

The Effects of the Marriage Enrichment Program Based on the Cognitive-Behavioral Approach on the Marital Adjustment of Couples

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of the marriage enrichment program based on the cognitive-behavioral approach on levels of marital adjustment of individuals. The experimental and control group of this research was totally composed of 30 individuals. A pre-test post-test research model with control group was been used in this research. Marital Adjustment Scale as being pre-test and post-test was applied to the experimental and control groups. In order to test that, meaningful differences between the scores of pre-test and post-test within both control and experimental group Mann-Whitney U test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test were used. It was found that this marriage enrichment program had positive effects on some levels of marital adjustment. The results indicate that the difference between the scores of post-test of the experimental and control groups is significant. The results of the Marital Adjustment Scale applied to the control groups revealed no significant difference between pre-test and post-test. The findings have been discussed in the light of literature, and some suggestions have been made. The marriage enrichment program could be used to enhancement marriage adjustment.

Key Words

Marriage enrichment program, cognitive-behavioral approach, marital adjustment.

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Having a past as old as the history of mankind, marriage is accepted as one of the most important corner stones in human life. The social and emotional support brought by marriages contributes to the physical, spiritual and social well-being of spouses (Williams, 1988; Özügürü, 1990). Since a happy marriage consists of confidence and sharing created by a relationship with love, respect and acceptance, it is an identifier of psychological health of the spouses (Williams, 1988). In studies, while the psychological and physical health conditions of individuals who have high degrees of marital conflict are observed to be worse than those who have well-adjusted marriages, it has been found out that the conflict state in marriages is significantly related to neurotic depression and tendency to commit suicide (Birtchnell & Kennard, 1983a, Birtchnell & Kennard, 1983b, Coyne & DeLongis, 1986). The studies conducted on the children of spouses who have conflict in their marriages indicate that these children have behavioral problems and are more maladjusted when compared to other children (Bond & McMahon, 1984; Frick, 1993; Kim, 2001).

Marriage and family researchers who are interested in the issue in order to look into the reasons for unsuccessful marriages indicate that individuals' beliefs towards marital relationships and their dysfunctional thoughts are the signs of problems in marriages (Ellis, 1986; Markman, Floyd, Stanley & Storaasli, 1988; Larsen & Olson, 1989; Dattilio & Padesky, 1990; Christensen & Senk, 1999; Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Leahy, 2004; Markman, Stanley, Jenkins, Petrella & Wadsworth, 2006). Cognitive-behaviorist therapists who emphasize the importance of cognitive restructuring in increasing the adjustment in marriages and relationships and changing the dysfunctional beliefs (Baucom, Sayers & Sher, 1990) have stated that there is a significant relation between the individuals' dysfunctional beliefs about themselves, their partners or relationships and the conflict situation in their marriages (Huber & Milstein, 1985; Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Möller & Zyl, 1991; Flett, Hewitt, Shapero & Rayman, 2001).

Maintaining marriage relationships in an adjusted and balanced way is also one of the main factors which form the basis of social harmony. Even if the efforts to put these relationships into order from the very beginning do not eliminate all the dangers, they help decrease them to a minimum level (Bilen, 2004). Each partner has a different problem

solving ways and a sense of self-esteem (Dinkmeyer, 2007). Therefore, teaching the ways to overcome conflicts and problems between the spouses, taking measures against problems before they increase, preparing spouses for the possible problems in their future and teaching them how to solve these problems before they become more significant may contribute to the continuance and development of the relationship without encountering negative consequence. This situation emphasizes the importance of preventing programs. The point in common in these programs which are named also as “marriage education”, “family life education”, “marriage enrichment”, “relationship enrichment”, “skills development” is that they are aimed for preventing rather than treatment (Berger & Hannah, 1999). The preventive programs occupy an important place in many countries’ government program (Halford & Simons, 2005; Stanley, Allen, Markman & others, 2005).

Preventing programs based on various psychological counseling approaches are available (Hickmon, Protinsky & Singh, 1997; Ripley & Worthington, 2002; Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner & Miller, 2004; Worthington, Ripley, Hook & Miller, 2007). Considering that marriage therapies based on cognitive restructuring may increase marital adjustment of spouses by creating significant cognitive changes in their beliefs and expectancies towards their partners and relations (Baucom, Epstein, Sayers & Sher, 1989; Haferkamp, 1994; Markman, Stanley, Jenkins, Petrella & Wadsworth, 2006). A marriage enrichment program based on cognitive-behavioral approach to increase individuals’ marital adjustment has been developed by Ersanli (2007). The effects of the marriage enrichment program based on the cognitive-behavioral approach on the marital adjustment of individuals have been investigated in this study.

Based on this general aim the following hypothesis has been tested: “The marriage enrichment program based on the cognitive-behavioral approach has a significant effect on the increase of marital adjustment of individuals”.

Method

Participants

It was announced in various institutions in Samsun that a series of marriage enrichment program sessions to develop marital relationships of

individuals would be given in Ondokuz Mayıs University. The Marital Adjustment Scale was administered to each individual. Taking into account the results of the Marital Adjustment Scale, a study group of 30 people was formed. A control group consisting of 15 people and an experimental group consisting of 15 people were formed taking the scores of the individuals from the scale into consideration.

For those in the experimental group the mean of the marriage duration was 10.33 (sd= 5.56) years and the age range was between 27 and 43 years ($x= 35.80$, sd= 5.89). The mean of those who were in the control group was 9.80 (sd= 2.37) years and their ages ranged from 29 to 42 ($x= 33.67$, sd= 2.89) years. It was also noted that the individuals in both of the groups had either high school degree or university degree.

Design of the Study

In this empirical study which has been conducted in order to see the effects of a marriage enrichment program based on the cognitive behavioral approach on the marital adjustment of individuals, “pre-test and post-test control group design” have been used. The independent variable of the study is the marriage enrichment program and the dependent variable of the study is marital adjustment.

Instruments

The data necessary to investigate the effects of the developed program has been gathered by the Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS).

The MAS was adapted to Turkish to measure marital adjustment by Tutarel-Kışlak (1999). It consists of 15 items. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was .84 for the scale, .85 for women and .83 for men. Test-retest coefficient was .57. Convergent validity was examined by assessing the correlation between the scores of the Marital Adjustment Scale and the scores of the The Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM). The correlation between MAS and RAM was -.54.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The marriage enrichment program consisted of 2-hour sessions on 9 weeks. In the first session the Marital Adjustment Scale was given as pre-test and the Marital Adjustment Scale was given to the control gro-

up at the same time to the experimental group. The experimental group has attended to 9 marriage enrichment sessions; whereas the control group has not been interfered during the same period. After 9 weeks, the Marital Adjustment Scale has been given to the control and the experimental groups again as a post test.

The activities used in the sessions which are based on the cognitive-behavioral approach are given in Table 1.

Table 1

The Activities in The Marriage Enrichment Program

Session	Activities
I.	Group members meet each other; announcement of group rules; review of expectations from the group and marriage; emphasizing positive and negative features of marriage.
II.	Informing about automatic opinions; exemplifying and sharing automatic opinions about marriage; homework.
III.	Informing about cognitive mistakes; exemplifying and sharing cognitive mistakes about marriage; homework.
IV.	Informing about A-B-C models; exemplifying A-B-C models about marriage; homework.
V.	Informing about irrational beliefs; handing out the list including the 12 irrational opinions of Ellis to the group members; reading the list together; discussing the opinions on unhappiness in marriage and on irrational relationship opinions; homework.
VI	Informing about the D and E models while presenting the A-B-C models in order to transform the irrational beliefs about relationships; informing about the self-help form prepared with regard to the A-B-C model; exemplifying the discussion started by adding the D and E models to the A-B-C models; homework.
VII.	Informing about I-Language and You-Language; exemplifying I-Language and You-Language within the context of marriage; homework.
VIII.	Informing about anger management; doing relaxation exercises; discussing, exemplifying and sharing irrational opinions leading to anger within the context of marriage; discussing irrational opinions leading to anger within the framework of A-B-C models; homework.
IX.	Evaluation of the process and group members by themselves; sharing of emotions and opinions about the conclusion of the program; conclusion of the session and the process.

Pre- and post test scores of control and experimental groups in the Marital Adjustment Scale were designed in such a way to test the hypothesis of the research and, moreover, the Mann-Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test were conducted. The statistical analyses have been done by using SPSS.

Results

The results of the Marital Adjustment Scale applied to the experimental and control groups revealed no significant difference in marital adjustment levels (pre-test experimental group= 38.66 ± 11.25 , pre-test control group= 41.53 ± 11.67 , $p > .05$).

Mann-Whitney U Test has been applied to the marital adjustment scores of the participants. The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test indicate that the difference between the scores of the participants of the experimental and control groups in post tests in terms of level of marital adjustment is significant ($p = 2.037$, $p < .05$).

The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicate that the difference between the scores of the participants on the experimental group of the pre- and post-tests in terms of level of marital adjustment is significant ($Z = 3.412$, $p < .05$). The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicate that the difference between the scores of the participants on the control group of the pre- and post-tests in terms of level of marital adjustment is significant ($Z = .333$, $p > .05$).

According to these findings, the marriage enrichment program based on the cognitive behavioral approach enhances marital adjustment level of individuals significantly. This result supports the hypothesis of the study.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of marriage enrichment program based on cognitive-behavioral approach to increase the level of the marital adjustment of the individuals. In this study, the pre- and post-tests were given to the experimental and control groups. The sessions lasted during 9 weeks with experimental group. The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test indicate the significant differences between the levels of marital adjustment of the couples on the experimental and control groups. According to this, the marriage enrichment program based on cognitive-behavioral approach increases the marital adjustment level of individuals significantly.

The similar studies support the results of this study. Their results indicated that the marriage enrichment program increase the marital adjustment or marital quality of couples (Huber & Milstein, 1985; Baucom, Epstein, Sayers & Sher, 1989; Baucom, Sayers & Sher, 1990; Dandeneau & Johnson, 1994; Haferkamp, 1994; Sevim, 1996; Hickmon, Pro-

tinsky & Singh, 1997; Worthington, Hight, Ripley et al., 1997; Ripley & Worthington, 2002; Kalkan, 2002; Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner & Miller, 2004; Ersanlı, 2007; Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007; Ledermann, Bodenmann & Cina, 2007).

In a research conducted by Worthington, Ripley, Hook and Miller (2007), the marriage enrichment program was applied to couples. The results showed that the marriage enrichment program is an effective intervention. A study by Markman, Floyd, Stanley and Storaasli (1988) showed that couples' levels of marital adjustment increased as a result of cognitive-behavioral marriage enrichment program. More recently, Kalkan (2002) investigated the effectiveness of the marriage enrichment program on increasing the level of the marital adjustment levels of couples. This study indicated that the marriage enrichment program increased marital adjustment level of individuals significantly.

It is seen that the activities developed in Marriage Enrichment Program based on cognitive-behavioral approach aim at cognitive and behavioral restructuring through changes in individuals' thoughts and behaviors. It is believed that gaining new behaviors, correcting faulty learning and also changing the irrational beliefs with rational ones contribute to the increase in the level of marital adjustment of married individuals.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, in this study, pre-test, post-test design was applied without follow-up. Future studies involving such a follow-up would be more informative about the effectiveness of the marriage enrichment program based on cognitive-behavioral approach for couples on marital adjustment levels. Secondly, the study sample was relatively well-educated. This homogeneity of subjects limits the generalizability of the results to other populations. Therefore, future studies should be conducted in a lower education level.

In addition future researchers should consider the cultural factors on marital relationships. Because, in most marriage enrichment programs conducted in Western societies. However, some couples may not share feelings and thoughts with each other in traditional societies (Chen & Li, 2007).

The implications for counselors and researchers can be derived from the findings of this study. In practice, marriage education, marriage enrichment, and marital therapy overlap (DeMaria, 2005). Therefore, this study may help counselors and psychologists in order to provide training program or marital therapy psychological counseling centers.

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