

Effectiveness of Group Training on Conflict Resolution for Marital Burnout and Adjustment Among Married Women Facing Conflict in Shiraz

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to evaluate the impact of group conflict-solving skills training on marital burnout and adjustment among married women experiencing conflict in Shiraz.

Method: This semi-experimental study utilized a pre-test design with a control group. Thirty people from counseling centers in Shiraz 2021-2022, participated in this study with a convenience sampling method and allocated in two group (15 in each group) by simple random allocation. The treatment group received ten sessions of 90 minutes twice a week (5 weeks) therapy, while the control group had no intervention. Marital Burnout Questionnaire (MBQ; Pines, 1996) and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) were used to measure pretest and post test scores. Data were analyzed with SPSS v24 using Multivariate analysis of covariance.

Results: The lower mean scores in the post-test for the intervention group indicate that group training in conflict resolution skills effectively decreased marital burnout among married women in Shiraz ($P < 0.01$). Furthermore, the higher mean scores for this group also suggest an improvement in marital adjustment ($P < 0.01$).

Conclusion: The current study indicates that conflict resolution skills training effectively enhances marital adjustment and reduces burnout. Therefore, it is recommended that similar training be offered at counseling centers, schools, and welfare organizations to support these women.

Keywords: Conflict Solving Solutions, Marital Burnout, Marital Adjustment, Married Women with Conflict

Introduction

Interpersonal conflicts are as common as social relationships, making varying levels of disagreement and resentment in couples' interactions unavoidable (Long, Chen, Wu, Zhou, Zhou, Zheng, & Lu, 2022). Glasser attributes marital conflict to discrepancies between spouses regarding their needs and how to fulfill them, self-centeredness, differing desires, behavioral patterns, and neglect of the marriage (Carasso, & Segel-Karpas, 2024). Systemic therapists view conflict as stemming from struggles over power and resources between partners. Two types of conflict can arise in marital relationships: constructive conflict and harmful conflict. Constructive conflict focuses on problem-solving, while harmful conflict leads to personal attacks between partners (Khosravi, Mirzamani Bafghi, & Jaafari Roshan, 2022). Effectively managing conflicts can prevent relationship stagnation and foster adaptive skills that enhance resilience to stressors, ultimately strengthening individuals against future challenges (McKibben, 2017). Conversely, poorly managed conflicts can destroy marital intimacy and negatively impact the physical and emotional well-being of couples (Khosravi et al, 2022). Marital conflicts can lead to significant family consequences, including poor adjustment, ineffective parenting, decreased marital satisfaction, burnout, and increased parent-child conflicts (Zaki, Abed, Abd El Wahab, & Shattla, 2022).

Researchers have extensively explored marital adjustment in various facets of human life, highlighting its importance in family and marital studies (Mansy, El-Ashry, Ahmed Ali, & Ahmed, 2024; Molgora, Fenaroli, Acquati, De Donno, Baldini, et al, 2019). Marital adjustment is defined as a process that entails outcomes such as difficulties in understanding sexual differences, personal and interpersonal anxiety, and overall marital satisfaction. Marital adjustment is the interplay of factors like conflict levels and shared activities that contribute to happiness and success in marriage, highlighting the importance of adaptability and problem-solving. This adjustment is a lifelong process in which couples must adapt their preferences, recognize personality traits, establish behavioral norms, and develop interaction patterns ((Mansy et al., 2024). Couples who are compatible are in agreement on different aspects of their relationship, content with how things are going, enjoy leisure activities together and effectively handle their time and money (Fallahchai, 2022).

Marital compatibility is a crucial factor in sustaining married life. Today, couples face significant challenges in communication and intimacy, with marital incompatibility leading to more interpersonal conflict than any other issue. An epidemiological study indicates that marital incompatibility is a significant risk factor for marital burnout and divorce (Dokaneifard, & Andabil, 2023). Burnout is a gradual phenomenon characterized by physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion from the gap between expectations and reality in marital life (Minoosepehr, Karbalaee Mohammad Meyguni, Nikoogoftar, & Gholamali Lavasani, 2022). Love and intimacy can gradually fade, potentially leading to the complete breakdown of the relationship. Newlyweds often enter marriage with certain expectations, and when reality falls short, they may experience disappointment and burnout in their relationship (Qavami, Mohammadi Fazel, Aliyari, & Beiraqdar, 2023). Researchers note that while all marriages experience some burnout, many struggles with poor quality and instability, often leading to thoughts of separation and difficulty in

marital adjustment (Atapour, Falsafinejad, Ahmadi, & Khodabakhshi-Koolaei, 2021). Various treatments have been employed to enhance marital adjustment and alleviate burnout, including couples therapy (Asadpour, & Veisi, 2019), the Choice Theory (Pirmoradi, Amini, Keykhosrovani, & Shafiabadi, 2022), acceptance and commitment therapy (Mardani, Uousefi, Ghorbani, & Mirzaei, 2023).

Conflict resolution training is particularly effective in improving marital adjustment and reducing burnout. Conflict resolution training programs have recently been employed to enhance social and emotional competence and mitigate destructive behaviors among individuals with behavioral issues (Niknam & Javaheri, 2020). These programs aim to improve problem-solving abilities, emotional awareness and management, decrease aggression, and enhance social skills through direct training, peer mediation, and the hidden curriculum (Broukhim, et al, 2019). Research indicates that these interventions effectively boost social, cognitive, and behavioral skills while reducing aggression, disciplinary referrals, victimization, and violence (Ilfiandra, Nadhirah, & Suryana, 2023). Conflict resolution training programs enhanced academic achievement, fostered positive attitudes toward school, improved assertiveness and self-control, and cultivated healthy interpersonal and group relationships both in school and at home (Niknam & Javaheri, 2020).

Marital disputes impact the entire family, particularly children. When parents fail to meet a child's basic needs and natural desires, it constitutes child abuse. Children have the right to a safe and peaceful home, and parental arguments are a form of intentional child abuse. If a couple experiences incompatibility or burnout due to these conflicts, they may redirect their attention and affection towards someone else, fostering feelings for that person instead of their spouse. Given the detrimental effects of the research variables on the cases discussed and the lack of focus on conflict resolution skills training for improving marital adjustment and reducing burnout among conflicted married women, this area represents a crucial opportunity for intervention to enhance couple dynamics and mitigate their negative impact on families and society. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the question: Can conflict resolution skills training significantly enhance marital adjustment and diminish marital burnout among women experiencing conflicts in Shiraz?

Methodology

This study utilized a semi-experimental pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The research involved married women seeking assistance at counseling centers in Shiraz from 2021 to 2022. Convenience sampling identified 40 participants from the Fasihzadeh and Parnian counseling centers. After some dropouts, 30 women were randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group, each consisting of 15 members.

The sample included married women aged 20 to 50 who have experienced marital conflicts for at least six months and meet these criteria: no prior attendance at conflict resolution training, no chronic psychological conditions requiring medication (e.g., severe depression), full personal consent, commitment to participate until the study's conclusion, and literacy.

Exclusion criteria include missing more than one training session, unwillingness to participate, or concurrent involvement in similar psychological programs.

This study implemented a comprehensive conflict resolution training program for spouses based on the foundational concepts from "Empowering Spouses" by Olson and Olson (2000), which was translated into Persian by Kamran Jafarinejad and Mansoureh Ardeshtirzadeh in 2004. The program also incorporated insights from "Conflict Resolution Skills for Spouses" by Shiri (2008). This program combines collaborative conflict resolution, mindfulness-based emotional regulation, and culturally sensitive practices, delivered through interactive techniques such as group support, role-playing, and skill-building exercises. Its goal is to equip married women with practical tools to navigate conflicts, reduce burnout, and foster healthier, more satisfying relationships. The training was conducted in a group format, comprising 10 sessions of 90 minutes each, held over 6 weeks with two sessions per week. A qualified therapist from the Parnian Counseling Center facilitated the sessions, creating a supportive environment for spouses to learn effective conflict-resolution techniques.

Research Tools

Marital Burnout Questionnaire (MBQ): This 21-item self-assessment questionnaire, developed by Pines (1996), measures three key components of burnout: physical fatigue (items 1, 4, 7, 10, 16), emotional exhaustion (items 2, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21), and psychological exhaustion (items 3, 8, 12, 15, 18, 19). Physical fatigue addresses feelings of tiredness, weakness, and sleep disorders; emotional exhaustion focuses on depression, hopelessness, and feeling trapped; and psychological exhaustion includes feelings of worthlessness, frustration, and anger towards a partner. Responses are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (never) to 7 (always), with four items scored in reverse. Higher scores indicate greater burnout (Pines, 1996). Fatehi et al. (2021) conducted a study to evaluate the reliability of this scale, reporting a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86 based on 240 samples. Furthermore, using the retest method with intervals of one, two, and four months, reliability coefficients of 0.89, 0.76, and 0.66 were obtained.

Marital Adjustment Scale (DAS): This 32-item scale, created by Spanier (1976), evaluates marital relationship quality from both spouses' perspectives and includes four subscales. Spanier determined the scale's structure by analyzing score differences between compatible and incompatible couples. The subscales assess couples' satisfaction with various relationship aspects, solidarity in joint activities, agreement on marital issues such as finances, and expression of affection, all rated on a Likert scale. Respondents indicate their agreement with each item based on their current situation. The total score, ranging from 0 to 151, is the sum of individual scores across all items and subscales, with scores below 100 indicating lower marital adjustment and above 100 indicating better adjustment (Spanier, 1976). Reliability and validity of the Iranian version of the questionnaire were confirmed, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.79 (Isanezhad, et al., 2012).

Table 1: Overview of Conflict Resolution Skills Training Sessions

Session	Session Brief description of session content
First	Introduce participants and the group leader, outline program goals and content, establish teamwork rules, and define conflict along with its causes, including both overt and hidden issues.
Second	Present the conflict model pyramid and its levels, emphasize the importance of dialogue skills, explain the hierarchical nature of conflict, and highlight the value of quick decision-making in crisis prevention.
Third	Teach conflict resolution techniques, covering competitive, avoidant, consensual, flexible, and collaborative styles.
Fourth	Introduce the principles of conflict resolution skills and begin training on the first step: selecting an appropriate time and place for discussion.
Fifth	Explain the second and third steps of conflict resolution: Step 2 involves identifying the problem's details, and Step 3 focuses on understanding the roles of those involved.
Sixth	Outline the problem-solving process and detail steps 4 and 5 of conflict resolution: Step 4 requires listing previous unsuccessful attempts, while Step 5 involves brainstorming solutions.
Seventh	Describe steps 6 and 7, which include selecting the best solution and learning to compromise.
Eighth	Explain steps 8 and 9, emphasizing the importance of follow-up: Step 8 involves determining individual roles in the solution, and Step 9 requires scheduling a follow-up meeting to assess progress.
Ninth	Discuss step 10 and the ground rules for maintaining relationships: Step 10 focuses on rewarding each other for contributions to the solution.
Tenth	Summary and Conclusion

Data Analysis Method

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in this study. Descriptive statistics provided indices of central tendency and dispersion to summarize the independent and dependent variables and to create graphs. Inferential statistics included tests for assumptions, specifically the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Levene tests for normal distribution. After confirming the statistical assumptions, a multivariate analysis of covariance was performed to test the main hypothesis, using SPSS version 22 for all analyses.

Findings

The study included 30 participants, divided into a control group of 15 and an intervention group of 15. In the control group, educational backgrounds included one person with a cycle degree, 2 with a diploma, 7 with a bachelor's degree, and 5 with a master's degree. The intervention group comprised 1 with a cycle degree, 3 with a diploma, 1 with an

associate degree, 5 with a bachelor's degree, 3 with a master's degree, and 2 with a doctorate. The control group includes 7 participants aged 20-30, 6 aged 31-40, and 2 aged 41-50. In the intervention group, there are 5 participants aged 20-30, 5 aged 31-40, 2 aged 41-50, and 3 aged 51-60 (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic variables

Education	Control		Intervention	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary	1	7.6	1	7.6
Diploma	2	3.13	3	20
Associate	0	0	1	7.6
Bachelor	7	7.46	5	3.33
Master	5	3.33	3	20
Doctorate	0	0	2	3.13
Age	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
20 to 30 years	7	46.7	5	33.3
31 to 40 years	6	40	5	33.3
41 to 50 years	2	13.3	2	13.3
51 to 60 years	0	0	3	20

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of marital adjustment and marital burn out scores intervention and control groups.

Group	Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Control	Couple satisfaction	21.80	3.098	22.27	3.173
	Couple cohesion	22.47	2.900	22.93	2.527
	Couple agreement	25.43	3.461	25.90	2.878
	Expression of affection	18.87	2.615	19.40	2.261
	Overall score of marital adjustment	88.57	6.184	90.50	5.279
Intervention	Couple satisfaction	23.33	3.039	25.53	3.314
	Couple cohesion	22.67	3.716	25.08	4.176
	Couple agreement	24.97	4.417	27.15	4.079
	Expression of affection	19.27	2.549	22.07	3.327
	Overall score of marital adjustment	90.24	7.233	99.83	8.078
Control	Physical fatigue	21.64	4.431	21.15	3.824
	Emotional exhaustion	33.73	6.840	32.27	6.088
	Mental exhaustion	26.87	5.527	26.03	5.246
	Overall score of marital burnout	82.24	9.069	79.44	8.914
Intervention	Physical fatigue	21.28	3.219	17.60	2.715
	Emotional exhaustion	35.47	5.423	28.67	5.108

Mental exhaustion	26.27	5.021	22.33	5.354
Overall score of marital burnout	83.01	6.346	68.60	7.814

Table 3 indicates that the average scores of the control group show little difference between the pre-test and post-test. In contrast, the intervention group experiences a significant increase in scores from the pre-test to the post-test.

Table 4: Results of multivariate analysis of covariance to compare marital burnout and marital adjustment in the intervention and control groups

Effect	test	value	F	Degrees of freedom of effect	Degrees of freedom of error	Significance level	Effect size
Group	Pillai's trace	0.799	49.698	2	25	0.001	0.799
	Wilks's lambda	0.201	49.698	2	25	0.001	0.799
	Hotelling's t race	3.976	49.698	2	25	0.001	0.799
	Roy's largest root	3.976	49.698	2	25	0.001	0.799

Table 4 indicates that the significance level for all four multivariate statistics—Pillai's trace, Wilks's lambda, Hotelling's trace, and Roy's largest root—is below 0.01 ($p < 0.01$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting a significant difference in marital burnout and adjustment scores between the intervention and control groups in the post-test, demonstrating the effectiveness of group training in conflict resolution skills.

Table 5: Between-subject effects test for comparing marital burnout and marital adjustment in the intervention and control groups at post-test.

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	P	Effect size
marital burnout	Between-group	963.441	1	963.441	43.163	0.001	0.624
	Within-group	580.341	26	22.321		0.001	
marital adjustment	Between-group	452.534	1	452.534	32.138	0.001	0.553
	Within-group	366.108	26	14.081			

Table 5 shows that the F values for both variables are significant at the 0.01 alpha level ($p < 0.01$). The post-test results indicate that the intervention group has lower mean marital burnout scores and higher mean marital adjustment scores compared to the control group.

Table 6: Results of multivariate analysis of covariance for comparison in intervention and control groups

Group	test	value	F	Degrees of freedom of effect	Degrees of freedom of error	Significance level	Effect size
Marital burnout	Pillai's trace	0.642	13.725	3	23	0.001	۰/۶۴۲
	Wilks's lambda	0.358	13.725	3	23	0.001	۰/۶۴۲
	Hotelling's trace	1.790	13.725	3	23	0.001	۰/۶۴۲
	Roy's largest root	1.790	13.725	3	23	0.001	۰/۶۴۲
Marital adjustment	Pillai's trace	0.539	6.139	4	21	0.002	۰/۵۳۹
	Wilks's lambda	0.461	6.139	4	21	0.002	۰/۵۳۹
	Hotelling's trace	1.169	6.139	4	21	0.002	۰/۵۳۹
	Roy's largest root	1.169	6.139	4	21	0.002	۰/۵۳۹

Table 6 indicates that all four multivariate statistics—Pillai's trace, Wilks's lambda, Hotelling's trace, and Roy's largest root—are significant at $p<0.01$. This suggests a notable difference in marital burnout and adjustment between the intervention and control groups in the post-test. Group training in conflict resolution effectively lowers marital burnout and enhances marital adjustment.

Table 7: Between-subject effects test for comparing marital burnout components of the intervention and control groups at post-test

Variable	Source	SS	DF	MS	F	P	Eta
Physical fatigue	Between-group	74.171	1	74.171	23.809	0.001	0.488
	Within-group	77.880	25	3.115			
Emotional	Between-group	178.891	1	178.891	27.956	0.001	0.528
	Within-group	159.978	25	6.399			
Mentally abandoned	Between-group	70.519	1	70.519	13.609	0.001	0.352
	Within-group	129.545	25	5.182			
Couples' satisfaction	Between-group	23.325	1	23.325	11.210	0.003	0.318
	Within-group	49.939	24	2.081			
Couples' solidarity	Between-group	21.123	1	21.123	13.279	0.001	0.356

	Within-group	38.176	24	1.591			
Couples agree	Between-group	13.295	1	13.295	11.723	0.002	0.328
	Within-group	27.218	24	1.134			
Expressing love	Between-group	36.645	1	36.645	20.455	0.001	0.460
	Within-group	42.995	24	1.791			

Table 7 shows significant F values for all components ($P < 0.01$). The lower mean scores of the intervention group in the post-test indicate that group training in conflict resolution skills effectively reduced marital burnout among married women experiencing conflict in Shiraz. Additionally, the higher mean scores of the intervention group in the post-test suggest that this training also improved marital adjustment for these women.

Discussion

This study investigated the effect of group conflict resolution skills training on marital burnout and adjustment in married women experiencing conflict in Shiraz. Covariance analysis revealed that the training significantly reduced marital burnout and improved marital adjustment, supporting the findings of Kianian & Ghavidel (2023), Dinmohaamadpour et al. (2024), Mardani et al. (2023), and Kamankesh et al. (2024). Özgüç & Tanrıverdi (2018) demonstrated that depression scores negatively correlated with positive and subordination conflict resolution styles and marital adjustment but positively correlated with negative conflict resolution styles. Conflict resolution styles and marital adjustment of depressed patients and their spouses predict depression in patients. The Dinmohaamadpour et al.'s findings indicated that family therapy when implemented, proved to be an effective intervention that significantly reduced instances of marital conflicts and helped alleviate feelings of burnout among married women. This therapy tackled underlying relationship issues while offering vital support that enhanced the emotional well-being of those involved (Dinmohaamadpour et al., 2024). Previous findings suggest that constructive conflict resolution—approaching conflict as a social issue that can be resolved through cooperation to meet both parties' needs—improves marital satisfaction and adjustment. Conversely, destructive behaviors marked by hostility and self-interest, such as physical and verbal aggression, negatively impact marital adjustment and satisfaction. Moreover, while negative coping mechanisms are harmful, spouses should also recognize behaviors like submission, protective buffering, and underestimating their partner's coping abilities, which, although not rooted in hostility, can have significant long-term consequences (Ünal, & Akgün, 2022).

In examining the impact of group training in conflict resolution on marital burnout and adjustment among married women in Shiraz, it becomes clear that when spouses fail to express or understand each other's needs and do not find positive solutions, stress and frustration can lead to burnout. In such relationships, the costs outweigh the rewards, resulting in accumulated damage and increasing emotional and physical distance between partners (Dinmohaamadpour et al., 2024). Marital burnout is emotional distance fosters indifference and disengagement, hindering relationship investment. By acquiring conflict resolution skills, couples can enhance their understanding of each other's needs and intentions. They foster a mutual caring attitude, minimizing criticism and blame, which enhances their communication through constructive and direct conversations. Indeed, they form stronger emotional bonds, enjoy greater intimacy, and actively engage with each other, resulting in reduced or no marital burnout (Javdan, et al., 2023). Liang & Wang (2024) found that integrating mindfulness into conflict resolution helps couples better manage emotions during disputes, leading to higher marital satisfaction. Additionally, Alvarez & Gomez (2023) emphasize the importance of cultural context, showing that culturally tailored training programs increase engagement and effectiveness. Yılmaz & Turk (2023) discovered that peer support plays a significant role in enhancing conflict resolution outcomes. Overall, incorporating these evidence-based approaches into training packages can greatly assist married women experiencing burnout. Utilizing recent research and successful international programs can empower women to handle conflicts more effectively and foster healthier, more satisfying marriages (Liang & Wang, 2024; Yılmaz & Turk, 2023; Alvarez & Gomez, 2023).

This sense of closeness serves as a solid foundation for improved marital adjustment. Learning conflict resolution skills promotes consideration of both partners' needs, leading to mutually satisfying outcomes and increased marital happiness. These couples engage in open and adaptive communication, utilizing effective verbal strategies to express their emotions while seeking agreement from their partners. Trust and mutual understanding drive them to minimize differences, focus on common interests, and collaborate in solving problems, enhancing their sense of fulfillment and success. This reduces interpersonal conflicts and improves marital harmony. The aim of conflict resolution training is to assist couples in finding satisfactory solutions (Niknam and Javaheri 2020). This approach involves problem-solving and can result in innovative outcomes. Couples who can handle conflicts using these skills create a space for more open communication and consensus on family issues, promoting intimacy. This closeness enables couples to collaborate on various family matters and avoid burnout in marriage, ultimately enhancing marital harmony (Broukhim, et al., 2019). During conflict resolution training, participants explore marital dynamics, reflect on past wounds and healing, connect with their emotions, and define their life mission (Kamankesh, et al., 2024). They are introduced to strategies like gratitude to enhance their relationships. The exercises promote self-awareness and understanding of others, teaching participants

to express concerns, listen actively, and practice empathetic, non-judgmental communication. As a result, participants experience greater emotional satisfaction and intimacy with their spouses, overcoming feelings of worthlessness, anger, frustration, and anxiety while reducing symptoms of marital burnout (Sepehrian & Dokaneifard, 2017). Group training in conflict resolution is effective for the marital adjustment of women facing conflict (Ünal, & Akgün, 2022). All couples encounter disagreements at various life stages; these conflicts do not inherently threaten their bond. Instead, they are a natural part of an intimate relationship arising from differing opinions, tastes, and desires. Thus, conflict is an element of the adjustment process as individuals in marriage bring diverse personal, familial, social, and cultural backgrounds, leading to varying perspectives on situations and issues. Differing opinions and beliefs can lead to conflict between couples (Özgüç, & Tanrıverdi, 2018). When managed constructively, conflict can enhance understanding in relationships. Thus, the health of a relationship hinges not on the frequency of conflict but on how it is addressed and resolved. Couples exhibit a range of responses during conflict; some may spiral into negative interactions that ultimately result in marital dissatisfaction and increased physical aggression (Khosravi, 2022). Effective conflict resolution skills are essential for successful romantic relationships, as individuals with these skills typically enjoy longer-lasting partnerships (Ünal, & Akgün, 2022). Poorly managed conflict can ruin marital life and harm couples' physical and emotional health. Successful resolution of conflict often leads to intimacy, satisfying both partners. The way conflict is managed, rather than the conflict itself, determines whether the outcome is destructive or constructive. Therefore, when couples develop conflict resolution skills, they improve their marital adjustment (Dokaneifard, & Andabil, 2023).

The training is general and does not account for the specific needs of individuals or couples. It only serves those who visit the clinic, leaving some women in need of individual counseling underserved. Additionally, participant engagement can be lacking in certain cases. To enhance the generalizability of these results, it is advised to expand this study to a larger national sample. Teaching constructive conflict resolution styles and personality types to women in conflict is essential, and their impact on marital adjustment and burnout should be studied. The current study indicates that conflict resolution skills training effectively enhances marital adjustment and reduces burnout. Therefore, it is recommended that similar training be offered at counseling centers, schools, and welfare organizations to support these women.

Conclusion

conflict resolution training should be promoted through mass media, such as television and radio, to raise awareness about its therapeutic benefits. Given the proven effectiveness of this approach, it is advisable to implement ongoing training programs for married women experiencing conflict.

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