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## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BOWEN THEORY-BASED GROUP TRAINING ON MARRIED WOMEN'S DIFFERENTIATION AND ASSERTIVENESS 1(AS) IN DISTRICT 5 OF TEHRAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of Bowen theory-based training on married women's differentiation and assertiveness. **Method:** This study is has a quasi experimental method and pretest-posttest plan with control group. Among the married women referred to Health House in District 5 of Tehran, 30 subjects with lower levels of differentiation and assertiveness than others were purposefully selected as the samples and put in two 15-subject experimental and control groups by random assignment. Bowen theory training is implemented for 9 sessions on experimental group, but the control group received no intervention. The analysis of covariance indicates that there is a significant difference between the studied groups and the research hypothesis confirmed. **Results:** Bowen theory-based training affects the married women's differentiation and assertiveness.

**Keywords:** *Bowen Theory, Self Differentiation, Assertiveness, Health House in Region 5 of Tehran*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The family, as the first basis of creating the character, is the most basic factor which creates the individual differentiation or emotional independence (Bowen, 1978). According to Bowen theory or the theory of natural systems, the family is known as an emotional system. Bowen considers all family problems caused by the emotional system. According to his idea, the couple is the primary architect of emotional climate for family and children (Kerr and Bowen, 1988). The differentiation is grown in the main family according to the internal standard of family from the childhood and makes the person emotionally, intellectually or behaviorally dependent or independent on the main family during life. Bowen theory is based on the concept of differentiation (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2002; Roytburd and Friedlander, 2008; quoted by Yousefi, 2010).

According to Bowen, a kind of emotional system governs the structure of family and it has the intergenerational transfer ability; and the individual mental health depends on his differentiation level of this system (Roytburd and Friedlander, 2008).

1- Bowen's followers believe that the people tend to repeat the learned communication style in family, wherein they are raised, in mate selection and other important relationships and transfer the same models to their children. Bowen believes that people chose the spouses with the same level of differentiation as their own level, thus non-surprisingly the relatively undifferentiated individuals married those with the same level of fusion with original families. The more the family fusion is enhanced, the more the possibility of anxiety and instability will be increased and the family will tend to find a solution through war and strife, separation, and dysfunction (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2001; translated by Baravati *et al.*, 2011).

On this basis, the differentiated and undifferentiated people have the following characteristics:

1- The differentiated people show the emotional reaction to others' behavior and spend a major part of their energy on experience, expression and intensified emotions. In contrast, the differentiated individuals may experience strong emotions, but they are underdeveloped by these emotions and show controlled reactions.

2- When the inner experiences or interpersonal interactions are very stressful, the undifferentiated people get emotional distance from others, whereas the differentiated individuals do not emotionally feel to isolate from others; these people have strong identity.

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3- The undifferentiated people have fusion with others in intimate relationships, while those who are well differentiated are able to maintain their self-definition.

4- The differentiation is manifested in the ability. Those with the lack of differentiation are emotionally dependent on others (Momeni, 2013).

According to the definition of safe and effective family, the members have warm emotional relationships with each other, and have the unconditional love, have self identity in such these families, maintain the members, and are receptive to each other, the individual threshold of tolerance is high against the conflict and anxiety, and they voluntarily seek to help when necessary (Wlash, 2008; quoted by Moradi, 2000). In contrast, there is no satisfactory communications in dysfunctional families and there are numerous problems in interpersonal boundaries; the people have low morale and there are vast feelings of depression (Biverz, 1989).

Therefore, this question rises whether Bowen theory training can influence the women's differentiation and the use of personal positions or their assertiveness?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Objectives**

1. Determining the effectiveness of Bowen theory-based group training on women's differentiation and assertiveness.

### **Research Method**

The method applied in this study is semi-experimental according to the pretest-posttest type with control group. In this study, the subjects are randomly put into the experimental and control groups.

Before implementing the training courses, both groups are measured by differentiation and assertiveness tests. Those with low levels of differentiation and assertiveness are purposefully selected and classified into control and evidence groups by random assignment.

### **Statistical Population and Number of Samples**

The statistical population of this study consists of all women referred to Health House in District 5 of Tehran in winter 2013.

The sampling method of this study has non-random purposive type. The samples are selected by researcher in this method according to the evaluation of their differentiation and assertiveness, the aims of study and nature of research, thus the intentional sampling is another name of this method.

The sample size is equal to 30 and the questionnaires of pretest are distributed among several Health Houses in District 5. Since the nature of this research is semi-experimental, among 100 filled questionnaires by married women, 30 women who have lower differentiation and assertiveness than others and have accepted the class conditions including the full presence and no absence, doing the assignments, study of supplementary notes provided by researcher, etc, are selected and put into two 15-sample control and evidence groups by random assignment.

### **Data Analysis Method**

The analysis of covariance is utilized to evaluate the data and analysis of results in this study as well as investigating the mean of pre-test and post-test of control and experimental groups.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **Main Hypothesis**

**1-Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's differentiation and assertiveness.**

**Table 1: Results of Levene's test for investigating the equality of variance**

	F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	Significance level
Differentiation	1.416	1	28	0.244
Assertiveness	0.384	1	28	0.540

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Levene's hypothesis test for investigating the equality of variance for dependent variable among different groups (experimental, control) indicates that the variance of dependent variable is equal among these groups, thus the analysis of covariance can be utilized for these groups.

**Table 2: Results of analysis of covariance for the first hypothesis of dependent variable in posttest of differentiation and assertiveness levels**

Sources of variance		Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level	Eta coefficient
Covariance effect	Differentiation	663350.700	1	663350.700	13059.309	0.000	0.998
	Assertiveness	67497.633	1	67497.633	1007.758	0.000	0.973
Group (experimental/control)	Differentiation	21816.033	1	21816.033	429.490	0.000	0.939
	Assertiveness	4588.033	1	4588.033	68.502	0.000	0.710
Error	Differentiation	1422.267	28	50.795			
	Assertiveness	1875.333	28	66.976			
Total	Differentiation	686589.000	30				
	Assertiveness	73961.000	30				

According to the data of table above, since F=429.490 with degrees of freedom (df= 1 and df=28) is significant at the significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed with confidence level of 95%.

In other words, the Bowen theory-based training affects the women's level of differentiation and the ETA coefficient indicates that 93.9% of variance in women's differentiation level has been caused by Bowen theory-based group training.

Furthermore, according to the data of table above, since F=68.502 is significant at the significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed with confidence level of 95%. In other words, the Bowen theory-based training affects the women's level of assertiveness and the ETA coefficient indicates that 15.8% of variance in women's assertiveness level has been caused by Bowen theory-based group training.

*Sub-hypotheses*

**2-Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's emotional reactivity.**

Levene's hypothesis test for investigating the equality of variance for dependent variable among different groups (experimental, control) indicates that the variance of dependent variable is equal among these groups, thus the analysis of covariance can be utilized for analysis.

**Table 3: Results of Levene's test for investigating the equality of variance**

F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	Significance level
2.916	1	28	0.099

**Table 4: Results of analysis of covariance for the first sub-hypothesis of dependent variable in posttest of emotional reactivity as the dependent variable**

Sources of variance		Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level	Eta coefficients
Covariance effect		55987.200	1	55987.200	4589.115	0.000	0.994
Group (experimental/control)		2881.200	1	2881.200	236.164	0.000	0.894
Error		341.600	28	12.200			
Total		59210.000	30				

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According to the data of table above, since  $F=236.164$  is significant at the significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed with confidence level of 95%. In other words, the Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's emotional reactivity, and the ETA coefficient indicates that 89.4% of variance in women's emotional reactivity has been caused by Bowen theory-based group training.

**3- Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's self-position.**

Levene's hypothesis test for investigating the equality of variance for dependent variable among different groups (experimental, control) indicates that the variance of dependent variable is equal among these groups, thus the analysis of covariance can be utilized for analysis.

**Table 5: Results of Levene's test for investigating the equality of variance**

F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	Significance level
1.406	1	28	0.246

**Table 6: Results of analysis of covariance for the second sub-hypothesis of dependent variable in posttest of self-position as the dependent variable**

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level	Eta coefficients
Covariance effect	48964.800	1	48964.80	3125.413	0.000	0.991
Group (experimental/control)	3286.533	1	3286.533	209.779	0.000	0.882
Error	438.667	28	15.667			
Total	52690.000	30				

According to the data of table above, since  $F=209.779$  is significant at the significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed with confidence level of 95%. In other words, the Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's self-position, and the ETA coefficient indicates that 88.2% of variance in women's self-position has been caused by Bowen theory-based group training.

**4-Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's emotional cutoff.**

Levene's hypothesis test for investigating the equality of variance for dependent variable among different groups (experimental, control) indicates that the variance of dependent variable is equal among these groups, thus the analysis of covariance can be utilized for analysis.

**Table 7: Results of Levene's test for investigating the equality of variance**

F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	Significance level
2.496	1	28	0.125

**Table 8: Results of analysis of covariance for the third sub-hypothesis of dependent variable in posttest of emotional cutoff as the dependent variable**

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level	Eta coefficients
Covariance effect	33200.133	1	33200.133	5893.515	0.000	0.995
Group (experimental/control)	5658.133	1	5658.133	1004.402	0.000	0.973
Error	157.733	28	5.633			
Total	39016.000	30				

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According to the data of table above, since  $F=1004.402$  is significant at the significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed with confidence level of 95%. In other words, the Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's emotional cutoff, and the ETA coefficient indicates that 97.3% of variance in women's emotional cutoff has been caused by Bowen theory-based group training.

**5-Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's fusion with others.**

Levene's hypothesis test for investigating the equality of variance for dependent variable among different groups (experimental, control) indicates that the variance of dependent variable is equal among these groups, thus the analysis of covariance can be utilized for analysis.

**Table 9: Results of Levene's test for investigating the equality of variance**

F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	Significance level
0.822	1	28	0.372

**Table 10: Results of analysis of covariance for the fourth sub-hypothesis of dependent variable in posttest of fusion with others as the dependent variable**

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level	Eta coefficients
Covariance effect	30273.633	30273.63	30273.633	3855.34	0.000	0.993
Group (experimental/control)	5467.500	1	5467.500	696.386	0.000	0.961
Error	219.867	28	7.852			
Total	35961.000	30				

According to the data of table above, since  $F=696.286$  is significant at the significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed with confidence level of 95%. In other words, the Bowen theory-based group training affects the women's fusion with others, and the ETA coefficient indicates that 96.1% of variance in women's fusion with others has been caused by Bowen theory-based group training.

**Discussion**

**Main hypothesis:** Bowen theory-based training affects the women's differentiation and assertiveness.

The results of analysis of covariance indicate that the hypothesis above is confirmed according to the data of Table (4-13) with the f-value of  $F=429.490$  at the significance level of  $\alpha= 0.05$ . It should be noted that there is no conducted study in this regard according to the researcher's investigation; thus the studies associated with this research are utilized for comparing the results of this study with previous studies. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of other studies indicating that the Bowen theory-based training reduces other problems.

Several studies are available for the influence of self-differentiation training on different dependent variables and their findings have supported its effectiveness on various relevant findings such as the mental health, reduced decision-making problems, etc.

The findings of this research are consistent with the foreign studies by Pelg (2008) and Skowron and Dendy (2002). According to the research findings, when the self differentiation is low based on the theory of systems theory, there is probably the self fusion which leads to the reduced subjectivity and the same thoughts and feelings in person with others. Since the conscious anxiety control is the basis of self differentiation process, the self differentiation training, which is resulted from the expression and separation of emotions and thoughts, reduces the anxiety in interpersonal relationships and allows for the emergence of self-strength and assertiveness. Since the person without the assertiveness feels to be incapable of control over the anxiety, the anxiety motivates and controls him. Therefore, the Bowen theory and self differentiation training gives the person the ability to control the anxiety in interpersonal

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situation and thus he acts with assertiveness. A person with the assertiveness ability assesses the situation and decides how to act without anxiety and sense of guilt.

On the other hand, the assertiveness includes the protection of self right and expression of self ideas and feelings in an appropriate, direct and honest manner, while the people without assertiveness have problems in expressing their ideas, feelings and attitudes which are the main aims of self differentiation, and also are unable to establish the proper communication with others. Therefore, it is expected that the person will gain the assertiveness by self differentiation and interpersonal relationships, gain stronger self-position, and able to express his ideas and feelings easier and better.

A person with enough assertiveness is able to express his views and this suggests the self-position which is achieved by self differentiation. In self differentiation training, the person learns how to respond to situations by differentiating his situation from others. Such this change leads to the enhanced assertiveness because the selection and responsiveness by different way requires the assertiveness. In other words, a person is differentiated, when his emotional needs and safety do not force him to lose or limit his individuality for ensuring the other individuals' love and acceptability.

They are not easily influenced by others to share or attract their thoughts and feelings and do not show the issues, problems, failures, anxiety and signs of damage for other people (Fischer, 2006). The differentiated people tend to have higher self determination in their relationships without experiencing the disabling fears and anxieties cut their relationships, and have tendency to experience more intimacy in their relationships with sinking down into the feelings (Popko, 2002). They are aware of the objectives of life, ideas and beliefs and have a clear definition of them. They do not involuntarily deal with situations, but control them according to the reason and logic. According to this component in self differentiation training, we expect the people who participate in sessions to have more assertiveness. By strengthening and acquiring the characteristics as the differentiated individuals' traits, the person is not affected by the wave prevailing the situations no longer. This means the assertiveness. The assertive individual does not rely on others, does not act passively, he is not timid and does not afraid of losing the others' approval. Furthermore, he is aware of his own and others' wishes and needs and cares about them.

The obtained results about this first sub-hypothesis suggest that the less differentiated or more emotional person is more reactive and spends his more energy on experiencing and feelings. It may be difficult for this person to remain calm in response to the other individuals' emotions. He is trapped in an emotional world, but is able to reduce these complications by training this theory and applying it according to the results of this research. The obtained results of the second sub-hypothesis suggest that the families where the relationships and interactions among members are on the basis of proximity, respect and protection of individual independence, the members do not physically and emotionally separate from the family in the case of stressful situations. The families with low performance in this regard will cause the members' cutoff, lack of intimacy and low satisfaction. Differentiation training enhances the level of differentiating in families, defines the boundaries and thus makes the person away from the risk of emotional cutoff.

The obtained results of third sub-hypothesis suggest that according to Bowen theory, the emotional interaction is the main problem in families, and it is solved by differentiation. It is concluded that those with low self differentiation have more fusion with others in their close relationships and thus Bowen theory training leads the relations with family members towards its natural state through a certain policy in dealing with family members. The obtained results of fourth sub-hypothesis indicate that the individuals with high self differentiation are well aware of their beliefs and have the sense of individuality. Those who differentiate between emotions and wisdom in family disputes, are able to protect their rights, insist on their position, but not captured by their feelings. This item directly affects the ability of assertiveness and facilitates the way of individual differentiation.

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