



# Investigating the effect of premarital education based on the SYMBIS model on communication skills and conflict resolution skills of fiancés

Elham. Majidi<sup>1</sup>

*Hengameh. Asgari Dehaghani*<sup>2\*</sup>

Marziyeh. Dehghani<sup>3</sup>

Mohammad. Samadi<sup>4</sup>

1. Master of Science, General Psychology, Khorasgan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan, Iran

2. \*Corresponding author: Master of Science, General Psychology, Zarrin Shahr Branch, Payame Noor University, Zarrin Shahr, Iran

3. Master of Science, Clinical Psychology, Tehran West Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

4. Master of Science, Clinical Psychology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Email: mohsenfazel1121@yahoo.com

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## Abstract

**Aim:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of premarital education based on the SYMBIS model on communication skills and conflict resolution skills of fiancés. **Method:** In terms of the purpose, the current research was of an applied type, and in terms of the research design and method, it was a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test design with an experimental group and a control group and a three-month follow-up period. Based on this, the statistical population of the research included all the fiancés who referred to the counseling centers of the 7th district of Tehran to receive pre-marital counseling in the first half of 2011. Therefore, 40 people (20 couples) were selected from among these people and were randomly assigned to an experimental group (20 people) and a control group (20 people). Then, premarital education based on the SYMBIS model prepared by Les and Leslie Perot (2006) was implemented on the experimental group. Also, in order to collect data, the research tools included the conflict resolution questionnaire (CRQ) and the communication skills questionnaire of Christensen and Salluvay (1984). In the descriptive part, frequency distribution tables were used, and in the inferential part of data analysis, mixed variance analysis with repeated measurements and Bonferroni's post hoc test and SPSS software version 26 were used. **Results:** The F value and the significance level of the obtained value were calculated in the variable of communication skills ( $F = 7.83$  and  $P = 0.004$ ) and conflict resolution skills ( $F = 6.91$  and  $P = 0.006$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that the independent variable i.e. premarital education based on the SYMBIS model has significantly changed the dependent variables i.e. communication skills and conflict resolution skills. This means that the changes made in the dependent variables were caused by the membership in the experimental group or the independent variable (premarital education based on the SYMBIS model). **Conclusion:** Based on the findings, it can be concluded that premarital education based on the SYMBIS model is effective on the communication skills and conflict resolution skills of the fiancés. Therefore, this model can be used in premarital counseling. **Keywords:** premarital education, SYMBIS model, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, fiancés.

## Introduction

Conflict is defined as the absence of agreement and opposition between two individuals, characterized by the incompatibility of opinions and behavioral objectives that are directed against each other. Conflict is not always negative; it is a method used by couples to manage their flawed relationships, but it can negatively impact the relationship (Darbani & Parsakia, 2022). Although all spouses experience conflict in their marital lives, they do not all respond in the same way and adopt different conflict resolution strategies. Conflict resolution strategies are a key indicator of successful romantic relationships, and individuals with strong conflict resolution strategies can extend the duration of their relationship (Viskerich & Deloie, 2013). If couples have poor conflict resolution skills and if conflicts are managed ineffectively, it can lead to the destruction of marital life and have detrimental effects on the physical and emotional health of the couple (Karimi, Karami, & Dehghan, 2014).

The SYMBIS model focuses on enriching marriage among engaged couples, those about to be engaged, and newly married couples (Wylie, 2012). The SYMBIS model is flexible and has been applied in various therapeutic, educational, and group settings. In its most comprehensive and strongest form, it requires a therapist with at least a master's degree or a spiritual counselor with a basic understanding of family system dynamics (Marks, 2007). The SYMBIS model can be conducted by a facilitator using an 8-session program for couples, which includes guidance for supervisors and a follow-up design for the marriage counseling program. This complete marriage preparation program has been successfully implemented in university campuses and in Protestant and Catholic churches (Parrott & Parrott, 2006); even couples may use the program independently, as they wish, by reading the book, watching video sessions, and performing exercises to benefit from it (Ghazalsafloo & Rostami, 2018). Therefore, given the importance of the engagement period and the two variables in question, namely communication skills and conflict resolution skills, and the necessity of pre-marriage training for the sustainability of marriage, the present study aims to answer the following question: Is pre-marital training based on the SYMBIS model effective in enhancing the communication and conflict resolution skills of engaged couples?

## Method

In terms of the purpose, the current research was of an applied type, and in terms of the research design and method, it was a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test design with an experimental group and a control group and a three-month follow-up period. Based on this, the statistical population of the research included all the fiancés who referred to the counseling centers of the 7th district of Tehran to receive pre-marital counseling in the first half of 2011. Therefore, 40 people (20 couples) were selected from among these people and were randomly assigned to an experimental group (20 people) and a control group (20 people). Then, premarital education based on the SYMBIS model prepared by Les and Leslie Perot (2006) was implemented on the experimental group. Also, in order to collect data, the research tools included the conflict resolution questionnaire (CRQ) and the communication skills questionnaire of Christensen and Salluvay (1984). In the descriptive part, frequency distribution tables were used, and in the inferential part

of data analysis, mixed variance analysis with repeated measurements and Bonferroni's post hoc test and SPSS software version 26 were used.

### **Results**

The F value and the significance level of the obtained value were calculated in the variable of communication skills ( $F = 7.83$  and  $P = 0.004$ ) and conflict resolution skills ( $F = 6.91$  and  $P = 0.006$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that the independent variable i.e. premarital education based on the SYMBIS model has significantly changed the dependent variables i.e. communication skills and conflict resolution skills. This means that the changes made in the dependent variables were caused by the membership in the experimental group or the independent variable (premarital education based on the SYMBIS model).

### **Conclusion**

The current study aimed to investigate the effect of pre-marital education based on the SYMBIS model on the communication and conflict resolution skills of engaged couples. The results of the data analysis, using repeated measures analysis of variance, showed that this therapeutic approach significantly affected the conflict resolution and communication skills of divorced women, and according to the results of the Bonferroni post-hoc test, this effect was also sustained in the follow-up stage. In further explaining the findings of the current research, it can be stated that the seventh session is about effectively resolving conflicts. Exercises such as "mind reading" and "identifying sensitive issues" are used to effectively resolve conflicts between couples. The "identifying private issues" exercise is designed to help couples clear their emotional residues and avoid unnecessary conflicts. This is an important technique for initiating effective conflict resolution, referred to as sharing in private issues, as it helps couples to share in thoughts and feelings that they have been hiding from each other (Rostami & Ghazalsafloo, 2017). The listening partner can only thank their spouse at the end of each sentence - just that. This allows couples to share their sensitive issues without fear of being blamed and defensive reactions. It also allows couples to receive criticisms in a confirming context. If one of the couples understands this process, this exercise can be performed daily to prevent the damage of accumulated feelings to the couple's relationship and to reveal conflicts (Wylie, 2012). Based on this, pre-marital education based on the SYMBIS model can enhance the communication and conflict resolution skills of engaged couples.

This research, like other studies, had limitations, which include: 1) The reliability of the questionnaire can bring self-error in generalizing the findings 2) Non-adherence to the principle of honesty in completing the questionnaire by participants 3) Use of purposive and convenient sampling methods 4) Inability to control all variables and implement quasi-experimental conditions. Therefore, caution must be observed in generalizing the results obtained from this study. It is recommended that researchers utilize this educational method for pre-marital counseling and also organize special training workshops for couple therapists and pre-marital counselors.

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