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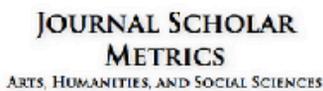
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Enhancing the Sense of Coherence and Social Acceptance in Married Female Students with Education-Family Conflict: A Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy Approach

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ABSTRACT

The study highlights the concept of education-family conflict, where educational roles clash with familial obligations, negatively affecting the sense of coherence and social acceptance of married female students. Previous studies have highlighted the increasing tendency of married women to pursue higher education and career advancement, which would emphasize the need for psychological interventions to support them. The study introduces Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy (PCBGT) as a novel intervention to address these concerns. Based on their education-family conflict scores, sense of coherence, and social acceptance, sixty married female students (aged 25-35) were purposively selected and equally assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group engaged in eight weekly 90-minute PCBGT sessions. Data were analyzed using One-way ANOVA with repeated measures. The findings underscore PCBGT's potential to empower students, enhancing their sense of coherence, manageability, meaningfulness, and social acceptance, persisting up to three months post-intervention. PCBGT enhances the sense of coherence by helping individuals recognize and apply their signature strengths, manage emotions, cultivate self-acceptance, and develop a more comprehensive and meaningful outlook on life. It also fosters social acceptance by promoting self-compassion, identifying strengths, regulating emotions, and enhancing interpersonal skills through structured sessions, ultimately improving individuals' interactions and relationships. However, further investigation is necessary to comprehensively understand how PCBGT influences the sense of coherence and social acceptance among married female students managing education-family conflict. *Key words:* PCBGT, sense of coherence, social acceptance, education-family conflict.

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Novelty and Relevance

What is already known about the topic?

- Married female students often struggle to balance family and academic responsibilities, leading to stress and reduced well-being.
- Education-family conflict can impact social acceptance and overall mental health.
- Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy emphasizes strengths, reframing, and envisioning positive outcomes.

What this paper adds?

- Introduces the Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Group as an effective intervention for married female students with education-family conflict.
- It highlights the positive impact of Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy on enhancing the participants' sense of coherence and social acceptance.
- Addresses the scarcity of studies on education-family conflict and offers insights into a novel approach to improving mental well-being in this specific demographic.

Adapting to new roles and relationships, balancing student and family life responsibilities, and planning and working toward learning and academic achievement, are some of the most important challenges married women entering university should

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be able to deal with (Lasode & Awote, 2014). Involvement in the education-family conflict, as one of the multiple role conflicts, can cause high stress for them and reduce their optimal functioning in each of these two areas. Education-family conflict means the contrast of education-related roles and responsibilities with the expectations a person needs to meet in their family life. This conflict causes stress, depression, and anxiety and consequently reduces function in the individual (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Meehan and Negy (2003) showed that married students have higher academic and marital problems than single students. Lasode and Awote (2014) found that 83% of married female students experienced stress due to the conflict between academic and family obligations and responsibilities.

There is a growing tendency among married women to go to university and improve their academic and professional status. The educational concerns of married female students may include struggles in planning, attending classes, taking exams, competing for grades, and doubting themselves about their academic ability (Archer & Lamnin, 1985). When these concerns conflict with their family roles in housekeeping, being a spouse, and motherhood, the pressures of both roles can negatively affect their mental health. Consequently, the pressures of time conflict and multiple requests can reduce the sense of management and control over various matters of life in married female students (Darab, 2004).

Sense of coherence is one of the effective components that help these people to be able to react appropriately to the pressures of their living situations. The sense of coherence, as proposed by Antonovsky (1993), encompasses three factors: Comprehensibility, which forms the cognitive dimension and refers to the perception that situations and events are structured and nothing negative or astonishing will happen, manageability, which is considered the behavioral dimension in which a person has the basic skills to face and address life challenges, and meaningfulness, which constitutes the motivational dimension of the sense of coherence meaning that the individual considers themselves valuable and believes life challenges are worth the investment and being engaged in.

According to Antonovsky (1993), a sense of coherence makes life events predictable and explicable, encourages one to use the available resources to meet one's needs, and challenges in this path will be considered valuable. People who feel a strong sense of coherence see everyday stress and situations, which are considered stressful for most people, as an inevitable part of life and provide a platform to learn how to deal with them (Tomotsune, Sasahara, & Hayash, 2009). A sense of coherence can reduce the impact of stress on individuals by amending the perception of the situation and reducing the negative impact of stressors through cognitive assessment and coping strategies (Leda & Grazziano, 2018). As a self-regulatory process, a high sense of coherence increases the tendency to manage stress better and more effectively (Groholt, Stigum, Nordhagen, & Kohler, 2003). Leda and Grazziano (2018) indicated that college students with a higher sense of coherence experience lower stress.

For married female students to be able to meet the time and energy demands of university and family, they need to plan for their responsibilities, review the implementation of plans, and design new ones for the future to be capable of managing the stress caused by multiple roles. Therefore, it seems that a sense of coherence can reduce the stress of the education-family conflict, by improving the perception of reality and existing situations, and managing and finding meaning in both roles that one plays.

Education-family conflict causes married women to be stressed about relationships with family and friends (Adebayo, 2006) and can affect their social acceptance. Social

acceptance refers to the behaviors people tend to do based on cultural norms to gain social desirability (Sârbescu, Costea, & Rusu, 2012) and the attitude of the individual towards the fact how much others want to relate to them or be in a common group with them (Leary, 2010). People with high social acceptance feel accepted by those around them, have a positive attitude and a good feeling about themselves and their past lives, and despite all their weaknesses and faults, they accept all aspects of themselves (Keyes & Shapiro, 2004). Although these people follow social norms as much as possible, they do not worry about showing their true selves and making choices among the values imposed by society, while people with low social acceptance worry about being rejected from society or left alone by expressing their true selves, as a result, they follow the expectations and standards of society regardless of their own value and personality norms (Kolahdooz, 2013).

Research indicated that people who feel socially accepted report various types of positive emotions, including happiness, life satisfaction, peace, and psychological well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002), while those who are socially neglected, deprived, or ignored reflect negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, sadness, jealousy, and loneliness (DeWall & Bushman, 2011).

The most important concerns of married female students with education-family conflict that can affect social acceptance include relations with professors and classmates, interpersonal conflicts with friends, difficulty in intimate relations with the spouse, and conflicts in parental roles (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Such factors can make married women believe that due to the pressures of time, energy, and conflicts of responsibilities, they are not good enough in their social roles and are not accepted by those around them; therefore, they may feel rejected or isolated.

Accordingly, psychological intervention on the sense of coherence and social acceptance can be helpful for married female students with education-family conflict. In this regard, Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (PCBT) is considered one of the newest approaches that seem to be effective in this field due to the positive nature of the model. PCBT, which was proposed by Bannink (2012), is an integrated approach that conflates the concepts and techniques of solution-focused brief therapy and positive psychology within a cognitive behavioral framework to bring about positive changes in cognition, emotion, and behavior to increase psychological well-being in addition to reducing clients' problems. PCBT has an optimistic view of human beings, and during the counseling process, it is the client who chooses their goals, determines the ways to achieve them based on past successful solutions, exceptions, and current strengths, and assesses how they have progressed in achieving their goals (Bannink & Peeters, 2021). This approach emphasizes paying attention to the positive aspects and using the strengths of the person, expanding previous positive experiences, creating new positive behaviors, and searching for 'better moments' instead of focusing on why problems are formed, analyzing failures, and eliminating weaknesses. Therefore, clients find this approach more encouraging than traditional cognitive behavioral therapy, are more inclined to participate in the counseling process and experience more positive counseling outcomes (Geschwind, Bosgraaf, Bannink, & Peeters, 2020). Geschwind, Arntz, Bannink, and Peeters (2019) indicated that PCBT had a significant positive effect on the treatment of major depressive disorder. The results of Gharadaghi and Komeylipour (2019), which aimed to determine the effectiveness of interventions based on PCBT on positive and negative emotions of women with spouses suffering from mental disorders, showed that group training based on PCBT had significantly increased positive affect and decreased

negative affect in the research group. Also, the study of Sadeghi, Abolghasemi, Kazemi, and Narimani (2019) signified that PCBT enhances happiness and prevents various psychological and social problems by increasing positive emotions in female teachers with chronic fatigue. In the next part, the mechanism of effectiveness of PCBT on the sense of coherence and social acceptance will be addressed.

In PCBT approach, the client's perceptions, choices, and decisions are respected (Bannink, 2012), and clients are considered experts who have the necessary abilities to achieve the preferred outcome; as a result, clients feel more autonomy (Bannink, 2012; De Shazer, 1985).

PCBT focuses on the use of character strengths in various areas of life to achieve psychological well-being. Peterson and Seligman (2004) introduced 24 character strengths based on six virtues that are fulfilling and important for a good life for oneself and others. The intensity of each character's strength is individually unique and different. Peterson and Seligman (2004) believe that using the top five character strengths of individuals as signature strengths will lead to more successful and enjoyable results and can be used not only as a criterion for making decisions but also as strategies for dealing with and solving problems, which make them feel their lives are in more control. In this regard, the research of Mahmoodi, Jafari, Zahrakar, and Zabihi (2020) indicates a positive relationship between applying character strengths and higher self-regulation in women.

During the counseling process of PCBT, the client identifies exceptions, which include three situations: 1) the problem in the client's life was less severe or even gone, 2) the problem was there, but the person could cope (a little bit) better, or 3) the problem was as strong as it is right now, but the person could accept it and put their focus on alternative thoughts and activities instead of the problem. The purpose of this technique is to identify what was different when the situation was better. Successful exceptions in the individual's past life indicate that the actions and behaviors of the client were not always accompanied by failure; therefore, it is possible to extend these successes in the future (De Shazer, 1985).

The miracle question is another important technique in this approach. The client is asked to imagine that one night when they are asleep, a miracle happens, and the problem for which they came to the psychologist is resolved. How does the client notice this change when they wake up? What has changed in the life of the client? What does the person do differently? These questions help the client to understand the difference between the miraculous and the problematic situations and to identify a hypothetical solution (Bannink, 2010).

One of the main goals of PCBT is to increase positive emotions in clients. According to Fredrickson's perspective, increasing positive emotions can change a person's cognitive appraisals of difficulties, facilitate them to overcome negative emotions, and enable people to creatively build and use new resources to improve their optimal functioning (Tugade, Fredrickson, & Feldman Barrett, 2004). These resources facilitate coping with adversity by improving the use of personal and professional skills. They also increase one's flexibility in accepting the negative characteristics of their environment (including education-family conflict). Therefore, PCBT can improve clients' sense of coherence in terms of their ability to manage and control life affairs.

Because positive emotions can change people's cognitive assessment of life events, they can change the meaning people give to their environment. Increasing positive emotions not only leads to forming a positive meaning in a person's life but also improves a person's resiliency (Fredrickson, 2004). Positive imagery toward the

future, as an emotional technique of PCBT, depicts a clear goal and increases the individuals' motivation to work toward achieving that goal (Vasquez & Buehler, 2007).

PCBT deals with a person's interactive network and the importance and meaning of one's relations to them. Establishing a good relationship with family, friends, and other important people and receiving their support and help are among the principles and goals of this therapy (Bannink, 2012). In the interactional matrix technique, you ask important people around you to participate in the counseling process; they tell you what your goal of counseling is, what you will be doing differently according to their point of view, what different behaviors will important others see from you, and how will they react differently to these changes (Bannink, 2012). In this way, not only do the clients focus more on their efforts to improve interaction with others, but they also become aware of other people's feedback on their activities and changes, and because of these improvements, they achieve higher social acceptance.

The focus of PCBT on personal strengths helps people identify the character strengths and resources within themselves and their social system and use their interpersonal skills to create new experiences and improve their interpersonal and social function. (Bannink, 2012). Moreover, identifying and using character strengths promotes self-compassion (Jafari, 2020). Gilbert (2010) points out that self-compassion is the first step to expressing kindness to others and receiving theirs. Therefore, by increasing compassion during the PCBT counseling process, people are expected to experience higher social acceptance. On top of that, PCBT is considered among humanistic approaches, in which empathy and unconditional acceptance have remarkable roles, leading clients to feel accepted and respected by others.

Education-family conflict is one of the significant concerns of married female students. Therefore, improving their psychological health is one of the major issues not only for themselves but for their families and the educational system. In Iranian culture, the role of women as the main responsible for raising children and taking care of household affairs is considered one of the obstacles to women's personal growth, including their academic activities. Furthermore, because of the social restrictions of Covid-19, the conflict between family and academic roles has accelerated, as mothers' responsibilities in taking care of their at-home children have become more exhausting. On the other hand, attending university classes, doing assignments, and preparing for final examinations prevent married female students from spending time with their families and children.

In this study, we investigated the effect of the Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Group (PCBGT) on the sense of coherence and social acceptance. According to the available sources, the concept of education-family conflict has not been deeply studied. Consequently, this component was addressed, and a questionnaire was created for selecting the purposeful sample group. Since the components of the sense of coherence and social acceptance had a philosophically and conceptually underlying relationship with the education-family conflict, they were selected as dependent variables. In this regard, married female students with education-family conflict were persuaded to help themselves by participating in a positive-oriented cognitive behavioral group therapy.

METHOD

Participants

The study included sample of married female students of the University of Ale Taha. The total number of students was 2342 and the number of married female students

at this university was 316 in 2022. After advertising the announcement to participate in the research on the university's website and the bulletin board, 218 women applied to participate in the study. The sample group was selected in three stages through the purposive sampling method; in the first stage, all the individuals answered a few questions as a criterion for assessing their education-family conflict, and 90 people with the highest scores were selected among them. In the second stage, individuals answered the questionnaires about the sense of coherence and social acceptance, and those who had scored the lowest on both of these questionnaires were selected as a sample. After holding the initial interview counted as the third stage, a randomized controlled trial was applied to 60 selected people having all the entry criteria, including being in an age range between 25-35 years, being married, having children, and not working besides their studies; not having psychological problems or taking psychiatric medication; being committed to participate in the sessions and do not be absent except at the necessary situation.

These participants were randomly and equally put into experimental and control groups (30 people in each group). Two members of the experimental group were excluded after three sessions of absence, one due to family problems and another due to pregnancy-related limitations. One member of the control group was excluded from the research since she refused to answer the post-test questionnaires. The characteristics of the participants in the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 1.

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. All participants filled up and signed the written informed consent for participating in this research.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants in the Experimental and Control groups.

Groups	Undergraduate n (%)	Postgraduate n (%)	One child n (%)	Two children n (%)	Three children n (%)
Experimental	18 (67.85%)	10 (35.71%)	20 (71.42%)	6 (21.42%)	2 (7.14%)
Control	22 (75.86%)	7 (24.13%)	18 (62.06%)	10 (34.48%)	1 (3.44%)

Instruments

Education-family Conflict Scale. Considering that there was no instrument to measure the education-family conflict, a six-question scale was prepared and applied by researchers. At first, six criteria were considered based on the theoretical concepts, including conflict in roles, conflict in responsibilities, conflict in time, decreased physical energy, decreased psychological function, and emotional distress due to perceived conflicts. A sample item was "How difficult is it for you to fulfill both your family and academic roles?" Then, the primary version was verified and confirmed by seven experts in psychology and psychometrics. The final version of this questionnaire included six items based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5, and the range of total scores was between 6 and 30, in which a higher score implies more education-family conflict. The calculated Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire in this research was .82.

Social Acceptance Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Iranian version by Samari & Lali Faz, 2005). This scale measures the level of social acceptance and has 33 questions that are answered either correctly or incorrectly. The total score is between 0 and 33; a score between 0 and 8 indicates no social acceptance and probable rejection; a score between 9 and 19 means compliance with social norms and moderate acceptance; and a score between 20 and 33 indicates high social adjustment. Its reliability coefficient with the test-retest method was higher than .80. In terms of validity, Cronbach's alpha of this test was .74, and in this research, Cronbach's alpha was .78.

The Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (Antonovsky, 1993; Iranian version by Alipour & Sharifi, 2012). This questionnaire is a standard self-report tool for measuring the sense of coherence and has 29 questions that are designed as a 7-point Likert scale from 1 to 7 and consists of three subscales of comprehensibility (11 questions), manageability (10 questions), and meaningfulness (8 questions). There are 13 items negatively rated, the score of which is counted in reverse. The sum of the total scores is between 29 and 203, and a higher score indicates a greater sense of coherence. Cronbach's alpha was obtained between .82 and .95 among 16 countries, and the results of the test-retest over two years is .54, which is an acceptable value (Antonovsky, 1993). In the studies conducted in Iran, this questionnaire had been translated from English to Persian and independently back-translated from Persian to English by different people, so precisely that the authors confirmed it has the same meaning and there are no discrepancies. The internal consistency of the 96 questionnaires was obtained, and the validity and reliability of the Iranian version of the questionnaire are acceptable (Alipour & Sharifi, 2012). Cronbach's alpha was obtained in this study .72.

Procedure

In the first step, all the students were informed about the research through student groups on social media, and married female university students who had children were invited to participate in an online survey of education-family conflict to select a sample with the highest scores among them.

Then, we selected our final sample among the initial sample who also had a lower score on the sense of coherence and social acceptance questionnaires and put them randomly into experimental and control groups. The tests done in the evaluation phase were considered pre-tests, and members in both groups refilled the questionnaires after the end of group therapy (post-test phase) and three months after that (follow-up phase). The experimental group participated in eight 90-minute sessions (once a week) in a PCBGT at the university's counseling center. The therapeutic protocol was designed by researchers based on the PCBT approach by Bannink (2012), described below. The control group was placed on a waiting list for five months, and after the end of group therapy's follow-up phase, they participated in three sessions of effective skills training to learn not only how to reduce family-education conflict but to promote a sense of coherence and social acceptance as well.

Based on ethical considerations, the psychotherapist undertook to observe ethical and professional confidentiality, and all members of the experimental group gave their written informed consent to participate in the study.

Design and Intervention

The study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to investigate the effectiveness of Positive-Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy (PCBGT) in addressing education-family conflict among married female students. This experimental design involved the random assignment of participants into either an Experimental Group (which received the PCBGT intervention) or a Control Group. The PCBGT intervention consisted of the application of a protocol of eight sessions of PCBGT.

First Session. Communicating and familiarizing group members, explaining the structure of sessions and rules of the group, identifying members' goals, and exploring satisfying aspects of their lives and dimensions that need improvement. Home task: Write a letter from yourself in the next five years to your current self to identify valuable goals for the future (where are you, what are you doing, and what have you done to achieve this position).

- Second Session.* Asking the miracle question to identify members' ideal expectations regarding their problems, identifying and analyzing goals, and modifying them based on positive, specific, and measurable criteria. Training and practicing positive imagery of Your Best Possible Self (strengthening hope and motivation). Home task: Practice positive mental imagery of Your Best Possible Self based on your future goals.
- Third Session:* Talking about exceptions when problems didn't exist, were not issues, or the person could successfully deal with. Identifying effective behaviors, as exceptions in the past, used for solving the problems and ineffective repetitive patterns. Home task: Expand exceptions by increasing effective actions and stopping ineffective patterns, complete a character strengths inventory from the VIA site, and extract the order of character strengths.
- Fourth Session:* Talking about people's experiences of doing efficient affairs, instructing the nature of character strengths and the importance of using the signature character strengths in success and improving quality of life, and sharing people's experiences of using signature strengths in life. Home task: Apply three signature strengths daily in life and in line with the goals, and talk to close and intimate people about the positive effects of using signature strengths in life.
- Fifth Session:* Sharing members' experiences of using signature strengths and talking about the emotions that come from these new experiences. Finding creative and different solutions to achieve the goals based on signature strengths. Home task: Use the signature strengths in a new and different way in line with the goals.
- Sixth Session:* Talking about people's exploratory experiences of using signature strengths in different ways, talking about the importance of regulating and balancing emotions, and identifying pleasure activities to increase positive emotions. Home task: Do daily mindfulness exercises and at least one pleasant activity each day to increase positive emotions.
- Seventh Session:* Talking about people's experiences of positive emotions, acquainting members with the concepts of self-compassion and self-acceptance, and developing a deep understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses. Home task: Practice relaxation accompanied by self-compassionate dialogues, understand and accept unpleasant emotions, and appreciate their achievements.
- Eighth Session:* Examining the changes made in the functions and emotions of the group members and examining the future goals of the members according to the group experiences, talking about what people can do to maintain and sustain the changes that have taken place, and resolving emotional issues related to members' separation from the group. Home task: Continue using the techniques implemented during the group therapy to achieve positive and satisfying changes and emotions in life.

Data Analysis

To compare the differences between the data obtained from the experimental and control groups in the three stages of pre-test, post-test, and follow-up, a mixed method of one-way analysis of variance (factorial) and repeated measurement was used. In addition, the Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965), Box' Test for Equivalence of Covariance Matrices (Box, 1949), and Mauchly' Test of Sphericity (Mauchly, 1940) were used to examine the assumptions of repeated measurement variance. The acceptable precision for this research was considered a 95% *CI*.

RESULTS

The mean and standard deviation of research variables in experimental and control groups in three stages of pre-test, post-test, and follow-up are shown in Table 2.

The examination of the assumption of normality of the distribution of variables, using the Shapiro-Wilk test, showed that all the statistical values obtained regarding the distribution of variables in all variable-related tests were not significant at the $p \leq .05$

Table 2. Results in Pre-test, Post-test, and Follow-Up.

Variables	Groups	Pre-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Post-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow Up <i>M (SD)</i>
Social acceptance	Experimental	11.40 (0.98)	21.26 (1.16)	18.60 (1.40)
	Control	11.53 (1.06)	12.46 (1.30)	11.53 (1.18)
Sense of coherence	Experimental	99.66 (6.98)	132.53 (8.40)	131.40 (8.80)
	Control	101.13 (2.23)	100.26 (5.43)	99.93 (6.11)
Comprehensibility	Experimental	47.60 (3.26)	48.52 (3.09)	48.66 (2.87)
	Control	46.06 (4.00)	45.33 (4.93)	45.86 (3.94)
Manageability	Experimental	37.33 (2.35)	48.86 (3.04)	47.80 (2.80)
	Control	37.86 (2.13)	38.06 (2.08)	37.73 (2.31)
Meaningfulness	Experimental	29.60 (2.82)	40.13 (3.77)	39.06 (3.80)
	Control	30.53 (2.69)	30.73 (2.43)	30.06 (2.71)

level. Therefore, the distribution of the variables was not significantly different from the normal distribution, and the distribution of the variables was normal.

The results of the *M* Box test and the Mauchly Test are indicated in Table 3. In examining the homogeneity of variances, Box' *M* test was applied to assess the equality of covariance matrices across the research variables and $p > .05$ suggests equality. Mauchly' Test of Sphericity was conducted to assess the assumption of sphericity for all variables and $p > .05$ indicating that the assumption of sphericity was met. Regarding Social Acceptance Box' *M* test (8.80) suggests that the covariance matrices are relatively equal, the *F*-value of 1.30 with a *p*-value of .25 indicating that there's no significant difference between the groups, and Mauchly' Test of Sphericity ($p = .18$) suggests that the assumption of sphericity was met. For Sense of Coherence, Box' *M* test (8.02) indicated relatively equal covariance matrices, the *F*-value of 1.18 with a *p*-value of .31 suggested no significant differences between groups, and the Mauchly' Test of Sphericity ($p = .000$) indicated a violation of the assumption of sphericity. In the case of Comprehensibility, Box' *M* test (4.41) suggests relatively equal covariance matrices, the *F*-value of .64 with a *p*-value of .69 indicated no significant differences between groups, and also Mauchly' Test of Sphericity ($p = .49$) suggested adherence to the assumption of sphericity. For Manageability, Box' *M* test (8.00) suggested relatively equal covariance matrices, the *F*-value of 1.17 with a *p*-value of .31 indicating no significant differences between groups, and Mauchly' Test of Sphericity ($p = .000$) indicated a violation of the assumption of sphericity. Lastly, for Meaningfulness, Box' *M* test (12.00) suggested relatively equal covariance matrices. The *F* value of 1.26 with a *p*-value of .11 indicating no significant differences between groups, and the Mauchly' Test of Sphericity ($p = .000$) indicating a violation of the assumption of sphericity. In instances of violated sphericity assumptions, corrected coefficients, specifically Geisser's coefficients, were employed in the analysis to ensure the validity of the results.

Table 3. Homogeneity of variances and variance-covariance matrix.

Variables	Box' <i>M</i>			Mauchly <i>W</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>W</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Social acceptance	8.80	1.30	.25	.93	3.39	.18
Sense of coherence	8.02	1.18	.31	.24	75.39	.000
Comprehensibility	4.41	.64	.69	.97	1.40	.49
Manageability	8.00	1.17	.31	.43	44.66	.000
Meaningfulness	12.00	1.26	.11	.22	81.23	.000

The results of one-way ANOVA with repeated measures in the study of the effectiveness of PCBGT on social acceptance and sense of coherence (with its subscales) are shown in Table 4. In examining the effect of time (investigating the difference between pre-test, post-test, and follow-up means) on the means of the variables, the obtained *F*

value (p value) included $F= 376.39$ for social acceptance ($p \leq .0001$), $F= 243.79$ for the sense of coherence ($p \leq .0001$), $F= 296.12$ for manageability ($p \leq .0001$), and $F= 153.82$ for meaningfulness ($p \leq .0001$) which are significant at the $p < .01$ level. However, the obtained F for comprehensibility was equal to 1.35 which was not significant at the $p < .05$. In examining the effect of the group (investigating the difference between the means in the two experimental and control groups) on the means of the variables, the obtained F value (p value) indicated a significant difference between groups in social acceptance ($F= 698.38$, $p \leq .0001$), in the sense of coherence ($F= 158.59$, $p \leq .0001$), in manageability ($F= 134.61$, $p \leq .0001$), and in meaningfulness ($F= 61.38$, $p \leq .0001$), which were significant at the $p < .01$ level. However, the obtained F for comprehensibility is equal to 5.09 which was not significant in $p < .05$. In studying the interactive effect of time and group (simultaneous comparison of pre-test, post-test, and follow-up means in both experimental and control groups) on the mean of variables, the F value (p value) obtained 281.58 for social acceptance ($p \leq .0001$), 283.19 for the sense of coherence ($p \leq .0001$), 294.10 for manageability ($p \leq .0001$), 162.81 for meaningfulness ($p \leq .0001$) which were significant at the $p < .01$ level and also 162.81 for comprehensibility was equal to 5.12 which was not significant at the $p < .05$.

Considering the effect size, the amount of obtained Eta squares in social acceptance ($\eta^2= .92$), Sense of coherence ($\eta^2= .74$), manageability ($\eta^2= .71$), and meaningfulness ($\eta^2= .52$) were more than .14 in research variables which indicated high effectiveness of the PCBT on the experimental group.

For pairwise comparisons of the mean scores of variables, the Bonferroni post

Table 4. Results of One-way ANOVA with repeated measures.

Variables	Sources	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Social acceptance	Time	856.97	2	428.48	376.39	.000	.87
	Group	1181.62	1	1181.62	698.38	.000	.92
	Time-group	641.11	2	320.55	281.58	.000	.83
Sense of coherence	Time	9079.73	1.14	7956.04	243.79	.000	.81
	Group	17850.27	1	17850.27	158.59	.000	.74
	Time-group	10547.28	1.14	9241.97	283.19	.000	.83
Comprehensibility	Time	4.74	2	2.37	1.35	.264	-
	Group	216.04	1	216.04	5.09	.018	-
	Time-group	18.30	2	9.15	5.12	.007	-
Manageability	Time	1153.29	1.28	901.10	296.12	.000	.84
	Group	191841	1	191841	134.61	.000	.71
	Time-group	1145.43	1.28	894.96	294.10	.000	.84
Meaningfulness	Time	913.74	1.12	812.23	153.82	.000	.73
	Group	1375.113	1	1375.11	61.38	.000	.52
	Time-group	967.12	1.12	859.68	162.81	.000	.74

Notes: df= degrees of freedom; MS= Mean Squares; SS= Sum of Squares.

hoc test was used, the results of which are shown in Table 5. The mean differences of social acceptance between Pretest-Posttest was 9.86 ($p < .01$), between Pretest-Follow Up was 7.20 ($p < .01$), and between Posttest-Follow Up was -2.66 ($p > .05$), self-coherence between Pretest-Posttest is 32.87 ($p < .01$), between Pretest-Follow Up was 31.74 ($p < .01$), and between Posttest-Follow Up was -1.13 ($p < .05$), manageability between Pretest-Posttest was 11.53 ($p < .01$), between Pretest-Follow Up was 10.47 ($p < .01$), and between Posttest-Follow Up was -1.06 ($p < .05$), and meaningfulness between Pretest-posttest was 10.53 ($p < .01$), between Pretest-Follow Up was 9.46 ($p < .01$), and between Posttest-Follow Up was -1.07 ($p < .05$). The results of this test show that the mean of the research variables (social acceptance, self-coherence, manageability, and meaningfulness) in the experimental group is significantly higher in the post-test and the Follow Up test than in the Pre-test ($p < .05$). Also, the difference between the scores

of the Post-test and the Follow Up test is not significant ($p < .05$). Therefore, PCBGT had a lasting effect on social acceptance, the sense of coherence, manageability, and meaningfulness over time.

Table 5. Results of Bonferroni *post hoc* test to compare the Mean scores in the stages of the Experimental Group.

Variables	Time comparison	<i>M</i> difference	<i>P</i>
Social acceptance	Pre-Post	9.86	.001
	Pre-FU	7.20	.001
	Post-FU	-2.66	.14
Sense of coherence	Pre-Post	32.87	.0001
	Pre-FU	31.74	.0001
	Post-FU	-1.13	.36
Manageability	Pre-Post	11.53	.0001
	Pre-FU	10.47	.0001
	Post-FU	-1.06	.31
Meaningfulness	Pre-Post	10.53	.0001
	Pre-FU	9.46	.0001
	Post-FU	-1.07	.29

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the effect of PCBGT on the sense of coherence and social acceptance in a randomized controlled trial on married female students with education-family conflict.

The results of analyzing the first hypothesis indicated that PCBGT has a positive effect on the sense of coherence, including its two subscales; manageability and meaningfulness. In PCBT, the goal of therapy is determined by the clients because they are considered experts in determining their goals and ways to achieve them. The process of therapy leads to the perception of life issues in a new way of focusing on the solution instead of focusing on the problem. Furthermore, people experience more ability to change and control their lives due to finding and implementing new solutions and behaving differently toward their goals (Bannink, 2012). As a result, a person's sense of coherence is strengthened in determining personal goals as well as in facing and resolving life challenges.

PCBT's focusing on positive experiences and abilities helps people to look at life in a new and positive way, which increases their optimism and psychological resources (Geschwind *et alii*, 2020). In this regard, one of the main techniques in PCBT, proposed by Peterson and Seligman (2004), is identifying and using signature character strengths that are considered an efficient intervention for helping people feel their lives are in more control, increase their resilience, and cope better with negative events and conflicts. Also, Mirshafiee and Jafari (2019) indicated that strength-based counseling increases future opportunities and decreases future limitations in male students. Identifying one's unique character strengths, being aware of the positive effect of applying these strengths to solving problems and challenges in different fields, and experiencing a pleasant and fulfilled life with the strong presence of virtues can strengthen the sense of coherence in a person.

In the group therapy process, members help each other to become more motivated to change by amending the conceptualization from problem to solution and by adopting a future-oriented attitude instead of a past-oriented one. Through awareness of successful exceptions, people learn what they did differently when there was no problem or the problem was less, and thus they can identify effective solutions (Bannink & Peeters, 2021) and experience higher manageability in matters of life.

The technique of writing a letter from the future to yourself leads to futuristic thinking, increases hope, and allows people to detailedly describe the preferred future they intend to achieve (Bannink, 2010). This letter helps them to identify important paths and tasks for achieving the future they hope for and to rely as much as possible on their abilities in the process (Bannink, 2007). This technique not only increases positive emotions in people by visualizing the preferred future but also determines the steps to achieve them. Accordingly, effective planning and managing these steps will improve the person's sense of coherence.

We applied reframing, as a technique in PCBT, to transform negative narratives into positive ones. Replacing blameful narratives that express self-blame and guilt with more compassionate, helpful, and calmer narratives about oneself, others, and the situation can be very beneficial (Gilbert, 2010). Thus, the students in the process of therapy identify altered and more positive narrations of the interpretation of education-family conflict that can lead to their intellectual and behavioral development; so that they can play different roles in their lives more efficiently. Amending impossibility stories, in which the impossibility of change is challenged (O'Hanlon & Bertolino, 2013) through making small changes in the process of group therapy, increases the feeling of mastery and control over the situations.

PCBT helps people look at stressful situations in life from a broader, longer-term perspective to give meaning to their lives. Pondering our present and future determines the meaning we give to life and all the difficulties we have experienced in the past. Sufferings of life are a source of strength instead of a source of weakness, and we can feel worthy and proud of using our strengths and skills to challenge them (Bannink, 2012). As another technique, identifying miracles also helps people to identify valuable and meaningful goals in their lives and the ways to achieve them (Bannink, 2010). All these mutual aspects of PCBT can improve meaningfulness in people, each in its specific manner.

The research's second question, which focused on the effect of PCBT on social acceptance in married female students with education-family conflict, was confirmed. PCBT describes the patterns of interactions that people have with others and investigates what clients need and want from a relationship. The inquiry for ways that people can communicate better with important people in their lives is considered during therapy (Bannink, 2012), which can affect the feeling of being accepted by others and social acceptance. Moreover, increasing optimism and self-esteem during the process of PCBT strengthens social resources, including deep relationships with spouses and friends, as well as resolving unresolved relational issues (Geschwind et alia, 2020).

In PCBT, using different techniques to increase compassion leads not only to understanding and accepting tensions, sufferings, and anxieties but also to an empathetic and compassionate relationship with oneself instead of denying negative emotions or blaming oneself. According to the theoretical basis, the mechanism of self-compassion consists of three steps: 1) self-acceptance, 2) accepting others, and 3) being accepted by others. Consequently, in the optimal condition of the psychotherapeutic process, self-compassion will eventually lead to social acceptance. (Gilbert, 2010). The research of Dolatabadi, Jafari, and Zabihi (2019) indicates that self-compassion-based group therapy can lead to the promotion of social relationships in menopausal women.

Other techniques in this approach, such as writing a letter from the future to your current self, positive imagery, and mindfulness, also increase positive emotions. Positive emotions, according to Fredrickson (2004), lead to increased happiness, optimism, and

improved relations with others. Subsequently, when people experience more positive emotions in their lives, they establish more constant and positive social relationships with others.

This study has four valuable strengths. First, according to our knowledge, education-family conflict in married female students was considered an advantageous research variable for the first time in Iran. Second, PCBT was used as a new intervention approach in the Iranian nonclinical population, which can be generalized to a broader population dealing with this conflict. Third, the nature of PCBT mainly focuses on the positive aspects of individuals related to psychological well-being, which makes it more encouraging and pleasurable for them to apply instead of the traditional Cognitive Behavioral Therapy that focuses on reducing mental health difficulties. Fourth, through getting and receiving corrective feedback from other members in group therapy, PCBGT provides more interactive opportunities for individuals to deal with issues from a solution- and a strengths-oriented perspective, as well as enabling them to practice new attitudes and behaviors in the realistic situation of the group.

The present study has three limitations. First, the study was conducted only on married female students with high education-family conflict; therefore, generalizing the results to men, non-students, employed, unmarried or divorced, and even married women without education-family conflict may not be accurate. The second limitation is that it had not been possible to control the situations of women's social life, including the quality of their relationships with family members, as well as how others react to the new therapeutic changes in their lives, since reinforcing, ignoring, or devaluing changes can affect the sense of coherence and social acceptance in women. The third limitation is that the definition of education-family conflict and what women have experienced about it might be slightly different in other countries than in Iran. That's why in the Iranian culture, most of the family responsibilities, including taking care of children, house chores, and in some cases meeting the needs of their husbands and their own immediate family, are expected to be done by women. Therefore, we cannot accurately say that the perceived psychological pressure of education-family conflict is the same in different cultures.

Education-family conflict can be related to the feeling of inability to manage and control the function of women's roles and responsibilities in both their family and university and can also be associated with women's feelings of inefficiency in social relations and low social acceptance.

The present study investigated the effect of PCBGT on married female students with education-family conflict to promote a sense of coherence and social acceptance. The PCBT approach deals with cognitive changes, including focusing on the preferred future rather than the past, moving toward goals that are valuable to clients, and identifying and expanding constructive beliefs; behavioral changes, including finding previous effective behaviors, eliminating repetitive and ineffective solutions, and creating and applying new solutions; and emotional changes, including activities for increasing positive emotions to help people achieve the goals that are valuable to them.

The results showed that PCBGT is positively effective in the sense of coherence and social acceptance in married female students with education-family conflict, and the group therapy results lasted up to three months. However, more research is needed to understand the mechanism of the effect of PCBGT on education-family conflict.

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