



EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF PREMARITAL COUNSELING ON LONG-TERM MARITAL SATISFACTION: A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW OF PSYCHOLOGICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND RELATIONAL OUTCOMES

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Abstract

The aim of this literature review is to evaluate how premarital counseling can influence marital satisfaction among couples. This literature review contains sixteen research articles which focus on various aspects of premarital counseling. The researcher chose these articles because of the articles' findings about how premarital counseling is important for couples who are looking to marry. The findings of this literature review show that premarital counseling is important for marital satisfaction in a variety of ways. Premarital counseling helps couples communicate better, understand sexual relationships, and accomplish conflict resolution. Additionally, premarital counseling allows for couples to set goals regarding finances and family. There are many factors which contribute to whether premarital counseling is accessible and helpful, which are also evaluated in this review. This review advocates for premarital counseling for higher levels of marital satisfaction.

Keywords

Premarital counseling, Marital satisfaction, Communication skills, Sex education, Premarital Programming, Couples success, Relationship satisfaction, Marital counseling

Marital satisfaction is something which all couples strive to possess. Therefore, premarital counseling programs have become popular as a means to strengthen marriages (Parhizgar et al., 2017). Premarital programs allow couples to better understand what their relationship will look like once they are married. This review of literature explores the relationship between premarital counseling and marital satisfaction. There are various factors which can contribute to effective premarital counseling. These factors include both styles of counseling and attributes of the couples attending counseling. In order to uncover whether or not premarital counseling helps with marital satisfaction, we will delve into each of these individual attributes. Premarital counseling helps improve marital satisfaction because it helps couples gain marital skills regardless of the attributes of the couples who attend.

Specific studies have shown that university students, or those who have university diplomas find premarital counseling to be helpful in learning communication skills for their marriage. A study that consisted mainly of people with university degrees, masters degrees, or doctoral degrees found that premarital relationship enrichment programs help couples to learn communication skills which have led to marital satisfaction (Yilmaz & Kalkan, 2010). This study showcases the importance of premarital education in helping with communication skills for people who are university students or people who

possess university diplomas. The value of communication skills in premarital counseling is not simply limited to university students or those with university diplomas. In a broader study of couples, it was found that premarital counseling led to better communication which led to marital satisfaction (Parhizgar et al., 2017). Another broad study of engaged couples reported that both men and women find communication skills to be of high value in premarital counseling (Sullivan & Anderson, 2002). Communication skills are vital in premarital education for people of all education levels.

Premarital counseling and conflict resolution

Addressing conflict resolution within premarital counseling programs helps increase marital satisfaction. This was demonstrated in the findings of a study by Sullivan and Anderson which explained that both men and women agree that conflict resolution is an important topic in premarital counseling (2002). Additionally, in another study couples highlighted the need for conflict resolution help in premarital programs (Risch et al., 2003). Premarital prevention programs have been found to help couples that participate gain better conflict management skills (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Conflict management is considered an essential aspect of premarital counseling because of its ability to help couples maintain a happy and healthy relationship.

Marital satisfaction can be influenced by a couple's willingness to attend further therapy after their premarital counseling. A study focused on further help-seeking after premarital counseling found that there is an increased likelihood of couples to consider further marriage counseling in the long run after having undergone premarital education (Williamson et al., 2018). Additionally, in a similar study, the results showed that premarital counseling helps to familiarize couples with the benefits of couple counseling, thus resulting in an increased likelihood for help-seeking later in their marriage (Williamson et al., 2014). This proves that premarital counseling builds the foundation for couples to feel comfortable to further relationship counseling during their marriage if necessary.

An aspect of premarital counseling which leads to marital satisfaction is conversations which prepare couples mentally for their sex life. These conversations introduce and discuss what a mentally and emotionally healthy sexual relationship looks like to significantly increase marital satisfaction (Parhizgar et al., 2017). Sexual education in premarital counseling can be especially important in specific religions or cultures. For example, sexual education in premarital counseling is extremely valuable for Iranian couples (Farnam et al., 2011). Another study found that women who participated in sexual education premarital counseling were found to have more satisfactory sexual relationships in marriage (Saleh, 2023). Therefore, sexual education in premarital therapy is beneficial to those who are striving towards a happy and healthy marriage. In addition to mental or emotional sexual education, premarital counseling which focuses on health-focused sexual education increases marital satisfaction. A study conducted by Saleh found that health-focused premarital counseling improves sexual and marital satisfaction (2023). Conversations regarding sexual health awareness help couples better prepare for marriage (Aholou et al., 2011). Based on this research, sexual health education is helpful in premarital counseling for increasing marital happiness.

Premarital counseling and family dynamics

A major benefit for undergoing premarital counseling is for couples to address expectations regarding familial relationships and boundaries. A study which focused on content for premarital counseling found that couples should discuss how much time will be spent with in-laws in order to prevent future marriage problems (Risch et al., 2003). Further, in Christian counseling, including the topic of familial relationships in discussions can help the individuals build love and respect for their in-laws (Namale et al., 2021). Therefore, attending premarital counseling which implements conversations regarding family boundaries can result in a healthier marriage.

Participation in premarital counseling leads to improved financial planning skills for couples as well. Many couples struggle in marriage because of money; therefore, couples desire premarital programs which address financial issues (Sullivan & Anderson, 2002). Premarital therapy which includes financial education helps couples learn to plan their budget and pull their resources together (Namale et al., 2021). Couples are passionate about the importance of financial decision making in programs intended for preparing couples for marriage (Risch et al., 2003). This research shows the correlation between premarital counseling which includes financial topics and marital satisfaction. Premarital counseling is less accessible for couples who are living in economic hardship; however, this counseling still has an impact on their

marital satisfaction when they do participate. Couples with economic hardship are less likely to attend premarital counseling, but they are likely to obtain benefits when they do attend (Stanley et al., 2006). Another article backs up these findings by concluding that couples who are undergoing economic hardship are less likely to have access to premarital counseling, yet these interventions can still be of value to them (Williamson et al., 2014). Economic hardship holds some couples back from attending premarital counseling, but those who are still able to attend experience increased marital contentment.

Premarital counseling is beneficial for marital satisfaction because it helps couples discuss their plans for the future in relation to having children. A pilot study of African American clergy revealed that discussions regarding family planning in premarital counseling are important in order to help couples prepare for marriage (Aholou et al., 2011). The topic of having children is important to both men and women who are undergoing premarital counseling (Sullivan & Anderson, 2002). Another study found that discussing the impact of children on marriage is important in counseling because the most problematic issue for couples who are married is balancing their children with their couple relationship (Risch et al., 2003). Overall, including family planning in premarital counseling leads to healthier marriages.

Premarital counseling and quality of counselor

Marital satisfaction is improved in couples who have an experienced and qualified premarital counselor. A study conducted with married women in Botswana drew the conclusion that premarital counseling is improved if the counselor is able to speak from wisdom based on their personal experiences (Moeti et al., 2017). Another study which was conducted with 86 engaged couples found that an aspect of key importance in premarital counseling is the characteristics of the counselor: these include trustworthiness, professionalism, and experience (Sullivan & Anderson, 2002). Therefore, an important aspect of getting beneficial premarital counseling is identifying the characteristics and quality of the counselor. The amount of time spent in the premarital counseling program can contribute to its effectiveness and also its appeal to couples. Characteristics like the amount of time that the couple spends in the program are considered important due to convenience (Sullivan & Anderson, 2002). However, in the traditional Botswana premarital counseling, it has been shown that counseling is less effective when there is not enough time to discuss all the important topics (Moeti et al., 2017). These studies demonstrate the importance of a balanced length for premarital programs in order to influence marital satisfaction.

Premarital counseling which is done in a religious context can lead to marital satisfaction. Premarital counseling is helpful for improving divorce rates and husbands and wives who participated in premarital counseling were found to have a high likelihood of being religious (Williamson et al., 2018). In another study it was shown that most people got premarital counseling in a religious context (Stanely et al., 2006). Therefore, research articles have shown that people who are religious are more likely to participate in premarital counseling which leads to marital satisfaction.

Premarital counseling is found to be of importance to both males and females. A study conducted by Sullivan and Anderson found that men and women value similar aspects of counseling (2002). In a study on problematic issues early on in marriage, men and women agreed on what they have found to be the most difficult in their marriages (Risch et al., 2003). Therefore, men and women both value premarital counseling, and they both find similar topics to be the most helpful for increasing happiness in marriage. Premarital counseling is important for cultivating marital satisfaction for people of all races and ethnicities; however, some races and ethnicities may lack access to this counseling. Couples who are of particular ethnicities are less likely to attend premarital counseling due to their ability to access counseling (Williamson et al., 2014). Black couples are less likely to get premarital counseling than white couples and Latinos are the most likely, however all races derive equal benefits (Stanley et al., 2006). Premarital counseling is less accessible for certain people groups, yet all couples can reach higher levels of marital satisfaction when participating in this form of therapy.

Premarital counseling and promotion policies

Since premarital counseling leads to marital satisfaction, questions arise on the possible benefits of promotion policies for premarital counseling. A study on U.S. promotion policies for premarital education found that promotion policies for premarital counseling had no effect on divorce rates (Clyde et al., 2019). However, efforts should be undertaken to help the uneducated and different ethnicities gain awareness

about premarital counseling (Williamson et al., 2014). Therefore, promotion policies for premarital counseling may not reduce divorce rates, but bringing awareness of premarital counseling to minority groups will increase their likelihood for marital satisfaction.

Conclusion

Premarital counseling programs help to increase marital satisfaction because they contribute to couples' knowledge of marital skills regardless of the varied backgrounds of couples. Some attributes of premarital counseling are especially important because they focus on key issues in early years of marriage. This literature review found communication skills and sexual education to be extremely important in preparing couples for marriage. Further research on these topics, and how to best implement them into marital counseling would be helpful for counselors. Additionally, attributes such as the quality of the counselor or the length of the program can contribute to whether couples experience more satisfied marriages. Thus, these qualities should be taken seriously in the context of creating premarital programs. Premarital counseling is an important program in helping with the increased marital issues which plague our world today.

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