

Research on Imago Therapy

While randomly controlled studies are not yet available—one is being completed at the time of this writing and should be submitted by summer of 2014—Imago Relationship Therapy has several quasi-experimental design studies that indicate improvement in marital satisfaction.

Nine couples who completed a six-week treatment protocol in IRT were tested pre- and post-treatment utilizing the Marital Satisfaction Inventory. It was hypothesized that there would be significant improvement in global distress, affective communication, and problem solving communication at post-treatment. The data supported the hypothesis and all measures were significantly lower (Luquet & Hannah, 1996).

In a larger replication study of the six-session treatment protocol with 21 couples, significant positive changes were found on the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Hannah, Luquet, et al 1997). Utilizing the same treatment group, couples were tested using the widely utilized managed care outcome measure Compass. Significant positive changes were found in the measures of well-being and symptom relief, with positive, but not significant changes in life functioning. These changes were in line with other treatment models that tested positively utilizing Compass (Hannah, Luquet, & McCormick, 1997).

Several recently published or in press studies have also shown significant changes in marital satisfaction including a pre-, post-, and three-month follow-up study of over two hundred Imago couples workshop participants. The two-day intensive training produced significant changes in the Dyadic Adjustment Scale with most of the change maintained at the three-month follow-up (Schmidt, Luquet, & Gehlert, in press). A workshop study of low-income Hispanic couples showed similar positive effect changes (Muro & Holliman, 2014). A study of a short

training of Imago Therapy showed a significant increase in empathy behavior between couples as measured by the Truax Empathy Scale as observed by trained third party observers (Holliman, Muro, & Luquet, in press).

A common difficulty in couples therapy research conducting a randomly controlled study with a control group and follow up to determine if there is a loss of effect over time. Couples often drop out before the third measure and it is difficult to find couples who will wait to receive treatment. At the time of this writing, the first of these studies is being completed and will be submitted for publication in the summer of 2015. Preliminary data analysis indicates that there is a large effect size after twelve-weeks of treatment and the treatment effect is maintained in the treatment group at time three, as opposed to the control group who mostly stayed at a distressed level throughout the time of the study (Gehlert, Schmidt, & Luquet, in preparation). A future replication study is in the planning stage to be conducted by a major university program.

Future research will also include a collaboration with the Princeton University Neuroscience Institute investigating brain changes and brain-to-brain connections of couples utilizing the Imago dialogue process while in communication in two fMRI scanners. Continued research will include research in Dallas on the impact of community Safe Conversation workshops on divorce rate, poverty, and parenting.

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