





## Post-Divorce Emotion/Social Adjustment of Women: Effectiveness of a Psycho-Education Program Based on Cognitive Behavioral Theory

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the psycho-education program based on the Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) on the emotional/social adjustment levels of newly divorced women. The research was carried out with a true experimental design with a control group in which pre-test-post-test and follow-up measurements were made. The research started with 15 newly divorced women in both groups. However, after the group was completed, 12 women remained in the experimental group and 11 women in the control group. Data collection tools are Fisher Divorce/Separation Adjustment Scale-Short Form and Personal Information Questionnaire. The results of the study reveal that the psychoeducation program based on CBT is effective in increasing the post-divorce adjustment of women. In addition, the psycho-education program was found to be effective in increasing women's self-worth and reducing grief reactions, disentanglement from relationship, and anger levels. Such a difference was not observed in the control group. At the same time, the effectiveness of the psycho-educational program continued in the follow-up measurements five weeks later.

It can be stated that the number of divorced couples has increased after the middle of the 20th century, especially with important divorce law reforms. In this context, it can be stated that divorce rates are lower in Turkey compared to some European countries where divorce rates are high (Eurostat,2023). However, it is noteworthy that the number of divorced couples in Turkey has increased, especially in recent years. Although the lockdown measures implemented in Turkey in the second quarter of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused a periodic decrease in divorce rates, the number of divorces increased above the previous year's data with the abolition of the restrictions (TUİK, 2020). On the other hand, the increase in domestic violence incidents and thus, the rise in the desire to end marriage during the pandemic period have drawn attention (Şahin et al., 2021; Vora et al., 2020). The 2021 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUİK) show that the increase in divorce rates continues and that 54.5% of divorces occur within the first 10 years of marriage (TUİK, 2021). In light of this information, it can be predicted that the recent increase in divorce rates will continue over the years.

Divorce can be defined as the legal ending of a marriage. It is claimed that divorce is not an instantaneous, situation, but rather a complex transition process that includes at least one of the parties considering the end of the marriage as an option, making an official divorce decision, and adapting to the new life (Amato, 2010; Asanjarani et al., 2018; Bohannan, 1970; Dahl et al., 2015; Erdim & Ergün, 2016). In this regard, one of the

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life tasks of the individual after divorce, which can cause radical changes in the individual's life, can be the reconstruction of this disrupted balance. Besides, many studies show that divorce generally has negative effects. (Amato, 2010; Cohen & Weitzman, 2016; Hughes & Waite, 2009; Krumrei et al., 2007). In this context, it has been stated that there is an increase in alcohol abuse, perceived stress levels, and some psychological problems including depression and anxiety, and a decrease in perceived life purposes of divorced individuals compared to married individuals (Amato, 2010; Bierman et al., 2006; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). It can be said that field experts draw attention to these possible negative effects of divorce and the concept of adjustment after divorce.

Despite the definitions of adjustment after divorce differ, it is seen that some points are especially emphasized in the process of building a new life. Based on the definitions made in the relevant literature, post-divorce adjustment has a multidimensional nature, including factors such as completing the grieving process, recovering from emotional burdens, individualization, creating a new social environment, and an increase in psychological well-being with the reconstruction of the disturbed balance, and occurs over time (Asanjarani et al., 2018; Chan Lai Cheng & Preifer, 2015; Diedric, 1991; Fisher, 1976; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Krumrei et al., 2007; Madden-Derdich & Arditto, 1999; Robinson, 2005; Wang & Amato, 2000; Weiss, 1975). Demographic, relational, and legal variables can be effective in this adjustment process. Moreover, some individuals are exposed to more intense and many secondary stresses after divorce due to demographic and structural features, and therefore, adjustment processes can be more difficult (Amato, 2010; Diedrick, 1991; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Relevant studies have revealed that single mothers are more exposed to secondary stress factors associated with the termination of marriage, such as relationships with ex-spouses, relationships with children, financial issues, change in work and living spaces, and social pressure or stigma, and eventually, adjustment may be more difficult (Dahl et al., 2015; Duffy et al., 2002; Hardesty et al., 2019; Holden & Smock, 1991; İlhan, 2020; Konstam et al., 2016; Uyar & Yıldırım, 2022; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Having a child is a secondary stress agent in the post-divorce adjustment process whereas having custody of a younger child, who needs more parental care, is considered a situation that makes adjustment more difficult (Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). In light of all this information, it can be stated that divorced women who have taken custody of an early-age child are in the risky group in the process of building their new life and need intense psychological support.

Although the evaluations about the phenomenon of divorce have differed during the historical process, today divorce is not considered the end of the family, on the contrary, it is thought that the family enters a new reconstruction process, since the parenting relationships are permanent and continuous, even if the marriage ends. In this context, various mental health services are provided in order to ensure the mental balance that is disturbed by the divorce, facilitate the adjustment of the divorced individual, and ensure positive development. In international applications, there are compulsory parenting education programs, especially for divorced individuals with early-age children (Amato, 2010; Ferraro et al., 2016; Jewell et al., 2017). Similarly, with the increase in divorce rates, protective, preventive, or intervention group studies are widely carried out with divorced individuals (Asadpour & Hosseini, 2018; Asanjarani et al., 2018; Canbulat ve Aladağ, 2023; Hasanvandi et al., 2013; Mohamadi & Khanjani Veshki, 2020; Shooshtari et al., 2016; Vukalovich & Caltabiano, 2008; Quinney & Fouts, 2003; Zohrabniya et al, 2022). In Turkey, especially in recent years, group practices are increasingly carried out with divorced individuals (Bulut Ateş, 2015; Canbulat ve Aladağ, 2023; Güzel, 2020; Halisdemir, 2020; Karadeniz Özbek, 2019; Öngider, 2013).

It is remarkable that different therapy approaches are used in group studies conducted with divorced individuals (Alimoradi et al., 2016; Ghorbani-Amir et al., 2019; Bulut Ateş, 2015; Canbulat ve Aladağ, 2023; Güzel, 2020; Öngider, 2013; Saadati & Lashani, 2013; Saadati et al., 2017; Zohrabniya et al, 2022). Also, cognitive behavioral therapy is widely used by researchers.

According to the CBT, the aim of the therapy process is basically to study the meaning that the individual attributes to events and circumstances that have the probable to influence one's emotional along with behavioral reactions (cognitive evaluation). According to Beck developed the theory, the emotional and behavioral problems experienced by the individual arise from a realistic, appropriate, and unconstructive

mindset. As a matter of fact, the emotional and behavioral problems of the individual are eliminated as this problematic mindset of the individual is changed (Beck, 2014). Furthermore, the mutual relationship between dysfunctional thoughts and behavioral outcomes in CBT is emphasized and it has been claimed that the current cognitive structure is preserved with behaviors (Özdel, 2015). Therefore, the intervention areas of the psychological help process include cognitions and behaviors. In the literature of adjustment after divorce, there are studies examining the relationship of this phenomenon with cognitive and behavioral elements. As a matter of fact, some studies examine the relationship between adjustment and subjective perceptions (Chan Lai Cheng & Pfeifer, 2015; Gaffal, 2010; Yılmaz & Fişiloğlu, 2005; Sayan Karahan & Yıldırım, 2021; Shapiro, 1996), while some studies examine the relationship between behavioral elements such as coping with stress, communication skills, social functionality or setting new life goals (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Thomas & Ryan, 2008; Wang & Amato, 2000). Moreover, there are studies examining the effectiveness of CBT on adjustment levels, hopeless and loneliness, resilience and self-controlling strategies, self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotion regulation skills, metacognitive beliefs and rumination levels, and mental health of divorced women, especially in recent years (Alimoradi et al., 2016; Asadpour & Hosseini, 2018; Ghezelseflo et al., 2019; Ghorbani-Amir et al., 2019; Shooshtari et al., 2016; Pyrsrayy et al., 2017; Zohrabniya et al., 2022). In conclusion, it can be suggested that the CBT, which prioritizes cognitive and behavioral interventions in the psychological help process, is an effective therapeutic approach to studying the phenomenon of post-divorce adjustment.

Divorce is a stressful life event that brings along radical changes in the dynamics of life and almost every individual will have difficulty adapting to the new life. However, due to some demographic and structural features, some individuals are more exposed to secondary stress factors, and their adjustment may be more difficult and get longer. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the CBT-based program, which was improve to increase the adjustment of divorced women, who have taken custody of their early-age children, to life after divorce. Toward this purpose, a response was sought to the question “Is the CBT-based psycho-education program significantly effective in increasing post-divorce adjustment of divorced women (total score and scores on each of the subdimensions of grief, disentanglement from relationship, anger, trust-intimacy, self-worth)?”

- 1.The post-test post-divorced adjustment level of the participants in the experimental group are significantly higher than their pre-test scores.
- 2.There is no significant difference between the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up post-divorced adjustment level of the participants in the control group.
- 3.The post-test post-divorced adjustment level of the participants in the experimental group are significantly higher than the post-test scores of the participants in the control group.
- 4.There is no significant difference between the mean post-test and follow-up scores of the participants in the experimental group regarding the post-divorced adjustment level.

### **Method**

The research had a true experimental design. In true experimental designs, members are randomly assigned to groups (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, p.270). Also, in this study, a participant pool was created from divorced women who met the application criteria for the group. Members were randomly assigned to groups. Follow-up measurements were performed to test the timewise effectiveness of the expected difference within and between the groups. In this context, pre-test, post-test and follow-up measurements were made in this research. There is a randomized control group. Consequently, the research was designed as an experimental study.

### **Participants**

In this study, the inclusion criteria of the research were determined, based on the knowledge that adjustment to divorce takes approximately two years (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Lorenz et al., 1997) and that having a young child is a secondary stress factor that makes adjustment difficult (Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). The inclusion criteria of the study (a) volunteering to participate in the research, (b) having completed

the official divorce case a maximum of two years ago, (c) having taken custody of child/children aged 0-10, and (d) having no clinical illness. The study started with 15 members in each group. After member losses, post-intervention measurements were made on 12 participants in the experimental group and 11 participants in the control group.

The age range of women in the experimental group was 27-35. In the control group it was 32-49. The average age was 31 in the experimental group. In the control group it was 37. The majority of the participants had an income-generating job. All of the participants in both groups had a high school degree or higher education level. In terms of marriage duration, women in the experimental group were divorced within the first 10 years of marriage. Those in the control group, except for 4 members, divorced within the first 10 years of marriage. Finally, in general, the participants in both groups were the party initiating the divorce. Some descriptive characteristics of the participants are presented below.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants in the Experimental and Control Groups

Variables	Groups	Experimental Group	Control Group
Age	Mean	31.16	37.36
	SD	2.44	4.92
Employment in an income-generating job	Employed	10	8
	Unemployed	2	3
Education level	High school	1	1
	Undergraduate	11	10
Duration of marriage	Less than 5 years	5	2
	6-10 years	7	5
	11-15 years	0	3
	16-20 years	0	1
Party initiating the divorce	I did	8	7
	My ex-spouse did	1	1
	We decided together	3	3

### Data Collection Tool

In this study, the Fisher Divorce/Separation Adjustment Scale-Short Form (FDAS-SF) was used testing the effectiveness of the experimental procedure. A Personal Information Questionnaire was used to obtain information about the participants' demographic characteristics.

**Fisher Divorce/Separation Adjustment Scale-Short Form (FDAS-SF).** The FDAS was developed by Fisher (1976) to determine the level of emotional/social post-divorce adjustment. It consists of 100 items ranked on a Likert-type range. The Turkish version was modified into a 25-item short form. Scale items are scored between "1-Always" and "5-Never. The score range of the scale is 25 to 125. An increase in the score on FDAS-SF indicates an increase in divorce/separation adjustment. FDAS-SF has five sub-dimensions: grief, disentanglement from relationship, anger, trust-intimacy, and self-worth (Yılmaz et al., 2021). Exploratory factor analysis of the FDAS-SF revealed that the five-factor structure explained 44.78% of the total variance. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the five-factor structure of the FDAS-SF fit the data well and that the items had strong factor loads under relevant dimensions (Yılmaz et al., 2021). The Cronbach alpha coefficient was determined as .91 for overall FDAS-SF, .84 for the grief sub-dimension, .90 for disentanglement from relationship, .81 for, .88 for trust-intimacy, and .80 for self-worth. Test-retest measurements of FDAS-SF were performed only for the total score and the reliability coefficient was found to be .81. Finally, in the convergent validity analysis performed using the Life Satisfaction Scale, the Psychological Well-Being Scale, and the Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale, significant positive correlations were revealed between the total adjustment and sub-dimension adjustment levels (only disentanglement from relationship did not have significance) and life satisfaction and psychological well-being levels and significant negative correlations were determined with depression-anxiety-stress levels (Yılmaz et al., 2021). Cronbach

alpha internal consistency was found to be .89 for the pre-test measure in the current study.

**Personal Information Questionnaire.** The form was created to determine some demographic characteristics such as age, education level, employment status, age of marriage, duration of marriage, age of the child, time passed since the divorce, and the party initiating the divorce.

### Group Process

Necessary research permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Hacettepe University Senate. In the first stage of the doctoral thesis, the author conducted face-to-face interviews with 15 newly divorced women and determined the opinions and needs of women regarding post-divorce adjustment. Then, the “Psycho-educational program on post-divorce adjustment based on the CBT” was developed using the literature on post-divorce adjustment, the acceptance of CBT regarding the psychological help process, and the qualitative data collected in the first stage of the doctoral thesis. The pilot application was carried out with 5 newly divorced women and the opinions of 3 field experts about the program were received. After the psycho-education program was finalized, the group was announced and applications were received. For this purpose, a poster promoting the group was designed and the group was announced on social media accounts of the researcher. Applications to the group were accepted online and the application process continued for five weeks between July and August 2021. A survey, including a “voluntary participation form” to obtain the consent of the applicant, a “Personal information questionnaire” to determine demographic characteristics, the “Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale-Short Form” to measure the pretest of the research, and the “Brief symptom inventory” to determine psychological symptoms, was prepared on Google Forms. Forty-one people filled out the survey online. The applications of four participants were rejected since they did not meet the application criteria. The researcher conducted pre-20-minute interviews with 37 people online. A standard “pre-interview form” was used in these interviews. During the interview, the applicant was given detailed information about the purpose, characteristics, and process of the group, as well as information regarding the expectations of the applicant from the group was received. After the pre-interviews, 7 applicants’ applications were rejected due to a clinical diagnosis, severe psychological symptoms, and not meeting the inclusion criteria. As a result, after the pre-interviews, applications of 30 divorced women to the group were accepted. Then, the scores obtained from FDAS-SF were ranked from the lowest to the highest, and the participants were assigned to the groups, respectively. After the groups were created, the members were interviewed and informed about which group they were assigned to. At this stage, five members of the experimental group stated that they wanted to be on the waiting list due to personal reasons. Therefore, five members of the control group were transferred to the experimental group, considering the score ranking. An “Informed consent form for post-divorce adjustment psycho-education group” was sent to the members of both groups online and their consent was taken. The post-test measurements were made after the group application was completed, the follow-up test measurements were made 5 weeks later, and the data collection process was completed. Finally, as an ethical requirement, the members of the waiting list (control group) were contacted and given the psycho-education group application in the online environment after the follow-up measurements were completed.

The experimental intervention in the study was carried out under the group leadership of the first author. The first author has been working as a psychological counselor in a psychological counseling and guidance center of a state university for about ten years and provides individual and group counseling to young adults and adults. The author conducts face-to-face or online counseling. In addition, the author has completed the "CBT theory and 100 hours of supervision training" organized by the Cognitive Behavioral Therapies Association. In the light of this information, it can be stated that the author has knowledge and experience in CBT, group counseling and online psychological counseling.

**Group Intervention.** Post-divorce adjustment psycho-education was held online through the author’s own zoom account. In order to ensure easy access for the participants, the group day and time were determined as 21.00 on Saturday evening. Each session included a warm-up game, group activities, and theme-related information presentations and lasted approximately two hours. The group process and sessions were planned considering the psychological help process of the Cognitive Behavioral Theory. The psychological help process was structured based on the presentation of the A-B-C help model related to the post-divorce adjustment theme, cognitive interventions, and then behavioral interventions needed by divorced women.

Information about the content of group sessions is given below.

**Table 2.** The Content of Cognitive Behavioral Theory-Based Psycho-Education Program Content

Sessions	Aim of session	Session content
Session 1	Introduction, group rules, general and specific purposes,	Warm-up games, Information presentation: “group rules, Group activity: “my individual purpose” form, Exercise: event emotion recording
Session 2	Problem areas related to post-divorce adjustment / A-B-C model presentation	Revision of exercises, Information presentation: “post-divorce adjustment and problem areas”, Warm-up game: “differentiation of emotions”, Information presentation: “A-B-C help model”, Exercise: “thought recording”
Session 3	Emotions and bodily responses, recognition and interpretation	Revision of exercises, <u>Warm-up game</u> : “emotion detective”, Group activity: “emotions and my body”, Group activity: “What my emotions say”, <u>Exercise</u> : Distribution of the emotion recording form
Session 4	Cognitive dysfunction and its types	Revision of exercises, <u>Warm-up game</u> : “Eye to eye”, Group activity: “Guess what”, <u>Exercise</u> : “Cognitive Dysfunction types examination form”
Session 5	Examination of automatic thoughts, practices for generating alternative thoughts	Revision of exercises, <u>Group interaction + information presentation</u> : “Thought analysis techniques, practices for generating alternative thoughts”, <u>Group activity</u> : “My way of coping with stress”, <u>Exercise</u> : “automatic thoughts analysis form”
Session 6	Stress and coping with stress	Revision of exercises, <u>Information presentation</u> : stress and methods used to reduce the negative effects of stress, <u>Group activity</u> : “How I deal with my sources of stress, <u>Exercise</u> : “practicing methods that reduce the negative effects of stress”
Session 7	Communication: barriers and facilitating elements	Revision of exercises, <u>Warm-up game</u> : my partner and I, <u>Information presentation</u> : communication, I language-you language, <u>Group activity</u> : “what is my communication language”, <u>Group interaction + information presentation</u> : “communication barriers”, <u>Exercise</u> : “I language-active listening practices”
Session 8	Boundaries in relationships-boundary problems	Revision of exercises, <u>Warm-up game</u> : “chat rooms”, <u>Information presentation</u> : “boundaries and boundary problems in relationships”, Group activity: “how are my boundaries in my relationships”, <u>Exercise</u> : “practices for building healthy boundaries”
Session 9	Partner relationships-future plans	Revision of exercises, <u>Warm-up game</u> : “my positive trait”, <u>Group activity</u> : “me in partner relationships”, <u>Warm-up game</u> : “I have the right”, <u>Group activity</u> : “my future”
Session 10	Evaluation-Termination	<u>Group activity</u> : “Evaluation of the group process, what was my individual purpose, how is my awareness”, <u>Closing game</u> : love overload

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in the SPSS 24 package program. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the mean scale scores of the groups. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was used for intra-group comparisons of mean pre-test-post-test and post-test-follow-up scores ( $p < 0.05$ ). Assumption for the homogeneity of variance was checked using Levene’s test, and results showed that all sub scores and total scores in pre-test were met homogeneity assumption; Grief [ $F = 1.58, p = .223$ ], Disentanglement from relationship [ $F = 1.58, p = .223$ ], Anger [ $F = .63, p = .437$ ], Trust-Intimacy [ $F = .58, p = .455$ ], Self-Worth [ $F = 1.87, p = .186$ ] and total score of the scale [ $F = 1.30, p = .268$ ]. Additionally, Skewness values were between  $-.050$  and  $-.609$ , while Kurtosis scores ranged from  $-.183$  to  $-1.18$ .

### Results

In the study, the aim was to examine the significance of the difference between the experimental and control group participants’ mean total FDAS-SF score and sub-dimension scores in pre-test, post-test, and follow-up

measurements. Table 3 shows the mean total FDAS-SF scores, the mean pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test scores on the sub-dimensions, standard deviations, and the results of the Mann Whitney U test, which statistically tests the significance of the inter-group differences.

**Table 3.** Mean Total and Sub-Dimension Scores of Groups on FDAS-SF, Standard Deviations, and Mann Whitney U Test Results

Measuring tools		Experimental group (n:12)	Control Group (n:11)	Mann Whitney U Test value	p
		□+SD	□+SD		
<b>Total FDAS-SF</b>	Pre-test	86.08±11.39	87.36±15.74	-.062	.951
	Post-test	101.50±9.68	88.45±15.46	-2.002	.045*
	Follow-up test	100.00±9.09	87.27±17.08	-1.878	.060
<b>Grief</b>	Pre-test	17.25±3.51	16.91±4.22	-.155	.877
	Post-test	20.25±2.70	17.18±3.42	-2.050	.040*
	Follow-up test	20.25±2.01	16.63±5.70	-1.364	.172
<b>Disentanglement from relationship</b>	Pre-test	21.83±3.01	19.55±4.03	-1.370	.171
	Post-test	23.75±1.76	19.91±3.98	-2.430	.015*
	Follow-up test	23.83±2.12	19.54±4.76	-2.572	.010*
<b>Anger</b>	Pre-test	14.83±3.92	14.91±4.52	-.031	.975
	Post-test	19.67±3.55	15.72±5.21	-1.946	.052
	Follow-up test	19.50±3.58	15.91±4.55	-1.824	.068
<b>Trust-Intimacy</b>	Pre-test	16.08±5.33	16.73±4.58	-.278	.781
	Post-test	18.17±4.95	16.45±6.60	-.463	.643
	Follow-up test	16.91±5.31	16.18±5.11	-.402	.688
<b>Self-Worth</b>	Pre-test	16.33±3.98	19.27±2.79	-1.913	.056
	Post-test	19.67±1.77	19.18±3.34	-.156	.876
	Follow-up test	19.50±2.02	19.00±3.46	-.220	.826

According to Table 3, there was an increase in the mean total FDAS-SF and sub-dimension scores of the participants in the post-test compared to the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-test, and this increase was preserved in the mean scores on other sub-dimensions, except for the trust-intimacy sub-dimension. In the control group, the mean scores of the FDAS-SF total and subscale measurements were close to each other. In the Mann-Whitney U test, the groups were at the same level with regards to the mean total FDAS-SF and sub-dimension scores before the experiment. After the experimental procedure, the difference between the groups with regards to FDAS-SF score [ $Z = -2.002, p < .05$ ] and the mean scores on the sub-dimensions of grief [ $Z = -2.050, p < .05$ ] and disentanglement from relationship [ $Z = -2.430, p < .05$ ] was statistically significant. Finally, there was no statistically significant difference between the groups with regards to the mean scores in other follow-up tests, except for the sub-dimension of disentanglement from relationship [ $Z = -2.572, p < .05$ ].

In the study, the significance of the intra-group differences between the pre-test-post-test measurements and post-test-follow-up measurements was also examined. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results are presented below.

**Table 4.** Results of The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Related to Mean Total FDAS-SF And Sub-Dimension Scores of Groups

Measuring tools		Experimental group		Control Group	
		Test value	p	Test value	p
Total FDAS-SF	Pre-test-post-test	-3.061	.002*	-.313	.754
	Post-test-Follow-up	-.802	.423	-.712	.476
Grief	Pre-test-post-test	-2.363	.018*	-.171	.864
	Post-test-Follow-up	-.137	.891	-.119	.905
Disentanglement from relationship	Pre-test-post-test	-2.056	.040*	-.516	.606
	Post-test-Follow-up	-.368	.713	-.425	.671
Anger	Pre-test-post-test	-2.992	.003*	-1.184	.237
	Post-test-Follow-up	-.154	.877	-.287	.774
Trust-Intimacy	Pre-test-post-test	-1.742	.081	-.223	.824
	Post-test-Follow-up	-1.695	.090	-.352	.725
Self-Worth	Pre-test-post-test	-2.810	.005*	-.071	.943
	Post-test-Follow-up	-.491	.623	-.516	.606

According to Table 4, there were statistically significant differences between the mean pre-test-post-test ranks of the experimental group on total FDAS-SF [ $Z = -3.061, p < 0.05$ ] and the sub-dimensions of grief [ $Z = -2.363, p < 0.05$ ], disentanglement from relationship [ $Z = -2.056, p < 0.05$ ], anger [ $Z = -2.992, p < 0.05$ ], and self-worth [ $Z = -2.810, p < 0.05$ ] whereas the difference between the mean post-test-follow-up test ranks on total FDAS-SF and all its sub-dimensions were insignificant. Otherwise, intra-group difference measurements of the control group were statistically insignificant.

### Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering the results of the research, it can be stated that the CBT -based psycho-education program was effective in increasing the level of post-divorce adjustment of women who had taken custody of their early-age children. As a matter of fact, after the experimental intervention, a statistically significant increase was observed in the total score of the participants in the experimental group regarding post-divorce adjustment and their scores on other sub-dimensions, except for the trust intimacy sub-dimension, and this increase remained after 5 weeks. There was no significant difference in the measurements of the control group. When the differences in the post-test scores between the groups were examined, it was observed that the experimental group participants had a higher mean score on total FDAS-SF and its sub-dimensions as per the control group. When the statistical significance of the inter-group differences was tested, the differences in the total post-divorce adjustment score and scores on its sub-dimension of disentanglement from relationship were found to be significant. In light of all this information, it can be suggested that the CBT-based psycho-education program is effective in increasing women’s post-divorce adjustment and that this effect continues for a certain period of time.

In the literature, CBT techniques have been used in group studies in which post-divorce adjustment or different variables related to adjustment have been examined (Alimoradi et al., 2016; Asadpour & Hosseini, 2018; Ghezelseflo et al., 2019; Ghorbani-Amir et al., 2020; Hasanvandi et al., 2013; Öngider, 2013; Shooshtari et al., 2016; Pyrsrayy et al., 2017; Zohrabniya et al., 2022). It has been stated that post-divorce adjustment is positively associated with the subjective perceptions and attitudes of the individual (Chan Lai Cheng & Pfeifer, 2015; Gaffal, 2010; Shapiro, 1996; Wang & Amato, 2000). In this context, the effectiveness of the program developed within the scope of the research regarding women’s post-divorce adjustment can be clarified by the suitability of the CBT, which the program was based on, to address this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, with this program developed based on the CBT, women who have taken custody of their early-age children had the opportunity to work and change their dysfunctional subjective perceptions that they attributed to the divorce-



related challenging life events with cognitive interventions and also to acquire some behavioral skills that support their adjustment.

In the study, unlike the control group, there was a decrease in the experimental group's grief and anger reactions, which were positively related to post-divorce adjustment, after the experimental intervention and a significant increase in disentanglement from relationship and self-worth. The research finding is consistent with the findings of previous experimental research in which similar measurement tools have been used (Asanjarani et al., 2018; Ghezelseflo et al., 2019; Karadeniz Özbek, 2019; Vukalovich & Caltabiano, 2008; Zohrabniya et al., 2022) and findings of experimental research conducted on post-divorce adjustment using different therapy approaches (Güzel 2020; Halisedemir, 2020; Saadati et al, 2017). The consistency between the results of these studies in which different approaches have been used in experimental interventions and the current research findings can be explained by the healing power of the group process. As a matter of fact, group experience is a process in which members learn to receive and give help and realize that they are not alone, and it is easier for them to use what they have learned through group experiences in social life (Voltan Acar, 2001). In this context, in the present study, the participants had the opportunity to provide psychological support to each other by self-revealing and listening to each other through the group, while gaining professional knowledge and skills about the process of adaptation divorce. In addition, the study group consisted of newly divorced women who had taken custody of their early-age children. In group interventions, members are more likely to realize that they are not alone in the face of similar problems and receive support from each other, and this may increase the effectiveness of the group intervention (Voltan Acar, 2001). In the light of this information, realizing that they are not alone and receiving emotional and intellectual support from people with similar characteristics may have positively affected their level of post-divorce adjustment.

Considering the importance of the difference between groups in the study, it was determined that the increase in the total post-divorce adjustment score and grief and disentanglement from relationship scores of the experimental group participants was significantly higher than the control group. This finding is consistent with the research finding that the post-divorce psychological support program had a significant effect on women's levels of post-divorce adjustment, grief, and disentanglement from the relationship (Karadeniz Özbek, 2019). Similarly, the research finding is supported by research findings revealing that CBT is effective in increasing the adjustment levels of divorced women (Ghezelseflo et al., 2019; Zohrabniya et al., 2022). The effectiveness of this program on the levels of post-divorce adjustment can also be explained by the development process and content of the program. During the preparation of the psycho-education program, the qualitative data about the opinions and needs of newly divorced women which were collected in the first stage of the research were utilized. As a matter of fact, in the explanation of the ACB model in the CBT or during cognitive interventions, group activity and warm-up games were prepared by benefitting from the opinions and life experiences of divorced women collected with qualitative data. Similarly, while addressing the function of emotions in the help model, correspondence was drawn with the sub-dimensions of grief, disentanglement from relationship, and anger, and divorced women's need to recognize and interpret their feelings was largely met. Behavioral skills to be acquired through the program were also determined based on the qualitative data collected. Finally, an emoji (Miss Güneş), which is similar to the characteristics of the group members, was used in the information presentations and examples of experiences, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors related to post-divorce adjustment were conveyed through this emoji. In this context, a point was made to prepare the psycho-educational program of the research in a way to include cultural elements with qualitative data in light of theoretical explanations and relevant literature. In summary, there is a need to research the phenomenon of post-divorce adjustment by including cultural elements (Chan Lai Cheng & Preifer, 2015). In this regard, the preparation of the psycho-education program considering qualitative data may be one of the factors affecting the significant increase in women's post-divorce adjustment.

Another finding obtained in the inter-group comparison of post-test scores was that the increase in trust-intimacy levels of the experimental group as per the control group was found to be as insignificant as the intra-group differences. The research finding is consistent with the finding of the research conducted by Karadeniz Özbek (2019) in which no significant difference between groups was found in the trust intimacy sub-dimension after the post-divorce psychological support program. However, the research finding is not similar to the research findings revealing that the CBT intervention is effective in reducing the loneliness levels of divorced

women (Alimoradi et al., 2016; Öngider, 2013). This finding of the study can be interpreted with the items in this sub-dimension and the content of the psycho-education program. The trust intimacy sub-dimension consists of 5 items related to new emotional relationships and sexual experiences. Three of the 5 items in this sub-dimension aim to measure the feelings, thoughts, or behaviors of the person related to sexual experiences. However, the theme of sexuality was not included in the psycho-education program of the research. As in the relevant literature, the need for new emotional relationships was frequently mentioned in the qualitative interviews conducted with divorced women in the first stage of the study. Based on this information, group activity and information presentation were added to the 9th session of the psycho-education program in order to address emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in new partner relationships. However, in the qualitative interviews, except for one woman, the participants did not express their opinions and needs about sexuality. This can be interpreted with cultural elements and gender roles. As a matter of fact, sexuality is a phenomenon that is considered private and suppressed due to the influence of social, cultural, religious, and social factors (Bilgin & Kömürçü, 2016). In summary, the ineffectiveness of the developed program in the trust intimacy sub-dimension can be explained by the structure of the scale items and the fact that the theme of sexuality, one of the components of this sub-dimension, was not covered in the psycho-education program.

Another finding related to the inter-group differences was the increase in the anger scores of the experimental group after the experimental intervention; however, this increase was not statistically significant compared to the control group ( $U=34.500$ ;  $p=.052$ ). This finding is not consistent with research findings that reveal a significant difference in the anger level of the experimental group after group intervention. (Asanjarani vd., 2018; Karadeniz Özbek, 2019; Vukalovich ve Caltabiano, 2008). In the interpretation of this research finding, theoretical explanations and demographic characteristics of the participants can be used. The items in the anger sub-dimension are associated with the intensity of anger towards the ex-spouse. When the demographic characteristics of the women were examined, almost all of them stated in the group application form that they were the party initiating the divorce or that they decided to divorce together and that they were satisfied with the decision to divorce. In addition, the majority of the participants expressed challenging life events related to the feeling of anger towards the ex-spouse, such as being cheated on, psychological and physical violence, and severe conflict as the reason for divorce. In this context, the intensity of anger felt towards the ex-spouse can complicate the adaptation to new life for the divorced individual (Chan Lai Cheng & Pfeifer, 2015; Guzmán-González et al., 2019; Kitson & Holmes, 1992). In light of all these theoretical explanations and information about the demographic characteristics of the participants, although there was a positive development after the experimental intervention regarding anger towards the ex-spouse, it can be suggested that the support needs of the participants in this area continue in parallel with the intensity of anger.

The last finding regarding the inter-group differences was that the increase in the self-worth level of the experimental group was insignificant compared to the control group. This finding is consistent with the findings of some research (Karadeniz Özbek, 2019) and is inconsistent with the results of other research (Asanjarani vd., 2018; Fisher, 1976; Vukalovich & Caltabiano, 2008) investigating the effectiveness of the experimental intervention on the self-worth levels of the participants. Considering the mean self-worth scores of the groups, there was a significant increase in the mean scores of the participants in the experimental group whereas there was no significant change in the mean score of the control group. In this context, this finding of the research can be explained by the loss of sample, which is one of the situations that cannot be controlled in the experimental process but has the potential to influence research results. In the experimental intervention, 3 members of the experimental group and 4 members of the control group withdrew from the research. After the experiment, the missing subjects were eliminated from the data set and the analysis of the difference between the pre-test groups was repeated. As a result, the difference between groups was not found to be statistically significant [ $U =35.500$ ;  $p=.059$ ]. However, when the mean pre-test scores of the groups in Table 3 were examined, it is noteworthy that there was a 3-point change in favor of the control group after the experimental losses. In this context, the 3-point increase observed in the mean self-worth scores of the experimental group after the intervention only seems to have helped to close the pre-experimental inter-group difference, which was caused by experimental losses. In summary, the fact that the psycho-education program did not give a significant result in favor of the experimental group in the self-worth sub-dimension in the inter-group

comparison can be associated with uncontrollable experimental losses during the experimental process and may have possibly affected the results.

This study has some limitations. The research was conducted with women who were newly divorced and had taken custody of their early-age children. In future studies, it may be recommended similar studies be conducted with divorced individuals without children, divorced individuals who do not have custody, or divorced men, and the effectiveness of the experimental intervention be tested by working with heterogeneous groups. Based on the knowledge that adjustment to divorce takes about two years (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Lorenz et al., 1997), the criterion in the current study is that at most two years has passed since the official divorce. However, there is a possibility that adjustment to divorce, which is related to secondary stress factors, may become chronic from time to time (Wang & Amato, 2000). In the light of this information, it may be recommended to determine a longer period passed after the official divorce in future studies and to test the effectiveness of the study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the group intervention was carried out online and the effectiveness of the program can be tested by providing the current education program in face-to-face environments in future research. Finally, follow-up measurements in the study were performed after 5 weeks and it was determined that the program was highly effective. In this regard, it may be recommended to test the continuity of this effect over a longer period in future studies.

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**Data Availability:** Data is available upon request from the corresponding author.

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