

An Application of the Imago Relationship Approach and Group Counselling for Developing the Marriage Relationship*

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Makale Geliş Tarihi: 23/03/2023

Makale Kabul Tarihi: 12/05/2023

DOI: 10.35675/befdergi.1269810

Abstract

The increase in divorce rates has revealed that the work to be done should be diversified in order to carry out the marriage union in a healthy way. Studies on improving the marital relationship based on the Imago Relationship approach, which has proven effective, are very limited in our country. For this reason, this review is important in that it is the first article in our country in which the Imago Relationship approach is systematically addressed. The purpose of the current study is to discuss the Imago Relationship approach in developing the marital relationship with all its aspects in light of the literature. In the study, the concept of imago, the theory of imago, the foundations of Imago Relationship Therapy, childhood wounds, romantic love, power struggle, the purpose of therapy, the role of the therapist, and the imago dialogue are discussed in detail. At the end of the study, a group counselling program based on the 8-session Imago approach, which was applied for the first time in Turkish culture by the researcher to increase marital adjustment and satisfaction, was included. This program is included in order to show that the Imago relationship approach is applicable in Turkish culture and to increase the effectiveness of the study. The program was applied in an experimental study in a group of 6 couples and it was concluded that the program was effective (Güven, 2017).

Keywords: Imago relationship therapy, marriage, group counselling

Evlilik İlişisini Geliştirmede İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı ve Grupla Psikolojik Danışma Uygulaması

Öz

* This study is based on the doctoral thesis of the first author under the supervision of the second author.

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Kaynak Gösterme: Güven, N., & İskender, M. (2023). An application of the imago relationship approach and group counselling for developing the marriage relationship. *Bayburt Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 18(39), 1047-1069.

Boşanma oranlarındaki artış, evlilik birliğinin sağlıklı şekilde yürütülebilmesi için yapılacak çalışmaların çeşitlendirilmesi gerektiğini gözler önüne sermiştir. İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı ile ilgili çalışmalar ülkemizde çok kısıtlıdır. Bu derleme çalışması, ülkemizde İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı'nın sistematik bir şekilde ele alındığı ilk makale olma özelliği taşıması bakımından önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, evlilik ilişkisini geliştirmede İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı'nı tüm yönleriyle alanyazın ışığında ele almaktır. Çalışmada imago kavramı, imago teorisi, İmago İlişki Terapisi'nin temelleri, çocukluk yaraları, romantik aşk, güç mücadelesi, terapinin amacı, terapistin rolü ve imago diyalogu detaylı bir şekilde ele alınmıştır. Çalışmanın sonunda da araştırmacı tarafından ilk kez Türk kültüründe uygulanan, 8 oturumluk İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı'na dayalı evlilik uyumunu ve doyumunu artırmak amacıyla hazırlanmış grupla psikolojik danışma programına yer verilmiştir. Bu programa, İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı'nın Türk kültüründe uygulanabilir olduğunu göstermek ve çalışmanın etkililiğini artırmak amacıyla yer verilmiştir. Program, deneysel bir çalışmada 6 çiftin bulunduğu bir grupta uygulanmış ve programın etkili olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır (Güven, 2017).

Anahtar Kelimeler: İmago ilişki terapisi, evlilik, grupla psikolojik danışma

Introduction

Marriage is one of the subjects that researchers work on. There may be problems from time to time on this journey, which is set out with the desire for a lifelong togetherness. Finding healthy solutions to these problems depends on the couple's having intention and investing the necessary effort to find these solutions. This process is both physically and emotionally wearing and tiring for couples. In the case of unresolved problems, unfortunately, the result can be separation. The fact that the number of divorces has increased especially in recent years in our country and that this situation has come to the fore as a social problem is important in terms of conducting more comprehensive research on the subject and working on a solution to the problem. While the number of divorced couples was 136 thousand 570 in 2020, it became 174 thousand 85 in 2021. The crude divorce rate, which expresses the number of divorces per thousand people, was 2.07 in 2021 (TÜİK, 2022). In addition, the number of couples who do not get divorced but who have constant conflicts in their marriages is not to be underestimated. For this reason, programs designed to strengthen the bonds of love in marriage, to minimize the problems experienced and to improve the quality of the marital relationship are extremely important in terms of physical and mental health. If marital problems are not prevented, unrest and discord between partners do not only affect the couples themselves, but also negatively affect their children and even the immediate environment.

Although there are many studies to improve marriage abroad, studies in our country are insufficient. The study of Güven (2017), who was the first to use Imago Relationship Therapy, which has attracted increasing attention abroad, is thought to be important in terms of both bringing Imago Relationship Therapy into Turkish culture and getting into the source of the problems in marriage for couples and bringing a different perspective to the marriage relationship. After Güven (2017),

Akbulut (2018) also examined the effect of the program based on the Imago approach on forgiveness and happiness and found it effective.

The purpose of the current study is to discuss the Imago Relationship approach in developing the marital relationship with all its aspects in light of the literature. In the study, the concept of Imago, the theory of Imago, the foundations of Imago Relationship Therapy, childhood wounds, romantic love, power struggle, the purpose of the therapy, the role of the therapist and Imago dialogue are discussed in detail. In addition, a criticism of Imago Relationship Therapy is also presented. At the end of the study, a group counselling program, which was applied for the first time in Turkish culture by the researcher, based on the 8-session Imago approach in order to increase unity and satisfaction in marriage is also presented. The program was implemented in a group of 12 married individuals in an experimental study and it was concluded that it was effective (Güven, 2017).

The word “Imago” is a Latin word meaning “image” in English (Luquet, 2007; Brown & Reinhold, 1999). It refers to the positive and negative characteristics of the early childhood caregivers rooted in the mind. This image is held in the “unconscious” part of the brain or in the part of the brain that includes unspoken memories (Luquet, 2007). Each individual records a schema in his/her brain that reflects the interactions and experiences with his/her parents and all the characteristics of these interactions and experiences. Imago is this inner schema. The person may be unaware of the existence of the Imago because it is deeply located in the unconscious. During infancy, the Imago performs a vital function, enabling the infant to distinguish his/her parents from other adults. In adulthood, it starts a struggle for a more competent life by operating at an unconscious level. A person who has a character structure similar to that of the parent is chosen as the partner. This provides an opportunity to heal old wounds (Hendrix & Hunt, 2001). Therefore, people find someone who has positive or negative character traits of their caregivers attractive. This attractiveness leads to re-enactment of early childhood memories where the initial wounds are made (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). After getting rid of the influence of love, the individual finds the opportunity to see that the person he/she loves and the reflections he/she directs towards him/her are separate realities. He/she realizes that the reflections are actually parts of him/her (Johnson, 2001).

From an early age, images or effects of positive or negative personality traits of caregivers begin to be recorded in the cortex. Generally, parents have the greatest influence. People who do not have the opportunity to grow up with their parents can also record the positive or negative character traits of their caregivers such as grandparents and aunts. These images begin to form an integrated image of caregivers. Such an integration forms the Imago. The Imago consists of the positive or negative character traits of all the important caregivers contributing to the up-bringing of the individual. These character traits are not as clear as in black and white photographs. They should be carefully examined for some time to fully understand them. As people

grow older, they unconsciously look for people to match these images. This is actually a paradox. If you ask someone what they are looking for in a partner, you will get a list of positive traits. No one says they want to have a relationship with someone who is callous, emotionally distant and indifferent. Consciously, everyone sets out to find ideal partners with positive traits. When the wedding is over and the couples are getting used to the married life, romantic love starts to disappear like an anaesthetic and negative trait begin to appear and become painful (Brown & Reinhold, 1999).

Theory of Imago

The theory of Imago is especially used in couple relationships and is based on the understanding of an evolving relationship. The theory is presented as the Four Journeys of the Essence-Cosmic Journey, Evolutionary Journey, Psychological Journey, Social Journey: Raising the awareness of bond forms the basis of the cosmic journey; increasing security forms the basis of the evolutionary journey, differentiating and healing past wounds form the basis of the psychological journey and finally, increasing the development of wholeness forms the basis of the social journey (IRI, 2014). Hendrix developed a systematic and detailed description of the stages of human development by synthesizing the theories of Margaret Mahler, Daniel Stern, Harry Stack Sullivan and Erik Erikson. This has led to the development of new profiles, the definition of the meaning and function of common life and to the reflection of a paradigm of shift from the ontology of separation to the ontology of attachment by the concept and processes of the Imago Therapy (Hendrix, 1996).

Imago Relationship Therapy offers couples an easy, understandable and applicable relationship philosophy with appropriate communication and problem-solving skills. The Imago philosophy gives couples reasons why in many situations, such as love and disappointment, it is better to put things away than to end the relationship. It also provides understandable tools to establish connections and to understand and respond to frustrations and heal childhood sensitivities (Luquet, 2007). An important aspect of the theory of Imago is that partners will tolerate each other when childhood wounds are painful and it is difficult at first for them to respond therapeutically to their partner. This is parallel to the psychoanalytic conceptualization of countertransference and its potential therapeutic benefits (Zielinski 1999). According to the theory of Imago, the gist of the matter is this: Two completely mismatched people who are developmentally injured from the same points and who are looking for other parts of themselves come together to meet their developmental needs and find the missing parts. Many do not know this secret and instead of cooperating in a way that suits the purpose of the relationship, they begin to harm their partners to protect themselves. It is necessary to understand the fact that the unconscious uses relationships in order to heal relationships and regain a sense of wholeness. The key here is cooperation (Luquet, 2007).

The main idea in the theory of Imago is the unconscious desire of the person to draw the emotionally distant partner close to himself/herself and change that person. Partners have to reveal the hidden aspects in themselves when they give what is the most difficult for themselves to each other. In this way, instead of projecting their own repressed personality traits onto their partners, they have to take responsibility and revive the rusted parts within themselves (Sinkjær, 1997). The basic thesis of Imago Relationship Therapy is that everyone has opportunities in a relationship and they create their relationship by using these opportunities. Every individual is a whole. The problems experienced by individuals are caused by unconscious parental behaviours. This results in detachment from self, alienation from people, problematic mental health, interpersonal tension and social ills (Luquet, 2007).

Fundamentals of Imago Relationship Therapy

Imago Relationship Therapy entails the understanding of not only Freud and systems theorists, but also Harry Stack Sullivan's interpersonal theory, Martin Buber's I-Thou philosophy, social learning theorists, spiritual traditions and quantum physics (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). Imago Relationship Therapy is an eclectic combination of psychotherapy approaches such as Relationship Therapy, Attachment Theory, Psychoanalysis, Transactional Analysis, Gestalt Therapy, Psychodynamic Approaches and Cognitive-Behavioural Techniques (Hendrix, 2008; Zielinski 1999). Imago Relationship Therapy, which is established on a psychodynamic basis and includes understanding the relationship, has replaced the analysis of the transference obtained from the relationship between the couple and the therapist with the analysis of the transference between married couples. Thus, it has used the power of relationship as a source of healing. It draws on the ideas of Freud and his early followers. It includes many of the teachings of people who study early childhood development such as Mahler, Bowlby, Ainsworth, Stearn and others. It combines its theoretical framework with the knowledge of learning theorists and behaviourists. It has also been created and shaped by knowledge compiled by other disciplines such as physics, anthropology and cosmology (Brown & Reinhold, 1999).

Born in the late 1970s, Imago Relationship Therapy coincides with the emergence of relational therapy. It has a special importance on marriage and other forms of togetherness. Unlike skill-based marital therapies, Imago includes the effects of childhood on partner choice and marital dynamics and the importance of acquiring relationship skills. The focus of the relationship skill is Imago Couple Dialogue. The therapist's role, on the other hand, radically changes from "expert" to "manager" in this dialogue process. Imago argues that all pathology is relational, that all relationship difficulties originate in childhood relationship disorders and that these reappear in intimate partner relationships in adulthood. Imago Dialogue is a powerful therapeutic practice that enables couples to re-establish bonds in their relationships, thereby repairing childhood relationship disorders (Luquet, 2007).

Imago Relationship Therapy is not a set of techniques, but a belief system for committed relationships. At the same time, Imago Relationship Therapy is a dynamic system open to new ideas. For example, Imago Relationship Therapy uses Gottman's discovery that soft starts on the part of the woman for relationship conflicts are a sign of marital success. It is now included in behaviour change requests as a means of optimizing partner responses. Although Imago Relationship Therapy supports long-term commitments and personal growth, it is an ongoing process, not a beginning (Zielinski, 2000). Designed to help couples heal themselves in long-term committed relationships, Imago Relationship Therapy combines key elements of systems, behavioural and psychodynamic theories. This model does not emphasize differences, but rather increases the level of commitment between partners as a means of overcoming childhood wounds (Slate et al., 2000).

Imago Relationship Therapy believes that potential partners seek each other unconsciously based on whether they have been injured in different ways during the same or similar developmental stages. Couples who use different coping styles in an intimate relationship involuntarily wound each other because each partner looks at the other from the perspective of his/her childhood troubles. Therefore, relationship disorder, fear, anger and shame arise (Zielinski, 1999). Imago Relationship Therapy is not just a wishful thinking theory; rather, it is a tried and true method of creating a passionate relationship that has always been desired (Hendrix, 2008). Imago Relationship Therapy is characterized by many attributes: applicable, rational, accessible, logical, respectful and helpful. Some therapists have chosen to use Imago Relationship Therapy as their sole or primary model. Others have simply used the skills and combined them with other skills they learned from other models. Some others have been trained in other experimental skill models and use Imago philosophy as a theoretical basis (Luquet, 2007).

Childhood wounds

According to the Imago Relationship approach, the situations that people need but cannot reach are called "childhood wounds". People are sensitive today to what was missing in their past. Conscience is set to behave like those who give people what they needed or lacked in the past and to believe that the only way to heal these wounds is to do as they did. Although showing tolerance is frustrating, this design of the relationship has a perfect plan: Healing the childhood wounds of each individual. The fact is that no one's family is perfect. Even if families are very good, their parenting is somewhat lacking. In other words, it is impossible to be a perfect parent (Hendrix & Hunt, 2013).

Childhood wounds play a major role in both partner selection and relationship conflicts. Reflections of childhood wounds manifest themselves as being attracted by people with similar wounds occurred either later in life or at a similar stage of the development. Childhood wounds lie at the heart of most conflicts and power struggles

couples face and curing them is the key in resolving problems in adult relationships. Therefore, in order to provide genuine treatment, therapists must be prepared to help their clients to understand and cope with their childhood wounds. Such understandings will contribute to the client's understanding of both himself/herself and his/her partner. Even just noticing childhood wounds contributes to the personal development of individuals so that they can enrich their adult relationships (Oh, 2005).

Romantic love

The romantic love process in Imago Relationship Therapy is a selection process that allows a person to unconsciously relate to another person who resembles his/her first caregiver with the hope of healing his/her emotional wounds and regaining the sense of wholeness. However, an attempt to reconnect inevitably fails because the chosen partner's resemblance to the original parents results in a resurgence of hurtful childhood situations. Thus a power struggle begins between the couples. The theory of Imago sees romantic love as a method of bringing together two emotionally wounded and weak people. This is a way of re-enacting scenes from childhood in which the weakness occurred. Thus, what is needed can be regained in the end because people somehow agree with the mistakes of the person with whom they have a love relationship. The goal here is to provide people with the opportunity to heal the hurtful experiences of their childhood through relationships, complete their development and thus give them what they need to grow (Luquet, 2007). Couples resort to marital therapy in order to find a solution to the breaking of the bond between them. The unconscious goal of the marital struggle is the desire to repair and maintain the bond. Therefore, the goal of therapy is to repair the bond (Brown & Reinhold, 1999).

Power struggle

Power struggle is a stage of the relationship that many couples are too familiar with. Many couples know the cliché that ends "*you know your honeymoon is over when.....*" and then a very long list is presented: Goes out late, spends too much money, works too much, doesn't understand my feelings, doesn't realize how hard it is to start a family, gets too involved in activities, plays football too much ... Some couples find ways to distance themselves from each other although they start with the desire to be together all the time. Sometimes couples use coercive methods like screaming or whining to get what they need from the other. Usually, one couple tries to be closer while the other tries to be more distant. Thus, disappointments arise regardless of the method used (Luquet, 2007).

Purpose of the Therapy

The purpose of Imago Relationship Therapy is to enable couples to form a conscious marriage together (Luquet, 2007) and to re-image each other (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). Another objective of Imago Relationship Therapy is to have a healing bond in

couple therapy. The main tool that can be used to establish this type of bond is Couple Dialogue (Flemke & Protinsky, 2003).

Role of the Therapist

Imago Relationship Therapy challenges a rule that puts the therapist at the centre of spiritual therapy. The role of the therapist in Imago Therapy is to be a factor facilitating the healing process. Even transferring authority from the therapist to couples creates a monumental change. Rather than diminishing the importance of the therapist, this actually increases the need for a competent therapist. This is like needing an obstetrician as well as a midwife during childbirth. The obstetrician provides further assistance in this natural process than a less competent person who knows all the answers (Hendrix, 2008). Unlike both traditional long-term and short-term therapists who function as specialists and sources of healing, the role of the Imago therapist is to lead the therapeutic process that empowers partners in the relationship to heal each other and develop towards wholeness. He/she serves like a coach rather than an expert or resource to enable them to become therapists for each other (Luquet, 2007). Imago therapists are inclusive. Reasonable demands are embedded in the personality of the therapist. These demands include educational, philosophical and psychological requirements, as well as therapeutic addressing, persuasion, and role modelling, to maintain the couple's hope in the face of the hopelessness that arises while the illusion of romantic love dies. Imago Relationship Therapy is based on the therapist's ever-evolving experiences of living in a conscious marriage, committed partnership, or coping effectively with their loss (Zielinski 1999). Being an Imago therapist is being the manager of this process. The imago therapist is a coach, not the centre of the process or the healer. The Imago therapist is someone who manages a process that allows partners to become each other's therapists. His/her ultimate goal is to encourage the couple to continue their journey of becoming each other's healers (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). Here, the role of the therapist has been radically changed from "expert" to "manager" in the dialogue process. The therapist enables couples to establish bonds with each other and eventually reach an empathetic relationship called dialogue. Conscious and consistent use of the three steps of dialogue – mirroring, validation and empathy – repairs the bond between partners. This bond enables emotional wounds to heal and developmental growth to continue and fosters spiritual growth (Luquet, 2007).

Imago Therapists work on the assumption that when the bond is repaired and functionalized, what emerges as individual or systemic pathology disappears. What makes this healing possible is a dialogue process that enables couples to break their symbiotic fusion, differentiate as separate persons, give up their own perspectives and connect with each other's subjective realities. Observed outcomes include reduced conflicts, increased respect for differences and regained passion. Partners must be passionate friends (Brown & Reinhold, 1999).

The eclectic nature of Imago Relationship Therapy requires skilled therapists with high self-awareness. These therapists must have received training in psychotherapy. In addition, therapists using Imago Relationship Therapy benefit greatly from their own experience (Slate et al., 2000). Imago therapists educate couples about their desires for behaviour change because these desires contribute to the growth each person needs to develop their missing parts (Zielinski 1999). Diagnoses, analysis, history eliciting, authority and expertise are useless if couples involved in a power struggle fail to repair the bond and try to restore integrity. The duty of the therapist should be to manage the interaction between the partners so that non-speech interactions occur during the session (Hendrix, 1996).

Imago Dialogue

Efficient communication is the foundation of a good relationship. Good communication skills may not solve problems or make the subject clear, but without them, neither a problem can be solved nor can issues be clarified. Communication as an exchange of verbal or nonverbal information, meaning and emotion between two people includes all possible ways of interaction. Communication can be good or bad, but lack of communication is the worst (IRI, 2015).

In Imago Relationship Therapy, relationship problems are not tried to be isolated from a traditional point of view. Instead, relationship problems are evaluated within the context of a relationship. Personality is formed and shaped in the context of the relationship. Thus, all wounds come from relationships, and as a result, all healing efforts must come from relationships. Such healing will not occur unless the couple is in a safe environment. In the Imago model, partners begin to build trust through a process called “Couple Dialogue” (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). Used to teach couples to communicate more effectively, Imago Dialogue or Couple Dialogue, is a process structured in such a way as to build the emotional trust people need to be able to communicate with one another about their weaknesses and needs without being defensive. It repairs the empathic bond that allows people to ease their defences. Many people resort to angry criticism, loud repetitions, outbursts, tears or defensiveness when talking to loved ones about a “hot topic”. They feel free to make friends when they explore the environment and decide that it is safe. However, if the reptilian brain senses “danger” (a critical partner/parent), then it takes a defensive position. Some people “hide” in a shell, as turtles do, withdraw, disconnect, become lonely or avoid – these are the minimisers. Others express their energies in an exaggerated way and go after their loved ones by wanting to be heard, shouting, giving advice or being overly emotional. These instinctive, reactive behaviours are present in all couples. They tend to increase conflicts and power struggles. The purpose of using the dialogue process is to teach partners to reduce their reactions and to allow them to listen to their partner in an effort to understand, validate and empathize (Robbins, 2005).

Dialogue is a development process for the couple. If practiced regularly, it becomes easier and causes less anxiety. In this work, it's all about staying in the process. If a couple leaves the dialogue process while discussing important issues, they revert to old and painful ways of communicating. Consciously and willingly participating in the dialogue process is an effort to understand the other. This supports the development (Luquet, 2007). The essence of Imago Therapy is to help couples learn to bond securely with each other and develop greater empathy for each other's pain with a specific tool – Couple Dialogue. Couples tend to loosen their defences when they participate in the dialogue process because they begin to experience a sense of security that offers a start to the healing that is being targeted (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). Dialogue in Imago Therapy is primitive. People have basic needs, such as knowing that they are heard and understood. They need to know that they are understood and that their feelings are acknowledged. Couple Dialogue ensures that these requirements are met. For many people, Couple Dialogue feels like any other communication tool they learn, such as active listening or repetition. The difference between this and other means of communication is the paradigm the therapist will wrap it in. Couple dialogue is more than just listening in its entirety. It also requires a thorough understanding that the other person has a valid significance and sentiment, that the other person's reality is real to him/her as well and should not be confused with the listener's own reality. In other words, Couple Dialogue teaches couples that their thoughts and beliefs do not have to be shared by the other partner in order to be valid. Couple Dialogue is key to understanding, healing and building connected relationships (Luquet, 2007). Teaching couples to communicate on a daily basis through dialogue, thus creating a safe environment in which they can live and work, is a slow process. However, if practiced regularly, it becomes more natural, just like snow removal, and couples can climb more difficult slopes (Brown & Reinhold, 1999).

Couple Dialogue ensures that the sender of an expression is fully heard and understood. When a person feels understood, he/she can direct the energy he/she uses to hold his/her own position to more beneficial purposes to improve his/her sense of self. At the same time, Couple Dialogue allows the recipient of the statement to listen to statements without feeling as if he/she has to agree with the other. It allows two realities to exist. Through the dialogue process, couples can facilitate each other's development when they can understand that there are two realities. This can happen when one partner fully understands the other's needs, it might be difficult though. Couple Dialogue is a three-step process involving mirroring, validation and empathy. When couples first learn about it, it can seem overly structured and rote. Some may even complain that it looks fake when they do it (Luquet, 2007). However, as it is practiced, the steps are slowly better understood and the couples who practice the dialogue become couples in dialogue. Making a commitment to be a couple in dialogue is the most important element of being a conscious partner. This means prioritizing the relationship. All Imago processes are based on this dialogue. Dialogue

helps couples understand their unique inner world. They see how each other's world works and they begin to be "us" instead of two individuals in conflict. So they become real partners (IRI, 2015). It's like a one-year-old child learning to walk ... After a short period of inexperience, walking will be more complete. Likewise, the result of the inexperienced process of dialogue will be a couple who understand and value each other (Luquet, 2007). Often couples don't realize how little they listen to their partner, but instead are actually constructing their own internal responses. In order for partners to feel understood from the heart, his/her message must be listened to wholeheartedly. Partners' realizing that they are truly understood will be a healing and maturing experience for them, even if they do not agree with each other. It is not necessary to agree; the important thing is to understand the point of view of the partner. Taking time to understand not only what the partner is saying, but also what he/she implies, deepens commitment and positively affects the mutual healing process (IRI, 2015).

Imago Dialogue Stages

Mirroring

Mirroring, the first phase of the dialogue process, involves the receiving partner repeating what has been said to the sending partner, not what he/she thinks should be said or what he/she wants to be said, but exactly what the sender has said. This part of the process ensures that contact is established and the sending partner knows that he/she has been heard. This is an exact change and prevents the receiver from coming up with a sudden defensive response because the receiver must concentrate and listen deliberately to fully hear what is being said. Mirroring is an important step to establish contact between the sender and receiver. So it has to be done correctly. It is quite appropriate for the receiver to ask the sender to repeat the statement. The main idea here is to get the message across (Luquet, 2007). Mirroring means listening deeply to the partner and accurately expressing the content of his or her message. A common form of this is to explain what the partner has said in another way. "Explanation" means expressing the message sent by the partner in a way that closely approximates what he or she wants to convey, but in the recipient's own words. Sometimes mirroring with the same words is recommended because it honours certain word choices of the partner. Mirroring reveals the intention at that moment to go beyond one's own thoughts and understand the partner from the partner's own perspective. Responses given before mirroring are rather "commentary" and may lead to misunderstanding. Mirroring allows the partner to repeat the message over and over, while allowing the recipient to repeat or paraphrase that message until he/she has understood it correctly (IRI, 2015).

Example for mirroring;

Let's see if I have understood you? I heard you say ... or you said

Validation

When the receiver accurately mirrors his/her partner, he/she will have validated what his/her partner has said. Validation is not the same as participation, although participation can also occur while validating. Validation is a way of saying “*I can’t look, but if I could see things through your eyes, I could understand how you see it that way.*” In other words, validation means “*your ideas are meaningful from your point of view*”. Validation is an important part of the dialogue process and is the component that differentiates the process from “active listening”. It requires the recipient to put himself/herself in the other’s shoes and understand his/her partner from the partner’s point of view. Validation can be momentary. It is listening long enough without defending yourself to understand that the other person has a valid point. But it does not mean that one person loses his/her own self in the other. Validation allows for two points of view to exist, and neither is wrong. The individuality of each of the individuals involved in the relationship is reflected in his/her own perspective. At the same time, validation prevents couples from experiencing the tension experienced by both partners as a result of the sending partner not feeling, thinking or believing the same things. In other words, validation breaks symbiotic thoughts and creates a healthy difference through relationship (Luquet, 2007). Validation is a type of communication that shows that the information received or mirrored means “something”. It shows that the partner’s point of view can be understood and validated because for the partner, this is “the truth”. Validation means that couples temporarily suspend their personal approach. This allows the partner’s experience to have its own reality. Validating the partner’s message does not mean agreeing with his/her perception. This just shows that there are two points of view in any communication between two people, that an “objective” approach is not possible and that the transfer of experience is an “interpretation” rather than a “reality” that is always true to everyone. Mirroring and validation processes verify the other person and increase trust and intimacy (IRI, 2015).

Example for validation;

It's understandable, understandable.

under the circumstances of ... I understand.

Because I sometimes... I can understand why you see it that way.

Empathy

Empathy is recognizing another’s feelings. It is the process of reflecting, imagining or being involved in the event or situation the sender is describing. This deep level of communication is aimed at recognizing and accessing the feelings of the sending partner and experiencing them personally to a certain extent. Empathy allows both couples to step out of their solitude, even for a moment, to have a genuine “rendezvous”. Such an experience has tremendous healing power (IRI, 2015). If the

receiver can validate his/her partner, he/she can understand that his/her partner has feelings about what has been said. This is the third part of the dialogue process: building empathy. In order for the receiving partner to empathize, he/she only needs to guess what the sending partner might be feeling. A person can have two, three or more emotions at the same time. There may even be opposing feelings. The receiving partner can say something like “*I can imagine that this is making you feel sad, alone and scared*”. The receiving partner may make a false interpretation, but it is ultimately an interpretation and an attempt to connect through empathy. If the receiver can stay in the process, there will be no wrong move. If the receiver misses his/her partner’s feelings, he/she can start by mirroring the correction his/her partner gave and try to understand those feelings through the dialogue process (Luquet, 2007).

Example for empathy;

When it happens like ... I can imagine you might feel.

Or if the feelings are clear: *I can understand you’re feeling*

And on a deep level: *I can experience ... (what you feel).*

Criticism of Imago Relationship Therapy

Criticisms of Imago Therapy are that Imago Relationship Therapy is clinically appropriate for a small, elite population and that there is the scarcity of trained therapists to use this method effectively (Slate et al., 2000).

Group Counselling Application

This program is a counselling group designed as a closed group consisting of 8 sessions. In the planning process of the program, the stages of the group counselling process and the Imago Therapy process were considered together. In this context, the program was prepared to help couples increase their marital satisfaction and harmony. Other objectives to be achieved with the program are listed below:

1. Helping them develop a relationship vision.
2. Making them understand their childhood wounds and disappointments.
3. Creating profiles for parents and partners.
4. Teaching couple dialogue.
5. Analyzing anger.
6. Experiencing keeping under control and self-soothing.
7. Enabling them to express compassion and appreciation.
8. Developing the imagination of a relationship in the future.

Program Features

The program is a program consisting of planned and structured activities, where couples share their feelings and thoughts. The program is based on the Imago approach. While preparing the program, national and international publications, books and programs related to marital satisfaction and marital adjustment were examined and national and international sources on Imago Therapy were reviewed. The program was prepared in a structure that would allow couples to get to know themselves and each other, to realize their expectations from each other and the source of their problems, to increase their interaction with the right ways of communication and to develop love and compassion for each other. The activities included in the program were of a developmental and preventive nature. Sessions lasted between 90 and 120 minutes.

Group Counselling Process

Session 1: “Our vision is happiness”

An activity was used to introduce group members to each other and to establish an environment of trust and the interaction was continued by asking whether the group members had experienced a group life before. Before giving information about the program, the couple files, which were prepared by the leader beforehand, which were consisted of the program introduction form, group rules form, statement and relationship vision form, pen and paper and on which the names of the couples were written, were distributed and they were asked to have them throughout the training process. In order to introduce the program, detailed information was given about the content. The rules regarding the group life were determined together with all the members. The couple declarations were read and signed by the members. The meaning of the concepts of marriage and marital adjustment for the members was determined and these concepts were evaluated according to the Imago approach. Vision forms were distributed for each couple in order to determine their “relationship vision”, enabling the couples to create their own relationship vision for their marriage. In line with the Imago approach, the couples were informed about marriage and marital adjustment, the problems experienced between partners and the reflections of these problems and the importance of couple training in conscious marriage.

Session 2: “Happy family, happy child with imago”

Relationship visions were reviewed and their importance was mentioned. In order to inform the group members in detail about marriage and marital adjustment and to raise awareness about the factors affecting marital adjustment, attention was drawn to the increase in divorce rates with numerical data and interactive discussions were conducted on “marriage, marital adjustment, stages of marital problems, negative effects of problems on individuals, healthy communication, the effect of past family life on marriage, the Imago approach, the purpose and importance of the Imago

approach, the contribution of couple training to individuals". The Imago approach was introduced and its importance in the marriage relationship was mentioned.

Session 3: "My wounds, my partner and my imago"

In order to raise awareness about the childhood wounds of the group members and the effects of these wounds on their current relationships, an activity was conducted on their past memories. The group members were encouraged to identify the positive and negative characteristics of the people who raised them and their partner. By drawing attention to the connection between the characteristics of the people who raised them and their partner, they were enabled to determine their Imago. Childhood frustrations of the group members and their reactions to them were determined. At the end of the session, the importance of healthy communication between partners and communication barriers were mentioned and information about Imago dialogue was given. Information forms were also distributed so that they could internalize Imago dialogue.

Session 4: "No exit with imago dialogue!"

In order for the group members to internalize Imago dialogue, the couples were asked to construct Imago dialogues. The main purposes of this session are to make the group members become more and more close and to raise awareness of their actions instead of just spending time with each other. In line with these purposes, the group members were made to realize their own exits regarding their relationships. Using the form prepared for this, the group members were encouraged to give up their exits for their relationships.

Session 5: "Romanticism again"

In order to raise awareness of certain behaviours that would make each other happy, the couples were asked to identify the behaviours that the other partner liked and to perform these behaviours regularly and consistently. Thus, the couples were enabled to carry their relationships into a safer space. Doing the Romanticism Again activity is extremely effective in recreating the conflict-free interaction environment of love. When couples begin to consciously increase the number of behaviours through which they show affection towards each other, they begin to feel more loving and safer. This activity helps couples to be happier and more harmonious in their marital relations by strengthening their emotional bonds. Before the activity, information was given about the necessity of romanticism again and the benefits it provides. It was tried to raise awareness and lay the groundwork for the activity by asking how they treated each other in the first years of their marriage, how they behave now and whether there is a difference between the behaviours in the first years and the current behaviours. The couples carried out the activity through the forms. The couples first described the behaviours they already liked in their partner. While doing

this, it is important that they focus on events that are distinct, positive, and occur in a particular order. Second, the couples recalled the romantic periods of their relationships and described long-neglected behaviours that expressed the care they showed each other at that time. Finally, the couples described caring and affectionate behaviours that they always wanted from each other but never expressed. While doing this, they benefited from their relationship vision or previous experiences. At the end of the session, the couples scored everything they wrote in the activity form according to their own order of importance and exchanged their lists with their partners and marked the items they did not want to do.

Session 6: “You’re welcome”

In this session, the couples were informed about the importance of understanding each other’s deepest needs in order to increase their trust and commitment by increasing their attentive behaviour towards each other with unexpected pleasures. Thus, the couples were given the opportunity to change their behaviours in line with their desires and to ease their resistance against each other. It was underlined that the couples should not share their lists with their partners in the surprise list activity and it was stated that they should create the list by observing the wishes and desires of their partners very carefully and by catching clues. The activity forms were handed out and the necessary instructions were given. The couples did not make any sharing because this activity should be kept confidential. The group leader moved on to another activity after the surprise list activity. The purpose of this activity, called “Stretching”, is to train partners about their deepest needs and to create opportunities for them to change their behaviours accordingly. The first step in this activity is to identify the desires behind couples’ frustrations. The leader handed out the activity form to the couples and first asked them to list in detail all the behaviours that were bothering them. Stating that the behaviours they did not like and wrote down in the form were also their frustrations, the group leader asked them to write the desire underlying each frustration next to it and then a request for this desire to be accomplished under each desire. Group members completed the activity by writing their desires and requests under their frustrations. The group leader asked them to share the desires and requests they had written with their partners using Imago dialogue, to correct the negative or ambiguous requests, and then to return to their own lists and rate these desires and requests according to the degree of importance for them and then to exchange them with their partners and to rate the difficulties of fulfilling these desires and requests according to themselves.

Finally, the group leader asked the couples to hide their partners’ desires and requests and to try to make their partners happy by fulfilling those requests several times a week, starting with the easiest one. The group leader ended the session by asking them to write down the awareness they gained in the session and to communicate using Imago dialogue whenever they find the opportunity.

Session 7: “My anger is safe”

In this session, which aimed to enable the couples to express their anger and resentment towards each other in a safe and constructive environment, to teach them a method of coping with their anger and to teach them how to control their anger with Imago dialogue, the feeling of anger was addressed and the couples were asked to remember and share the cases of intense anger and the last thing they were angry with. The objective of the activity of taking under control is to provide a standard method for coping with their anger by enabling couples to express their anger and resentment towards each other in a safe and constructive environment. It is important that both couples use this technique.

Session 8: “Conscious marriage”

The aim of the last session is to make the group members aware of the changes they have experienced during the program process, to raise their awareness of conscious marriage and to make them understand the importance of couple dialogue. After receiving the feelings and thoughts about the program process from the volunteer participants, all the training sessions are briefly summarized, respectively. Group members are informed about what they will do after the program.

Results and Discussion

In the current study, Imago Relationship Therapy was discussed comprehensively and a group counselling program developed to increase marital adjustment and satisfaction of couples based on the Imago approach was included. In an experimental study (Güven, 2017), the program was applied to 12 married individuals for 8 weeks and it was observed that the marital adjustment and satisfaction scores of the group members increased. Comparison of the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups after the application revealed significant differences in favour of the experimental group in each of the marital adjustment and satisfaction scales. The difference between the two groups was found to be in favour of the experimental group in the retention tests. This difference can be considered as an indicator of the permanence of the program’s effect. In summary, based on the results obtained from the experimental study in which the program was tested, it can be said that the group counselling program based on the Imago approach to increase marital adjustment and satisfaction was effective.

When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that studies focused on Imago Relationship Therapy support the effectiveness of the therapy. Almost all studies on the Imago approach have tested it on couples participating in the workshops developed by Harville Hendrix, the founder of Imago Therapy, for weekends and conducted by trained Imago therapists and have found it effective (Pitner, 1995; Beeton, 2006). In a qualitative study, Oh and Byun (2010) examined how participants involved in Imago couple therapy changed their perspectives on childhood wounds and the appearance of their partners. Oh, emphasizes that, after long research, each individual’s childhood

wounds and unmet needs can prominently shape any intimate relationship he/she will enter in the future (Oh, 2005).

Relationship enrichment programs aim to serve the needs of couples from a wide range of sadness levels, which is the main focus of Heller's (1999) research. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods in the study, Heller measured the impact of attitude, behaviour and perception in terms of couple harmony, couple trust and intimacy on 60 participants in a psycho-educational study based on Imago Relationship Therapy, called GTLYW (Getting the Love You Want). As a result of the measurements applied separately to men and women, both groups showed significant positive changes on all the dependent variables. As a result of retention tests, it was revealed that these gains lasted for a long time (Heller, 1999).

A peaceful family creates the infrastructure of a peaceful society, and a peaceful togetherness of the couples creates a peaceful family. In healthy marriages, the mental and physical health of partners and children is also good (Canel, 2011).

Imago Relationship Therapy is an approach to relationship counselling that offers some new ideas and methods. It combines several principles from different psychological therapeutic approaches in a unique approach. It is based on the belief that the relationship is bodily. It approaches the couple as a whole and all therapy is done when both partners are present. This approach uses some hands-on exercises to increase the emotional bond between partners and teach them new relationship and communication skills (Klerk, 2001). Practices are about creating "conscious marriage" where partners feel secure and passionate. This means their acquiring therapeutic methods, processes and skills that will enable them to create thoughtful, not reactive, relationships (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). Some aspects of Imago Relationship Therapy – for example, the exploration of painful past events – are also recommended for other uses, such as premarital counselling, in the hope that committed relationships will last forever (Slate et al., 2000).

Suggestions

During the application, it was observed that the active participation and efforts of both couples had a positive effect on their marital adjustment. In this context, more time can be devoted to sample activities in the sessions and couples can be given the opportunity to practice more during the session. Due to the limited national studies on the Imago approach, any kind of work to be done in this field will contribute to the development of the field. The relationship of the Imago approach with other concepts associated with marriage can be investigated. Group counselling program based on the Imago approach can also be applied to individuals in the premarital period and its effectiveness can be tested. Imago dialogue can be applied as a technique in all kinds of interpersonal communication issues, and its effect in other areas can also be tested. Imago dialogue which forms the basis of the Imago approach can be implemented

within the scope of school guidance and counselling services. The activities used in the counselling program with this group can also be used in family training. Awareness studies can be conducted to ensure that couples participate in such activities that improve marital adjustment.

Author Contribution

The author declares that no other author has contributed to the study and that he has read and approved the final version of the study.

Ethical Declaration

The authors declare that the current study is not subject to the approval of the ethics committee and that the rules set by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) were followed throughout the study.

Conflict Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Evlilik, araştırmacıların üzerinde yoğun çalıştığı konulardan biridir. Ömür boyu sürecek bir beraberlik istemi ile çıkılan bu yolculukta zaman zaman sorunlar yaşanabilir. Bu sorunların sağlıklı bir şekilde çözümlenebilmesi çiftlerin bu niyette olmasına ve gereken çabayı göstermesine bağlıdır. Bu süreç çiftler için gerek fiziksel gerek duygusal olarak yıpratıcı ve yorucudur. Çözümlemeyen durumlarda ise sonuç maalesef ayrılık olabilmektedir. Ülkemizde, boşanma sorununun özellikle son yıllarda büyük bir artış göstermesi ve bu durumun toplumsal bir sorun olarak gündeme gelmesi, konuyla ilgili daha kapsamlı araştırmalar yapılması ve sorunun çözümüne yönelik çalışmalar yapılması bakımından önem taşımaktadır.

Boşanan çiftlerin sayısı 2020 yılında 136 bin 570 iken 2021 yılında 174 bin 85 olmuştur. Bin nüfus başına düşen boşanma sayısını ifade eden kaba boşanma hızı 2021 yılında binde 2,07 olarak gerçekleşmiştir (TÜİK, 2022). Boşanma kararının yanında boşanmayan ancak evliliklerinde sürekli çatışma yaşayan çiftler de azımsanmayacak sayıda. Bu nedenle evlilikte sevgi bağlarının kuvvetlendirilmesi, yaşanan problemlerin en aza indirilmesi ve evlilik ilişkisinin kalitelendirilmesi amacıyla yapılan programlar, beden ve ruh sağlığı açısından son derece önem taşımaktadır. Evliliğe dair sorunlar önlenmediği takdirde, eşler arasındaki huzursuzluk ve uyumsuzluk, sadece çiftlerin kendilerini etkilememekte, aynı zamanda çocukları ve hatta yakın çevreyi de olumsuz etkilemektedir.

Özellikle yurt dışında evliliği geliştirici çalışmalar bir hayli fazla olsa da ülkemizdeki çalışmalar yetersizdir. Yurt dışında giderek ilgi gören İmago İlişki Terapisi'ni ülkemizde ilk çalışan Güven'in (2017) çalışmasının hem İmago İlişki Terapisi'ni Türk kültürüne kazandırması bakımından hem de alanda çiftlere yönelik evlilikte yaşanan sorunların kaynağına inmesi ve evlilik ilişkisine farklı bir bakış açısı getirmesi bakımından önemli olduğu düşünülmektedir.

Bu derleme çalışmasının amacı, evlilik ilişkisini geliştirmede İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı'nı tüm yönleriyle alanyazın ışığında ele almaktır. Çalışmada, imago kavramı, imago teorisi, İmago İlişki Terapisi'nin temelleri, çocukluk yaraları, romantik aşk, güç mücadelesi, terapinin amacı, terapistin rolü ve imago diyalogu detaylı bir şekilde ele alınmıştır. Çalışmanın sonunda da araştırmacı tarafından ilk kez

Türk kültüründe uygulanan, 8 oturumluk İmago yaklaşımına dayalı evlilik uyumu ve doyumunu artırmak amacıyla hazırlanmış grupla psikolojik danışma programına yer verilmiştir. Program deneysel bir çalışmada 12 üyenin yer aldığı bir grupta uygulanmış ve etkili bulunmuştur (Güven, 2017). Bu program, 8 oturumdan oluşan kapalı grup olarak tasarlanmış bir psikolojik danışma grubudur. Programın planlama sürecinde grupla psikolojik danışma sürecinin ve İmago Terapi sürecinin aşamaları birlikte yer almaktadır. Bu bağlamda program, çiftlerin evlilik doyumlarını ve uyumlarını artırmalarına yardımcı olmak amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. Program ile ulaşılmak istenen diğer amaçlar; çiftlerin ilişki vizyonu geliştirmelerine yardımcı olmak, çocukluk yaralarını ve hayal kırıklıklarını anlamalarını sağlamak, ebeveynlere ve eşlere profil oluşturmak, çift diyalogunu öğretmek, öfkeyi çözümlenmek, kontrol altında tutmayı ve kendini yatıştırılmayı deneyimlemek, şefkati ve takdiri ifade etmelerini sağlamak ve gelecekteki ilişki hayalini geliştirmektir. Program planlanmış ve yapılandırılmış etkinliklerden oluşan, çiftlerin duygu ve düşüncelerini paylaştığı bir programdır. Program İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı'na dayalıdır. Program hazırlanırken evlilik doyumunu ve evlilik uyumu ile ilgili yurtiçi ve yurtdışı yayınlar, kitaplar ve konuyla ilgili programlar incelenmiş ve İmago terapi ile ilgili yerli ve yabancı kaynaklardan faydalanılmıştır. Program, çiftlerin kendilerini ve birbirlerini tanımalarına, birbirlerinden beklentilerini ve sorunlarının kaynağını fark etmelerine, doğru iletişim yollarıyla aralarındaki etkileşimi artırmalarına, birbirlerine karşı sevgi ve şefkat geliştirmelerine fırsat veren bir yapıda hazırlanmıştır. Programda yer alan etkinlikler geliştirici ve önleyici niteliktedir. Oturumlar 90-120 dakika arasında sürmektedir. Uygulama sonrasında deney ve kontrol grubunun son test puanlarının karşılaştırılması, evlilik uyum ve doyum ölçeklerinin her birinde deney grubu lehine anlamlı farklılıklar göstermiştir. İki grup arasındaki farkın, izleme testlerinde de deney grubu lehine olduğu bulunmuştur. Bu farklılık, programın etkisinin kalıcılığının bir göstergesi olarak değerlendirilebilir. Özetle, programın test edildiği deneysel çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçlara dayanarak, evlilik uyumunu ve doyumunu artırmaya yönelik İmago İlişki Yaklaşımı'na dayalı grupla psikolojik danışma programının etkili olduğu söylenebilir.

İlgili literatür incelendiğinde yapılan araştırmaların da İmago İlişki Terapisi odaklı çalışmaların etkili olduğunu destekler niteliktedir. İmago yaklaşımıyla ilgili yapılan hemen hemen tüm çalışmalar İmago Terapi'nin kurucusu Harville Hendrix'in hafta sonları için geliştirdiği ve bunun eğitimini almış İmago terapistleri tarafından yapılan atölye çalışmalarına katılan çiftler üzerinde sınanmış ve etkili bulunmuştur (Pitner, 1995; Beeton, 2006).

İmago İlişki Terapisi, ilişki danışmanlığına bazı yeni fikirler ve yöntemler sunan bir yaklaşımdır. Farklı psikolojik yaklaşımlardan birkaç ilkeyi eşsiz bir yaklaşımda birleştirmektedir. İlişkinin bedensel olduğu inancına dayalıdır. Çiftlere bir bütün olarak yaklaşmaktadır ve tüm terapi her iki partnerin de hazır bulunması durumunda yapılmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım, eşler arasında duygusal bağı artırmak, onlara yeni ilişki ve iletişim yetenekleri öğretmek için bazı uygulamalı egzersizler kullanmaktadır

(Klerk, 2001). Uygulamalar, eşlerin kendilerini güvenli ve tutkulu hissedecekleri “bilinçli evlilik” oluşturmak konusundadır. Bu, tepkici değil düşünceli ilişkiler oluşturmalarını sağlayacak terapötik yöntem, süreç ve beceri elde etmeleri anlamına gelir (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). İmago İlişki Terapisi'nin bazı boyutları – örneğin, acı verici geçmiş olayların keşfi – adanmış ilişkilerin sonsuza kadar sürmesi umuduyla evlilik öncesi danışmanlık gibi diğer kullanımlar için de önerilmektedir (Slate ve diğ., 2000).

Uygulama esnasında çiftlerin her ikisinin de aktif katılımı ve çabalarının çiftlerin evlilik uyumlarına olumlu etkisi gözlenmiştir. Bu kapsamda oturumlarda örnek etkinliklere daha fazla zaman ayrılabilir ve çiftlere oturum esnasında daha fazla uygulama yapma fırsatı verilebilir. Yurtiçinde İmago yaklaşımı ile ilgili çalışmaların sınırlılığı nedeniyle bu alanda yapılacak her türlü çalışma bu alanın ilerlemesine katkı sağlayacaktır. İmago yaklaşımının evlilikle ilişkilendirilen diğer kavramlarla ilişkisi araştırılabilir. İmago yaklaşımına dayalı grupla psikolojik danışma programı evlilik öncesi dönemde bulunan bireylere de uygulanıp etkililiği test edilebilir. İmago diyalogu kişiler arası her türlü iletişim konularında bir teknik olarak uygulanabilir, diğer alanlardaki etkisi de sınanabilir. İmago yaklaşımının temelini oluşturan imago diyalogu okulların rehberlik ve psikolojik danışma hizmetleri kapsamında uygulanabilir. Bu grupla psikolojik danışma programında kullanılan etkinlikler aile eğitimlerinde de kullanılabilir. Alanda çalışan uzmanların bilhassa evlilik uyumunu geliştiren bu tür faaliyetlere çiftlerin birlikte katılımının sağlanması için farkındalık çalışmaları yapılabilir.