

Check Your Relationship Functioning – An Offer for Every Couple Who Takes Part and What About the Relationship?

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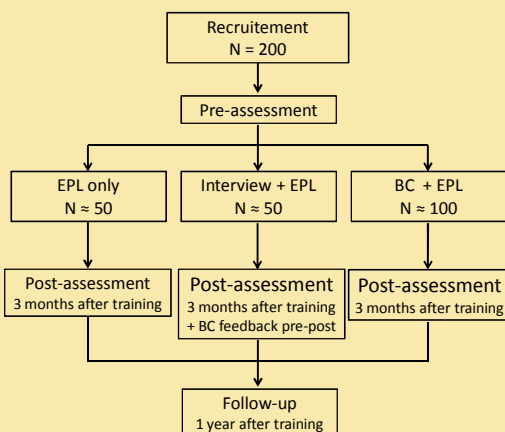
Introduction

- The **risk of divorce** currently amounts to **over 40%** in Germany, emphasizing the **need for early and economical prevention efforts**.
- A **well-known prevention program is EPL** (*Ein Partnerschaftliches Lernprogramm*), a 5 session group training (10hrs) to enhance couples communication skills and problem solving.
 - Couples who took part in EPL **showed longtime learning effects** and had a **lower divorce rate** compared to couples within the control group (Hahlweg & Richter, 2009).
 - Unfortunately in many cases **couples ask for help when there is only a limited chance left to achieve positive changes** (Hahlweg, Thurmaier, Engl, Eckert & Markman, 1997).
- In order to get as many couples as possible and especially younger ones into preventive interventions, the idea was to **develop a shorter intervention to improve couples satisfaction**. In this context **individual feedback about the couples relationship status** seemed to be promising:
 - Within the context of a **family check-up** participants reported to have **mostly taken advantage of the feedback they were given with the aid of questionnaires** they had answered before (Ueberlacker, Hecht & Miller, 2006)
 - In a study, analyzing the effect of a **marriage check-up**, couples were given an **individual feedback about their relationship**. As a result they reported **less marital distress** (Miller & Rollnick, 2002)

Method

- We developed a **brief 4 hours intervention**, the **Beziehungs-Check (BC)**, in which **couples undergo an extensive relationship assessment**
 - Questionnaires
 - Interview to enhance motivation for change
 - Behavioral observation of problem-solving
 - Individual feedback on the status of their relationship quality to call the partners attention to the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship
- The **focus of the assessment session** (1.5h) is on
 - Partnership and sexual satisfaction
 - Stress management, communication and problem-solving
 - Individual health aspects
- We have a **controlled longitudinal design with three groups of couples** (see Figure 1)
 - Couples only taking part in EPL
 - Couples undergoing the interview, taking part in EPL and receiving the individual tailored feedback 3 month later
 - Couples undergoing the whole BC, then taking part in EPL

Figure 1. Assessment flowchart from recruitment to the 1-year follow-up



Hypotheses

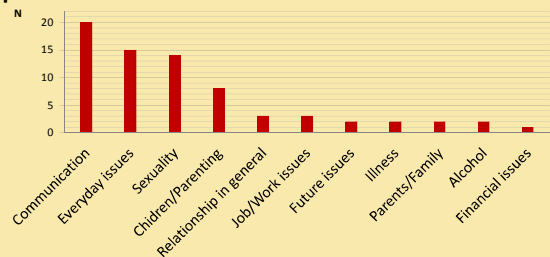
- Older couples are more likely to take part in the project.
- A large number of couples is dissatisfied with their relationship.
- Partners in a relationship who have received psychological treatment are more likely to accept further interventions.
- The BC-interview has no influence on the EPL results.

Results

Who takes part in the BC?

- N = **93 couples**, average **partnership duration: 11 years** (SD = 11)
 - **only 26 (28%) with a partnership duration of less than 4 years**
- 47% were married**; 29% women/25% men had been married before
- Age**: Woman = 43 years (SD = 11); Men = 46 (SD = 11)
 - **15 (16%) women and 12 (13%) men younger than 31 years**
- 32% women and 33% men were rather dissatisfied** with their relationship (PFB)
- 6% / 2%** (women/men) had **high scores in depression** (PHQ-9)
- 15% / 4%** had **high scores in anxiety** (GAD-7)
- 48% / 22%** reported to have **received psychotherapeutic treatment**

Reported main conflicts



Does the interview already improve the effects of EPL?

	N (SD)	EPL only	EPL + interview
• N (couples)		18	42
• Average relationship duration		12.6 (14.5)	14.8 (11.6)
• Age (men)		45.3 (14.3)	46.6 (11.3)
• Age (women)		42.4 (14.3)	45 (10.8)
• % married		61.1	54.8
• % psychotherapeutic treatment		50	60
• % living together with at least one child		38.9	40.5

Group differences concerning relationship satisfaction (PFB)

- Pre – **Women**: $p = .335$ n.s.; **Men**: $p = .929$ n.s.
- Post – **Women**: $p = .864$ n.s.; **Men**: $p = .367$ n.s.

Group differences concerning arguing (PFB)

- Pre – **Women**: $p = .953$ n.s.; **Men**: $p = .685$ n.s.
- Post – **Women**: $p = .544$ n.s.; **Men**: $p = .504$ n.s.



Discussion

- As expected **older couples with a longer relationship duration took part in the prevention project** more often than younger ones.
 - Older couples are more likely to take part in prevention programs (Markman & Rhoades, 2010)
- About 33% of the couples were dissatisfied** with their relationship
 - Couples search for help when they already have chronic conflicts
- More than 25% of the partners had been married before**
 - Maybe partners who already failed in relationships are more open to early interventions
- Nearly **50% of the women and 22% of the men reported to have received psychological treatment**
 - Maybe those people are more open to further interventions
- No difference was found between the couples who only took part in EPL and the ones who underwent the BC-interview before**
 - The next step is to analyze if the whole BC improves the effects of EPL
 - Preferably, in the long run the efficacy of the BC as an own intervention should be investigated