



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Effect Of Post-Divorce Adjustment Program On Life Satisfaction, Adjustment To Divorce And Psychological Symptoms Of Divorced Individuals

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of the Post-Divorce Adjustment Program (PDAP) on individuals' adaptation to divorce, life satisfaction, levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The research employed a pre-test, post-test, follow-up, and control group quasi-experimental design. The research group consisted of 20 divorced individuals aged between 25 and 45. These individuals were divided into two groups: 10 in the experimental group and 10 in the control group. In the experimental group, participants received the PDAP individually, consisting of six sessions held once a week. This study utilized a mixed research approach employing a parallel embedded design, where qualitative data complement quantitative data. Therefore, in addition to quantitative data collection tools, semi-structured interview forms developed by the researchers were used to collect qualitative data. To determine the effectiveness of the PDAP in the experimental group, statistical analyses including the Mann-Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test were conducted. Furthermore, a clinical significance assessment was carried out to determine individual changes within the experimental group throughout the PDAP application. Qualitative data were summarized and interpreted using various analytical techniques, including structural, descriptive, and longitudinal analysis methods. Findings indicated that the PDAP significantly contributed to improving divorced individuals' adaptation to divorce and their overall life satisfaction, while concurrently reducing levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Additionally, the qualitative analysis of data derived from semi-structured interviews revealed that the PDAP facilitated positive transformations in participants' lives. It was found that the individuals in the experimental group took the initial steps to reorganize their lives and began applying the skills acquired from the program to their daily lives. The findings were discussed within the context of relevant literature, and recommendations were presented.

The term divorce holds varying interpretations among researchers in the field. Some view it as a legal procedure (James & Friedman, 2009), while others regard it as a challenging phase of transition (Sakraida, 2005). Yet, for some, it represents a transitional crisis (Uçan et al., 2005). Broadly defined, divorce can be

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understood as the transition from living with diverse family members to a solitary existence or with specific family members, or in its simplest form, as the legal, social, emotional, and psychological dissolution of a marriage (Demo & Fine, 2010; Friedman, 1984).

When scrutinizing the changes in divorce rates, it is notable that there has been a noticeable increase in recent years. The crude divorce rate, denoting the number of divorced individuals per 1,000 individuals in a year, has doubled in numerous countries within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since the 1980s (OECD, 2022). This surge in divorce rates is also evident in data provided by Eurostat Statistics Briefs (Eurostat, 2024) and the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023). According to these data, the collective crude divorce rate for the 27 European Union member nations stands at 2.0. Eurostat (2024) data further reveal that the countries with the highest crude divorce rates include Latvia (2.9), Lithuania (2.6) and Sweden (2.1). Noteworthy changes in crude divorce rates are also observed in the United States. Although this rate decreased from 4.0 in the early 2000s to 2.9 in the 2020s and 2.6 in 2022, it remains higher than in many other countries (CDC/NCHS, 2022). These findings underscore the fact that millions of people go through divorce each year.

Given the emotional, psychological, social, and financial challenges that arise from divorce (Mikolai & Kulu, 2018), it can be asserted that millions of people experience long-term adjustment issues after divorce. A decline in life satisfaction is one of the problems individuals face after divorce. Research conducted on the post-divorce process, recognized as a demanding life event, supports this notion (Lucas et al., 2003; Luhmann et al., 2012). Longitudinal studies conducted in different countries have shown a connection between divorce and decreased life satisfaction, indicating that life satisfaction tends to decrease after divorce (Clark & Georgellis, 2013; Lucas, 2005). A similar longitudinal study uncovered substantial fluctuations in life satisfaction among individuals in the period following divorce, underscoring the profound impact of the divorce process on individuals (Denissen et al., 2018).

Another circumstance encountered during the post-divorce period is the occurrence of psychological issues. Some divorced individuals continue to grapple with significant psychological issues, even years after the divorce, making their adaptation to the process more arduous (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015). Within the context of post-divorce adjustment, prevalent psychological maladjustments encompass depression, anxiety, stress, emotional distress, and feelings of isolation (Birnbaum et al., 1997). Kalmijn and Monden (2006) posit that divorce profoundly affects both parties involved, with a pronounced prevalence of depressive symptoms during this process. A longitudinal study conducted with 1,856 divorced individuals yielded similar results, indicating a significant increase in psychiatric symptoms after divorce (Hald et al., 2020). Furthermore, research conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIH) in the United States has reported a correlation between divorce and early mortality, depression, anxiety, stress, and mental disorders (as cited in Afifi et al., 2006).

The post-divorce period is a transitional phase in an individual's life characterized by significant changes (Vukalovich & Caltabiano, 2008). This phase entails divorced individuals changing their old habits and adapting to a new way of life, which often brings about feelings of tension. This underscores the pivotal importance of post-divorce adjustment. Post-divorce adjustment encompasses positive transformations, which can be determined through various indicators such as psychological well-being, positive emotional states, overall happiness, life satisfaction, and coping abilities. It also includes the relative absence of physical or mental health symptoms (Kramrei et al., 2007). Factors that disrupt post-divorce adjustment include diminished self-esteem, a decrease in problem-solving and coping skills, challenges related to emotional awareness and management, disruptions in social relationships, particularly within the family, and changes in occupational and economic aspects of life (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Sakranda, 2008). Such impairments not only complicate the process of post-divorce adjustment but also contribute to diminishing life satisfaction. They particularly exacerbate psychological issues, such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Wilder, 2016).

It is noteworthy that such problems are particularly apparent within three years of divorce. According to Korkut (2003), after divorce, individuals may have reactions that go beyond their usual reactions and it may

take 1-3 years for the emotions felt during these reactions to 'stabilise'. Similarly, Monden et al (2015) found that depression, anxiety and stress levels increased after divorce, with a corresponding significant increase in antidepressant use in the three years before and after divorce. Furthermore, divorced individuals were found to have higher rates of hospitalisation, suicide and death in the three years following divorce (Corcoran & Nagar, 2010; Nielsen et al., 2014; Sbarra, 2015). Based on these findings, it can be said that the three years after divorce are more challenging and problematic.

The extent of encountered difficulties, coupled with individual traits like emotional regulation, access to social support, and problem-solving abilities, significantly influences the magnitude of psychological challenges experienced during this transitional period. If an individual's coping strategies prove inadequate in navigating the challenges arising after divorce, they may struggle to regain their previous levels of well-being and life satisfaction (Chan Lai Cheng & Pfeifer, 2015). Taking into account these factors that impact an individual's post-divorce adjustment, activities aimed at mitigating the influence of potential risk factors and enhancing an individual's adaptation to these challenging situations are recognized as preventive measures. Thomas and Ryan (2008) have underscored that despite divorce often being marked by unwanted emotions like anger, unhappiness, and resentment, with adequate support, it can be transformed into a period of new beginnings. Such findings emphasize the importance of protective support services in the context of divorce.

In the sphere of post-divorce support services, it is apparent that the development of programs commenced in the United States during the 1970s. Over time, these programs have evolved to encompass support groups, adjustment programs, educational seminars, and parenting education initiatives (Fisher, 1977; Graff et al., 1986; Kessler, 1976; Stone et al., 1999). Subsequent years witnessed a notable surge in divorce rates, prompting numerous researchers to develop preventive programs for the post-divorce period. For example, Geasler and Blaisüre (1999) reported that 1,516 counties and cities in the United States have parenting programmes for divorced parents, an increase of 180% over the results of a 1993-1994 study in which 541 counties had programmes. Geelhoed et al. (2001) reviewed 81 different parenting programmes offered by 67 courts in the United States of America to children whose parents were divorced. Positive results were found for these programmes, which consisted of one or two sessions and lasted an average of 4 to 5 hours. In addition, Velderman et al (2018) compared the effectiveness of a culturally adapted post-divorce programme for Dutch children aged 4-8 years with findings in the US, highlighting the positive effects of the programme.

Research, including similar studies, has consistently shown that these programmes improve the adjustment of divorced people, and especially their children, and produce positive outcomes (Blaisüre & Geasler, 2000; Quinney & Fouts, 2004). When scrutinizing the landscape of post-divorce support services offered internationally, it becomes evident that these services primarily concentrate on understanding emotions, coping with negative emotional states, fostering a sense of belonging, shaping a new identity, addressing post-divorce loss and the grieving process (Kessler, 1976; Vukalovich, 2004; Walker, 1979), elevating overall well-being levels (Øygard et al., 2000), bolstering self-esteem, improving communication skills, facilitating post-divorce adjustment, while concurrently alleviating the burden of depression (Barlow, 1982; Lee & Hett, 1990).

When these post-divorce counseling programs are examined, benefits such as making sense of divorce, regulating emotions, problem solving, and developing interpersonal relationship skills come to the fore (Alpaslan, 2018; Alvarez et al., 2024; Rasti & Mohammadi, 2024). It is reported that integrating these elements into psychological counseling significantly helps individuals cope with the complexities of life after divorce. A comprehensive understanding of the post-divorce process helps individuals set realistic expectations and prepare for the emotional and practical challenges ahead (Rasti & Mohammadi, 2024). This awareness facilitates better decision-making and encourages a proactive approach to post-divorce adjustment (Hagemeyer, 1986). Examining this awareness in the post-divorce process has been shown to help individuals understand the consequences of divorce, allowing for more informed choices and potentially smoother transitions (Wegscheider-Cruse, 2012). Emotion regulation is necessary to manage intense emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear that underlie psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress associated with divorce (Alvarez et al., 2024). Effective emotion regulation strategies can prevent negative behaviors and promote psychological well-being (Houben et al., 2015). Post-divorce support services emphasize the

importance of understanding and managing emotions to improve personal adjustment and relationship dynamics (Frisby et al., 2012; Saini & Corrente, 2024).

Problem-solving skills enable individuals to deal with the practical challenges that arise during and after divorce, such as co-parenting arrangements, financial decisions, and daily life adjustments (Shahabi vd., 2021). Developing these skills through counselling can support more effective coping mechanisms and greater control over one's circumstances. The stress associated with divorce can negatively affect thinking and decision-making (Proulx, 1991). Problem-solving skills help individuals approach problems in a logical and systematic way, minimizing the impact of heightened emotions (Shahabi vd., 2021). Effective problem solving develops a sense of control and mastery over one's circumstances. This contributes to resilience, allowing individuals to adapt to their new reality and maintain life satisfaction (Yap et al., 2020). Divorce counseling often focuses on improving communication and problem-solving skills to facilitate a smoother transition. After divorce, individuals may need to renegotiate relationships with ex-partners, children, and social networks (Beck & Beck, 2014). Developing interpersonal skills is essential for communicating effectively, setting boundaries, and building new relationships. Counseling can provide a safe space to practice and improve these skills, promoting healthier interactions and reducing the likelihood of conflict (Afifi et al., 2015). Improved interpersonal skills contribute to better co-parenting relationships and overall social support. Bringing these concepts together in counseling provides a holistic approach to post-divorce adjustment (Krumrei et al., 2007). By addressing emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal issues, counseling can provide comprehensive support tailored to the individual's unique needs. This integrated approach can be expected to facilitate personal development, resilience and a more positive adaptation to life after divorce. Based on these findings, it can be argued that therapeutic interventions that combine divorce meaning making, emotion regulation, problem solving, and interpersonal skills training will be effective in helping individuals navigate the complexities of life after divorce.

When analysing the studies on the divorce phenomenon in Turkey, it can be seen that the reasons for divorce and the post-divorce processes are examined in terms of different variables. For example, Gökce (2020) examined the reasons for divorce of divorced parents and found that they were severe incompatibility, economic problems, infidelity, domestic violence and lack of communication. According to the results of the research conducted by Güven and Koroğlu (2023), it was concluded that the most important reasons for divorce were infidelity and irresponsibility towards the spouse-child, and disagreement and incompatibility between spouses were also among the important reasons for divorce. When examining the variables that influence the post-divorce processes in Turkey, it is analysed that these are factors such as gender, socio-economic status, education level and regional differences. Specifically, it has been found that women's socioeconomic status and education level are determinants of divorce rates and that divorce rates are higher among women with higher education levels and economically independent women (Özekin & Süküti, 2023). In addition, it is found that divorce rates are higher in regions with high socioeconomic development levels and divorce decisions are easier to make due to the high education and income levels of women in these regions (İğdeli & Ay, 2021). Furthermore, studies on the difficulties faced by women in the post-divorce process show that divorced women experience problems such as economic difficulties, social pressures and child custody. It is found that women with low socio-economic status in particular face more difficulties in the post-divorce period (Can & Aksu, 2016). It is noteworthy that the phenomenon of divorce in Turkey is generally analysed by focusing on women.

Looking at studies on support programmes to enhance post-divorce adjustment in Turkey, one of the pioneering initiatives in this area is attributed to Öngider (2013). The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for divorced women by comparing the levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness perception of divorced women before and after CBT. As a result of the study, it was found that the levels of anxiety, depression and loneliness of divorced women decreased statistically significantly after CBT. Following this study, researchers such as Bulut-Ateş (2015), Canbulat (2017), Karadeniz-Özbek (2019), Halisdemir (2020) and Güzel (2020) developed different programmes on divorce. It is worth noting that these studies generally focus only on women and children. When these studies are examined, it is found that such studies are effective in reducing the parental stress levels of divorced

women, increasing the levels of acceptance and empathy, and helping mothers gain benefits for themselves, their children, and the mother-child relationship. In addition, it was found that divorcees' emotional awareness increased and their level of adjustment to divorce increased. It is noteworthy that most of these studies used a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group. While some of the studies used mixed methods, others used quantitative research methods. The common suggestion of the studies was to include men in the study, to provide individual counselling and to develop short term post-divorce adjustment programmes.

It is notable that studies conducted in Turkey in recent years, except for Güzel and Çeçen-Eroğul (2022) research, have exclusively targeted women and children. Moreover, despite the existence of group sessions catering to both divorced women and men, there is no evidence of any experimental studies conducted in individual sessions. The inherent variability in the post-divorce process, wherein each individual experiences unique changes and responds differently, essentially rendering divorce a profoundly personal journey for each person (Asanjarani et al., 2018), underscores the imperative need for personalized support services to facilitate post-divorce adjustment. Given the favorable outcomes of internationally validated programs addressing divorce adjustment, it is strongly suggested that the development of such programs in Turkey, particularly within dedicated units, would significantly elevate the quality of support services provided.

Group-based approaches are often generic and may not fully address the unique challenges faced by individuals (Cella et al., 2002), making individualized interventions critical. Individual sessions may lead to more significant post-divorce adjustment outcomes by allowing therapists to address specific emotional and cognitive patterns related to self-compassion and emotional acceptance (Stangier et al., 2003). In addition, individual CBT-based programs have been found to significantly reduce grief reactions, separation distress, and anger (Holden, 2021) and improve self-esteem and emotional regulation after divorce (Gargari et al., 2024). In addition, individual counseling provides tailored emotional support and allows for a depth of focus that cannot be achieved in group sessions (Rose & Ishak, 2019). This individualized approach addresses the multifaceted emotional, psychological, and practical challenges that individuals face during and after divorce (Symoens et al., 2014). Individual sessions are dynamic and adaptive in nature and offer several methodological advantages over group-based approaches. Counselors can modify interventions in real time in response to client feedback and evolving needs (Chen & Giblin, 2017). In addition, the private setting allows clients to feel safe discussing personal issues without fear of judgment or stigma, which can be a concern in group therapy. There is an advantage to rewriting personal stories in an individual setting (Kendra et al., 2014). This can support significant reductions in distress and psychological well-being. Given the diversity of experiences and challenges that individuals face after divorce, the importance of individual counseling in this process is better understood.

The analysis of psychological help services after divorce shows that different philosophies and different therapy approaches are tried. However, it was found that Humanistic Philosophy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) were the most preferred of these approaches (Abdollahpour et al., 2022; Noroozi et al., 2018; Poureghbal et al., 2023; Tucker & Smith-Adcock, 2017). Humanistic philosophy and CBT are two different but complementary approaches to psychotherapy. Both frameworks may be preferred in post-divorce adjustment programmes due to their emphasis on personal development and adaptive coping mechanisms (Bourdon et al., 2021; DeRobertis & Bland, 2020). The humanistic approach, based on the principles of self-actualisation and unconditional positive regard, emphasises the individual's intrinsic capacity for growth and self-healing (Scott, 2003). Rooted in the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, this approach sees individuals as innately capable of overcoming difficulties through self-awareness, acceptance and the realisation of their potential (Singh, 2023).

Humanistic philosophy is particularly favoured in divorce counselling because it promotes an environment of unconditional acceptance, enabling clients to regulate their complex emotions and reshape their self-concept (Tucker & Smith-Adcock, 2017). On the other hand, CBT, developed by pioneers such as Aaron Beck, is a structured, problem-focused therapy that emphasises the interplay between thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Beck & Fleming, 2021). By addressing cognitive distortions and promoting adaptive coping

strategies, it provides clients with tools to effectively manage stressors (Ebrahimi et al., 2024). This improves emotional regulation and decision-making (Leahy, 2012). This theoretical approach is effective in post-divorce support programmes because it helps participants restructure maladaptive beliefs and develop practical solutions to difficulties associated with the divorce process (Noroozi et al., 2018). According to these findings, humanistic principles provide the foundation for emotional healing and self-acceptance, while CBT strategies offer pragmatic tools to address the concrete challenges of life after divorce.

In conclusion, the literature review highlights the increased emotional, social and psychological vulnerability and adjustment difficulties of divorced individuals. In this context, protective support services for the post-divorce period, similar to a risk factor, are ready to reduce risks, strengthen adjustment, protect mental well-being and increase life satisfaction of divorced persons. Although there are numerous international programmes aimed at reducing the impact of potential risk factors and enhancing post-divorce adjustment, it is clear that such programmes are remarkably scarce in Turkey. Given the increasing divorce rates in Turkey (TÜİK, 2023), mental health professionals are likely to benefit from access to rigorously designed and empirically validated programmes. In this context, this study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of PADEP, which was designed to enhance the post-divorce adjustment of divorced individuals. Based on a review of the relevant literature, this programme was developed with the aim of providing content that facilitates understanding of divorce, regulation of emotions, development of problem-solving skills and enhancement of interpersonal relationship skills. Given the success of humanistic philosophy and CBT in this area, the infrastructure of the programme has been prepared according to these approaches.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed research approach employing a parallel embedded design, where qualitative data complement quantitative data (Yin, 2006). Within this framework, the researchers examined the changes in post-divorce adjustment, life satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and stress levels of both the experimental and control groups before and after the implementation of the PDAP using quantitative measurement instruments. Additionally, they investigated the perspectives of individuals in the experimental group regarding their experiences before and after the PDAP through qualitative assessment tools. The quantitative aspect of this research adopted a 2X4 research design, encompassing experimental and control groups, incorporating pre-test, post-test, and follow-up measurements, along with a control group. This design is commonly used in psychological and educational research where randomised controlled trials are not feasible due to ethical, practical or logistical constraints (Cook & Campbell, 2007). By using a matched control group and assessing outcomes over time, this approach allows researchers to infer causal relationships between the intervention and observed changes.

### **Analysis Of Individual Sessions**

Individual sessions allow interventions to be tailored to meet the specific needs of participants, thereby increasing the validity of the results. This is consistent with the flexibility inherent in quasi-experimental designs, which are often used to study real-world applications of interventions (Reichardt, 2019). The use of consistent pre- and post-assessments ensures that individual-level changes can be attributed to the intervention, rather than external factors. This is consistent with the methodological rigour recommended for quasi-experimental designs when analysing individualised treatments (Campbell & Stanley, 2015). The analysis of individual sessions within quasi-experimental designs has been supported by research in clinical and educational settings, where interventions are often adapted to the individual circumstances of participants (Boruch, 1997).

### **Participants**

The sample included 20 individuals who were recruited based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) legally divorced, not remarried, and within a three-year post-divorce period; (2) individuals who expressed

dissatisfaction with their post-divorce circumstances; (3) individuals who provided informed consent by signing the consent form. Moreover, individuals currently undergoing psychological counseling and those with any psychiatric diagnoses were excluded from the study. Among the participants assigned to the experimental group, six are female and four are male, with an average age of 31.8 (sd=4.86). In the control group, there are six females and four males, with an average age of 31.5 (sd=4.81). Table 1 presents the information about the participants' educational backgrounds, number of children, and the duration since their divorce.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the participants

Variables	Level	Experimental Group (f)	Control Group (f)	Total (f)
Gender	Female	6	6	12
	Male	4	4	8
	Total	10	10	20
Age	25-30 Years	5	5	10
	31-35 Years	3	2	5
	36-40 Years	1	3	4
	40-45 Years	1	-	1
	Total	10	10	20
Education Level	Primary education	-	1	1
	High School	3	3	6
	Two-years college	4	2	6
	Bachelor's degree	3	3	6
	Master degree	-	1	1
	Total	10	10	20
Number of Children	No Child	5	7	12
	1 Child	3	1	4
	2 Children	2	2	4
	Total	10	10	20
Time Since Divorce	0-6 Months	1	1	2
	7-12 Months	-	3	3
	13-18 Months	1	3	4
	19-24 Months	2	1	3
	25-30 Months	5	2	7
	31-36 Months	1	-	1
	Total	10	10	20

$\chi^2=35.444$ ;  $df=19$ ;  $p=.012$

### The Post-Divorce Adjustment Program

The PDAP was structured in two phases, following the stages outlined by Nazlı (2016):

#### *Phase 1: Development of the Program*

The infrastructure of the PDAP was prepared by taking into consideration the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings from existing literature on post-divorce assistance programs, as well as the socio-economic and socio-cultural context of the targeted region. In addition, five academics, who are experts in the field and have studied divorce, gave their opinions and suggestions on the infrastructure, content and implementation of the programme. The PDAP was founded on a humanistic philosophy and a cognitive-behavioral approach. While preparing the infrastructure of PDAP, components related to understanding and accepting divorce, emotion regulation, problem-solving, and improving social relationships were added to the program based on studies conducted with divorced individuals (Bowers et al., 2014; Schramm et al., 2018). The PDAP was designed to consist of six sessions, to be conducted once a week, considering that short-term counseling processes are more effective in exploring relevant solutions (Corey, 2012) and the low participation rate in long-term assistance services (Bloom et al., 1982). Additionally, due to the differences in the experiences of divorced individuals and the recommendation for interventions to be individualized (Halisdemir, 2020; Monder et al., 2015), the PDAP was created as individual sessions. The utilization of semi-structured programs not only provides a



balance of standardization and adaptability but also lends itself to social science research by offering greater flexibility (Türnüklü, 2000). Such flexibility allows sessions to follow a predefined protocol, ensuring a more systematic and comparable delivery of information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Consequently, the PDAP was planned as semi-structured sessions.

### *Phase 2: Defining the Four Components of the Program*

The PDAP involved four key components: objectives, content, process, and evaluation. The objectives were structured in accordance with Wellman and Moore's taxonomy. Within this framework, the specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be acquired were outlined as the program's goals (Nazlı, 2016). The objectives were formulated at the "perception" and "comprehension" levels, aiming to empower divorced individuals to comprehend the divorce process, actively employ emotion regulation skills, and engage in functional problem-solving, while also organizing their social relationships and building social support networks.

The PDAP consisted of a total of six sessions, conducted once a week, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. The initial session focused on introductions, structuring, and exploring the divorce situation. The second session delved into the understanding of divorce, while the third session centered on emotion regulation. The fourth session focused on problem-solving, and the fifth session addressed interpersonal relationships and family-of-origin relationships. The final session encompassed an evaluation of the program's outcomes and explores the changes that have occurred in the participants' lives in line with the program's objectives. Additionally, homework assignments provided at the end of each session enabled participants to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to their daily lives.

### **Procedure**

In this context, pamphlets and flyers announcing the study were prepared for the formation of the study group. The necessary legal permissions were obtained from the ..... Governor's Office and the ..... Provincial Police Directorate in order to distribute the prepared leaflets. The leaflets were delivered to various institutions, organisations and residential areas, and individuals who volunteered to participate in the study were reached. In addition, the programme was announced by sharing the prepared brochures online through social media. As a result of the publicity, a total of 28 people, 11 male and 17 female, volunteered to take part in the study. The researcher conducted a preliminary interview with these 28 people, and in this preliminary interview the participants were given general information about the PDAP sessions. The participants were also asked to sign the informed consent form. As a result of this application, it was determined that three male and five female participants did not meet the inclusion criteria of the study and were excluded from the research group. The blind coder administered quantitative pre-tests to the remaining 20 participants in the study group. Individuals who met the study inclusion and exclusion criteria were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups according to the pre-test results. This resulted in an experimental group of 10 participants, four men and six women, and a control group of 10 participants. In this way, the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups were equalised and an attempt was made to ensure that the study group was homogeneous.

The study's qualitative interviews were conducted by a blind coder, an expert in the field of psychological counselling, who had been previously trained by the researcher. These interviews were conducted in ..... Municipality's Family Counseling Center and lasted approximately 40-45 minutes. The qualitative pre-interview information collected by the blind coder was filed, and then PDAP was applied to the experimental group. The practical phase of the research took place at the ..... Municipality's Family Counseling Center, with prior authorization obtained from the ..... Municipality Mayor's Office. The implementation of the PDAP, which was conducted in six individual sessions, began in July 2020 and the individual sessions, which totalled 60 sessions, were completed in March 2021. There were no dropouts or losses among the participants throughout the study. Approximately 10 days after the completion of the PDAP implementation process, the blind coder conducted a qualitative interview with the individuals in the experimental group using a semi-structured final qualitative interview form, and the opinions of the individuals in the experimental group about the changes that occurred in their lives after the PDAP implementation were obtained. As the qualitative



interviews were conducted to analyse the changes in the lives of individuals in the experimental group after PDAP implementation, no qualitative interview was conducted with the control group. Following the implementation with the experimental group, the PDAP was also applied to voluntary individuals from the control group.

## **PDAP Session Contents**

### ***Session 1***

Outcome:

- Understand how the post-divorce adjustment programme works.
- Recognise the problem areas associated with divorce.
- Identify their thoughts and attitudes about divorce.

Process: In the first session of the study, the aim was to structure the sessions to be held in the future, to present the programme to be implemented to the client, to determine the purpose of the client's participation in the programme and to raise awareness about life after divorce. In this context, after getting to know the client, the history of the marriage and the divorce was taken and the evaluation of the terminated relationship was emphasised. This session also worked on helping the clients to express themselves emotionally, to feel understood and listened to, and to develop awareness of the situation they were in. The failure of the relationship, the factors that contributed to this failure, the decision to separate, the emotions and reactions experienced as a result of the separation, i.e. divorce, were discussed. In addition, the stress of the divorce, the difficulties after the divorce, the losses experienced, the emotional reactions to these losses, in short, the mourning process of the divorce were shared. To facilitate this sharing, an attempt was made to create a safe space in the counselling setting. At the end of the session, the participants were asked to clarify the goals of the counselling and to write a letter about the end of the marital relationship as homework.

### ***Session 2***

Outcome:

- Recognise dysfunctional thoughts and attitudes about divorce.
- Make sense of divorce in a functional way.
- Recognise their feelings about divorce.

Process: In the second session of the study the focus was on making sense of the divorce and the aim was for the client to make sense of this process in a realistic way and to accept this process. In this context, the client was asked to read the letter about the end of the marriage given at the end of the first session, and the parts that needed to be emphasised were worked on. The second session involved the process of restructuring the client's thoughts, feelings and behaviours about the divorce. In line with the aim of the session, various themes in the client's letter, such as guilt, rejection, exclusion or the perception of oneself as a social object to be gossiped about, were addressed within the framework of the 4D cycle of CBT. At the end of the second session, the 4D Cycle of CBT worksheet prepared by the researcher was given as homework to help the client better understand the relationship between situation, thoughts, emotions and behaviour.

### ***Session 3***

Outcome:

- Recognise the role of emotions in human life.
- Have knowledge of emotion regulation skills.
- Identify healthy ways of dealing with unwanted emotions.

Process: The aim of the third session was for the client to acquire emotion regulation skills and to learn how to cope with unwanted emotions. In this context, the third session of the study discussed emotions and

emotional reactions arising from the divorce situation and allowed the participants to touch on these emotions. In this way, it was attempted to create an awareness of the existence of these emotions and how they are expressed. In particular, situations and people that triggered certain emotions were identified and new strategies for approaching these situations and people were developed. It was also emphasised how these emotions and emotional reactions affect oneself and others. Emotional regulation skills focused on 'separation anger', which is particularly common after divorce. In this context, work was done with the client on accepting and expressing anger appropriately in order to reframe anger as an emotion rather than a behaviour. Finally, work was done on how to use emotion regulation skills in situations that upset her and how to express emotions constructively. In this context, the work on expressing emotions with the 'I language' and the work on expressing emotions with the 'I language' were given as homework as well as relaxation exercises.

#### *Session 4*

Outcomes:

- Identifies how to deal with problems that reduce quality of life.
- Understands methods of problem solving.

Process: The aim of the fourth session was to develop problem solving skills and to deal with uncomfortable situations after divorce. To this end, the homework given in the previous session was worked on. It was emphasised what and how the adaptation to the post-divorce period, which is one of the most important transitions in a person's life, is affected, and the problem-solving schema created by the researcher on this topic was studied. The problem-solving schema was used to identify the areas in which the client had the most problems and to set short-term, medium-term and long-term goals in order to deal with these problems in a healthy way, and then an experiential plan was created and the person was helped to organise his or her daily life. In addition, the client was made aware of the resources and risks associated with the plan. Finally, the problem-solving scheme created by the researcher was given as homework. This scheme was asked to be elaborated and developed.

#### *Session 5*

Outcomes:

- Understand how to manage problems in social relationships.
- Understands how to organise his/her family of origin and social relationships.

Process: The aim of the fifth session was for the client to understand his family of origin and his social relations. In this direction, first of all, the homework given in the previous session was evaluated. How to deal with problems related to interpersonal relationships was assessed in the context of the problem-solving skills emphasised in the previous session. In addition, the situations that the client wanted to change in his family of origin and in his social relationships were highlighted, and help was given to identify the resources that he could use to achieve these changes. In summary, this session tried to help the client to identify the relatives, friends and groups of friends from whom he/she could get support when needed and to get help from the right people when needed. In other words, it tried to raise awareness of how to build appropriate support networks. At the end of the session, they worked on how to improve the individual's social support networks and this topic was given as homework.

#### *Session 6*

Outcome:

- Recognises the changes in his/her life during the programme process.

Process: The last session of the programme aimed to identify the changes brought about by BSUP in the client's life and to evaluate the programme process. The last session started with an analysis of the homework given in the previous session. The session began by highlighting the client's thoughts about the divorce in general.

Changes in the client's understanding of divorce were identified. Then the feelings after the divorce were highlighted, especially the feelings of anger. Changes in the client's methods of coping with intense emotional states were noted. Then, when the client had a problem, the client's abilities to cope rationally with the problem were assessed and changes in these abilities were noted. Finally, the client's social relationships were analysed and the change in relationships with other people was highlighted. In this way, an attempt was made to determine both the changes that had occurred in the client during the process and the contributions of the programme to the client. The last session ended with a general summary of the process.

## **Data Collection Tools**

### ***Adult Divorce Adjustment Scale (Adult DAS)***

The Adult DAS, developed by Nazlı et al. (2021), serves the purpose of assessing the adjustment levels of individuals going through or legally divorced. It consists of 17 items and has three subscales: psychological adjustment, social relationship adjustment, and family-of-origin relationship adjustment. The internal consistency coefficients, measured through Cronbach's alpha, for these subscales and the overall scale are as follows: .883 for the overall scale, .835 for psychological adjustment, .856 for social relationship adjustment, and .90 for family-of-origin relationship adjustment (Nazlı et al., 2021). In this particular study, the calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .886 for the overall scale, .797 for psychological adjustment, .776 for social relationship adjustment, and .733 for family-of-origin relationship adjustment. Higher scores achieved on the Adult DAS indicate a heightened level of adjustment within the specific domain it evaluates.

### ***Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)***

The SWLS, developed by Diener et al. (1985), measures an individual's self-assessment of life satisfaction based on their self-determined criteria. Comprising a single factor and structured on a 7-point Likert scale, this scale consists of five items and was adapted into Turkish by Köker (1991). The validation and reliability study for the adult version of this scale was conducted by Dağlı and Baysal (2016), resulting in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .88. Within the context of this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the SWLS was computed as .877.

### ***Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)***

The DASS-21, developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), measures adverse emotional states associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. This scale encompasses three subscales, namely depression, anxiety, and stress, with each subscale comprising seven items, summing up to a total of 21 items. The Turkish adaptation of the DASS-21 was carried out by Yıldırım et al. (2018). Elevated scores on each of the subscales signify an increased presence of symptoms tied to that specific domain. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scale range between .87 and .90. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the DASS-21 were determined to be .889 for depression, .887 for anxiety, and .906 for stress.

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

The researchers developed semi-structured interview questions to collect qualitative data during the pre and post-interviews of the study. These questionnaires were designed based on the Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, which emphasizes how individuals interpret their experiences and the impact of these interpretations on their current experiences (eg. What is divorce to you? What is it like to be divorced?), rather than merely analyzing the situations themselves (Beck, 1993). In addition, qualitative interview questions were formulated using the opinions and suggestions of two field experts who had previously worked on qualitative data collection. Taking a Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approach to the divorce process, the researchers drew upon the functionality of questions used in similar studies, like those conducted by Spillane-Grieco (2000), to formulate questions aimed at assessing how individuals interpret and make sense of the divorce process. The questions, rooted in CBT principles, are intentionally open-ended, allowing participants to express their thoughts and reveal their perceptions regarding various aspects of their lives, including daily life skills, making sense of divorce, life satisfaction, emotional well-being, problem-solving abilities, and interpersonal relationships (eg. How do you spend a weekday from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night? What would you change in your life if you could? Why?). The interview questionnaires were structured

following the guidelines recommended by Creswell (2014), encompassing introductory queries, content-related questions, closing inquiries, supplementary prompts, and concluding instructions.

## Data Analysis

### *Analysis of Quantitative Data*

Non-parametric analysis techniques were utilized due to the absence of a normal data distribution and the inadequate sample size for parametric tests (Büyüköztürk, 2011). Consequently, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was employed to assess whether significant disparities existed between the pre-test and post-test scores among the groups. Additionally, the Mann Whitney-U test was applied to investigate variations between the pre-test and post-test scores across groups. Subsequently, to determine the effect size upon identifying significant distinctions between the scores, the formula  $r = z/\sqrt{N}$  was applied. The resulting “r” value was then interpreted, with .1 signifying a “small” effect size, .3 indicating a “medium” effect size, and .5 denoting a “large” effect size, as per the categorization suggested by Coolican (2014).

### *Clinical Significance*

Clinical significance, which centers on individual changes, is assessed through the computation of the “reliable change index” (RCI) and/or the determination of specific cutoff points associated with the utilized measurement instrument (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). This approach seeks to ascertain the reliability of changes observed in participants. In this study, clinical significance was evaluated employing the subsequent formula (Bauer et al., 2004; Jacobson & Truax, 1991):

$$RCI = \frac{X_{pre} - X_{post}}{S_{diff}}, S_{diff} = \sqrt{2(Sh)^2}, Sh = S_{Sx} \sqrt{1 - r_x^4}$$

In the assessment of changes occurring in participants, an RCI exceeding  $\pm 1.96$  signifies that the change is independent of the standard error attributed to the scale, affirming the reliability of the change. Conversely, an RCI less than  $\pm 1.96$  indicates that the change is a result of the standard error linked to the measurement tool, signifying the unreliability of the change.

### *Analysis of Qualitative Data*

The qualitative data underwent a content analysis process comprising four stages: i) data coding, ii) identification of relevant themes, iii) organization of codes and themes, and iv) interpretation of findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Initially, to ensure coding reliability, the data transcripts were independently coded by both the researchers and a qualified academic expert in qualitative research (Creswell et al., 2007). When disagreements in coding arose, discussions were held to achieve consensus regarding the interpretation of these concepts, with a focus on attaining a high level of agreement. Based on patterns observed in the responses, key concepts were established, followed by the formulation of codes. The coding of qualitative data was performed using both first and second cycle coding methods (Saldana, 2017).

During the first cycle coding, a structural coding approach was initially applied to categorize the data. Data were further organized in alignment with predetermined themes using descriptive coding. These themes were developed with consideration for problem areas frequently encountered by divorced individuals, as identified during the literature review, encompassing aspects such as daily life skills, making sense of divorce, life satisfaction, emotional state, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, descriptive coding was employed to prepare for the second cycle coding and subsequent interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). Second cycle coding, an advanced analytical method, was used to reevaluate data previously coded in the first cycle, particularly when adjustments were necessary. It allowed for the identification of variations, increases, decreases, and instances of unchanged conditions within a process (Saldana, 2017). In this study, a longitudinal coding process was undertaken by comparing participants' expressions during initial qualitative interviews with those obtained during the final qualitative interviews.

The coding process considered not only the predetermined themes identified during the literature review but also newly emerging themes, such as self-perception, which became evident during the experimental process. Qualitative data were independently analyzed by the researchers and a recognized academic expert in the field. Ultimately, these data were synthesized in the study's conclusion section.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The researchers conducted training sessions for two expert psychological counselors, who were designated as blind coders, regarding the research's data collection instruments. These blind coders collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Furthermore, diversity among researchers was ensured by involving various experts in the stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, following the principles outlined by Johnson (1997). Additionally, the criteria recommended by Büyüköztürk (2011) were taken into consideration. To enhance the applicability of the research findings, participants were provided with minimal yet sufficient information about the study to minimize any potential "expectancy effects." Pre- and post-measurements were conducted both before and after the experimental procedure to effectively manage any "time and treatment effects." Furthermore, a follow-up test was administered approximately 10 days after the conclusion of the experimental procedure to mitigate the influence of time and treatment effects. A purposive sampling method was employed when forming the study group, with all individuals responding to the research announcement being rigorously evaluated based on the stipulated inclusion and exclusion criteria, thereby effectively fulfilling the "subject selection" criterion. Additionally, the study group was thoughtfully composed of individuals sharing similar life experiences to ensure that the "subjects' history" criterion was met. Lastly, with regard to the "data collection instrument" factor, it's worth noting that the same measurement instruments were consistently administered in the same predetermined sequence during all measurements. Furthermore, all measurements were meticulously carried out in a consistent manner, taking place in the same location and being overseen by the same blind coder.

During the development of the qualitative research design for this study, both internal and external reliability factors were carefully considered. To bolster "credibility," the criteria of participant verification and expert examination, as suggested by Holloway and Wheeler (1996), were diligently addressed as follows: Data collection was conducted in separate 90-minute sessions during pre- and post-interviews. The researchers conducted an average of seven sessions, each lasting around 90 minutes, with each participant in the experimental group, thus ensuring "long-term interaction." The "participant verification" criterion was met by not sharing research findings with the participants. Additionally, the "expert examination" criterion was met through the evaluation of the research process by an academic expert in the field of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, who possesses prior experience in utilizing qualitative research methods in their own work.

Considering the "dependability" criterion, the researchers employed triangulation strategies (Denzin, 1978). For meeting the "data source triangulation" criterion, the researchers conducted interviews with ten different divorced individuals. Furthermore, research data were collected by two expert psychological counselors serving as blind coders, while data analysis and interpretation were carried out by the researchers and an academic expert in the field of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, ensuring the "researcher triangulation" criterion. Lastly, both quantitative and qualitative data, researcher observations, and a review of the existing literature were employed to satisfy the "method triangulation" criterion.

To enhance "confirmability" (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996), the researchers presented detailed information about the study, including the use of voice recording devices, field notes, diaries, research methods, study objectives, purposes, expectations, and how research measurements were conducted. For "transferability" (Houser, 2015), the researchers provided comprehensive information about the study group, participant characteristics, and the study process.

While presenting qualitative findings, a direct quotation technique was utilized. To adhere to privacy guidelines, participants within the experimental group were assigned random numbers ranging from 1 to 10. Quoted participants were identified using "P" followed by their respective numerical order. For instance, "P1" represents the first participant, while "P6" corresponds to the sixth participant. The statements made by participants during the pre- and post-interviews were labeled as "Pre" and "Post." For example, "P2-Pre"

indicates the response of the second participant during the pre-interview, while “P7-Post” signifies the response of the seventh participant during the post-interview.

### Data Collection Procedure

Following the implementation with the experimental group, the PDAP was also applied to voluntary individuals from the control group. Before the PDAP, all participants underwent a pre-test (T1) administered by an expert psychological counselor who was a blind coder. Following this, qualitative pre-interviews were conducted with the experimental group. After the researchers administered the PDAP to the experimental group, the blind coder administered a post-test (T2) and qualitative post-test, as well as a follow-up test 1 (FT1) three months after the application and follow-up test 2 (FT2) six months after the application. For the control group, only the T2 assessment was administered, followed by the FT1 evaluation three months later. A summary of the measurement procedures conducted for the study group can be found in Table 2. The data collected through these procedures were analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis methods.

**Table 2.** Measurement procedures applied to the participants

	Pre-Test (T1)	Qualitative Preliminary Interview	Final (T2)	Test	Qualitative Final Interview	Follow-up Test 1 (FT1)	Follow-up Test 2 (FT2)
Experimental Group	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Control Group	+	-	+	-	-	+	-

## Results

### Quantitative Findings

Table 3 presents the averages and standard deviation values for the scores obtained by the participants at T1, T2, FT1, and FT2

**Table 3.** Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Adult DAS, SWLS, and DASS-21

Variables	Groups	Pre-test		Final test		Follow-up 1		Follow-up 2	
		$\bar{X}$	<i>S</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>S</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>S</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>S</i>
Adult DAS	Experimental	52.40	8.70	76.00	6.03	72.80	6.03	70.50	7.59
	Control	55.50	8.04	57.00	8.00	52.80	10.62	-	-
	Total	53.95	8.37	66.50	7.01	62.80	8.32	70.50	7.59
SWLS	Experimental	10.50	2.83	18.10	2.76	17.40	3.62	18.20	2.52
	Control	11.00	1.33	10.30	3.09	11.20	2.61	-	-
	Total	10.75	2.08	14.20	2.92	14.30	3.11	18.20	2.52
DASS-21 Depression	Experimental	10.90	3.07	3.20	2.89	3.80	2.82	3.40	2.50
	Control	8.90	5.25	10.40	4.81	10.30	4.42	-	-
	Total	9.90	4.16	6.80	3.85	7.05	3.62	3.40	2.50
DASS-21 Anxiety	Experimental	9.50	5.10	3.30	3.12	3.10	3.21	3.50	3.06
	Control	6.90	4.48	8.70	4.44	8.40	3.53	-	-



Table 3 (Continued)

	Total	8.20	4.79	6.00	3.78	5.75	3.37	3.50	3.06
DASS-21	Experimental	11.30	4.42	5.00	2.66	4.20	2.61	4.70	3.36
Stress	Control	9.00	5.63	9.90	5.44	11.20	4.68	-	-
	Total	10.15	5.02	7.45	4.05	7.7	3.64	4.70	3.36

Note: n= 20 (Experimental Group= 10, Control Group = 10); Adult DAS: Adult Divorce Adaptation Scale;

SWLS: Satisfaction With Life Scale; DASS-21: Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

### *Anxiety Stress*

The researchers examined whether there was a difference in the pre-test scores of the participants between the groups and reported no significant difference among all T1 scores of the experimental and control groups (UYBUÖ= 37.50,  $p > .05$ ; UYDÖ= 41.50,  $p > .05$ ; U Depression = 37.50,  $p > .05$ ; UAnxiety= 34.50,  $p > .05$ ; UStress= 32.00,  $p > .05$ ; Tablo 4).

**Table 4.** Mann Whitney U Test Results for Pre-Test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Adult DAS, SWLS, and DASS-21

	Groups	<i>n</i>	Rank Mean	Rank Total	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Adult DAS	Experimental	10	9.25	92.50	37.50	.344
	Control	10	11.75	117.50		
SWLS	Experimental	10	9.65	96.50	41.50	.510
	Control	10	11.35	113.50		
DASS-21 Depression	Experimental	10	11.75	117.50	37.50	.343
	Control	10	9.25	92.50		
DASS-21 Anxiety	Experimental	10	12.05	120.50	34.50	.238
	Control	10	8.95	89.50		
DASS-21 Stress	Experimental	10	12.30	123.00	32.00	.169

Note: Adult DAS: Adult Divorce Adaptation Scale; SWLS: Satisfaction With Life Scale; DASS-21: Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

### *Post-Divorce Adjustment*

Participants in the experimental group exhibited significantly higher Adult DAS scores at T2 compared to T1, with statistical significance ( $z = -2.80$ ,  $p < .05$ ; as shown in Table 5). Furthermore, the FT1 scores for the experimental group were notably higher than their initial T1 scores ( $z = -2.80$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and their FT2 scores similarly exceeded their FT1 scores with statistical significance ( $z = -2.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Conversely, there were no statistically significant differences between the control group's T2 and T1 scores ( $z = -1.70$ ,  $p > .05$ ), nor between their FT1 and T1 scores ( $z = -.76$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In this context, it can be confidently asserted that the PDAP effectively contributed to the enhancement of post-divorce adjustment for participants, and this positive impact persisted over time.

### *Life Satisfaction*

There was a statistically significant improvement in life satisfaction among participants in the experimental group, with their T2 scores surpassing their T1 scores ( $z = -2.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ; as shown in Table 5). Moreover, substantial differences were observed between their T1 and FT1 scores ( $z = -2.80$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and between their T1 and FT2 scores ( $z = -2.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ), favoring the latter. Conversely, no statistically significant variations were identified in the corresponding T1 and T2 scores for the control group ( $z = -.93$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Additionally, no



significant distinctions were found between T1 and FT1 scores ( $z = -.42, p > .05$ ). These findings robustly suggest that the PDAP effectively heightened life satisfaction among divorced individuals, and this difference persisted over time.

### *Depression, Anxiety, and Stress*

The participants in the experimental group had significantly higher scores in DASS-21 at T2 compared to T1, and the difference had a wide effect size ( $z_{\text{depression}} = -2.81, p < .05$ ;  $z_{\text{anxiety}} = -2.82, p < .05$ ;  $z_{\text{stress}} = -2.80, p < .05$ ; see Tablo 5). Similarly, there was a significant difference between T1 and FT1 ( $z_{\text{depression}} = -2.82, p < .05$ ;  $z_{\text{anxiety}} = -2.81, p < .05$ ;  $z_{\text{stress}} = -2.80, p < .05$ ) and between T1 and FT2 ( $z_{\text{depression}} = -2.81, p < .05$ ;  $z_{\text{anxiety}} = -2.82, p < .05$ ;  $z_{\text{stress}} = -2.81, p < .05$ ) scores, all in favor of T1. These findings underscore the functionality of the PDAP in reducing participants' depression, anxiety, and stress scores while effectively maintaining these improvements over time.

Contrastingly, within the control group, no significant distinctions emerged in DASS-21 depression scores between T1 and T2 ( $z_{\text{depression}} = -1.74, p > .05$ ). Nonetheless, there was a notable difference in favor of T2 concerning anxiety and stress T1 and T2 scores ( $z_{\text{anxiety}} = -2.20, p < .05$ ;  $z_{\text{stress}} = -1.98, p < .05$ ), indicating an increase in anxiety and stress levels over time. In the subsequent follow-up study, no significant variations were evident between the control group's DASS-21 T1 and IT1 scores.

**Table 5.** Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test Results for Pre-Test and Final Test, Pre-Test and Follow-up Test 1, Pre-Test and Follow-up Test 2 Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Scales	Final test – Pre-test								Follow-up 1 – Pre-test						Follow-up 2 – Pre-test				
	Groups		<i>n</i>	SO	ST	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> ( $\eta^2$ )	<i>n</i>	SO	ST	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> ( $\eta^2$ )	SO	ST	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> ( $\eta^2$ )
Adult DAS	Experimental	Negative	0	.00	.00	-2.80	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	0	.00	.00	-2.80	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	.00	.00	-2.81	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)
		Positive	10	5.50	55.00				10	5.50	55.00				5.50	55.00			
		Equal	0	.00	.00				0										
	Control	Negative	2	5.50	11.00	-1.70	.088	-	4	4.63	18.50	-.76	.446	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Positive	8	5.50	44.00				3	3.17	9.50								
		Equal	0						3										
SWLS	Experimental	Negative	0	.00	.00	-2.81	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	0	.00	.00	-2.80	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	.00	.00	-2.81	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)
		Positive	10	5.50	55.00				10	5.50	55.00								
		Equal	0	.00	.00				0										
	Control	Negative	5	3.90	19.50	-.93	.351	-	4	4.75	19.00	-.42	.668	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Positive	2	4.25	8.50				5	5.20	26.00								
		Equal	3						1										
DASS-21 Depression	Experimental	Negative	10	5.50	55.00	-2.81	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	10	5.50	55.00	-2.82	.005*	.89 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	5.50	55.00	-2.81	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)
		Positive	0	.00	.00				0	.00	.00				.00	.00			
		Equal	0	.00	.00				0	.00	.00				.00	.00			
	Control	Negative	2	5.25	10.50	-1.74	.080	-	2	6.00	12.00	-1.60	.109	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Positive	8	5.56	44.50				8	5.38	43.00								
		Equal	0						0										
DASS-21 Anxiety	Experimental	Negative	10	5.50	55.00	-2.82	.005*	.89 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	10	5.50	55.00	-2.81	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	5.50	55.00	-2.81	.005*	.89 <sup>a</sup> (.28)
		Positive	0	.00	.00				0	.00	.00				.00	.00			
		Equal	0	.00	.00				0	.00	.00				.00	.00			
	Control	Negative	2	2.00	4.00	-2.20	.028*	.69 <sup>a</sup> (.22)	3	2.33	7.00	-1.84	.064	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Positive	7	5.86	41.00				6	6.33	38.00								
		Equal	1						1										
DASS-21 Stress	Experimental	Negative	10	5.50	55.00	-2.80	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	10	5.50	55.00	-2.80	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)	5.50	55.00	-2.81	.005*	.88 <sup>a</sup> (.28)
		Positive	0	.00	.00				0	.00	.00				.00	.00			

Table 5 (Continued)

	Equal	0	.00	.00				0	.00	.00				.00	.00
Control	Negative	1	2.50	2.50	-1.98	.047*	.62 <sup>a</sup> (.19)	3	3.17	9.50	-1.19	.231	-	-	-
	Positive	6	4.25	25.50				5	5.30	26.50					
	Equal	3						2							

Note: Adult DAS: Adult Divorce Adaptation Scale; SWLS: Satisfaction With Life Scale; DASS-21: Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, \* =  $p < .05$ ; <sup>a</sup> = Large impact size

**Table 6.** Distribution of RCI Results for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Adult DAS, SWLS, and DASS-21

Variables	Groups	Positive change		Negative change		No change	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Adjustment to Divorce	Experimental	10	100	-	-	-	-
	Control	-	-	-	-	10	100
Life Satisfaction	Experimental	10	100	-	-	-	-
	Control	1	10	3	30	6	60
Depression	Experimental	10	100	-	-	-	-
	Control	-	-	2	20	8	80
Anxiety	Experimental	10	100	-	-	-	-
	Control	-	-	1	10	9	90
Stress	Experimental	8	80	-	-	2	20
	Control	-	-	-	-	10	100

Note: Adult DAS: Adult Divorce Adaptation Scale; SWLS: Satisfaction With Life Scale; DASS-21: Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

### *Clinical significance*

In the experimental group, all participants experienced notable improvements in divorce adjustment, life satisfaction, depression, and anxiety scores at T2, meeting the RCI criteria (see Table 6). Remarkably, eight participants within this group also demonstrated significant improvements in stress scores that fulfilled the RCI criteria. Conversely, the control group showed no positive changes meeting the RCI criteria. Surprisingly, a few participants in the control group exhibited negative changes that met the RCI criteria, which included three individuals in life satisfaction, two in depression, and one in stress.

### **Qualitative Findings**

The qualitative data underwent a meticulous content analysis technique, resulting in a systematic and descriptive coding process. Subsequently, these codes were organized under distinct thematic categories, namely: “Daily Activities,” “Reactions to Divorce,” “Emotional State,” “Problem Solving,” “Interpersonal Relationships,” and “Self-Perception.”

#### *Daily Activities*

Within the dataset, expressions related to the positive or negative rituals and responsibilities undertaken by individuals in the experimental group during their daily lives were identified and codified. These codifications were then grouped under the overarching theme of “Daily Activities.” Upon a comprehensive analysis of these codes, it became evident that they could be further subcategorized into two distinct sub-themes: “Functional Activities” and “Dysfunctional Activities,” concerning the behaviors and activities individuals engaged in throughout the day. Under the sub-theme of “Functional Activities,” the codes encapsulated a range of activities, including hobbies/pet care, physical exercise/sports, engagement in art and cultural endeavors, income-generating pursuits, as well as efforts directed towards personal development and childcare responsibilities. These activities were seen as functionally contributing to aspects such as physical health, cultural and social enrichment, personal growth, economic stability, and nurturing children. Conversely, the sub-theme of “Dysfunctional Activities” encompassed codes that depicted behaviors characterized by self-isolation, disengagement from social circles, irregular employment patterns, and struggles with sleep. These activities were considered dysfunctional.

P9-Pre: “I am at home... I spend the whole day at home. TV, phone, nothing else...”

P3- Post: “I go to the gym. I’ve just started exercising. It makes me feel productive...”

During the second round of coding, a longitudinal analysis was conducted to discern shifts in participants' daily activities between their initial and final qualitative interviews. Across all participants in the experimental group (n=10), a consistent trend emerged, showcasing a decline in codes related to dysfunctional activities and a corresponding rise in codes linked to functional activities over the course of time.

P8-Pre: “Throughout the day, I mostly look at my phone, try to read a book, but it doesn't work, more phone, the virtual world...”

P8- Post: “I walk regularly when I have time... there is a park nearby, and I take my coffee there to watch the trees. I’ve also started knitting and selling my creations...”

When evaluating the participants' sharing during the initial and final qualitative interviews, a notable trend emerged. Activities such as withdrawing from social interactions, avoiding contact with others, irregular employment, and disrupted sleep patterns decreased. Conversely, there was an increase in engaging with friends, participating in cultural activities, and pursuing income-generating work. This observation suggests that the intervention effectively contributed to improving the participants' daily functional activities.

#### *Reactions to Divorce*

Participants' statements regarding their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors related to divorce were coded, and these codes were grouped under the theme “Reactions to Divorce.” Within this theme, expressions associated with remorse over the divorce, feelings of guilt, catastrophic thinking, concealing the divorce, experiencing a sense of meaninglessness or emptiness, and mistrusting others were grouped under the sub-theme “Negative Reactions to Divorce.” On the other hand, responses related to accepting the divorce, embarking on a fresh start, freeing oneself from troubled relationships, making future plans, and discussing divorce openly were clustered under the sub-theme “Positive Reactions to Divorce.” Below are examples of these coded statements:

P5-Pre: "...I perceive divorce as a failure."

P1-Pre: "An empty box. I'm unsure; I couldn't find the words to express it. I feel like I'm in a void."

P3- Post: "...if two people can't get along and there's a serious problem, it's not the end of life; it can be a new beginning, something good for both sides..."

P2- Post: "I started preparing for the exam to become a civil servant. Maybe I will be assigned to a good place."

During the longitudinal analysis of reactions to divorce, it was noted that while negative reactions to divorce codes diminished qualitatively in three participants, such as mistrusting others, in the final interviews, they increased in codes related to functional daily activities. As an illustration, the responses of P9 can be presented:

P9-Pre: "I can't trust people anymore. When I divorced, I realized people are not trustworthy. I don't talk to anyone about this; I feel ashamed."

P9- Post: "Yes, divorce is a bad thing, but if there's a serious problem, it's not the end of life; you can start over..."

Furthermore, positive reaction codes like embarking on a fresh start, making future plans, and discussing divorce openly increased in seven participants during the final interviews.

P7- Post: "I used to get angry when they asked me something about divorce, but these words don't hurt me anymore. I used to be unbearable."

P3- Post: "That period happened, and at the end of that period, I asked the following questions: What can I do now? What can I do for myself? What can I do for my life? I'm shaping my future. I'm comfortable now openly sharing that I divorced; it doesn't bother me when discussing it..."

When analyzing the final interview responses of the experimental group, a noticeable trend emerges wherein their perceptions and reactions towards their divorce experience become more harmonious and accepting in comparison to their initial interviews. In the initial qualitative interviews, expressions of shame, life falling apart, bankruptcy, and feeling trapped were predominant. In the qualitative final interviews, however, expressions and thoughts indicating recovery after a challenging period, acceptance of the current situation, and embarking on a new life were more prevalent. This reflects the evidence of the positive changes experienced by individuals during the experimental process. Below are some participant responses as examples of this phenomenon.

P5-Pre: "You feel like you've committed a sin, like you've done something shameful..."

P6-Pre: "I found myself in a game, a trap; my spouse and their family set a trap for me..."

P1- Post: "...after all, this is not the end of the world; it's two people who couldn't get along ending their relationship..."

### *Emotional state.*

In the qualitative portion of the study, findings related to the ability to manage emotional intensity and control emotional responses were coded. These codes were grouped under the theme of "Emotional State." Within this theme, the expressions and findings are categorized into two sub-themes: "Emotional Regulation Flexibility" and "Emotional Regulation Rigidity." Within the sub-theme of "Emotional Regulation Rigidity," the coded expressions encompassed aspects such as the suppression or non-disclosure of emotions, repetitive contemplation, abrupt emotional fluctuations, the prevalence of negative emotional experiences, depressive reactions, and the expression of negative emotions through aggressive behavior. Conversely, within the sub-theme of "Emotional Regulation Flexibility," the coded expressions revolved around practices such as utilizing relaxation exercises, redirecting attention, experiencing a heightened frequency of positive emotions, enhancing emotional awareness, and maintaining control over one's behavior during intense emotional states.

P4-Pre: "Recently, I've been grappling with intense loneliness. However, I make a conscious effort not to reveal this to anyone, as it feels like an even heavier burden on me..."

P10-Pre: "...Lately, I've been experiencing bursts of anger for reasons I can't quite pinpoint, and it often brings me close to tears."

P5- Post: "...I've gained better control over my emotions. In one instance, when I felt angry, I decided to take a deep breath and reminisce about a moment when my mother and I shared tea in our garden. This helped me regain my composure."

P6- Post: "...My recent experiences have left me feeling happier, and I find genuine joy in laughter."

The longitudinal coding analysis regarding the theme of emotional state revealed that during the initial interviews, participants were making efforts not to make their emotions noticeable to others, expressed aggressive reactions to topics they wouldn't normally react negatively to, experienced sudden changes in their emotions, and had difficulty controlling their reactions. However, in the final interviews, there was a qualitative decrease in such emotional issues. Participants demonstrated an increase in emotional regulation skills, including emotional awareness, understanding of their emotions, acceptance of emotions, practicing relaxation exercises when experiencing emotional intensity, and controlling impulsive behaviors. Additionally, it was found that all participants in the experimental group (n=10) initially experienced negative emotions such as anger, loneliness, resentment, anger, sadness, and helplessness, but in the final interviews, they reported feeling positive emotions such as happiness, peace, self-confidence, and hope. This change during the intervention process indicates an improvement in participants' emotional awareness and their ability to express their emotions. Sample responses illustrating this transformation are provided below:

P9-Pre: "I'm angry with everyone around me, and I'm hurt too. They don't even realize it because I act like I'm happy. Does a person have no value at all?"

P5-Pre: "After the divorce, they took the house's belongings... I got very angry, punched doors, and furniture."

P5- Post: "I don't honk in traffic anymore. Yesterday, the traffic light turned green, but the car in front of us didn't move. I swear I didn't say a word. I would have been angry before. I'm more in control now."

P9- Post: "Lately, I feel loved, valued, cared for, and respected. Before, I felt unimportant, undervalued, or at least, that's how it seemed to me. Now, I can find happiness in small things."

### *Problem Solving*

The qualitative interviews in the research encompassed participants' expressions related to problem-solving, including the identification of problem areas, gathering information about the problem and its resolution, determining a solution, implementation, and evaluating the outcome. These discussions were categorized under the overarching theme of "Problem Solving." Within this theme, two distinct sub-themes were identified: "Functional Attitudes in Problem Solving" and "Dysfunctional Attitudes in Problem Solving." Under the sub-theme of "Functional Attitudes in Problem Solving," the coded expressions encompassed the ability to define the problem, search for and apply alternative solutions, seek social support, and evaluate the outcome of the solution. Conversely, the sub-theme of "Dysfunctional Attitudes in Problem Solving" encompassed behaviors such as avoidance of the problem, evading behavior, and exhibiting aggression. Here are illustrative excerpts reflecting these coded expressions:

P8- Post: "...now I'm thinking about what else can be done if that doesn't work, and I've truly seen that there are other options."

P5- Post: "When I'm alone and feeling down at night, I hop in my car and drive up to that mountain across, admire the view, and call a friend. We chat and have conversations."

P7-Pre: "...during this period, I started drinking alcohol, but that didn't work. Now, I look at my phone until my brain goes numb; that's how I try to forget."

P6-Pre: "When I encounter issues with people and want to put an end to a conversation, I often respond with a harsh tone."

The longitudinal analysis of qualitative data indicates a qualitative decrease in rigid emotional regulation attitudes, such as denying emotions, failing to express them, rumination, experiencing abrupt emotional shifts, and struggling to control reactions, between the initial and final interviews. Conversely, there is a qualitative increase in flexible emotional regulation attitudes, including emotional awareness, the ability to understand

and accept emotions, using relaxation exercises, directing attention, experiencing positive emotions, and exhibiting controlled behavior during intense emotional states. This change suggests that participants enhanced their emotional awareness and learned to express their emotions during the intervention program. Sample participant responses that illustrate this shift are provided below:

P5-Pre: "I don't typically consume alcohol. I even tried that to see if it would help me numb my senses. It didn't. Then, I attended a self-defense course for six months, trying to get myself beaten up. None of it worked."

P5- Post: "...I no longer sit around contemplating the same issues; I actively seek solutions. Moping around and feeling sad doesn't change anything in my life. That's why, to resolve the problem, you need to take action, find a way to overcome these obstacles. Trying and struggling are essential."

P7-Pre: "Concerning these hardships, I withdrew from people, I didn't want to engage much; I didn't want to interact. I initially turned to alcohol, but that didn't work. Now, I immerse myself in religious texts. I've shut my doors to people."

P7- Post: "When I encounter difficulties, my first instinct is to think about a solution and try to act thoughtfully. I try to find a solution. If I can't find a solution on my own, I seek help from those around me. I ask them to look for solutions."

### *Interpersonal Relationships*

Participants in the experimental group shared their experiences regarding interactions with others, which have been categorized under the "Interpersonal Relationships" theme. These expressions have been further divided into two sub-themes: "Effective Attitude/Behavior" and "Ineffective Attitude/Behavior." Within the "Effective Attitude/Behavior" sub-theme, the coded expressions encompass spending quality time with friends, fostering positive family relationships and interactions, assertively terminating negative relationships, and demonstrating empathy. Conversely, the "Ineffective Attitude/Behavior" sub-theme includes behaviors such as limited or minimal interaction with individuals, decreased self-disclosure, self-isolation or withdrawal from social contexts, heightened sensitivity, lack of trust, and strained family relationships or interactions. Here are sample statements illustrating these coded expressions:

P1- Post: "I'm trying to spend more time with my mother now. We have more fun together, spend time, and laugh. When I face difficulties, my mother is there."

P2- Post: "...I distanced myself from people who harm me, now there are happy people in my life."

P3-Pre: "...After the divorce process, I generally preferred to be alone. I usually hang out alone."

P7-Pre: "...during this process, I trusted many people, and I took significant blows, so now I can't trust anymore."

Longitudinal coding analysis revealed that during the initial interviews, participants had limited and distant interactions with others. They struggled to open up, displayed a tendency to withdraw from others, behaved quite sensitively, and faced trust issues with people, especially after divorce. In the final interviews, there was a qualitative decrease in their distrust of others, but it still persisted. Participants were observed to view other individuals as a potential threat or risk and did not have sufficient confidence to open up to people around them. Although there was an increase in sharing daily life experiences, they still avoided close relationships. Sample expressions in this regard are as follows:

P10-Pre: "I'm fed up with the pressure from other people, I don't trust anyone anymore."

P9-Pre: "People treat us as if we're contagious; they exclude us. It's like they think we'll take their husbands away because we're divorced. So, I'm excluding them, closing myself off."

P9- Post: "I joined a few associations, like the one for street animals, Yeşilay, etc. I constantly meet with friends there. It's nice to be engaged with people all the time. I don't have anyone to share my troubles with, but we engage in activities."

P10- Post: "...We can't say all people are bad, but my trust in people has dwindled. I can still have a good time with a few colleagues, but I don't have the same level of trust in people anymore."



Within the experimental group's dataset, participants notably emphasized their relationships with their nuclear families. While three participants exhibited a qualitative reduction in their negative attitudes toward their nuclear families during the final interviews, traces of these attitudes still persisted. For seven participants, there was a qualitative increase in their attitudes towards their nuclear families.

P9-Pre: "...this guy who didn't even remember being a father until now is insisting that this girl is his daughter. So, my father still doesn't look at my face. I endure it for my mother's sake. But, because of him, I can't see my mother and siblings."

P9- Post: "I spend time with my mother and siblings. We go on picnics and outings. They are my biggest supporters, and I can feel their support better now. My relationship with my father has not been good since my childhood, and it still isn't."

P5-Pre: "My family wants to spend time with me a lot, but I can't go out much. I'm more alone."

P5- Post: "I packed my things and put them in my parents' basement. I moved in with my parents. Living with them is very good. I often take them out, and they're happy, and so am I."

The qualitative reduction in ineffective attitudes and behaviors concerning interpersonal relationships, such as social withdrawal, reduced self-disclosure, isolation, heightened sensitivity, lack of trust, and strained family interactions, coupled with the corresponding increase in effective attitudes and behaviors, suggests that the program implemented had a positive impact on participants' interpersonal attitudes and behaviors. Nevertheless, the lingering issues related to trust and avoidance of close relationships, particularly trust in others, may indicate the need for more extensive and sustained interventions in this area.

### *Self-perception*

The expressions of individuals in the experimental group concerning themselves have been categorized under the theme of "Self-Perception." The theme of self-perception consists of two sub-themes: "Positive Self-Perception" and "Negative Self-Perception." Under the sub-theme of "Negative Self-Perception," coded expressions include not feeling a sense of belonging, making excessive sacrifices to gain acceptance, feeling worthless, experiencing powerlessness/helplessness, and guilt. On the other hand, the sub-theme of "Positive Self-Perception" comprises codes related to feeling valuable, self-acceptance, and feeling adequate/empowered. Here are some sample statements:

P1-Pre: "...I don't even consider myself worth talking to. It's as if I'm nothing."

P9-Pre: "Who am I, and what's my purpose? I toil away, going to work, coming home, earning money, all just so that others will like me. I'm still useless."

P7- Post: "...I exist now, I love myself, I am valuable. In the past, I would always say it's for the kids, and I would exhaust myself."

P4- Post: "...My self-confidence has increased; I feel like I can do anything. I create, I make handicrafts, and I sell them. It turns out I can."

In the initial interviews, participants in the experimental group tended to blame themselves more and used expressions indicating feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and obligation towards others. In the final interviews, participants were found to have gained self-awareness regarding themselves and their lives. They began producing new and different solutions, which increased their self-confidence. They shifted from being other-centered to self-centered in their thoughts and actions. Another noteworthy finding is that despite using more negative expressions about themselves in the initial interviews, participants reported feeling stronger, more valuable, and freer in the final interviews. In addition to these expressions, an increase in statements related to future goals, aims, desires, self-confidence, feeling valuable, and self-directed actions during the program further supports the idea that participants' self-perception was positively affected by the intervention. Here are some sample participant responses illustrating these changes:

P3-Pre: "I feel worthless. Nobody values me. Being a divorced woman is shameful in the eyes of people."

P3- Post: "I started doing sports. Sports make me feel productive. I feel valuable."

P1-Pre: "Being divorced makes you feel like you've been pushed away by people. You feel like an undesirable thing. I feel very strange about myself. Like I'm guilty, like I'm sick."

P1- Post: "Now I don't allow others to shape my future. I want to manage my life myself. To do that, I think and do what makes sense to me. I spend my days doing what I want."

P8- Post: "I will become a civil servant, I will work hard, I will succeed..."

## Discussion

Based on the findings of this research, individuals who underwent the PDAP exhibited significant improvements in their divorce adaptation and life satisfaction compared to the control group. Simultaneously, their levels of depression, anxiety, and stress saw significant reductions. When applying the RCI, it becomes evident that within the experimental group, all participants experienced clinically significant and positive shifts in their divorce adaptation, life satisfaction, depression, and anxiety. Eight individuals within the group also showed such improvements in their stress levels. These quantitative outcomes are substantiated by qualitative data. Upon the completion of the intervention, participants reported increased active involvement in their daily lives. They expressed a decrease in negative thoughts associated with divorce, enhanced emotional regulation capabilities, improved problem-solving skills, more open and communicative interpersonal relationships, and an augmented sense of self-worth. These qualitative findings align with prior research highlighting the efficacy of support programs offered to individuals navigating the challenges of divorce (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996; Criddle et al., 2003; Strouse & Roehrl, 2011).

Previous research in the Turkish context has also indicated that post-divorce support services can mitigate adverse consequences and foster better adaptation following divorce (Güzel & Çeçen-Eroğul, 2022; Halisdemir, 2020; Karadeniz Özbek, 2019; Kiye, 2022; Öngider, 2013). Notably, the majority of prior studies in Turkey have primarily employed group settings and have predominantly focused on women. In contrast, this study diverges from past Turkish research as it incorporates individually-tailored programs, which have demonstrated heightened effectiveness (Monden et al., 2015). Furthermore, it employs a multifaceted approach to assess program effectiveness, integrating various evaluation methods (Chambless & Hollon, 1998), and includes male participants within its target demographic. Furthermore, it's crucial to mention that apart from one study (Kiye, 2022), none of the previous Turkish studies have utilized the RCI. Moreover, none have applied advanced analytical methods like qualitative longitudinal analysis. These outcomes underline the necessity for more comprehensive research initiatives in Turkey across diverse levels to better understand the post-divorce process.

One explanation for the effectiveness of PDAP may be that it is based on humanistic and CBT principles. The humanistic approach would be expected to create a supportive environment and encourage participants to process their emotions constructively and rebuild their sense of self. In addition, the integration of humanistic principles may have promoted participants' autonomy and personal development, fostering a sense of agency that was crucial in the difficult post-divorce period. This idea is consistent with research suggesting that unconditional positive regard increases emotional resilience and self-awareness (Rogers, 1961; Ross, 2019). In addition, the CBT elements of the programme may have played a role in equipping participants with the tools to identify and challenge their cognitive distortions, such as catastrophic thinking about divorce, thereby reducing psychological distress (Beck, 1993). The programme examined CBT's emphasis on the interplay between state, cognition, emotion and behaviour, with a particular focus on making sense of divorce, emotional regulation and problem solving. This study may have reduced maladaptive responses by promoting adaptive strategies. This idea is consistent with findings that structured interventions targeting the dynamics of states, thoughts, emotions and behaviour make a significant contribution to life satisfaction (Hofmann et al., 2012).

In short, in the early PDAP sessions, participants shared their feelings and experiences about divorce and felt unconditionally accepted during these discussions. This may have reduced their distorted beliefs about divorce by enabling them to identify and restructure their feelings, thoughts and behaviours about divorce. It is known that distorted beliefs about a situation can influence negative attitudes towards that situation (Dattilio, 2017).

The associated PDAP sessions may have reduced distorted beliefs about divorce and enabled participants to perceive the situations associated with divorce as more likely. In particular, the reduction of catastrophic and extraordinary expressions related to divorce may have positively affected their reactions to divorce, emotional regulation skills and interpersonal relationships by making the divorce situations seem more realistic to the participants.

Additionally, during the PDAP sessions, participants may have enhanced their emotion regulation skills by becoming more aware of their emotions related to divorce and working through them. Considering that individuals commonly experience significant emotional challenges during the divorce process (Mikolai & Kulu, 2018), the improvement in emotion regulation skills could be seen as contributing to the positive changes in divorce adaptation, life satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and stress. Especially when coping strategies for emotional distress are insufficient in dealing with the challenges that arise after divorce, it can impact an individual's ability to regain their pre-divorce life satisfaction and adapt to the process (Chan Lai Cheng & Pfeifer, 2015). Similarly, the role of emotion regulation features is important in decreasing high abnormalities, stress and anxiety (Sbarra et al., 2011) that may occur in intense emotional states (Young et al., 2019).

Another explanation for the positive changes observed in divorced individuals following the PDAP could be an improvement in their problem-solving skills. The sharing of problem-solving scenarios during the fourth PDAP session, in particular, may have supported individuals in actively, rationally, and concretely addressing the challenges they face post-divorce. Effective problem-solving in dealing with these challenges may have reduced individuals' discomfort, thereby enhancing their adaptation to the process and life satisfaction while also potentially mitigating depressive, anxious, and stressful reactions during challenging situations. This notion is consistent with previous research findings. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Hawkins et al. (2008) demonstrated the effectiveness of problem-solving skills in divorce adaptation. Furthermore, Baitar et al. (2012) found that problem-solving behaviors were associated with post-divorce well-being. These findings suggest that support services like PDAP, which foster problem-solving skills, contribute to positive post-divorce changes in individuals.

Another explanation for the change in divorced individuals may be related to their social lives. The sessions in the later stages of the PDAP program, which focused on interpersonal relationships and communication, might have prompted individuals who were previously isolated and often spent their time alone at home to enhance their communication skills and become more socially engaged. The improved communication and social skills could, in turn, be expected to contribute to better adjustment to divorce and increased life satisfaction. This perspective is supported by Baitar et al. (2012), who reported that improved communication skills supported positive post-divorce changes. Furthermore, as emphasized by Wilder (2016), interpersonal communication has been shown to predict divorce adjustment and life satisfaction, encompassing relationships with friends, family of origin, and ongoing connections with ex-spouses. Drawing from similar findings in the existing literature (Makidon, 2013; Quinny & Fouts, 2004), it can be suggested that enhanced interpersonal relationships reduce participants' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, thereby fostering better adjustment to divorce and higher life satisfaction.

A noteworthy finding in this study is that some divorced individuals did not experience the intended level of change, particularly concerning their relationships with their families of origin. While quantitative measurements indicated significant positive changes in various aspects for these individuals, qualitative analyses of pre- and post-interviews unveiled negative expressions, particularly in relation to their families of origin. One plausible explanation for this phenomenon could be the erosion of trust resulting from not receiving the anticipated support from their families of origin during the challenging divorce process. Weigel's (2007) research lends support to this notion, as it reveals that messages conveyed by families of origin are intertwined with romantic relationships and their outcomes. Similarly, Colletta (1979) observed that low-income divorced women predominantly expected and received support from their families of origin. This situation can be considered a contributing factor negatively impacting interpersonal relationships, including those with their families of origin, for divorced individuals who did not receive the expected support from this source.

Lastly, although not the primary focus of the PDAP, the observed shifts in participants' self-perception during the intervention process may offer another explanation for the noted positive changes. The process of reshaping

one's self-concept is considered a vital psychological mechanism that indirectly influences favorable post-divorce transformations (Larson & Sbarra, 2015). In this context, the indirect influence of the PDAP sessions on participants' self-esteem might have exerted a positive impact on their mental well-being. This indirect impact could have operated through participants' interpersonal relationships since self-esteem is closely intertwined with an individual's ability to form and sustain healthy social connections (Baum, 2004). Furthermore, the improved problem-solving skills of individuals might also account for the positive changes in their self-esteem (Dumont & Provost, 1999). Finally, the professional counseling environment, characterized by unconditional acceptance, likely contributed to participants feeling understood, thereby reinforcing their positive self-perceptions (Baitar et al., 2012). Consequently, participants with supported self-esteem likely became more adaptable throughout the divorce process as they recognized their own significance.

Another noteworthy finding in this study is that while none of the control group participants exhibited a significant positive change meeting the RCI criteria, some participants demonstrated a significant negative change meeting the RCI criteria (Life Satisfaction 3, Depression 2, Stress 1). This revelation suggests that individuals who did not avail themselves of any form of support services following divorce experienced an increase in their mental health complaints. Existing literature similarly indicates that individuals who forgo seeking assistance after divorce may experience an exacerbation of their complaints due to the influence of certain variables (Wanberg et al., 2023; Zimmerman et al., 2004). Furthermore, in the control group, anxiety and stress levels were found to increase for a certain period and then not significantly differentiate for another period. This fluctuation may be attributed to the variable course of mental health issues following divorce. In other words, individuals who did not receive professional support after divorce may experience periods of increased complaints while other periods remain unchanged.

### **Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions**

This study's findings highlight that receiving professional support services following divorce increases divorced individuals' adaptation to divorce, life satisfaction, and concurrently reduces complaints such as depression, anxiety, and stress. In this context, it is important for future studies to develop structured programs for such professional support services. This research underscores to professionals working with post-divorce individuals the significance of helping them construct a realistic and rational view of divorce, regulating their emotions, enhancing problem-solving skills, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and fostering positive self-perceptions. This study was conducted in individual sessions, and active participation by the participants was observed. Incorporating individual sessions into professionals' practices can facilitate clients' active engagement in the process and better expression of their needs. Especially when working with individuals facing intensive problems, individual sessions can be beneficial, while group sessions may prove useful for individuals with moderate to lower levels of problems. Therefore, it is important to tailor post-divorce programs to individuals' needs and risk levels, test the effectiveness of such staged programs, and then disseminate them accordingly.

The PDAP, which spans a total of six sessions, demonstrates that effective results can be achieved in a short period. Finally, the fact that there was no participant attrition during the PDAP process, which involved six female and four male participants, suggests that men also require professional assistance during this process, just as women do. In this regard, encouraging and persuading divorced men to seek professional support is crucial. All these factors emphasize the importance for professionals in this field to incorporate individual sessions, develop sessions that cater to both genders, keep the number of sessions low, and focus on key elements such as restructuring, emotion regulation, problem-solving, and interpersonal relationship development. Future research can be conducted with these considerations in mind. Additionally, alongside individual sessions, the effectiveness of incorporating group sessions can be tested. Furthermore, future studies could investigate the effectiveness of involving divorced individuals with children in sessions attended together with their children.

This study has several limitations. One of the limitations is that it does not meet the assumptions of parametric statistics. Future research can focus on studies that meet the assumptions of parametric statistics. It is known

that certain societal factors, especially, reduce men's willingness to seek help after divorce (Baum, 2004). The PDAP was implemented in a community-oriented culture, and a similar situation was encountered in this study. Ten participants took part in the PDAP, consisting of six women and four men. In future studies, attention can be paid to achieving equal gender ratios among participants.

The third limitation of this study is that data examining whether the effect of the PDAP persists after the intervention were collected for three months in the control group and six months in the experimental group. Future studies can contribute by including longer-term follow-up studies to assess the effectiveness of post-divorce support interventions. Fourthly, the study group was selected from individuals who did not have a clinical diagnosis but reported problems after divorce. Subsequent studies can compare findings by including individuals who have received clinical diagnoses after divorce. Finally, one of the characteristics of evidence-based intervention programs is that the effectiveness of the program is determined by different researchers (Chambles and Hollon, 1998). Therefore, different practitioners can evaluate the effectiveness of the PDAP. An important strength of this study is that it provides an intervention tool aimed at preventing post-divorce problems in the Turkish literature. The PDAP, in this regard, is a semi-structured, short-term, individual program with proven effectiveness that can be utilized by mental health practitioners, guidance and psychological counseling professionals, family counselors, and divorce process counselors.

**Code Availability.** The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate.** The ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Ankara University on 30.03.2020, with the approval number 3/71.

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