

The Effects of a Premarital Relationship Enrichment Program on Relationship Satisfaction*

*Tuğba YILMAZ** , Melek KALKAN****

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of a premarital relationship enrichment program on relationship satisfaction among couples. The experimental and control groups were totally composed of 20 individuals. In order to test whether there are any significant differences between the scores of pre-test and post-test within the control and experimental groups, Mann-Whitney U test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test were used. It was found that this premarital relationship enrichment program had positive effects on relationship satisfaction. Premarital relationship development program can be included in the preventive studies in mental health organizations. By cooperating with local government, it can be provided that couples who apply for marriage benefit from "Marriage Preparation Education."

Key Words

Premarital Relationship Enrichment Program, Relationship Satisfaction, Marital Preparation.

*This research is a summary of first author's Master Thesis.

** Psych. Counselor, Avut Primary School, Salıpazarı-Samsun/Turkey.

*** *Correspondence:* Assoc. Prof. Melek Kalkan, Ondokuz Mayıs University Faculty of Education Department of Educational Sciences, 55139, Kurupelit-Samsun/Turkey.
E-mail: mlkalkan@superonline.com

Human beings go on their lives as a member of small or large groups. The most important one of these groups is family which is called a special small group and provides a continuation of human species. Compliance with certain conditions, you can create families with at least two individuals of the opposite sex to choose each other as partners. Choosing their partners, deciding with whom they will share their lives, family building, family responsibility, and living with their partners are some of the duties of young adulthood period (Yeşilyaprak, 2003).

Premarital relationship period is a period for two different people who do not know each other, to know and understand each other and create bonds of love which are necessary to live together before they take the decision to marry. Personal, social, and legal facilities such as friendship before marriage and engagement are for the purpose of fulfilling this fact (Özgüven, 2000).

Taking a decision to marry is a complicated process. People's desire to make their physical, emotional, and social needs real is among the important factors that lead people to marriage. Women and men should try to understand the real identity, expectations, and characteristics of both themselves and the candidate partner's in the premarital relationship period (Kalkan & Ersanlı, 2008). The first step of their selection is being informed about themselves. The answer to the question 'with whom I marry' which the person asks himself/herself depends on recognizing himself/herself. People who are getting married usually emphasize what kind of person the partner is; because they do not analyze themselves but they cannot know if they will get on well with him or not (Tarhan, 2008). In mate selection, the sense of responsibility, communication skills, stress coping skills, self-disclosure, and altruism are important characteristics (Boran, 2003; Yavuzer, 2004).

In the premarital period, couples find the opportunity to talk about the future. Issues such as home economics, decision of having children, situations about work, building home are spoken in this period. These speeches help individuals to come to an 'Us' consciousness from an 'I' consciousness. Stable and happy relationships may occur with two different personalities to complete each other (Özügürlü, 1996). Dokur and Profeta (2006) say that, first, married or unmarried, couples need to talk about their relationships to carry out a healthy relationship. Also, individuals will have speech problems partly in the future thank to the speeches in this period and they can make healthier decisions based on these experiences.

According to Özgüven (2000), happiness in marriage depends on making

a good choice of husband and wife, at a wide range. Couples should know themselves and each other well; know what they expect from future and marriage; and solve important issues before marriage. Longitudinal studies indicate that non-functional communication styles in premarital period are the indicators of disharmony in marriage (Larsen & Olson, 1989). The perceptions of youth and married people were examined in early studies. Studies indicate that people interest in couple communication, responsibility, conflict solving, parental skills, spiritual matters, sexuality, and gender roles in marital preparation programs (Boisvert et al., 1995; Williams, Riley, Risch & Dyke, 1999; Wilmoth, 2007).

Knowing themselves and their partners in premarital period, making their expectations from marriage clear, having problem solving skills for the problems that may occur in the future and being aware of each other's harmonious and inharmonious characteristics contribute to develop and continue the relationship. Because of these reasons prevention programs are extremely important. Therefore, individuals need premarital relationship development training programs to prevent problems before they occur and develop relationships between couples before they marry. These programs are useful in creating harmonious and satisfactory marriages (Gingrich, 2003; Ridley & Sladeczek, 1992; Senediak, 1990). These programs are preventative approaches and they help develop marriage relationships and improve the quality of marriage (Bagarozzi, Bagarozzi, Anderson & Pollane, 1984; Barlow, 1999; Busby, Ivey, Harris & Ates 2007; Einhorn et al., 2008; Larson, Anderson, Holman & Niemann, 1998; McGeore & Carlson, 2006; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997; Valiente, Belanger & Estrada, 2002). Markman and Hahlweg (1993) found that premarital relationship education predicts marital problems in future. The couple therapy, marital and family therapy are popular interventions nowadays; but there are few studies about premarital relationship education (Kalkan & Kaya, 2007). The unrealistic expectations about marriage cause marital conflicts and unhappiness (Martin, Martin & Martin, 2001). Therefore, premarital relationship programs are important for realistic expectations about marriage and partner.

In Turkey, divorce rates increasingly grow from 2000 to 2006 (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], Evlilik İstatistikleri, 2006). III. Family Meetings emphasize that youths be informed about marriage and marital life (Devlet Bakanlığı Aile Araştırma Kurumu Başkanlığı, 1998).

One of the premarital relationship programs is the SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage before It Starts) developed by Parrott and Parrott (Parrott

& Parrott, 1999). The SYMBIS is a model which tries to establish a successful marriage in seven sessions. In this research, premarital relationship development program's effects on couples' relationship satisfaction, in which the SYMBIS model is used, are investigated. Study tested in the research is as the following: "Relationship satisfaction of the couples who participate in the premarital relationship development program will increase significantly after the application in accordance with the couples who do not participate in such an application.

Method

Participants

It was announced in various institutions in Samsun that a series of premarital relationship enrichment program sessions to marital preparation of couples would be given in Ondokuz Mayıs University. The Relationship Satisfaction Scale was administered to each applicant. Taking into account the results of the Relationship Satisfaction Scale, a study group of 20 people was formed. A control group consisting of 10 people and an experimental group consisting of 10 people were formed taking the scores of the individuals from the scale into consideration.

For those in the experimental group, the mean of the age was 25.8 ($S=4.61$) years. The mean age of those who were in the control group was 25.6 ($S=3.27$) years. The relationship duration range was between 1 and 3 years in each group. It was also noted that the individuals in both groups had either university degrees or master and doctoral degrees.

Design of the Study

In this empirical study which has been conducted in order to see the effects of SYMBIS premarital relationship enrichment program on the relationship satisfaction of couples, "pre-test and post-test control group design" was used. The independent variable of the study is the premarital relationship enrichment program and the dependent variable of the study is relationship satisfaction.

Instruments

The data necessary to investigate the effects of the developed program were gathered by the Romantic Relationship Satisfaction Scale. The scale was developed to measure relationship satisfaction by Sakallı-Uğurlu (2003). It consists of 9 items. At the top of the scale was the

statement “in general, I have a _____ relationship with my partner”. The participants read the following nine adjective pairs and indicate which adjective define their romantic relationship on a 7 point-scale: good-bad, happy-unhappy, satisfactory-unsatisfactory, content-not content, rewarding-punishing, passionate-not passionate, full of love-full of hate, enjoyable-irritable, and exciting-unexciting. The factor analysis showed that one factor explained 54.38% of the total variance. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was .90 for the scale (Sakallı-Uğurlu).

Procedure and Data Analysis

The premarital relationship enrichment program consisted of 2-hour sessions on 7 weeks (Parrott & Parrott, 2006). In the first session, the Romantic Relationship Satisfaction Scale was given as pre-test and the Romantic Relationship Satisfaction Scale was given to the control group at the same time to the experimental group. The experimental group has attended to 7 premarital relationship enrichment sessions; whereas the control group has not been interfered during the same period. After 7 weeks, the Romantic Relationship Satisfaction Scale was given to the control and the experimental groups again as a post test.

Pre and post test scores of the control and experimental groups in the Romantic Relationship Satisfaction 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 were done by using SPSS.

Results

The results of the Romantic Relationship Satisfaction Scale administered to the experimental and control groups revealed no significant difference in relationship satisfaction levels (pre-test experimental group= 57.3 ± 6.81 , pre-test control group= 58.6 ± 2.63 , $p > .05$).

Mann-Whitney U test has been applied to the relationship satisfaction 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 relationship satisfaction is significant ($Z=3.021$, $p < .01$).

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 relationship satisfaction is significant ($Z= 2.812, p<.01$). 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 relationship satisfaction is significant ($Z= -.632, p>.05$).

According to these findings, the premarital relationship enrichment program enhances relationship satisfaction level of couples significantly. This result supports the hypothesis of the study.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a premarital relationship enrichment program to increase the level of the relationship satisfaction of the couples. In this study, the pre- and post-tests were given to the experimental and control groups. The sessions lasted during 7 weeks with experimental group. The results indicate significant differences between the levels of relationship satisfaction of the couples on the experimental and control groups. According to this, the premarital relationship enrichment program increases the relationship satisfaction level of couples significantly.

Similar studies support the results of this study. Parker (2007) says that marriage and relationship education programs' goal is to prevent distress and breakages in relations by giving information about noticing difficulties in couples' relationships and about developing the skills needed for married couples or couples getting prepared for marriage, no matter which culture it is. Thus, participants who participate in this program can manage contrast, get skills in communication and develop more successful relationships. When relationship satisfaction of the couples who are participated in the SYMBS, Premarital Relationship Development Program, is investigated, it is observed that training programs increase couples' relationship satisfaction. Various research studies which are done to determine the effects of relationship enhancement (RE) program, developed by Bernard Guerney, show that program provides significant gains about self-opening empathy and relationship satisfaction to the couples (Stahmann, 2000).

Research related to the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) developed by Markman (2006) proves that couples' participated in the PREP display a lower divorce rate and a higher relationship trust. At the end of the group program developed by

Stahmann and Hiebert, it has been observed that couples' marriage success and relationship satisfaction have increased (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997).

Research findings show that it helps individuals, who participated in Premarital Relationship Development Program, display higher relationship satisfaction when compared to the individuals in control groups. Earlier research related to the SYMBIS proves that couples participated in sessions, realize implicit problems during sessions and develop the ways of solving them (Parrott & Parrott, 1999). Thus, it proves that couples develop more successful and more satisfied relationships.

Carroll and Doherty (2003) tested premarital relationship development programs' effectiveness with a meta-analytic study. Analysis results show that premarital relationship development programs cause an increase in the quality of communication skills, conflict-solving skills and relationships.

McGeorge and Carlson (2006) tried to determine the effectiveness of premarital education program with the research they did. The program in which twenty-nine couples participated lasted for eight weeks. Results show that suitability for marriage and marriage desire post-test scores of individuals who participated in premarital training program are significantly higher, in compared to the individuals in control groups.

These results are similar to the results of the research. In this research, it is expected that the level of relationship satisfaction of individuals who participated in premarital relationship development training program will be higher than the individuals who do not participate in. At the end of the program, it has been proved that there is a significant difference between the relationship satisfaction of the individuals who participated in the program and did not participate in the program, in favor of the experimental group. There has been a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test averages of the scores which have been got from the experimental group's relationship satisfaction scale, but on the contrary to this there isn't a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test averages of the scores which have been got from the control group's relationship satisfaction scale. This result has the qualifications to prove the effectiveness of the premarital relationship development program that is applied.

Couples who participated in the premarital relationship development program have started to evaluate marriage with a more realistic approach by realizing about marriage relations. They have had skills

to increase the intimacy in relationships by learning their love styles. Thanks to the sessions they have had skills to decrease their attitudes which affect their happiness in a negative way by noticing that their attitudes determine their level of happiness. They have had effective communication skills by learning communication differences between them and their partners. They have started to understand the opposite sex better by discovering gender differences between men and women. They have had skills to discuss the issues that cause discussion in their relationships in a healthier approach and to decrease the discussions. They have learned the importance of strengthening the spiritual dimension of their relationship and the ways to strengthen. This information, participants got during the sessions, contribute to increase the relationship satisfaction as it is shown in the results that are obtained.

According to the results of research, it is concluded that premarital relationship development program helps couples to increase their relationship satisfaction, and that individuals who are participated in the program benefit significantly from this program. Based on these results the following recommendations are made:

Preparation of Marriage Programs or Premarital Relationship Development Programs must be included as a class or as a subject of a class in license programs such as Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Psychology, Social Service Expertise of Universities, so that graduates may help other individuals in society about this subject effectively as “helpers”. It is recommended that couples can be informed about premarital relationship development program in Guidance Research Centers of the Ministry of Education and by participating in volunteer couples education program, healthy marriages in community can be increased. Premarital relationship development program can be included in the preventive studies in mental health organizations. By cooperating with local government, it can be provided that couples who apply for marriage benefit from “Marriage Preparation Education”. It should be necessary that couples who will marry in the future after they complete social, economical and professional preparations, must participate in these trainings and they can get married only by this way. Large-scale social projects about getting “marriage preparation” education to individuals at low level of education and to rural areas, and about making it widespread may be organized. The results of the research show that premarital relationship development program increases couples’ relationship satisfaction, couples’ marital satisfaction. But, marital satisfaction has not been investigated in this study after marriage. Watching studies that aim to reveal the long-term effect

of premarital relationship development training program may be done in future research. Thus, relationship satisfaction that is provided before marriage, may be determined whether it continues or not after marriage. The sample of this research has been selected from individuals who are at the level of university or at a higher educational level. In the future research, the effect of the program on participants at lower educational level may be examined. In this study, couples who make at least 1-year date and plan to marry in the future are sampled. In future research, engaged couples' benefit level of program may be handled.

References/Kaynakça

- Bagarozzi, D., Bagarozzi, J. I., Anderson, S. A., & Pollane, L. (1984). Premarital education and training sequence (pets) : a-3 year follow-up of an experimental study. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 1*(63), 91-100.
- Barlow, J. (1999). A new model for premarital counseling within the church. *Pastoral Psychology, 48*(1), 3-9.
- Boisvert, J., Ladouceur, R., Beaudry, M., Freeston, M. H., Turgeon, L., Tardif, C., et al. (1995). Perception of marital problems and of their prevention by quebec young adults. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 156*(1), 33-44.
- Boran, F. (2003). *Aşk ve evlilik*. İstanbul: Epsilon.
- Busby, D. M., Ivey, D. C., Harris, S. M., & Ates, C. (2007). Self-directed, therapist-directed, and assessment-based interventions for premarital couples. *Family Relations, 56*(7), 279-290.
- Carroll, J., & Doherty, W. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital education. *Family Relations, 3*(52), 105-118.
- Devlet Bakanlığı Aile Araştırma Kurumu Başkanlığı. (1998). *III. Aile şurası toplantısı*. Ankara: Yazar
- Dokur, M. ve Profeta, Y. (2006). *Aile ve çift terapisi*. İstanbul: Morpa Kültür Yayınları.
- Einhorn, L., Williams, T., Stanley, S., Wunderlin, N. Markman, H., & Eason, J. (2008). PREP inside and out: Marriage education for inmates. *Family Process, 47*(3), 341-356.
- Gingrich, F. (2003). Complementary delusions in premarital counseling. *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling, 6*(4), 51-71.
- Kalkan, M. ve Ersanlı, E. (2008). Bilişsel-davranışçı yaklaşıma dayalı evlilik ilişkisini geliştirme programının evli bireylerin evlilik uyumuna etkisi. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri, 8*, 963-986.
- Kalkan, M. ve Kaya, S. N. (2007). Evlilik öncesi ilişkileri değerlendirme ölçeğinin (EÖİDÖ) geliştirilmesi: Geçerlik ve güvenilirlik çalışması. *Aile ve Toplum, 3*(11), 35-40.
- Larsen, A. S., & Olson, D. H. (1989). Predicting marital satisfaction using prepare: A replication study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 15*(3), 311-322.
- Larson, J. H., Anderson, S. M., Holman, T. B., & Niemann, B. K. (1998). A longitudinal study of the effects of premarital communication, relationship stability, and self-esteem on sexual satisfaction in the first year of marriage. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 24*(3), 193- 206.

- Markman, H. (2006). Preventive education: distinctive and directions. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 20(4), 411-433.
- Markman, H.J., & Hahlweg, K. (1993). The prediction and prevention of marital distress: an international perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 13(1), 29-43.
- Martin, P.D., Martin, M., & Martin, D. (2001). Adolescent premarital sexual activity, cohabitation, and attitudes toward marriage. *Adolescence*, 36(143), 601-609.
- McGeorge, C., & Carlson, T. (2006). Premarital education: An assessment of programme efficacy. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 28(1), 165-190.
- Özgülven, İ. E. (2000). *Evlilik ve aile terapisi*. Ankara: Pdrem Yayınları.
- Özğürürlü, K. (1996). *Evlilik raporu*. İstanbul: Altın Kitaplar.
- Parker, R. (2007). The effectiveness of marriage and relationship educations programs. *Family Matters*, 77(3), 57-59.
- Parrott, L., & Parrott, L. (1999). The symbis model. In R. Berger & M. Hannah (Eds.), *Preventive approaches in couples therapy* (pp. 237-254). Lillington, N.C.: Edwards Brothers.
- Parrott, L., & Parrott, L. (2006). *Saving your marriage before it starts*. Michigan: Zondervan.
- Ridley, C., & Sladeczek, I. (1992). Premarital relationship enhancement. *Family Relations*, 41(2), 148-153.
- Sakallı-Uğurlu, N. (2003). How do romantic relationship satisfaction, gender stereotypes, and gender relate to future time orientation in romantic relationships?. *The Journal of Psychology*, 137(3), 294-303.
- Senediak, C. (1990). The value of premarital education. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 11(3), 26-31.
- Stahmann, R.F., & Hiebert, W. J. (1997). *Premarital and remarital counseling: The professional's handbook*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Stahmann, R. F. (2000). Premarital counselling: a focus for family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 163(22), 104-116.
- Sullivan, K., & Bradbury, T. (1997). Are premarital prevention programs reaching couples at risk for marital dysfunction? *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 65(1), 24-30.
- Tarhan, N. (2008). *Evlilik psikolojisi*. İstanbul: Timaş.
- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2006). *Türkiye istatistik yllığı*. Ankara: Yazar.
- Valiente, C. E., Belanger, C. J., & Estrada, A. U. (2002). Helpful and harmful expectations of premarital interventions. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 5(28), 71-77.
- Williams, L. M., Riley, L. A., & Dyke, D. T. V. (1999). An empirical approach to designing marriage preparation programs. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*. 4(27), 271-283.
- Wilmoth, J. (2007). A survey of marriage preparation provided by assemblies of god pastors in Oklohoma. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 2(5), 20-33.
- Yavuzer, H. (2004). *Evlilik okulu*. İstanbul: Remzi.
- Yeşilyaprak, B. (2003). *Gelişim ve öğrenme psikolojisi*. Ankara: Pegem A Yayıncılık.

Metinlerde Adobe Caslon Pro 10 p. harf büyüklüğü
 vurgularda Adobe Caslon Pro Italic 10 p. harf büyüklüğü
 makale başlıklarında Adobe Caslon Pro 17.5 p. harf büyüklüğü
 arabaşlıklarda Myriad Pro Bold 9 p. harf büyüklüğü
 kullanılmıştır.