

Integrating PREPARE/ENRICH & Couple Communication Programs: A Longitudinal Follow-Up Study (2007)

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Abstract

This longitudinal study followed up on 25 married couples one to five years after marriage who had taken both the PREPARE/ENRICH and the Couple Communication programs before marriage. Overall, the results demonstrated the couples were very satisfied with both programs and also found the combination of two programs as valuable. At the follow-up, the couples reported they used the communication skills they had learned. The research scales demonstrated the couples significantly improved their communication, conflict resolution skills and marital satisfaction. Couples reported they found it helpful to their marriage to coach other couples on communication skills.

Introduction:

Previous research has been done that describes the impact of the PREPARE Program (Knutson and Olson, 2003) and the Couple Communication Program (Miller and Sherrard, 1999) on improving a couples relationship. This study assessed the impact of combining the two programs for premarital couples as they prepare for marriage.

This study builds on the growing evidence that premarital programs like these two are a good investment in helping get marriages off to a great start. In a major review and meta-analysis of studies on premarital programs, Carroll and Doherty (2003) found the mean effect size of premarital programs was .80, which means the couples in these programs improved about 30% in communication, conflict resolution and couple satisfaction after participating in a premarital program.

Stanley and colleagues (2006) also reported that premarital education programs reduced the likelihood of divorce by 30% in a major survey of over 3,300 adults. Premarital program participation was associated with higher couple satisfaction, lower levels of destructive conflict and higher commitment to marriage.

The current study was designed to assess the impact of having premarital couples take both the PREPARE and Couple Communication Programs before marriage. Then, a follow-up study was done one to five years after the couples were married.

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METHODS

Sample:

This longitudinal study followed 25 couples who had taken both the PREPARE/ENRICH Program and the Couple Communication program before marriage. Five couples were followed-up after 5 years, five couples after 2 years and 15 couples after one year. Four couples had coached another couple in Couple Communication and four couples coached several (2-4) couples.

Research Scales and Survey:

The follow-up survey included a brief questionnaire that asked couples about their satisfaction with both the PREPARE Program and the Couple Communication Program. Couples were asked about how much they currently used the communication and conflict resolution skills they learned. They also completed three ENRICH scales including communication, conflict resolution and marital satisfaction. These were designed to assess the current levels and compare them with the same scales when couples first took the program.

RESULTS

Satisfaction with PREPARE/ENRICH Program

In terms of taking PREPARE/ENRICH, almost half of the couples (45%) had 2-4 hours of feedback, nearly one-third (30%) had 5-8 hours, and one-quarter (25%) had only one hour of feedback on PREPARE/ENRICH. The majority of couples rated the PREPARE/ENRICH Inventory as “very useful” (56%), while 27% rated it as “generally useful” and 17% said it was “somewhat useful.”

Regarding couple feedback, over half of the couples (52%) found the feedback “very useful”, 30% said it was “generally helpful” and 18% said it was “somewhat helpful.” In general, the more hours of feedback the more useful the couples reported the feedback.

The couples also evaluated the PREPARE Building a Strong Marriage (BSM) workbook and the six couple exercises: (1) identifying couple strengths and growth areas; (2) communication skills; (3) conflict resolution; (4) financial management; (5) couple system and family of origin; (6) personal, couple and family goals. The couples found the booklet was “somewhat useful” (40%), “generally useful” (32%), and “very useful” (28%).

Satisfaction with the Couple Communication Program

For the Couple Communication Program (CCP), which typically was four 2 hour sessions (8 hours of teaching), all the couples took the program once and 4 couples also took Couple Communication II. One quarter (25%) of the couples served as a coach for another couple on the CCP.

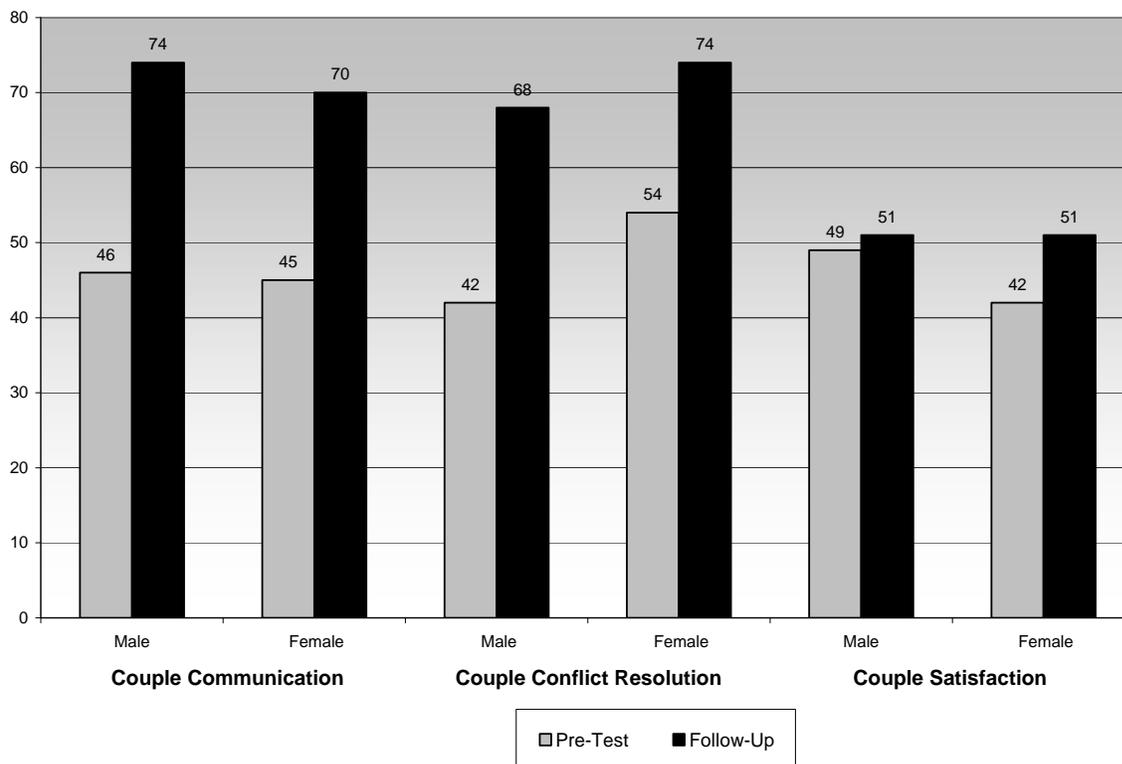
Over three quarters (75%) of the couples rated the CC program as “very useful” and about one-quarter (25%) found it was “generally useful.” Almost half (46%) of the couples said they “sometimes” used the communication skills they were taught, 40% said “often” and 14% said “very often.”

Pre-Test and Follow-Up Results

Three scales used in both the pre-test and the follow-up evaluation assessed the following areas: couple communication, conflict resolution and couple satisfaction. All three of these scales are reliable and valid and are from the ENRICH couple inventory.

Significant improvement occurred in couple communication and conflict resolution for both males and females (See Figure 1). While the marital satisfaction scores for both the males and females increased, the improvement was significant only for the females. It should be noted that the male scores were higher to begin with and improved to the same level as the female scores. Overall, the combined program was very successful in increasing the two major relationship skills (communication and conflict resolution) that were taught in the program.

Figure 1: PREPARE/ENRICH & Couple Communication Programs



Couples Value Combined Programs:

The value of the combined PREPARE/ENRICH and Couple Communication programs was rated very highly by the couples with the majority (58%) reporting the combination “very valuable”, while 34% said it was “generally valuable” and only 8% rated the two programs as “somewhat valuable.”

Strengths and Limitations of Study:

This is a unique study in that it assessed the value of combining two couple programs for premarital couples. Another value of the study was that it was a longitudinal follow-up study of couples 1-5 years after they completed the programs.

A limitation of the study is that it did not compare the results with a matched control group that had no premarital preparation. The sample also was based on premarital couples that chose to get married in a church setting. The sample was also primarily Caucasian and middle class.

References:

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