



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of Marriage Enrichment Program on Spousal Burnout of Married Women

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of the Marriage Enrichment Program on spouse burnout. The study is a study with a pretest-posttest-follow-up test and experiment-control group. The study group consisted of 18 married women: nine in the experimental group and nine in the control group. A 10-session “Marriage Enrichment Program” based on awareness raising was applied to the experimental group. The study used the spousal Burnout Scale and Personal Information Form as data collection tools. The spousal Burnout Scale was applied to the experimental and control groups as a pre-test, post-test and follow-up test. Whether the difference between the pretest-posttest-follow-up test mean scores of the experimental and control groups was significant was determined using the Mann-Whitney U test and Wilcoxon Signed Ranking test. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the Marriage Enrichment Program reduced spouse burnout. In addition, it was concluded that this effect lasted for at least 12 weeks according to the follow-up test result averages. In the control group, which was not treated, no improvement was observed in the levels of spouse burnout. The findings were interpreted, and suggestions were made as a result.

Marriage, which has its roots in ancient times, can be defined as a close relationship that includes formal and emotional bonds, which is still valid today. The marriage process, which is associated with monogamy, begins with the wish of two people to go on a happy journey together for the rest of their lives. However, the marriage process does not always go as desired, and the history of the troubles experienced in this process goes back to the history of humanity. There are many different ways to solve the problems experienced in this process. Everyone generally has an opinion on marriage, but the competencies required for a “healthy” marriage process may not be accessible to everyone. When marriage is considered a process, it can also be considered a union with competencies to be acquired. At this point, marriage enrichment programs can meet this need.

Both the mental and physical health of people depend on the state of their close relationships, such as marriage. A study determined that the problems experienced by the spouses during the marriage process were related to disappointment, hatred, sadness, anxiety, tension, hopelessness, hatred and hurt (Whitsitt, 1992). Also, a study examining the quality of close relationships found that the marital relationship strongly influences the development and treatment of psychiatric symptoms and the risk of relapse (Jakubowski et al., 2004). On the other hand, Levenson and Gottman (1985) found in their study that with the decrease in marital satisfaction, the health status of married participants deteriorated (Brooks et al., 2002). Depending on all these results, the problems that people experience during the marriage process affect the individual’s well-being. It is also a fact

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that spouses may need help from time to time in constructing and maintaining this state of well-being. At this stage, a functional marriage enrichment program can help couples with problems in the marriage process.

Some of the most critical decisions in human life are the decisions to marry and choose the individual to marry. The marital life that emerges after this is one of the essential elements that determine the satisfaction of the individual from life. With marriage, spouses want to preserve their physical, emotional and social satisfaction for many years. However, marital life does not always go smoothly at the desired level. In this process, the marital relationship between spouses becomes ordinary over time, and it is necessary to reconsider with a new perspective. In this context, marriage enrichment programs show themselves as programs that increase marital satisfaction, first in America and then worldwide.

Several studies have examined the impact of relationship enhancement programs on different aspects of romantic relationships. Yalçın and Ersever (2015) researched the Relationship Enhancement Program. They found that it significantly improved the relationship satisfaction of university students and their partners, although its effectiveness decreased after two months. Yılmaz and Kalkan (2010) focused on pre-marital relationship enhancement programs and reported that a seven-week program significantly increased couples' relationship satisfaction. Deveci-Sirin and Bayrakci (2020) investigated the Romantic Relationship Enrichment Program (RREP) and observed that it significantly enhanced couples' relationship satisfaction over two months. However, it did not significantly affect their romantic belief levels. These findings collectively emphasize the potential of relationship enhancement programs to positively impact relationship satisfaction, especially in preparation for marriage among young adults. Additionally, romantic relationships play a crucial role in human life, and relationship education programs, which provide strategies tailored to individuals' values and context, have been associated with numerous positive outcomes, including life satisfaction and physical well-being (Gazioglu et al., 2022). However, despite their widespread use in Western countries, there is a need for further research to explore the effectiveness of these programs in the Turkish cultural context and to provide recommendations for their development (Gazioglu et al., 2022).

In Turkey, the Preparatory Marriage Program was prepared and implemented by Haskan-Avci (2013) based on Gottman's Strong Relationship House model. The Marriage Preparation Program prepared in this context discusses communication barriers and conflict resolution methods. This model consists of seven steps: creating a love map, sharing interest and admiration, turning towards each other instead of being away from each other, creating a positive perspective, managing conflict; supporting and realizing dreams and aspirations; creating a shared meaning" and these issues were addressed in the sessions (Haskan-Avci, 2013).

When we consider the family as a structure, the person will receive professional assistance for himself and other family members during the marriage process. The individual who is happy in the marriage process will also contribute to the happiness of his environment. Marriage enrichment programs can contribute to the happiness of individuals and, therefore, the whole family with their preventive and curative structures. In a study by Jafari et al. (2021), the researchers aimed to assess the impact of practical communication skills training on marital burnout among married women. The study involved 94 participants selected from a pool of 936 married women who exhibited high marital burnout. Participants were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The intervention included seven sessions specifically designed for the experimental group, focusing on practical communication skills. Results showed a significant reduction in marital burnout and improved effective communication skills among the experimental group. This suggests that enhancing effective communication skills can be valuable in reducing marital burnout and may have implications for pre-marital programs and married couples. In another study by Vurak-Batik and Kalkan (2019), the impact of the "Marital Relationships Enrichment Program for Couples in the Period of Transition to Parenthood" on couples expecting their first child was examined. The program, consisting of 8 group sessions and two follow-up sessions, significantly increased marital satisfaction among participants. The study highlighted the program's effectiveness in enhancing marital satisfaction both before and after the birth of their child.

In the context of our current study, which aims to evaluate the effects of a marital enrichment program on marital burnout, it is crucial to justify the investigation by considering the existing literature. Marital burnout, as identified in previous research, often arises due to a significant gap between individuals' expectations of

emotional relationships and the reality they experience (Pines, 2002; Zarei et al., 2013). This dissonance can lead to frustration and eventual boredom within the marital relationship. Furthermore, when individuals internalize idealized expectations of marriage as a source of meaning and problem-solving, unmet expectations can result in frustration and a perceived loss of significance in their lives (Pines, 2002; Zarei et al., 2013). This understanding of the dynamics of marital burnout underscores the importance of exploring interventions, such as marital enrichment programs, that may help bridge this gap and alleviate burnout.

Additionally, the concept of the self plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of marital burnout. Self-concept, shaped through interactions with the environment, is not static and can evolve through interpersonal experiences (Higgins, 1987). It has been demonstrated in previous research that the self-concept significantly influences marital relationships and overall satisfaction (Claxton et al., 2012). Therefore, considering the impact of self-concept on marital dynamics, it becomes apparent that addressing issues related to marital burnout can have a broader impact on individuals' overall sense of fulfilment and meaning in life.

Furthermore, the significance of spousal support within marriage cannot be understated. Marriage is a fundamental institution that provides emotional, social, and physical intimacy, signifying emotional value, love, and respect between partners (Çag & Yildirim, 2013). A satisfying marriage contributes to emotional well-being and helps couples cope with stress and depression (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). The role of social support, including support from a spouse, has been consistently shown to mitigate the adverse effects of stress and promote better physical and mental health (Anis-ul-Haque & Sohail, 1997; Gündüz, 2005). Moreover, the absence of social support has been linked to higher levels of burnout (Greenglass & Burke, 1988; Gündüz, 2005), emphasizing the pivotal role of spousal support as a critical predictor of burnout in marriages.

As identified in previous studies, cognitive factors also contribute significantly to marital burnout dynamics. These factors encompass attributions related to the marriage and partner and dysfunctional thought patterns (Güven & Sevim, 2002). Unrealistic expectations within marriage and towards one's partner have been associated with disappointment and unhappiness. Furthermore, as couples experience a decline in passion and love, even minor disappointments can lead to negative perceptions of their spouses (Koolae et al., 2010). The influence of irrational beliefs on burnout has been well-documented (Ohue et al., 2011), and unrealistic standards among partners have been identified as contributors to marital problems (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). These cognitive factors provide additional insight into the complexity of marital burnout and the potential areas where intervention, such as marital enrichment programs, can be beneficial.

In light of this existing literature, our study seeks to examine the efficacy of a marital enrichment program in addressing marital burnout, considering the role of spousal support, cognitive factors, and self-concept dynamics. By exploring the effects of such programs, we aim to contribute to understanding how interventions can bridge the gap between individuals' expectations and reality in their marital relationships, ultimately promoting healthier and more satisfying marriages while alleviating burnout.

During the marriage process, it may be beneficial for the spouses to have information about marriage enrichment programs, appropriate communication and problem-solving skills, and better define each other. In addition to the themes covered in the Marriage Enrichment Program, a 10-session Marriage Enrichment Program was prepared, considering that the awareness of spouses about these themes would increase and their marital burnout would decrease.

Methodology

Study Design

In this study, in which the effect of the Marriage Enrichment Program based on awareness raising on specific issues on spouse burnout was examined, a pretest-posttest-follow-up test experimental design and an experimental design with a control group were used.

Table 1. Research Design

	Groups	Pre-test	Operation	Post Test	Follow Test
R	Experimental	SBS	Marriage Enrichment Program (MEP)	SBS	SBS
R	Control	SBS	-	SBS	SBS

R: Random Assignment. - : No operation. ETO: Spousal Burnout Scale

Participants

In the process of forming the research group, psychological counselling centres, private rehabilitation centres, primary schools and high schools, Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Family Life Centers were visited by the MEP practitioner and the MEP was introduced. Also, the program was promoted by sharing on social media. As a result, individuals who scored three and above, which is the critical value in ETO, were evaluated. Afterwards, participant lists were created. The Marriage Burnout Scale was applied to 36 married women during the process. As a result of the evaluation, 11 women were excluded from the program because they scored below three points, which is the critical score in the ETO. As a result, women with high spouse burnout scores and who needed intervention were included in the program. Afterwards, seven people who stated they could not continue the program entirely were removed. As a result, 18 married women were randomly selected as the experimental and control groups. In order for the internal validity to be high during the MEP application process, the groups were ensured to have the same number and similar characteristics. The demographic information of the study group is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group

Variables		Experimental Group		Control Group	
		f	%	f	%
Graduation	Primary education	1	11	2	22
	High school			1	11
	Associate-University	8	88	6	66
Spouse graduation	Primary education	1	11	2	22
	High school	2	22	1	11
	Associate-University	6	66	6	66
Age	20-30	1	11	2	22
	31-40	6	66	5	55
	40-50	1	11	1	11
	50+..	1	11	1	11
Spouse Age	20-30	1	11	2	22
	31-40	3	33	2	22
	40-50	4	44	3	33
	50+..	1	11	2	22
Marriage Duration	1-6	1	11	2	22
	6-10	2	22	3	33
	11-15	4	44	3	33
	16-20	1	11	1	11
Job	20+...	1	11		
	Teacher	7	77	6	66
	Civil Servant	1	11		
	Private	1	11	3	33
Spouse Job	Teacher	3	33	7	77
	Civil Servant	1	11		
	Private	6	66	3	33
Number of Kids	1	2	25	1	14
	2	5	63	3	43
	3	1	13	3	43
	4				
Ages of the Children	1-5	2	25	2	29
	5-10	4	50	3	42
	10+..	2	25	2	29
Marriage Style	Arranged	2	22	3	33
	Meeting	7	77	6	66
Economic Situation	Sufficient	5	55	4	44
	Insufficient	4	44	5	55

Preparation Process of the Marriage Enrichment Program

The researcher worked for ten years at the Çankırı Guidance Research Center Guidance Service. During this period, she organized family training in schools without guidance counsellors in the city centre and Çankırı districts. In this process, the researcher:

- Participants tend to tell their problems more than listening,
- Participants feel better as they talk,
- In family education, activities and exercises are more beneficial than didactically transferring them,
- The consultation processes with the group he participated in and directed were very beneficial,
- She saw that her interviews with her colleagues supported her views.

Within the scope of the research, a literature study on Marriage Enrichment Programs was conducted and religious, skill-building and theoretical-based programs in the field were examined.

While preparing the Marriage Enrichment Program, the “System Approach” was taken as the theoretical basis, and the programs that develop skills within the literature were considered. According to the systems approach, the system comprises interacting parts, units and personalities. As a result, every element of the system interacts with other parts. (Gladding, 2011). For this reason, positive changes in family members will always reflect on the family, which is a big team, and the functioning of the structure will be significantly affected. The program should be in a structure that raises awareness and be implemented in an interactive environment that does not allow the clients to remain passive.

Implementation Goals of the Marriage Enrichment Program

The Marriage Enrichment Program (MEP) aims to raise awareness of couples about functional life skills, to reduce spouse burnout, and, as a result, to create a program that increases couples’ life satisfaction. In this process, it was aimed to receive deep sharing from the participants and to provide emotional relief. While the program’s achievements were being prepared, the system approach, skill-developing marriage enrichment programs, and the achievements for creating a group counselling environment were determined.

. Summary of the Psychoeducation Program

<p>1.Session Getting to know each other and being a group</p>	<p>Objectives: 1. Participants get to know other members of the group. 2. An environment is created where group dynamics can occur. 3. An environment is created where the participants can express themselves comfortably.</p> <p>How the program will proceed Group Rules and Contract Sticking Name Tag Acquaintance Exercise</p>
<p>2.Session Getting to know yourself and your partner</p>	<p>Objectives: 1. Participants increase their awareness of their ongoing marriage and themselves. 2. Participants gain motivation for change. 3. Participants’ self-confidence and self-esteem increase.</p> <p>Cognitive Distortions, ABCDE Model, Cognitive Distortions Inventory as Homework</p>
<p>3. Session Communication</p>	<p>Objectives: 1-Participants gain awareness about the current communication pattern in their continuous marriage life. 2-Participants gain awareness of using effective communication patterns that can be functional in their marital life</p> <p>Communication Presentation Dysfunctional Communication Patterns Back-to-Back Talk Experiment</p>

Table 3 (Continuation)

4.Session Conflict and Problem Solving	Objectives: 1-Participants gain awareness about the dysfunctional reactions they apply throughout their marriage life. 2-Participants gain awareness about new functional life skills in conflict and problem solving. 3-Participants transfer the new life information they have learned to their lives. Conflict and Problem Solving Presentation Role Playing
5.Session Effective Parenting	Objectives: 1-Participants gain awareness about effective parenting skills. 2- Participants develop insight into what is wrong with them. 3- Participants apply their achievements in their lives and as a result, they change their behavior Effective Parenting Presentation Effective parent ruler homework
6.Session Change and Development in the Family	Objectives: 1-Participants understand how suitable the family as a structure is for change. 2-Participants have information about the developmental stages of the family. 3-Participants understand what a healthy family is and gain motivation for change. Presentation of family development periods My Family Activity (Which period are you in and what are you going through).
7.Session Health in the Family	Objectives: 1-Participants understand the characteristics that should be found in a healthy family. 2-Participants comprehend the positive characteristics that their families should have Health in the Family Presentation Healthy Family Inventory
8.Session Stress and Trauma in the Family	Objectives: 1-Participants know how to deal with family life stressors. 2-Participants know how to deal with difficult life events when they are exposed to them. 3-Participants understand how families are organized. Presentation of Stress and Trauma in the Family, Shares
9.Session Love In The Family	Objectives: 1-Participants understand how important it is to show love in the family. 2-Participants know how to show love to each other. 3-Participants know how to keep love alive during the marriage relationship. Sustainable Love Environment and Love Presentation Shares
10.Session Assessment	Objectives: 1-Participants remember their achievements during the MEP implementation process. 2-Participants gain motivation to implement their achievements. Evaluation of the MEP Program Completion
During the sessions • Breathing and imagination exercises, hot chair activity, and off-topic sharing were also carried out.	

Program Implementation Process

The Marriage Enrichment Program was implemented in five weeks, two sessions per week. Sessions started in November 2022 and were held regularly, two sessions a week. There was no loss of subjects during the MEP application process. In this process:

After a short warm-up and introductory chat with the participants in each session, the leader entered the session, summarized the previous sessions and started the new session. Along with the presentation, the leader asked

the participants how they experienced the situations shared in their families. Participants evaluated and shared their own families throughout the presentation. At the end of the session, the leader summarised what happened that day. He asked the group if there was any missing or excess portion. He concluded the sessions with good wishes and wishes. In order to consolidate the gains in the process, homework was given and then evaluated.

During the Marriage Enrichment Program, special attention was paid to the reflection of the healing effect of the group environment on the participants. It was comforting that the participants who had similar problems expressed their problems and shared their solutions throughout the process. The individual's receiving group support and acceptance by the group in the group environment is the driving force for change. In addition, in environments where similar problems are shared, participants share their feelings more, and change occurs faster in this process.

Data Analysis

Before starting the data collection process, the Hacettepe University Ethics Committee was applied, and the ethics committee approval of the research was obtained. In order to test the research hypotheses, the methods and results used in the analysis of the data obtained with the Personal Information Forum, the Spousal Burnout Scale (SBS) are given. In the first stage, SBS was applied to ensure the equivalence of the experimental and control groups and the results were evaluated. Since there were 9 participants in the experimental and control groups ($n < 30$), nonparametric statistics were applied. SBS was applied to the experimental and control groups for the follow-up test results before, after and two months after the MEP application. Considering the SBS scores in the experimental and control groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether the groups were equal. Also, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to compare the pretest-posttest-follow-up test scores in the experimental and control groups. With this method, it was tested whether the difference between test scores was significant. In addition, the SPSS-IBM 25 program was used in all analysis stages, and the level of significance was determined as .05.

Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form. During the preparation of the personal information form, closed-ended questions were asked about the Marriage Enrichment Program participants, their spouses and children. In the preparation of the personal information form, items including the family development periods were included, depending on the research problem and the literature on the subject. In the personal information form, the participants' age, profession, graduation, spouse's age, occupation, graduation, how many years they have been married, how many children they have and how old they are, whether they feel financially sufficient, and how many years they have been married are included. The researcher developed the personal information form.

Spousal Burnout Scale. The reliability of the Spousal Burnout Scale (SBS) has been rigorously assessed through various methods. In studies conducted by Çapri (2013), test-retest reliability coefficients were calculated at one, two, and four months, yielding values of .89, .76, and .66, respectively. These results indicate satisfactory stability and consistency in the scale's measurements over time. Furthermore, internal consistency coefficients were examined, demonstrating strong reliability. The internal consistency coefficients for the original Pines SBS were found to be $\alpha = .91$ and $\alpha = .93$, underscoring the scale's reliability. In the Turkish adaptation study of SBS, the internal consistency coefficient was established as $\alpha = .94$, reinforcing its reliability. The high internal consistency coefficients suggest that the scale consistently measures the intended construct. Additionally, the scale's equivalence coefficient between its two halves was calculated as $r = .91$ using the equivalent halves method, further affirming its reliability (Çapri, 2013). These reliability assessments collectively demonstrate the Spousal Burnout Scale's robustness and consistency in measuring burnout levels in couples.

Analysis of Data

In order to test the research hypotheses, the methods and results used in the analysis of the data obtained with the Personal Information Forum, the Spousal Burnout Scale (SBS) are given. In the first stage, SBS was applied to ensure the equivalence of the experimental and control groups and the results were evaluated. Nonparametric statistics were applied since nine people were in the experimental and control groups ($n < 30$). SBS was applied to the experimental and control groups for the follow-up test results before, after and two months after the

MEP application. Considering the SBS scores in the experimental and control groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether the groups were equal. Also, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to compare the pretest-posttest-follow-up test scores in the experimental and control groups. With this method, it was tested whether the difference between test scores was significant. In addition, the SPSS-IBM 25 program was used in all analysis stages, and the significance level was determined as .05.

Results

The “Mann-Whitney U Test” was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups formed within the scope of the MEP application regarding Spousal burnout pre-test scores.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U Test Results of Spousal Burnout Scale Pre-Test Results of Marriage Enrichment Program Experimental and Control Group Participants

Dependent Variable	Group	n	Ranks Mean	Sum of Ranks	Mann Whitney U	Z	P
Spouse Burnout	Exper.Pre	9	10,89	98	28,0	-1,220	,222
	Cont.Pre	9	8,11	73			

It is seen that the difference between the pre-test mean scores of the Experimental and Control Groups on the Spousal Burnout Scale before the application is not significant according to the Mann-Whitney U-test results ($p>.05$). Thus, it can be said that the experimental and control groups are equivalent before the MEP application.

Table 4. Marriage Enrichment Program Experimental and Control Group Participants’ Spousal Burnout Scale Post-Test Mann-Whitney U Test Results

Dependent Variable	Group	n	Ranks Mean	Sum of Ranks	Mann Whitney U	Z	P
Spouse Burnout	Exper.Post	9	5,78	52	7,000	-3,166	,002
	Cont.Post	9	13,22	119			

There was a significant difference in favour of the experimental group between the spouse burnout scale post-test mean scores of the experimental group and control group participants in the Marriage Enrichment Program. A significant difference, which was not found before the MEP application, emerged after the application. It was observed that the mean SBS scores decreased in the experimental group ($p<.05$).

Table 5. Marriage Enrichment Program Experimental Group Spousal Burnout Pre-test Post-test Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

Measurements	PostTest – Pre-Test	n	Ranks Mean	Sum of Ranks	Mann Whitney U	Z
Spouse Burnout	Negative Rank	7	4	28	-2,646	,008
	Pozitive Rank	0	0	0		
	Equal	2	0			

The “Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test” was used to examine the effect of the Marriage Enrichment Program on spouse burnout and is shown in Table 5. According to the results of the analysis, the Spousal Burnout Scale scores of the experimental group decreased significantly compared to the pre-application ($p<.05$). When the mean rank and totals of the difference scores are evaluated, it is seen that this difference is in favour of negative ranks. According to these results, it can be said that the Marriage Enrichment Program is effective in reducing the marital burnout levels of married women.

Table 6. Experimental Group Partner Burnout Post-test Follow-Up Test Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results

Measurements	PostTest-FollowTest	n	Ranks Mean	Sum of Ranks	Z	p
Spouse Burnout	Negative Rank	0	0	0	-1,732	,083
	Pozitive Rank	3	2	6		
	Equal	6	0			

Ten weeks after the completion of the Marriage Enrichment Program application, the difference between the follow-up test and post-test mean scores was examined to test the persistence of spousal burnout levels in the experimental group. As indicated in Table 6, no significant difference was observed between the post-test mean scores and the follow-up test mean scores ($p>.05$). As a result, it can be said that the effect of MEP lasts at least ten weeks.

Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

Our study aimed to evaluate the impact of a Marriage Enrichment Program (MEP) on reducing spouse burnout among married women. Our findings revealed that married women in the experimental group who participated in the MEP experienced a significant reduction in the level of spouse burnout. We conducted a follow-up test two months after the MEP application, demonstrating the program’s sustained effect, lasting at least two months. These results underscore the effectiveness of marriage enrichment programs in reducing spouse burnout, aligning with previous research in this domain. For instance, Nazari et al. (2015) conducted a study focusing on the effect of a solution-focused therapy approach on women’s spouse burnout levels. The study employed a pretest-posttest experimental design with a control group, with 30 participants divided equally between experimental and control groups. The findings of this study indicated that solution-focused short-term therapy effectively reduced spouse burnout and decreased the tendency toward divorce in married women.

Similarly, Sirin and Deniz (2016) explored the impact of the Family Education Program (FEP) developed by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, specifically focusing on its modules related to marriage and family life. The study utilized a pretest-posttest experimental design with a control group, incorporating a post-test follow-up assessment. The Spousal Burnout Scale developed by Pines, (1996) and adapted by Çapri (2013) was employed in this research. The findings revealed a significant decrease in spouse burnout among women following the implementation of the Family Education Program (Sirin & Deniz, 2016). Beyond spouse burnout, various programs have effectively addressed different aspects of marital relationships and family education in Turkey. Notably, these studies are relatively recent, with most emerging after 2000. These investigations have delved into subjects such as marriage preparation programs, marital adjustment, marital satisfaction, problem-solving skills, social support, empathy, and conflict resolution (Canel, 2007; Deveci-Şirin, 2013; Duran, Ş., & Hamamcı, 2010; Halil & Kahraman, 2012; Kalkan & Ersanlı, 2008). Our study reaffirms the positive impact of the MEP in reducing spouse burnout among married individuals, with this effect persisting for at least ten weeks.

In the broader context of relationship enhancement programs, research has explored their influence on various aspects of romantic relationships. For instance, Yalçın and Ersever (2015) researched the Relationship Enhancement Program, demonstrating its significant improvement in relationship satisfaction among university students and their partners. Similarly, Yilmaz and Kalkan (2010) on pre-marital relationship enhancement programs, reporting a substantial increase in couples’ relationship satisfaction following a seven-week program. Furthermore, Deveci-Sirin and Bayrakci (2020) investigated the Romantic Relationship Enrichment Program (RREP), observing a significant enhancement in couples’ relationship satisfaction over two months.

These findings underscore the potential of relationship enhancement programs to positively impact relationship satisfaction, particularly among young adults and couples preparing for marriage. Haskan-Avci (2013) developed the Preparatory Marriage Program within the Turkish context based on Gottman’s Strong Relationship House model. This program addresses communication barriers and conflict resolution methods, providing valuable guidance to couples. Recognizing the importance of family as a structure, it is crucial to emphasize that the professional assistance individuals receive during the marriage process benefits themselves and their entire family, contributing to overall happiness. For instance, a study by Jafari et al. (2021) assessed the impact of effective communication skills training on marital burnout among married women. This study

revealed a significant reduction in marital burnout and improved effective communication skills among participants, suggesting the potential value of such interventions in reducing marital burnout and enhancing communication skills.

In another study by Vurak-Batik and Kalkan (2019), the “Marital Relationships Enrichment Program for Couples in the Period of Transition to Parenthood” significantly increased marital satisfaction among couples expecting their first child. The program, consisting of 8 group sessions and two follow-up sessions, highlighted its effectiveness in enhancing marital satisfaction before and after their child’s birth.

In the context of our current study, which aims to evaluate the effects of a marital enrichment program on marital burnout, it is essential to justify our investigation by considering the existing literature. Marital burnout, as identified in previous research, often arises due to a significant gap between individuals’ expectations of emotional relationships and the reality they experience. This dissonance can lead to frustration and eventual boredom within the marital relationship. Furthermore, when individuals internalize idealized expectations of marriage as a source of meaning and problem-solving, unmet expectations can result in frustration and a perceived loss of significance in their lives. This understanding of the dynamics of marital burnout underscores the importance of exploring interventions, such as marital enrichment programs, that may help bridge this gap and alleviate burnout.

Additionally, the concept of self-concept plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of marital burnout. Self-concept, shaped through interactions with the environment, is not static and can evolve through interpersonal experiences. It has been demonstrated in previous research that self-concept significantly influences marital relationships and overall satisfaction. Therefore, considering the impact of self-concept on marital dynamics, it becomes apparent that addressing issues related to marital burnout can have a broader impact on individuals’ overall sense of fulfilment and meaning in life.

Furthermore, the significance of spousal support within marriage cannot be understated. Marriage is a fundamental institution that provides emotional, social, and physical intimacy, signifying emotional value, love, and respect between partners. A satisfying marriage contributes to emotional well-being and helps couples cope with stress and depression. The role of social support, including support from a spouse, has been consistently shown to mitigate the negative effects of stress and promote better physical and mental health. Moreover, the absence of social support has been linked to higher levels of burnout, emphasizing the pivotal role of spousal support as a critical predictor of burnout in marriages.

As identified in previous studies, cognitive factors also contribute significantly to marital burnout dynamics. These factors encompass attributions related to the marriage and partner and dysfunctional thought patterns. Unrealistic expectations within marriage and towards one’s partner have been associated with disappointment and unhappiness. Furthermore, as couples experience a decline in passion and love, even minor disappointments can lead to negative perceptions of their spouses. The influence of irrational beliefs on burnout has been well-documented, and unrealistic standards among partners have been identified as contributors to marital problems. These cognitive factors provide additional insight into the complexity of marital burnout and the potential areas where intervention, such as marital enrichment programs, can be beneficial.

In light of this existing literature, our study seeks to examine the efficacy of a marital enrichment program in addressing marital burnout, considering the role of spousal support, cognitive factors, and self-concept dynamics. By exploring the effects of such programs, we aim to contribute to understanding how interventions can bridge the gap between individuals’ expectations and reality in their marital relationships, ultimately promoting healthier and more satisfying marriages while alleviating burnout. Our research aims to build upon and expand the existing body of knowledge in this field, particularly in the Turkish cultural context, and provide valuable insights for future research and the development of effective marital enrichment programs.

Limitations

The MEP application was carried out in the Kastamonu-Tosya district, with the majority of participants who are university graduates. It is beneficial to carry out the MEP application with participants with an education level close to the average of Türkiye. Participants, who were all women, accompanied the MEP application.

There were very few male participant candidates in the participant collection phase. It would benefit the MEP to be a more heterogeneous participant group. The judgments drawn from the study results are limited to the features measured by the Spousal Burnout Scale. Individuals scoring three or higher on the Spousal Burnout Scale were included in forming the experimental and control groups. The results of the study can be generalized to groups with similar characteristics.

Suggestions

Family education programs implemented in Turkey should actively involve the practitioner and the participant in the program implementation process. It is essential to benefit from group counselling, psychodrama and group guidance activities, exercises and experiments related to the subject to be covered, especially in the sessions. Also, it would be beneficial for the participants not to be in a classical seating arrangement and to organize the session in a circle that prioritizes sharing and interaction. It is essential to share the thoughts and feelings of the participants during the session. In this context, MEP includes activities and exercises. It is a marriage enrichment program in a circular seating arrangement that prioritizes sharing and listening.

The Marriage Enrichment Program is a program that can be used in marriage training to be prepared by state or private institutions. At the local level, municipalities, Guidance and Research Centers, and Private Psychological Counseling Centers will benefit from the Marriage Enrichment Program. Universities will ensure that the Marriage Enrichment Program is benefited from at the national level by the Ministries of National Education, Youth and Sports and Family and Social Policies. Couples who are exposed to spouse burnout during marriage will be able to participate in the Marriage Enrichment Program and will have a better situation during the marriage process.

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