

## Marriage Enrichment

Marriage enrichment uses an educational approach to enhance couple relationships. The goals of marriage enrichment are to help couples become aware of themselves and their partners, explore their partners' feelings and thoughts, encourage empathy and intimacy, and develop effective communication and problem-solving skills. Although many of the programs were created for couples that are functioning fairly well in their marriages, there is an increase in the programs being used with troubled and dysfunctional couples.<sup>1</sup>

### Benefits

Marriage enrichment programs may differ in format and scope, however they all strive to strengthen relationships, build interpersonal skills, and prevent marital distress. Research has been conducted on several marriage enrichment programs to determine their effectiveness and appropriateness. Outcomes from the various programs give empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of marriage enrichment.<sup>2</sup>

A research study found that couples participating in marriage enrichment program demonstrated improved marital satisfaction, sexual intimacy, and intellectual intimacy.<sup>3</sup> Results from another study demonstrated that participants involved marriage enrichment had significantly higher scores in self-disclosure than those in the control group.<sup>4</sup> One study looked at marriage enrichment's effect on need for control, expressed affection, and wanted affection indicated that compared to the control group, those in the treatment group had significant improvement in identifying their needs for control, expressed affection, and wanted affection.<sup>5</sup> Studies on marriage enrichment have also demonstrated that inventories could differentiate between happily and unhappily married couples.<sup>6</sup> In the one study, comparisons between the marriage enrichment group's pretest and posttest scores showed significant differences in the Marital Self-Evaluation, Marital Communication Inventory, and Dyadic Adjustment Scale.<sup>7</sup>

A study examining the effects of a marriage enrichment program on communication and conflict resolution skills in couples indicated that participants demonstrated higher levels of positive communication and lower levels of negative communication than the control group.<sup>8</sup> A 5-year follow-up study showed that participants continued with higher levels of positive and lower levels of negative communication than the control group.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the treatment group had lower levels of marital violence.<sup>10</sup> Research has also indicated that couples that participate in a marriage enrichment program are less likely to separate or divorce up to 5 years after participating in the program (**Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998; Markman et al., 1993**).<sup>11,12</sup>

In addition to outcome research, there have also been studies conducted on what marriage enrichment participants view as helpful during their experiences. Overall, marriage enrichment participants generally view their experiences as rewarding. One research study found that 70% of participants viewed their experiences as excellent or very good.<sup>13</sup> In the same study, 51% of participants reported learning an exceptional amount or very

much, 96% stated that they would repeat the experience, and 98% would recommend ME to a friend.<sup>14</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Hof, L., & Miller, W. R. (1981). *Marriage enrichment: Philosophy, process, & program*. Bowie, MD: Robert J. Brady.
- <sup>2</sup> Bowling, T., Hill, C.M., & Jencius, M. (2005). An overview of marriage enrichment. *The Family Journal*, 13 (1), 87-94
- <sup>3</sup> Worthington, E. L. J., Buston, B. G., & Hammonds, T. M. (1989). A component analysis of marriage enrichment: Information and treatment modality. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 67, 555-560.
- <sup>4</sup> Ridley, C. A., & Bain, A. B. (1983). The effects of premarital relationship enhancement program on self disclosure. *Family Therapy*, 10, 13-24.
- <sup>5</sup> Ridley, C. A., & Sladeczek, I. E. (1992). Premarital relationship enhancement: Its effects on needs to relate to others. *Family Relations*, 41, 148-153.
- <sup>6</sup> Fowers, B. J., & Olson, D. H. (1989). ENRICH marital inventory: A discriminate validity and cross-validation assessment. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 15, 65-79.
- <sup>7</sup> Mattson, D. L., Christensen, O. J., & England, J. T. (1990). The effectiveness of a specific marital enrichment program: TIME. *Individual Psychology: Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research and Practice*, 46(1), 88-92.
- <sup>8</sup> Markman, H. J., Floyd, F., Stanley, S. M., & Storaasli, R. (1988). The prevention of marital distress: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 210-217.
- <sup>9</sup> Markman, H. J., Renick, M. J., Floyd, F. J., Stanley, S. M., & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A 4- and 5-year follow-up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61(1), 70-77.
- <sup>10</sup> Markman et al., 1993
- <sup>11</sup> Hahlweg, K., Markman, H. J., Thurmaier, F., Engl, J., & Eckert, V. (1998). Prevention of marital distress: Results of a German prospective longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 12, 543-556.
- <sup>12</sup> Markman et al., 1993
- <sup>13</sup> Hawley, D. R., & Olson, D. H. (1995). Enriching newlyweds: An evaluation of three enrichment programs. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 23(2), 129-147.
- <sup>14</sup> Hawley & Olson, 1995