared schema therapy-based couple therapy with the Gottman method among women on the verge of divorce and found that both approaches significantly reduced marital conflicts, although the Gottman method demonstrated notable improvements in communication and emotional regulation ([Paydari Niam & Jadidian, 2025](#)). Taei et al. compared integrative behavioral couple therapy and Gottman therapy among women with addicted husbands and reported significant reductions in marital disillusionment in both intervention groups, further

supporting the effectiveness of Gottman-based interventions in distressed marital populations (Taei et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature supporting the effectiveness of Gottman-based interventions, several gaps remain in the existing research. First, many previous studies have focused primarily on marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, or intimacy, while comparatively limited attention has been given to the simultaneous examination of marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies. These variables represent critical dimensions of relational functioning that may strongly influence marital stability and the decision to seek divorce. Second, women applying for divorce constitute a psychologically vulnerable population characterized by heightened emotional distress, interpersonal dissatisfaction, and relational instability, yet relatively few studies have specifically targeted this group using comprehensive Gottman-based interventions. Third, considering the cultural significance of family stability within Iranian society, examining evidence-based therapeutic interventions for divorce-seeking women may provide valuable implications for counseling centers, family courts, and mental health professionals.

Moreover, the integration of emotional empathy enhancement with relationship maintenance training may be particularly important in reducing marital disillusionment and promoting relational resilience. Emotional empathy enables partners to respond sensitively to one another's emotional needs, whereas relationship maintenance strategies foster positive communication and sustained emotional investment within the relationship. Deficits in these domains may accelerate emotional distancing and relational dissatisfaction among couples experiencing chronic conflict. Therefore, interventions capable of simultaneously strengthening empathy, communication, and relational maintenance behaviors may significantly improve marital functioning among women at risk of divorce (Karimi et al., 2024; Mirbagheri et al., 2025).

Considering the increasing prevalence of divorce-related psychological difficulties, the documented effectiveness of Gottman-based interventions, and the limited research simultaneously addressing marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies among women applying for divorce, the present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Gottman model-based marital skills training on marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies in women applying for divorce.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and employed a quasi-experimental method with a pretest–posttest design, including a two-month follow-up phase and a control group, based on clinical trial standards. The statistical population consisted of all women applying for divorce who referred to family counseling centers affiliated with the judiciary in the city of Hamedan between September 2025 and February 2026. Among this population, 30 participants who met the inclusion criteria were selected through convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria included an age range of 18 to 50 years, literacy, residence in Hamedan, a maximum of six months since the initiation of the divorce process, informed consent to participate in the study, and absence of simultaneous participation in other psychological interventions. After selection, participants were randomly assigned into two equal groups of 15 participants, including an experimental group and a control group. The study adhered to ethical principles, including voluntary participation, confidentiality of participants' information, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

2.2. Measures

The Marital Disillusionment Scale (MDS) developed by Niehuis and Bartell (2006) was used to assess marital disillusionment. This instrument consists of 16 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 6. The total score ranges from 16 to 112, with higher scores indicating greater levels of marital disillusionment. The scale evaluates individuals' perceptions of disappointment, emotional dissatisfaction, and unmet expectations within marital relationships. Previous psychometric investigations have confirmed the validity and reliability of the instrument. In Iran, Seyyed Alitabar et al. (2016) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Emotional empathy was measured using the Emotional Empathy Scale developed by Mehrabian and Epstein (1972). This scale contains 33 items, including 17 positively worded items and 16 reverse-scored items, which are rated on a five-point Likert scale. Total scores range from 33 to 165, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of emotional empathy. The scale measures individuals' emotional responsiveness, sensitivity to others' feelings, and empathic tendencies in

interpersonal relationships. The original study reported satisfactory psychometric properties, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .84, supporting the reliability of the instrument.

Relationship maintenance strategies were assessed using the Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure (RMSM) developed by Stafford and Canary (1991). The instrument consists of 31 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale and assesses seven subscales, including assurance, openness, conflict management, task sharing, positivity, advice, and social networks. Total scores range from 31 to 217, with higher scores indicating greater use of constructive relationship maintenance strategies. The RMSM is widely used to evaluate behaviors and communication patterns aimed at preserving relational stability and satisfaction. The Persian version of the scale demonstrated strong psychometric properties, and Ghezelsefloo et al. (2018) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93 for the total scale.

2.3. Intervention

The experimental group participated in nine weekly 90-minute sessions of Gottman model-based marital skills training based on the protocol proposed by Irvine (2022). The intervention focused on improving communication patterns, emotional understanding, conflict management, and relational stability. The first session introduced participants to the structure and objectives of the program and emphasized the importance of communication skills in marital relationships. The second session focused on enhancing emotional awareness through the "Love Maps" principle, which involved identifying partners' interests, concerns, values, and emotional experiences. In the third session, participants were trained in affection and admiration skills, including gentle start-up techniques and the use of "I" statements during conversations. The fourth session addressed destructive communication patterns through instruction on the "Turning Toward" principle and identification of the "Four Horsemen" of dysfunctional interaction, namely criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and

stonewalling, alongside adaptive alternatives. The fifth session emphasized mutual acceptance and flexibility in decision-making through the principle of accepting influence. The sixth session focused on conflict management skills, distinguishing between solvable and perpetual problems, and teaching relaxation and de-escalation techniques. The seventh session aimed to strengthen problem-solving abilities and realistic agreement-building strategies during interpersonal tension. The eighth session explored communication gridlocks and emphasized understanding deeper values and emotional needs underlying unresolved conflicts. Finally, the ninth session focused on creating shared meaning in marital relationships through rituals, common goals, and positive interaction patterns that contribute to relationship continuity and satisfaction.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics. In the descriptive section, means and standard deviations were calculated for all study variables. In the inferential section, the assumptions underlying parametric analyses were examined prior to hypothesis testing. The normality of data distribution was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and homogeneity of variances was evaluated using Levene's test. Subsequently, repeated-measures analysis of variance was conducted to examine within-group and between-group changes across the pretest, posttest, and follow-up phases. Due to the violation of the sphericity assumption, the lower-bound epsilon correction was applied. Bonferroni post hoc tests were also used to identify pairwise differences between measurement stages. The significance level for all statistical analyses was set at .05.

3. Findings and Results

Descriptive statistics, including the means and standard deviations of marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies across the experimental and control groups at the pretest, posttest, and two-month follow-up stages, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Dependent Variables in the Gottman and Control Groups Across Measurement Stages

Variable	Group	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)	Follow-up M (SD)
Marital Disillusionment	Control	76.6 (1.05)	76.5 (1.13)	76.4 (1.09)
	Gottman	76.8 (0.99)	72.6 (0.72)	70.8 (0.59)
Emotional Empathy	Control	100.4 (3.89)	102.1 (3.45)	104.1 (2.64)

Relationship Maintenance Strategies	Gottman	100.4 (3.43)	133.3 (3.44)	136.2 (2.80)
	Control	106.9 (3.73)	107.4 (2.93)	109.3 (2.98)
	Gottman	109.7 (2.83)	145.0 (2.84)	151.1 (2.74)

As presented in Table 1, the mean scores of marital disillusionment in the Gottman group decreased from the pretest to the posttest and follow-up stages, whereas only negligible changes were observed in the control group. In contrast, emotional empathy and relationship maintenance strategies increased substantially in the Gottman intervention group from pretest to posttest, and these improvements were maintained during the two-month follow-up period. The control group demonstrated only slight fluctuations across the three assessment stages, indicating the relative stability of these variables in the absence of intervention.

Before conducting inferential analyses, the assumptions underlying repeated-measures analysis of variance were examined. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test indicated that the distributions of all three dependent variables across the measurement stages were normal ($p > .05$). Levene’s test for homogeneity of variances was non-significant across all stages ($p > .05$), indicating equality of variances between the groups. However, Mauchly’s test of sphericity was significant for all variables ($p < .01$), suggesting violation of the sphericity assumption. Therefore, the lower-bound epsilon correction was applied when reporting the repeated-measures analysis of variance results.

Table 2

Results of Repeated-Measures Analysis of Variance for the Dependent Variables

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Marital Disillusionment	Time $\times$ Group	138.42	1	138.42	19.404	< .001	.401
Emotional Empathy	Time $\times$ Group	2241.57	1	2241.57	32.614	< .001	.529
Relationship Maintenance Strategies	Time $\times$ Group	2987.31	1	2987.31	31.524	< .001	.521

The results of repeated-measures analysis of variance demonstrated that the interaction effect of time and group was significant for marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies. Specifically, Gottman model-based marital skills training significantly reduced marital disillusionment, $F(1, 28) = 19.404$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .401$. Furthermore, the intervention

significantly increased emotional empathy, $F(1, 28) = 32.614$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .529$, and relationship maintenance strategies, $F(1, 28) = 31.524$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .521$. The obtained effect sizes indicated that the intervention accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in the dependent variables.

Table 3

Bonferroni Post Hoc Test Results Comparing the Gottman and Control Groups

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p
Marital Disillusionment	Control vs. Gottman	3.111	1.242	.045
Emotional Empathy	Control vs. Gottman	21.089	4.812	< .001
Relationship Maintenance Strategies	Control vs. Gottman	27.422	4.837	< .001

The Bonferroni post hoc comparisons revealed that participants in the Gottman intervention group showed significantly lower marital disillusionment scores than the control group during the posttest and follow-up stages. Additionally, the Gottman group demonstrated significantly higher levels of emotional empathy and relationship maintenance strategies compared with the control group. The persistence of significant differences during the follow-up phase indicates the stability and durability of the intervention effects over time.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Gottman model-based marital skills training on marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies among women applying for divorce. The findings demonstrated that the intervention significantly reduced marital disillusionment and significantly increased emotional empathy and relationship maintenance strategies

in the experimental group compared with the control group. Furthermore, the persistence of these effects during the follow-up phase indicated the relative stability and durability of the intervention outcomes over time. These findings suggest that Gottman model-based marital skills training can serve as an effective intervention for improving interpersonal functioning and reducing relational distress among women experiencing severe marital conflicts and considering divorce.

One of the major findings of the present study was the significant reduction in marital disillusionment among participants who received Gottman-based training. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that Gottman-oriented interventions effectively reduce emotional distancing, marital dissatisfaction, and relational instability among distressed couples (Naseri et al., 2023; Saffarpour et al., 2022; Taei et al., 2024). The present finding is also aligned with the results reported by Babaahmadi et al., who found that emotionally focused interventions contribute to the prevention of marital disillusionment and enhance intimacy between spouses (Babaahmadi et al., 2024). Similarly, Obi et al. identified marital disillusionment as a multidimensional phenomenon associated with psychological stress, interpersonal dissatisfaction, and relational instability, emphasizing the importance of therapeutic interventions aimed at strengthening communication and emotional connection (Obi et al., 2026).

The effectiveness of Gottman-based training in reducing marital disillusionment may be explained through several psychological and interpersonal mechanisms. First, the intervention emphasizes emotional awareness and constructive communication, which help couples identify maladaptive interaction patterns and replace them with supportive relational behaviors. Women applying for divorce often experience chronic criticism, emotional neglect, and unresolved conflicts, which gradually intensify hopelessness and dissatisfaction within the marital relationship. The Gottman model directly targets these destructive interaction cycles by teaching couples how to recognize and regulate negative communication patterns such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. By reducing these dysfunctional patterns, participants become more capable of engaging in emotionally responsive and respectful interactions, which may reduce feelings of disappointment and relational exhaustion (Irvine, 2022).

Another important explanation relates to the intervention's focus on rebuilding emotional intimacy and friendship between spouses. The Gottman approach conceptualizes successful marriages as relationships characterized by emotional attunement, mutual respect, and positive emotional engagement. Through principles such as "Love Maps," "Fondness and Admiration," and "Turning Toward," participants learn to recognize their partner's emotional needs and respond in more supportive and validating ways. This process may gradually restore emotional security and reduce negative perceptions toward the marital relationship. Previous studies have similarly shown that Gottman-based interventions improve intimacy, relationship quality, and emotional closeness among distressed couples (Jalalvand et al., 2023; Rajaei et al., 2019). Therefore, the reduction in marital disillusionment observed in the present study may reflect improvements in emotional responsiveness, relational understanding, and constructive communication patterns.

The findings of the present study also demonstrated that Gottman model-based training significantly increased emotional empathy among women applying for divorce. This finding is consistent with the literature emphasizing the critical role of empathy in marital functioning and relational adjustment (Mirbagheri et al., 2025; Nazemi et al., 2022). Emotional empathy allows individuals to perceive, understand, and respond appropriately to their partner's emotional experiences, thereby facilitating intimacy, trust, and emotional connection. Couples characterized by higher empathy are generally more capable of regulating conflicts, expressing emotional support, and maintaining constructive interactions during stressful situations. In contrast, deficits in empathy may intensify emotional distancing, misunderstandings, and relational dissatisfaction.

The observed increase in emotional empathy may be attributed to the emotionally focused and interaction-oriented structure of the Gottman intervention. The training sessions encouraged participants to become more aware of emotional signals, relational needs, and communication patterns within their marital relationships. By learning active listening skills, empathic responding, and emotional validation techniques, participants likely became more capable of understanding their partner's feelings and perspectives. The Gottman model also emphasizes emotional attunement and responsiveness as central components of healthy relationships, which may directly strengthen empathic capacities among couples (Irvine et al., 2024). Furthermore, teaching participants to avoid defensive

reactions and destructive communication patterns may create safer emotional environments in which empathy can emerge more effectively.

The present finding is also supported by the study conducted by Mirbagheri et al., which demonstrated that emotional empathy is positively associated with adaptability and couple functioning among compatible couples (Mirbagheri et al., 2025). Likewise, Nazemi et al. found that empathy among divorce applicants is significantly influenced by communication skills and emotional expression abilities (Nazemi et al., 2022). These findings collectively suggest that interventions aimed at strengthening communication and emotional responsiveness can improve empathic functioning among couples experiencing relational distress. The current results therefore provide additional empirical support for the role of Gottman-based interventions in enhancing emotional understanding and interpersonal sensitivity among women at risk of divorce.

Another major finding of the present study was the significant increase in relationship maintenance strategies following the intervention. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of constructive relational behaviors in promoting marital stability and satisfaction (Ghezelsaflou & Hashemi, 2018; Karimi et al., 2024). Relationship maintenance strategies include behaviors such as reassurance, openness, conflict management, positivity, and mutual support, all of which contribute to preserving relational quality and emotional commitment. Couples who effectively utilize these strategies are generally more resilient in coping with stress and interpersonal difficulties.

The improvement in relationship maintenance strategies observed in the present study may be explained by the skill-based nature of the Gottman intervention. Participants were trained in practical communication and conflict-management techniques that directly enhanced their ability to engage in adaptive relational behaviors. For example, the intervention emphasized soft start-up techniques, emotional validation, collaborative problem-solving, and constructive conflict regulation. These skills likely increased participants' awareness of the importance of maintaining positive relational interactions and reduced reliance on maladaptive communication styles. Additionally, the intervention encouraged participants to engage in intentional efforts to strengthen emotional connection and relational trust, which may further enhance maintenance-oriented behaviors.

The present findings are congruent with the work of Ghezelsaflou and Hashemi, who identified relationship maintenance strategies as significant predictors of marital stability and relational adjustment (Ghezelsaflou & Hashemi, 2018). Similarly, Karimi et al. demonstrated that conflict resolution training significantly improves relationship maintenance behaviors among couples experiencing interpersonal difficulties (Karimi et al., 2024). The current findings therefore extend the existing literature by demonstrating that Gottman model-based marital skills training can simultaneously strengthen communication quality, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies among women seeking divorce.

The persistence of intervention effects during the follow-up phase represents another important aspect of the findings. The stability of improvements in marital disillusionment, emotional empathy, and relationship maintenance strategies suggests that participants were able to internalize and continue utilizing the learned skills beyond the immediate intervention period. One possible explanation for this durability is that the Gottman model focuses not only on temporary symptom reduction but also on the development of enduring interpersonal competencies and emotional regulation skills. By learning practical strategies applicable to daily marital interactions, participants may have become more capable of sustaining constructive communication patterns over time.

The long-term effectiveness observed in the present study is consistent with previous research supporting the sustained benefits of Gottman-based interventions. Irvine et al. reported that Gottman Method Couples Therapy produced durable improvements in trust, emotional intimacy, and relational functioning among couples experiencing infidelity (Irvine et al., 2024). Similarly, Saffarpour et al. demonstrated that Gottman therapy contributes to enduring reductions in marital burnout and improvements in quality of life among distressed couples (Saffarpour et al., 2022). These findings collectively suggest that Gottman-based interventions may provide couples with long-lasting relational tools that continue to influence interpersonal functioning after the completion of therapy.

Another important consideration is the cultural relevance of Gottman-based interventions within the Iranian context. Family relationships and marital stability are highly valued within Iranian culture, and women applying for divorce often face substantial emotional, familial, and social pressures. Consequently, interventions that enhance emotional communication, empathy, and relational problem-

solving may be particularly beneficial for this population. The present findings indicate that the Gottman model can be effectively adapted to Iranian cultural contexts and may provide meaningful support for women experiencing severe marital distress. This observation is consistent with studies conducted among Iranian couples that reported significant improvements in marital functioning following Gottman-based interventions (Naseri et al., 2023; Paydari Niam & Jadidian, 2025; Rajaei et al., 2019).

Overall, the findings of the present study support the theoretical assumptions underlying the Gottman model and highlight the importance of emotional responsiveness, constructive communication, and relationship maintenance in promoting marital stability. The results further suggest that women applying for divorce may substantially benefit from structured interventions that target both emotional and behavioral dimensions of marital functioning. Given the increasing prevalence of divorce-related psychological distress, implementing evidence-based marital interventions within counseling centers and family support services may contribute significantly to reducing relational dysfunction and improving psychological well-being among distressed couples.

One of the limitations of the present study was the relatively small sample size and the use of convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations of women applying for divorce. In addition, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may have been influenced by response biases and social desirability. Another limitation was the restriction of the sample to women from counseling centers in a single city, which may reduce the applicability of the findings to other cultural and demographic contexts. Furthermore, the follow-up period was limited to two months, and longer-term evaluations were not conducted.

Future studies are recommended to examine the effectiveness of Gottman model-based interventions using larger and more diverse samples across different geographical and cultural settings. Researchers may also compare the Gottman approach with other contemporary couple therapies in order to identify the relative strengths and mechanisms of different intervention models. In addition, future research could investigate the long-term sustainability of intervention outcomes through extended follow-up assessments. Examining mediating variables such as emotional regulation, attachment styles, communication patterns, and psychological flexibility may also provide

deeper insight into the mechanisms through which Gottman-based interventions influence marital functioning.

The findings of the present study suggest several practical implications for counselors, psychologists, and family support professionals. It is recommended that Gottman model-based marital skills training be incorporated into counseling programs for couples experiencing marital conflicts and considering divorce. Family counseling centers and family courts may particularly benefit from implementing structured communication and empathy-enhancement programs based on the Gottman approach. Training professionals in Gottman-based intervention techniques may improve the effectiveness of marital counseling services and contribute to reducing relational distress among vulnerable couples. Additionally, educational workshops focused on emotional empathy, conflict management, and relationship maintenance strategies may help couples strengthen relational resilience and prevent the escalation of marital problems.

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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