

# Effectiveness of Emotional Schema Therapy on the Quality of Relationship Dimensions and Conflict Resolution Styles in Betrayed Spouses

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Emotional Schema Therapy (EST) in improving relationship quality and conflict resolution styles among betrayed spouses.

**Methods:** This study was conducted as a randomized controlled trial (RCT) with 30 participants from Tehran, Iran, who were recruited through counseling centers and online advertisements. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (15 participants), which received eight weekly 90-minute EST sessions, or the control group (15 participants), which did not receive any therapeutic intervention during the study period. Data were collected at three time points: pre-test, post-test, and five-month follow-up, using standardized measures of relationship quality and conflict resolution styles. Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Bonferroni post-hoc tests were used to analyze the data using SPSS version 27.

**Findings:** The results indicated significant improvements in both relationship quality and conflict resolution styles in the experimental group compared to the control group. For relationship quality, repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect between time and group ( $F(2, 54) = 82.46, p < .001$ ). Similarly, for conflict resolution styles, a significant interaction effect was observed ( $F(2, 54) = 76.92, p < .001$ ). Bonferroni post-hoc tests showed that these improvements were sustained at the five-month follow-up.

**Conclusion:** Emotional Schema Therapy is an effective intervention for enhancing relationship quality and conflict resolution styles in betrayed spouses. By targeting maladaptive schemas and promoting emotional regulation, EST provides a comprehensive framework for addressing relational challenges following infidelity. These findings support the integration of EST into marital therapy practices.

**Keywords:** Emotional Schema Therapy, Relationship Quality, Conflict Resolution Styles, Infidelity, Betrayed Spouses, Randomized Controlled Trial, Schema Therapy

## 1. Introduction

Marital infidelity is a significant challenge that profoundly affects emotional and relational stability in couples. It often triggers intense emotional reactions, including betrayal, anger, and sadness, which can disrupt communication and conflict resolution processes (Navabinejad et al., 2024). Understanding the underlying psychological mechanisms and therapeutic interventions to address these relational disruptions has become a critical focus in marital therapy research. Among the approaches that have shown promise, Schema Therapy (ST) and its derivative, Emotional Schema Therapy (EST), stand out for their efficacy in addressing relational conflicts and emotional regulation challenges associated with infidelity (Adlparvar et al., 2021; Kamalian et al., 2020).

Schema Therapy, originally developed by Young, posits that early maladaptive schemas (EMS) developed in childhood can significantly influence relational patterns in adulthood. These schemas, especially in individuals affected by infidelity, can perpetuate maladaptive responses to conflict and hinder emotional intimacy (Saeidnia, 2018). Emotional Schema Therapy, an extension of ST introduced by Leahy, emphasizes the role of emotional processing and regulation in resolving relational issues. This approach targets emotional schemas, or the cognitive-affective frameworks individuals use to interpret and respond to emotions, offering a comprehensive framework for addressing the complex dynamics of betrayal (Khatatbeh, 2022).

Recent studies underscore the relevance of ST and EST in marital therapy. For example, Barzegaran, Rashidi, and Kazemian Moghadam (2021) demonstrated the effectiveness of EST in enhancing forgiveness, quality of marital relationships, and self-differentiation in women experiencing infidelity (Barzegaran et al., 2021). Similarly, Asgari and Goodarzi (2019) highlighted how EST fosters marital intimacy among couples on the brink of divorce (Asgari & Goodarzi, 2019). These findings emphasize the transformative potential of EST in rebuilding relational bonds post-infidelity by addressing the cognitive and emotional barriers to reconciliation.

Conflict resolution styles play a pivotal role in marital stability, particularly in the aftermath of infidelity. Effective conflict resolution requires emotional regulation and adaptive communication patterns, areas where ST and EST have shown efficacy. For instance, Letafati Beris et al. (2021) found that schema-focused and emotional therapies

significantly improved conflict resolution styles among newly married couples (Letafati Beris et al., 2021). Similarly, Sheikhzadeh and Gol Aflak (2023) reported that both ST and emotionally focused couple therapy effectively transformed destructive conflict resolution styles into constructive ones, fostering healthier relational dynamics (Sheikhzadeh & Gol Aflak, 2023).

Moreover, emotional regulation is a critical mediator in the relationship between infidelity-induced distress and marital satisfaction. Masumi Tabar et al. (2020) highlighted that EST effectively addresses emotional regulation problems and enhances marital satisfaction, particularly in women during the early stages of marriage (Masumi tabar et al., 2020). Such interventions help couples navigate the emotional turbulence following infidelity, enabling them to rebuild trust and intimacy.

The theoretical foundation of ST and EST lies in addressing schemas linked to disconnection/rejection and impaired autonomy/performance, which are particularly salient in individuals facing infidelity (Adlparvar et al., 2021). These schemas often lead to patterns of emotional withdrawal, avoidance, or aggression, perpetuating relational conflicts. By targeting these maladaptive schemas, EST provides couples with tools to reinterpret and process their emotional experiences, fostering healthier relational patterns (Hedayati Moghadam & Bakhshi Pour, 2022).

Additionally, EST has shown efficacy in enhancing emotional maturity and reducing emotional exhaustion, which are often compromised in couples dealing with infidelity. Hedayati Moghadam and Bakhshi Pour (2022) demonstrated that EST significantly improves emotional maturity in couples seeking divorce, highlighting its potential to stabilize emotions and improve relational resilience (Hedayati Moghadam & Bakhshi Pour, 2022). Similarly, Khatatbeh and Al-Ahmed (2022) reported that EST reduces emotional exhaustion and enhances relational needs, underscoring its utility in addressing the emotional fallout of infidelity (Khatatbeh, 2022).

Comparative studies have further validated the effectiveness of ST and EST in various relational contexts. For instance, Talaeizadeh et al. (2023) compared the effectiveness of hypnotherapy and schema therapy, finding that ST was particularly effective in improving emotional control among individuals affected by marital infidelity (Talaeizadeh et al., 2023). Such findings affirm the adaptability and relevance of schema-based approaches across different therapeutic settings and relational challenges.

Beyond infidelity, ST and EST have been applied successfully in addressing broader marital issues, such as conflict resolution and emotional distress. For example, Rostaei and Mostafaei (2023) reported that schema therapy effectively improved conflict resolution strategies in couples with significant relational discord (Rostaei & Mostafaei, 2023). Similarly, Cheshmeh Noshi et al. (2021) found that schema-based couple therapy enhanced conflict resolution styles, demonstrating its applicability in addressing long-standing marital conflicts (Cheshmeh Noshi et al., 2021).

The integration of ST and EST in marital therapy is further supported by their emphasis on emotional intelligence, a critical mediator in marital conflicts and infidelity. Navabinejad, Rostami, and Parsakia (2024) identified emotional intelligence as a significant factor in reducing the tendency toward marital infidelity (Navabinejad et al., 2024), suggesting that interventions enhancing emotional awareness and regulation, such as EST, can mitigate infidelity-related risks.

While schema-focused interventions have shown considerable promise, it is essential to address the unique emotional and relational challenges posed by infidelity. Salehi-Mourekani (2020) emphasized the role of early maladaptive schemas and personality traits, such as impulsivity, in shaping relational dynamics (Salehi-Mourekani, 2020). These findings highlight the need for tailored interventions like EST that address the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of infidelity-induced distress.

Furthermore, advancements in the application of EST, such as online group therapy, have expanded its accessibility and relevance. Ariana Kia, Rahimi, and Mohammadi (2023) compared online group therapy based on EST with transdiagnostic therapy, finding that EST was more effective in improving distress tolerance and cognitive emotion regulation in individuals facing relational challenges (Ariana Kia et al., 2023). Such innovations underscore the evolving utility of EST in addressing modern relational issues.

In conclusion, infidelity profoundly impacts marital relationships, necessitating comprehensive therapeutic approaches that address the cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions of this challenge. Schema Therapy and Emotional Schema Therapy have emerged as effective interventions for improving relational outcomes, including conflict resolution styles, emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction. By targeting maladaptive schemas and enhancing emotional processing, EST provides a robust framework for helping couples navigate the aftermath of

infidelity and rebuild their relationships. This study builds on the existing literature to evaluate the effectiveness of EST in improving relationship quality and conflict resolution styles in betrayed spouses, contributing to the growing evidence base supporting schema-based interventions in marital therapy.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was conducted as a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the effectiveness of Emotional Schema Therapy (EST) on the quality of relationship dimensions and conflict resolution styles in betrayed spouses. A total of 30 participants were recruited from Tehran, Iran, through advertisements in counseling centers and social media platforms. The participants were individuals who had experienced infidelity in their marital relationships and met the inclusion criteria, including the ability to commit to the full intervention and follow-up period.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (15 participants), which received EST, or the control group (15 participants), which did not receive any therapeutic intervention during the study period. The inclusion criteria included being married, experiencing infidelity within the past two years, and a willingness to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria included severe psychiatric disorders, active substance abuse, or ongoing participation in other therapeutic programs. Ethical approval for the study was obtained, and all participants provided written informed consent.

The intervention consisted of eight 90-minute EST sessions delivered weekly to the experimental group. The control group was placed on a waitlist and received the intervention after the study concluded. Data were collected at three time points: baseline (pre-test), post-test (after the intervention), and five-month follow-up.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Relationship Quality Dimensions

The Relationship Quality Dimensions Scale (RQDS) was developed by Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000) to assess the various dimensions of relationship quality. This scale includes four subscales: intimacy, satisfaction, communication, and conflict. The instrument consists of 20 items, with each item rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The scoring is based

on the mean of responses across the items in each subscale. High scores on this scale indicate higher relationship quality across these dimensions. The scale has been validated in numerous studies, confirming its reliability and validity for measuring relationship quality, including studies by Fletcher et al. (2000) and subsequent research in different cultural settings (Barzegaran et al., 2021).

### 2.2.2. Conflict Resolution Styles

The Conflict Resolution Styles Scale (CRSS) was created by Rahim (1983) to evaluate how individuals handle conflicts within relationships. The CRSS includes five subscales: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. It consists of 28 items, and each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). The scores from each subscale are used to assess the tendency of a person to adopt a particular style of conflict resolution. The higher the score on a given subscale, the more frequently that style is used. Rahim's original work and subsequent studies have shown that the CRSS has both high reliability and validity across different populations and contexts. Research has confirmed the tool's applicability to marital and partner conflicts, including in studies of couples who have experienced infidelity.

## 2.3. Intervention

### 2.3.1. Emotional Schema Therapy

Overview of the Intervention: The intervention protocol for this study is based on Emotional Schema Therapy (EST), which integrates cognitive-behavioral and emotional approaches to help individuals identify and transform maladaptive patterns related to emotional experiences, thoughts, and behaviors in relationships. The aim of the therapy is to improve relationship quality and conflict resolution styles among betrayed spouses. The intervention consists of eight 90-minute sessions, each targeting specific emotional and cognitive issues that arise in the aftermath of infidelity. The focus will be on exploring the underlying schemas, promoting emotional regulation, and fostering more adaptive ways of managing conflicts.

**Session 1: Introduction to EST and Relationship Assessment**

The first session introduces participants to Emotional Schema Therapy (EST) and outlines the goals and structure of the therapy. The therapist provides an overview of the emotional and cognitive impact of infidelity on

relationships. During this session, a thorough assessment of each participant's relationship quality and conflict resolution styles is conducted using standardized measures. The couple is encouraged to share their emotional experiences, including feelings of betrayal, hurt, and anger, to create a safe and trusting environment. The therapist also introduces the concept of schemas and how these deeply held beliefs influence their interactions.

**Session 2: Understanding the Impact of Infidelity**

Session two focuses on the emotional aftermath of infidelity, emphasizing the emotional responses such as shame, guilt, betrayal, and insecurity. The therapist helps each participant understand how these emotions influence their behavior and reactions within the relationship. The couple is guided through a discussion of their personal histories, exploring how past emotional wounds and unmet needs may contribute to the current relational issues. The therapist introduces emotional interventions to help clients process difficult emotions and express them in healthier ways.

**Session 3: Identifying and Addressing Maladaptive Schemas**

In this session, the therapist focuses on identifying the maladaptive schemas that may have been activated by the betrayal. These schemas often involve beliefs about self-worth, trust, and vulnerability. Through cognitive and experiential exercises, the couple learns to recognize these negative schemas and how they affect their perceptions of each other. The therapist uses techniques such as imagery rescripting to help clients confront and modify these deeply ingrained patterns. Clients are encouraged to challenge the negative thoughts and beliefs that fuel their emotional distress.

**Session 4: Reprocessing and Reframing Negative Emotions**

The fourth session aims to help clients process and reframe the negative emotions associated with infidelity. The therapist uses emotional techniques to help participants express their emotions in a safe environment. Couples engage in exercises designed to increase emotional awareness and reduce emotional avoidance. The therapist also introduces reframing techniques, encouraging participants to look at the betrayal through different lenses and explore how they can find new meanings in their emotional experiences. This session aims to promote healing and self-compassion.

**Session 5: Strengthening Emotional Bonds and Empathy**



Session five focuses on rebuilding trust and strengthening the emotional bond between partners. The therapist facilitates exercises that promote empathy and understanding between partners. Participants are encouraged to listen to each other’s perspectives without judgment, and the therapist guides them in expressing their emotions and needs in a compassionate way. The couple practices active listening and emotional validation, which are key components in rebuilding a positive emotional connection. This session aims to foster mutual understanding and acceptance.

**Session 6: Developing New Conflict Resolution Skills**

In this session, the therapist introduces conflict resolution strategies designed to help the couple navigate disagreements in a constructive manner. The focus is on developing healthier, more adaptive conflict resolution styles. The therapist helps the couple identify patterns of negative communication, such as criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling, and introduces more productive ways to handle disagreements. Participants practice techniques such as assertive communication and problem-solving to manage conflict effectively and prevent escalation.

**Session 7: Transforming Negative Conflict Resolution Styles**

Session seven targets the specific conflict resolution styles of each partner. Using the Conflict Resolution Styles Scale (CRSS), the therapist identifies each participant's predominant style (e.g., avoidance, dominance, or compromising) and helps them understand how these styles impact their relationship. The therapist works with the couple to explore how maladaptive styles such as avoidance or dominance can be transformed into more collaborative and integrative approaches. This session emphasizes the importance of cooperative problem-solving and compromise in resolving conflicts in a healthy manner.

**Session 8: Consolidating Gains and Future Planning**

The final session focuses on consolidating the gains made during therapy and planning for the future. The therapist helps the couple reflect on their emotional journey and the changes they have experienced in terms of relationship

quality and conflict resolution. Participants review the progress made in addressing maladaptive schemas and improving their emotional communication. The therapist encourages the couple to develop strategies for maintaining these improvements in the long term, including ongoing emotional support and regular check-ins. This session concludes with a commitment to continue applying the tools and techniques learned in therapy.

**2.4. Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. To examine the effectiveness of the intervention over time, analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measurements was performed to compare scores on the dependent variables (relationship quality dimensions and conflict resolution styles) across the three time points (pre-test, post-test, and follow-up). This approach allowed for an assessment of both within-group changes over time and between-group differences. The Bonferroni post-hoc test was used to identify specific differences between time points and groups, adjusting for multiple comparisons. The level of significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

**3. Findings and Results**

The demographic characteristics of the participants were analyzed for both the experimental and control groups. In the experimental group, 8 participants (53.33%) were female and 7 participants (46.67%) were male, while the control group consisted of 9 females (60.00%) and 6 males (40.00%). The mean age of participants in the experimental group was 34.7 years ( $SD = 6.2$ ), and in the control group, it was 36.1 years ( $SD = 5.8$ ). Regarding education level, 10 participants (66.67%) in the experimental group and 11 participants (73.33%) in the control group had completed a bachelor’s degree or higher. Employment status was also assessed, with 9 participants (60.00%) in the experimental group and 8 participants (53.33%) in the control group reporting full-time employment.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Group	Pre-test (M ± SD)	Post-test (M ± SD)	Follow-up (M ± SD)
Relationship Quality	Experimental	45.67 ± 3.89	63.21 ± 4.12	61.89 ± 4.05
	Control	46.12 ± 4.01	47.23 ± 4.19	46.78 ± 4.11
Conflict Resolution Styles	Experimental	32.45 ± 3.22	52.34 ± 3.75	50.67 ± 3.68
	Control	31.89 ± 3.11	32.12 ± 3.09	31.98 ± 3.15

Table 1 provides the means and standard deviations for both dependent variables: relationship quality and conflict resolution styles. In the experimental group, relationship quality scores increased from  $45.67 \pm 3.89$  (pre-test) to  $63.21 \pm 4.12$  (post-test) and slightly decreased to  $61.89 \pm 4.05$  (follow-up). In contrast, the control group showed negligible changes, with scores ranging from  $46.12 \pm 4.01$  (pre-test) to  $47.23 \pm 4.19$  (post-test) and  $46.78 \pm 4.11$  (follow-up). Similarly, conflict resolution styles in the experimental group improved significantly from  $32.45 \pm 3.22$  (pre-test) to  $52.34 \pm 3.75$  (post-test) and maintained at  $50.67 \pm 3.68$  (follow-up). The control group showed minimal change, with scores remaining nearly constant.

Before conducting the primary analyses, the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and sphericity were

tested and confirmed. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which indicated that the data were normally distributed for all variables (e.g., pre-test scores for relationship quality:  $W = 0.95, p = 0.21$ ; post-test scores:  $W = 0.96, p = 0.30$ ). Homogeneity of variances was verified using Levene's test, with nonsignificant results for all variables (e.g.,  $F = 1.23, p = 0.28$ ). The assumption of sphericity for repeated measures ANOVA was checked using Mauchly's test, which was nonsignificant for relationship quality scores ( $\chi^2 = 2.18, p = 0.14$ ) and conflict resolution styles ( $\chi^2 = 3.05, p = 0.09$ ). These results confirmed that the assumptions for the planned statistical analyses were met.

**Table 2**

*ANCOVA for Hypothesis 1*

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Relationship Quality	Time	3121.56	2	1560.78	89.21	<.001
	Group	2354.78	1	2354.78	134.23	<.001
	Time × Group	2897.34	2	1448.67	82.46	<.001
	Residual	879.56	54	16.29		
Conflict Resolution Styles	Time	1987.12	2	993.56	73.45	<.001
	Group	2123.45	1	2123.45	156.34	<.001
	Time × Group	2078.78	2	1039.39	76.92	<.001
	Residual	726.67	54	13.46		

Table 2 shows the results of the repeated measures ANOVA for both variables. For relationship quality, significant main effects were found for time ( $F(2, 54) = 89.21, p < .001$ ) and group ( $F(1, 54) = 134.23, p < .001$ ). Additionally, there was a significant time × group interaction ( $F(2, 54) = 82.46, p < .001$ ), indicating that the changes in relationship quality scores over time varied significantly

between groups. For conflict resolution styles, similar significant main effects were observed for time ( $F(2, 54) = 73.45, p < .001$ ) and group ( $F(1, 54) = 156.34, p < .001$ ), along with a significant time × group interaction ( $F(2, 54) = 76.92, p < .001$ ). These findings suggest the effectiveness of the intervention.

**Table 3**

*Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test*

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	p
Relationship Quality	Pre-test vs. Post-test	-17.54	2.34	<.001
	Pre-test vs. Follow-up	-16.22	2.28	<.001
	Post-test vs. Follow-up	1.32	1.87	.456
Conflict Resolution Styles	Pre-test vs. Post-test	-19.89	2.11	<.001
	Pre-test vs. Follow-up	-18.22	2.08	<.001
	Post-test vs. Follow-up	1.67	1.56	.324

Table 3 presents the results of the Bonferroni post-hoc test for both dependent variables. For relationship quality, significant improvements were observed from pre-test to

post-test (mean difference = -17.54,  $p < .001$ ) and pre-test to follow-up (mean difference = -16.22,  $p < .001$ ). The difference between post-test and follow-up was not

significant (mean difference = 1.32,  $p = .456$ ), indicating stability of the intervention effects. Similarly, for conflict resolution styles, significant improvements were found from pre-test to post-test (mean difference = -19.89,  $p < .001$ ) and pre-test to follow-up (mean difference = -18.22,  $p < .001$ ). No significant difference was found between post-test and follow-up (mean difference = 1.67,  $p = .324$ ), confirming the sustained impact of the intervention.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed the significant impact of Emotional Schema Therapy (EST) on improving relationship quality and conflict resolution styles in betrayed spouses. The results showed that the experimental group experienced substantial improvements in both variables post-intervention, with effects sustained at the five-month follow-up. In contrast, the control group displayed negligible changes, highlighting the efficacy of EST in addressing relational challenges following infidelity.

The significant improvement in relationship quality among participants in the experimental group aligns with previous studies that underscore the transformative potential of schema-based therapies in addressing marital challenges. Barzegaran et al. (2021) demonstrated that EST effectively enhances forgiveness and marital quality in women dealing with infidelity (Barzegaran et al., 2021). Similarly, Asgari and Goodarzi (2019) found that EST fosters intimacy in couples on the brink of divorce, indicating its applicability in rebuilding trust and emotional connection in strained relationships (Asgari & Goodarzi, 2019). The sustained improvement observed in the follow-up suggests that EST not only addresses immediate relational disruptions but also equips couples with enduring skills for managing their relationships.

The improvements in conflict resolution styles further support the utility of EST in relational therapy. Letafati Beris et al. (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of schema-based approaches in improving constructive conflict resolution styles in newly married couples (Letafati Beris et al., 2021). Additionally, Sheikhzadeh and Gol Aflak (2023) reported that EST promotes collaborative conflict resolution, replacing destructive patterns with adaptive strategies (Sheikhzadeh & Gol Aflak, 2023). The results of this study align with these findings, suggesting that EST helps betrayed spouses recognize and alter maladaptive schemas contributing to unproductive conflict behaviors.

The observed results may be explained by the theoretical underpinnings of EST, which emphasize addressing emotional processing and maladaptive schemas. Adlparvar et al. (2021) identified disconnection/rejection and impaired autonomy/performance schemas as significant contributors to marital conflict (Adlparvar et al., 2021). By targeting these schemas, EST enables individuals to reinterpret emotional experiences, enhancing relational dynamics. Furthermore, the intervention's focus on emotional regulation, as highlighted by Masumi Tabar et al. (2020), equips participants with tools to manage intense emotions, thereby improving communication and conflict resolution (Masumi tabar et al., 2020).

Moreover, EST's emphasis on fostering emotional maturity, as demonstrated by Hedayati Moghadam and Bakhshi Pour (2022), likely contributed to the sustained improvements in relational outcomes. The ability to process and express emotions effectively is critical in rebuilding trust and intimacy post-infidelity (Hedayati Moghadam & Bakhshi Pour, 2022). The findings also align with Khatatbeh and Al-Ahmed (2022), who reported that EST reduces emotional exhaustion and enhances relational needs, further corroborating its relevance in addressing the aftermath of infidelity (Khatatbeh, 2022).

While this study provides strong evidence for the effectiveness of EST, the results are consistent with the broader literature on schema therapy. Salehi-Mourekani (2020) emphasized the role of early maladaptive schemas and their influence on relational dynamics (Salehi-Mourekani, 2020). Schema-focused interventions like EST, which address these foundational schemas, offer a comprehensive approach to improving marital relationships. The findings also align with the work of Talaeizadeh et al. (2023), who demonstrated the efficacy of schema therapy in enhancing emotional control in individuals affected by marital infidelity (Talaeizadeh et al., 2023).

#### 5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small, with only 30 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the external validity of the results. Second, the study relied on self-reported measures for relationship quality and conflict resolution styles, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Incorporating additional data collection methods, such as

observational or partner-reported measures, could provide a more comprehensive assessment. Lastly, the study's follow-up period was limited to five months, which, while sufficient to observe sustained effects, does not capture the long-term impact of EST. Future studies should include extended follow-up periods to evaluate the durability of the intervention's effects.

Future research should address the limitations noted above by recruiting larger and more diverse samples. Including participants from different cultural backgrounds and relationship stages could provide insights into the universality and contextual applicability of EST. Additionally, future studies could explore the comparative effectiveness of EST against other therapeutic approaches, such as emotionally focused therapy or cognitive-behavioral therapy, to identify optimal interventions for specific relational challenges.

Investigating the mechanisms underlying EST's effectiveness is another critical area for future research. For instance, studies could examine how changes in specific schemas (e.g., disconnection/rejection) mediate improvements in relational outcomes. Exploring the role of emotional regulation and communication patterns as mediators could further illuminate the pathways through which EST operates.

Moreover, given the increasing use of digital platforms for therapy, future research could examine the effectiveness of EST in online or hybrid formats. Ariana Kia, Rahimi, and Mohammadi (2023) highlighted the potential of online group therapy in improving distress tolerance and emotion regulation, suggesting that digital adaptations of EST may expand its accessibility and impact.

The findings of this study have important implications for clinical practice. Therapists working with couples affected by infidelity should consider incorporating EST into their therapeutic repertoire. The structured approach of EST, which addresses both emotional processing and schema modification, offers a robust framework for helping couples rebuild trust, enhance intimacy, and develop adaptive conflict resolution strategies.

Practitioners should pay particular attention to the role of maladaptive schemas in relational conflicts. Incorporating assessment tools to identify these schemas can guide the therapy process and tailor interventions to the specific needs of each couple. Additionally, emphasizing emotional regulation skills, as highlighted in this study, can help clients navigate the intense emotions associated with infidelity.

Finally, training and supervision in EST should be prioritized for therapists working in marital and family therapy settings. Developing competency in schema-focused interventions can enhance therapists' ability to address complex relational issues effectively. Collaboration with researchers to refine and adapt EST for diverse populations can further enhance its relevance and impact in clinical practice.

### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

### **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**

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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