



Efficacy of the Gottman Method in Enhancing Relationship Quality in Couples with and Without Children

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Abstract. The Gottman Method is an evidence-based model of communication skill improvement and strengthening emotional ties, popularizing conflict as an acceptable resolution mechanism in recent years. Online and offline were the two forms of interventions used in this comparative research study undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the Gottman Method in enhancing relationship dynamics.

The study was divided into four groups. Participants and significant aspects such as emotional awareness, friendship building, shared meaning, conflict management, and trust building were considered, with emphasis placed on Gottman oriented intervention. Relationship quality improvement was assessed before and after the intervention using the standardized psychological test QMRS (Quality of Marital Relationship Scale).

Results reflected that relationship quality in all groups was significantly enhanced with intervention. Couples with children scored higher on conflict management and relationship stability compared to those without children, while emotional penetration and clarity of communication were relatively higher among childless couples. Both online and offline delivery methods were effective, though offline sessions yielded slightly higher results in terms of emotional involvement, whereas online sessions offered similar benefits with greater flexibility and accessibility.

The research also recommends enhancing therapeutic services through online platforms without compromising intervention quality.

Keywords: Gottman Method, Relationship Quality, Couples Therapy, Online Intervention, Offline Intervention, Parental Status, Marital Satisfaction, Conflict Management

1 INTRODUCTION

The cornerstone of a happy family is a good couple's relationship. Parenting is recognized to be stressful, to change roles, and to temporarily reduce relationship happiness (Lawrence et al., 2008). Research has shown that early parenting year are

consistently linked to less closeness, more conflict, and less time spent in the marital or partner connection (Jean et al., 2004).

Couples therapy and other therapeutic methods assist partners in strengthening their bond, resolving conflict, and improving communication. The Gottman Method is regarded as one of the strategies for improving couple functioning that has the strongest scientific backing. Over forty years of meticulously carried out empirical observational studies led to the development of this methodology. The "Sound Relationship House" concept serves as the foundation for the Gottman Method, which emphasizes fostering friendship, resolving conflict amicably, creating shared purpose, and improving communication.

Although the program has been shown to be helpful in a variety of demographics, little is known about its efficacy in India, or whether online distribution is as effective as offline workshops (Davoondi et al., 2018; Garanzini et al., 2017; Hosseinpour et al., 2020). Furthermore, previous studies have not examined couples with and without children, despite evidence that parental duties may affect therapeutic responsiveness.

This study addresses these gaps by evaluating the efficacy of Gottman's online and offline therapies for childless and child-bearing Indian couples.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on interventions created with a Gottman Method approach currently shows that it has very positive effects on a wide range of demographic and psychological situations. The Gottman Method is based on decades of observational research and the theory of the "Sound Relationship House," which teaches couples how to develop friendship, construct a container for conflict, and create a space for shared meaning. What has been published on this clinical approach can be summarized as: effectiveness in diverse populations, the relative effectiveness of this approach to other well established clinical approaches, the subtleties of different delivery modes, and the gaps in the current research landscape.

2.1 Efficacy in Diverse Populations

- **Marital Intimacy and Adjustment**

Recent clinical psychology studies have consistently documented the basic success of Gottman Therapy in relation to improving proximity and marital adjustment. Davoondi et al. (2018) explored the direct effect of this technique on the improvement of intimacy and adaptation of married couples. Their results showed that the highly structured approach was not only effective in enhancing immediate marital closeness, but was also effective with sustained follow up after long periods of time. The scientists found that some techniques, like constructing "Love Maps" and applying physiological self-

soothing, were especially effective at helping couples manage stress factors during the day. This makes the Gottman framework a very effective and long-term therapeutic approach for researchers and clinicians working to stabilize hostile marital relationships and create psychological safety.

- **Application in Same Sex Relationships**

To illustrate the strong cross-cultural and cross-demographic acceptability of the model, Garanzini et al. (2017) performed an extensive uncontrolled study to assess levels of satisfaction in relationships between 106 gay and lesbian couples who were participating in Gottman Couples Therapy. After 11 structured therapy sessions, the collected data showed statistically significant increase in both groups in relation to their satisfaction with the relationship. The measure obtained from the study was 0.5 standard deviations, a very successful and clinically meaningful value in the field of couples therapy. Interestingly, the treatment was successful, even with the presence of early comorbidities of relationships. In several documented cases, couples with the highest initial distress in their relationship had the deepest clinical improvement, indicating that the Gottman Method offers universal tools that rise above sexual orientation and minority stressors.

- **Navigating Severe Life Stressors: Infertility and Emotional Divorce**

The Gottman Method has also been shown to be essential when couples experience extreme and life-changing psychological stressors. In an attempt to assess this method among infertile couples referred to the infertility ward of Fatemieh Hospital in Hamadan, Hosseinpoor et al. (2020) investigated this method. After controlling for the effects of sociodemographic factors using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), female participants receiving the intervention had a significant increase in marital intimacy. Male participants also revealed an increase in relational closeness, but the response of the females was quite strong. The findings of this study show the potential of this approach to educate couples on the basics of healthy connection, which can help to prevent what is referred to in the clinical literature as "emotional divorce" that often occurs during the emotionally challenging and lonely journey of becoming a parent. Like that, Masjedi et al. (2022) highlighted how Gottman Couples Therapy is able to help couples who are at the breaking point of an emotional divorce. Their study revealed that skill-specific intervention can be successfully used to defuse extreme marital burnout and to restore the core trust of the relationship even if the partners feel completely unconnected to one another.

2.2 Comparisons with Other Therapeutic Models

There are several psychological models that can be used to resolve relational problems, but studies have shown a unique strength of the Gottman Method: its skill-based approach. In 2017, Saemi et al. and Bafandegan (2020) compared and contrasted the Gottman framework with Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and Narrative Therapy.

The two therapies, Narrative Therapy and Emotionally Focused Therapy, have a great emphasis on the externalisation of problems and the re-writing of personal histories, and Emotionally Focused Therapy focuses primarily on the underlying attachment bonds. These researchers' comparative analyses suggest that the Gottman Method often produces better and more readily quantifiable results in certain instances where the relationship is experiencing extreme marital distress. Couples often experience a more rapid symptom reduction and more effective practical coping with their relationship as a result of the Gottman Method's emphasis on behavioral skills and strategies, specifically those for handling conflict, which are identified and neutralized, such as the "Four Horsemen" of apocalyptic communication.

2.3 Online vs. Offline Delivery Modalities

The swift shift of psychotherapies and other psychosocial interventions to digital formats has sparked investigations into the clinical effectiveness of tele-psychology and virtual psychoeducation. Initial studies show that the Gottman Method delivered online is highly effective and greatly improves the accessibility for individuals who may have logistical barriers to attending the program in person (Brand, 2012; Dylami, 2019). Digital interventions are effective, offer flexible learning environment, and have the benefit of alleviating the stigma of a traditional therapy clinic. But the traditional face to face environment has its own unique clinical benefits. Person-to-person interactions are often said to create a far more powerful and meaningful emotional connection to the therapeutic journey. This may be because the therapist is physically close, and the clinician can see the nuances in nonverbal communication, as well as because of the fact that there is a space set aside for the therapy, which has no relationship to the immediate distractions of the home environment.

2.4 Research Gaps Identified

Although the Gottman Method is widely validated and popular around the world, a global review of the current academic literature shows that there are important blind spots that the present study is uniquely set out to explore:

- **Cultural Context:** There is a very little empirical research to assess the effectiveness of Gottman Method among the Indian population. Indian marriages tend to be a complex affair involving extended families and distinct cultural attitudes about how to resolve conflict; these may not be empirically tested against in Western marriages.
- **Parental Status:** Previous literature has largely treated couples as a monolith regarding family structure. No comparative analysis is found measuring degree of therapeutic responsiveness between childless couples and couples with children. As individuals become parents, they experience certain stressors, time constraints, and changes in identity that should be examined directly in the academic field.
- **Delivery Mode Comparison:** While online and offline methods have been studied

independently by various researchers, there is insufficient comparative research evaluating these delivery modalities side by side within a single controlled, socio-cultural context to determine if digital delivery dilutes the emotional impact of the intervention.

3 OBJECTIVES

- 1. Compare pre–post changes in relationship quality in couples with children receiving online Gottman workshops.
- 2. Compare pre–post changes in couples without children receiving online workshops.
- 3. Compare pre–post changes in couples with children receiving offline workshops.
- 4. Compare pre–post changes in couples without children receiving offline workshops.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental comparative research design, consisting of four groups based of parental status of couples and mode of instructions i.e., online and offline formats.

Table 1. The distribution of participants in each group, i.e., Group 1, 2 3 and four has been represented in Fig 1

Group Description	N
G1 - Couples with children – Online	25
G2 - Couples without children – Online	25
G3 - Couples with children – Offline	25
G4 - Couples without children – Offline	25

Note. N = Number of participants in each group.

4.2 Sample

This study included all the couples i.e., married, unmarried, same-sex partner who were in romantic relationship. The primary eligibility criteria of the study were the participant needs to be in the committed relationship with the same partner for minimum period of one year. Purposive sampling was used to choose 100 participants, between the ages of 20 and 45 who had been together for at least a year. It was not mandatory for the partner to participate together; individuals were allowed to attend the intervention. This method was adopted to gain the real world understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention. Each group has been divided in 25 participants.

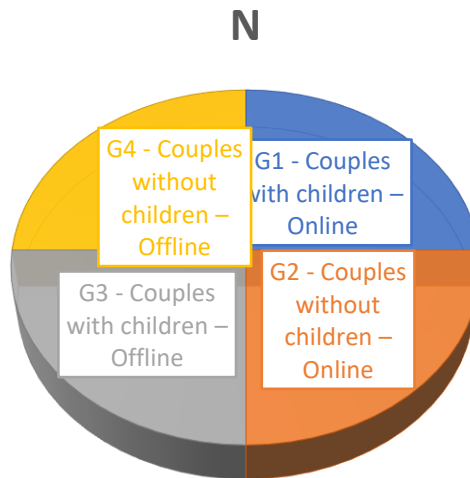


Fig. 1. Distribution of particulars across four intervention groups.

The figure presents the equal distribution of participants based on parental status and mode of intervention.

4.3 Intervention

In this study 8-hour Gottman workshop-based interventions were via delivered either in two formats: Online (Zoom, Google Meet) and Offline (Delhi-NCR)

4.4 Tool

Quality of Marital Relationship Scale (QMRS) — The 100-item evaluation includes support, intimacy, empathy, openness, autonomy, love, dominance, and conflict.

4.5 Data Collection

In this study Pre-test and Post-Test design was used. Pre-test was conducted followed by 8-hour workshop-based intervention was delivered in online via zoom or google meet and offline (In -person). Participation for both the partner was not mandatory, individual participants were allowed to participate. After the gap of one month Post – test was conducted.

Pre-test → 8-hour workshop-based intervention → 1-month gap → Post-test

5 RESULTS

The following results were interpreted according to the standard scoring ranges of the Quality of Marital Relationship Scale (QMS), ranging from 0 to 300.

Table 2. Pre – Post Scores

Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Mean Gain
With Children – Online	186.4 (22.1)	210.8(20.5)	24.4
Without Children – Online	190.1(21.3)	224.6(19.8)	34.5
With Children – Offline	188.9(23.7)	229.2(22.0)	40.3
Without Children – Offline	192.5(22.8)	238.1(21.1)	45.6

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

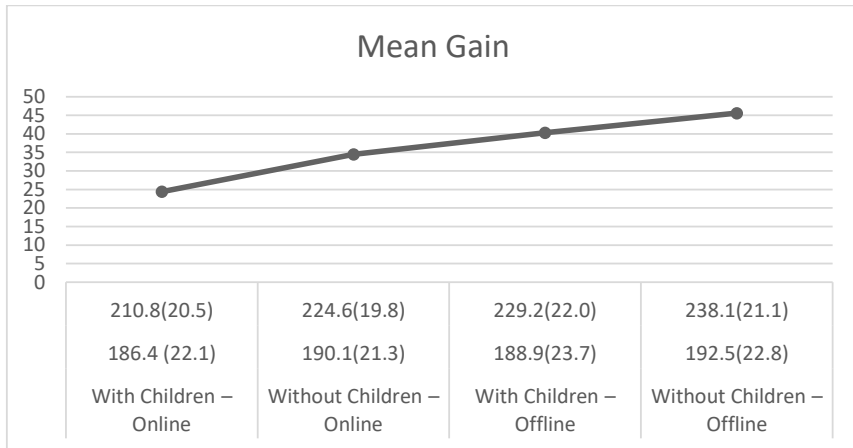


Fig. 2. Mean gain in relationship across online and offline intervention groups.

The figure illustrates the comparative improvement in relationship scores across the four groups following the intervention.

Table 3 Paired Sample t Test for Group 1 and 2

Group	t-value	p-value
G1	9.88	< .001
G2	11.74	< .001

Note. $p < .001$ indicates statistically significant improvement

Table 4. Paired Sample t- Test for Group 3 & 4

Group	t-value	p-value
G3	13.92	< .001
G4	15.04	< .001

Note. All groups showed significant improvement

- Descriptive statistics were used to examine the pre and post intervention relationship scores across all groups. The mean and standard deviation values for each group before and after interventions are presented in Table 2.
- All four groups demonstrated significant improvement of relationship scores in post-test intervention in comparison with pre-test intervention. The increase in means scores suggest a positive impact of across all groups both online and offline mode, higher gains were observed in the offline groups.
- Paired t-test was conducted to check the effectiveness of the intervention within the group. The results exhibited the significant improvement in the relationship scores for Group 1 and 2 (Table 3) and Group 3 and 4 (Table 4).
- The obtained t-value and in corresponds to p-value indicated that the intervention has significantly relationship quality among all groups.
- We have also conducted ANOVA test to check the post-test Differences Across Groups. The results represented $(3, 196) = 8.47, p < .001$ Post-hoc Tukey indicates that offline participants have shown better improvement in post-test scores in comparison with online participants. Couples without Children demonstrated better score against couple with Children.
- Group 4, couple without children (offline participants) showed highest improvement and Group 1, couple with children (Online) showed lowest improvement in terms of their relationship quality scores.
- The comparative analysis of mean gain has been illustrated in Fig 2., which depicts greater improvement in the scores of the offline participants in comparison to online participants, specifically couples without children.

6 DISCUSSION

All four groups showed improvements in relationship quality, indicating that the Gottman Method is helpful for a wide spectrum of Indian couples. Research indicates that face-to-face contact fosters deeper bonding and emotional resonance, as seen by the comparatively greater improvements observed in offline workshops (Mortazavi et al., 2019). Perhaps due to fewer time constraints, less stress from children, and greater emotional availability, childless couples did better.

These results corroborate data from around the world that the Gottman Method improves intimacy, communication, and conflict resolution. The online groups' positive outcomes imply that digital transmission is a workable treatment approach in Indian contexts.

7 CONCLUSION

Indian couples' relationships are considerably improved by the Gottman Method. Significant benefits are obtained from both online and offline workshops; However, the benefits are higher for childless couples and offline workshops. The study demonstrates how the concept can be applied to various family forms and delivery methods.

8 LIMITATIONS

- Limited to North Indian participants
- Self-reported responses may contain bias
- Short follow-up duration (1 month)
- Individual self-report might not be actual representation of actual improvement in couple pattern.

9 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Longitudinal studies with follow-ups at 6–12 months
- Inclusion of rural and non-English speaking populations
- Comparison with other therapeutic models (EFT, CBT-based couple therapy)

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Disclosure of Interests. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Oxford. Definition.

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