

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Premarital Education Programs and Their Practical Impacts in Türkiye\*

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## Abstract

*This study, which investigates the impact of premarital education programs on marital adjustment in Türkiye, was conducted using a qualitative research method. Within the scope of the research, interviews were conducted with 28 individuals who had participated in premarital education sessions organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Services in various official institutions. To ensure triangulation, additional interviews were carried out with the educators who delivered the training as well as with the designers who developed the program. The study examines marital adjustment in terms of individuals' satisfaction and fulfillment within their relationships and discusses the potential for sustaining a positive level of adjustment through education. Findings indicate that these premarital education programs have a positive influence on marital adjustment. However, the results also highlight the need for improvements in program content, implementation, cultural relevance, and accessibility. By offering a multidimensional evaluation of premarital education both through a review of global literature and within the specific context of Türkiye, this study aims to contribute to the academic literature and inform policymakers.*

**Keywords:** Marriage, family, marital adjustment, premarital education, couple adjustment

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## Öz

*Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı tarafından bazı resmi kurumlarda uygulanan evlilik öncesi eğitim programlarının evlilik uyumuna etkisini araştırmaktadır. Araştırma nitel analiz yöntemiyle yürütülmüş, evlilik öncesi eğitimlere dahil olmuş 28 kişiyle görüşülmüştür. Araştırma çok katmanlı şekilde yapılmış, birden fazla bakış açısıyla değerlendirmek amacıyla eğitimi alan katılımcılar, eğitimi veren uzmanlar ve programı hazırlayan formatörlerle triangulasyon yöntemiyle mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışma, bireylerin ilişkilerinde yaşadıkları memnuniyet düzeyinden hareketle evlilik uyumunu ele almakta ve evlilik öncesi eğitimlerin bu uyumu nasıl destekleyebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, evlilik öncesi eğitimlerin özellikle iletişim becerileri, çatışma yönetimi ve eşler arası rol paylaşımı gibi alanlarda evlilik uyumunu desteklediğini ortaya koymakta; ancak mevcut programların içerik, uygulama biçimi, kültürel uyum ve yaygınlık açısından geliştirilmesi gerektiğine işaret etmektedir. Bu çalışma, özellikle alanda hakim evlilik öncesi eğitim modellerine odaklanarak seçilmiş uluslararası literatür örnekleriyle Türkiye’deki uygulamaları içerik, metod ve kültürel uyum açısından değerlendirilerek hem akademik literatüre hem de politika yapıcılara katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Evlilik, Aile, Evlilik Uyum, Evlilik Eğitimi, Çift Uyum

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## Introduction

The family is the most fundamental unit of social structure. Individuals who come together through marriage are considered to have formed a family socially. The family has many social, psychological, biological, religious, and cultural functions (Dizman, 2021). In Turkish society, the concepts of marriage and family are inseparable and equivalent concepts. According to the Turkish Civil Code (Law No. 4721), the family is legally defined as an institution with psychological, biological, and sociological functions established by two adults of the opposite sex who fulfill the legal requirements of society (Baş, 2021; Turkish Civil Code, 2001). However, today the concept of family has diversified, with single-parent families and cohabitation relationships emerging (TÜİK, 2023). Moreover, recent research emphasizes that the family should also be considered a context in which power distance, gender roles, and authoritarian dynamics are reproduced, reflecting both its supportive and problematic aspects (Yazgan, 2024).

The concept of marriage in Türkiye has distinctive characteristics compared to other contexts. At the same time, demographic data show a decline in marriage rates and an increase in divorce rates in many Western countries (OECD, 2023). Out-of-wedlock birth rates in Türkiye are low among OECD countries (OECD, 2025). However, Turkish society has been affected by global changes in recent years and has become more diverse. The fertility rate has fallen to 1.48, indicating that Türkiye's population is on a downward trend (TÜİK, 2024). In this context, pre- and post-marital education can contribute to the continuity of marriages, help clarify expectations from marriage, support couples in acquiring skills such as communication, problem-solving, and role-sharing, and make it easier for them to be more aware when making the decision to marry and maintain healthier relationships (Yıldırım, 2021).

The examination of marriage relationship education in the Turkish context is important in terms of academic diversity. Furthermore, the foundations of marriage relationship education are based on Western cultural concepts of interpersonal equality, sexual openness, romanticism, and indi-

vidual satisfaction (Markman et al., 2022; Henrichs, 2020). In this context, when looking at its historical background, Türkiye, located at the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures, embodies both a richness and certain challenges of cultural, historical, and geographical diversity in the design and implementation of marriage relationship education. Therefore, the Turkish example is critically important in terms of testing and evaluating marriage education programs applied in many cultures. This is particularly important because Türkiye's unique socio-cultural dynamics, which combine both collectivist and individualist orientations, provide valuable insights into how universal marriage education models can be adapted to non-Western contexts (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996, 2010; Sunar & Okman Fişek, 2005). Our study examines the premarital education programs implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services in Türkiye since 2012 (Ministry of Family Activity Report, 2012). In this study, the premarital education programs implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services since 2012 were evaluated through in-depth interviews with the program developers, educators, and participants. The results of this study are significant in terms of the effectiveness of these state-run education programs in Türkiye.

## Literature Review

Relationship education programs were first implemented in religious institutions around the world, for example, in churches in the United States where clergy-led premarital counseling was offered to engaged couples (Healthy Marriage Research Brief, 2017). These programs, which became widespread in the US, Australia, and Western countries starting in the 1950s, were attended by one-third of married couples in the US, UK, and Australia by the end of the 1990s (Stanley et al., 2006; Halford, 2011). There are many studies in the literature on premarital education. Clyde and colleagues (2019) examined the role of government policies and showed that supportive policies improve access and effectiveness, Busby et al. (2007) compared different models to examine their levels of impact and found that structured models yield

stronger outcomes, and McGeorge (2006) investigated the effectiveness of the programs and reported higher marital satisfaction and lower early divorce risk among participants.

Pre-marital preparation programs are categorized in three ways in the literature: theory-based, skill-based, and inventory-based models. All programs aim to develop sustainable, healthy relationships by examining relationships in different ways. One of the theory-based marriage programs, Gottman's strong relationship house model, is based on findings that marriages are generally damaged within the first 5 years (Carrere et al., 2000). The model aims to ensure that the premarital preparation period and the first years of marriage are as calm, happy, supportive, and fulfilling as possible (Gottman, 1993). This therapy, the goal is to transform the course of the relationship by accessing the couple's individual emotions (Goldman & Greenberg, 2007). Imago theory is an approach that provides couples with the emotional skills necessary to build a healthier and more balanced relationship with each other, referencing childhood emotional states related to the difficulties they experience (Harville et al., 2015).

The primary goal of skill-based approaches is to enhance couples' communication skills. Most relationship development programs focus on premarital education rather than the marriage process (Yalçın, 2010). The Minnesota marriage development program, which is skill-based, emphasizes raising awareness about oneself and one's spouse and increasing satisfaction with marriage (Wampler & Sprenkle, 1980). The Relationship Enhancement Program (REP) is a program in which couples show improvement in marital communication, couple satisfaction, relationship harmony, intimacy, and mutual trust (Jakubowski, 2004). In the CCP (Couples Communication Program), couples develop awareness about themselves and their partners by improving their open communication skills (Silliman & Walter, 2000). The goal of the SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts) program, developed by Parrott and Parrott, is to reveal the strengths of the relationship, develop healthy expectations about marriage, create happiness routines, and improve conflict resolution skills (Parrot & Parrot, 2003). The PAIRS (Practical

Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) program aims to ensure satisfaction in close relationships and develop the ability to maintain enjoyable intimate relationships (Heyman & Durana, 1999). The PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) program focuses on marital success and relationship quality based on a cognitive-behavioral approach (Silliman & Walter, 2000). The CCET (Cognitive-Conceptual Education Training) program considers the development of stress management skills as important as communication skills (Halford & Guy Bodenmann, 2013). Skill-based programs aimed at improving marital relationships differ in terms of the skills they focus on, their partner-centeredness, and their organizational structure. Research findings consistently report that these programs lead to positive outcomes in areas such as communication, marital adjustment, intimacy, and conflict resolution, which is why they were included in this study (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Markman et al., 2022).

In the inventory approach program, couples receive feedback by completing relationship measurement and individual assessment inventories (Halford, 2004). The fundamental assumption of the Prepare Enrich premarital preparation and relationship development program is that the quality of a marital relationship can be predicted before marriage (Olson & Olson, 1999). The FOCCUS Pre-Marital Inventory is seen as a user-friendly program that supports couples in preparing for marriage (Foccusinc, 2024). The RELATE program helps couples clarify their perceptions, highlight areas of agreement and disagreement, etc. (Galbraith, 2007). Involving individuals in these trainings, each of which includes different improvement and repair stages, provides them with the opportunity to develop awareness about relationships (Olson & Olson, 1999). This process contributes to important goals such as individuals maintaining their marriages with an egalitarian approach, ensuring their individual happiness, and striving to improve their communication.

Pre-marital education programs focus on preventing potential problems that may arise at different stages of the marriage life cycle, from the preparatory phase of the marriage institution to the loss of the last member of the family (Yıldız, 2016:

69). These programs also provide support for couples experiencing difficulties in the early stages of marriage and for the challenges they may encounter in adapting to each other during their first years together (Yazıcı and Demirli, 2020). In this context, individuals' participation in these education programs increases their relational awareness and supports the development of their communication skills. This situation ensures that they enter into the institution of marriage more consciously and prepared, both physically and mentally, by participating in preparatory training that emphasizes the importance of marriage. Marital adjustment is defined as satisfaction with the marriage union. Marital harmony can also be defined as a reduction in conflicts within the marriage and an increase in satisfaction and contentment (Erbek et al., 2005).

In the Turkish context, marriage is strongly influenced by religious and cultural elements, and in addition to the official civil ceremony, couples often hold a religious ceremony as well (Ersalan, 2012). Cohabitation outside of marriage is considered wrong in many ways in Türkiye (Taya, 2016). Marriage in Türkiye is of great importance in terms of both the continuity of the family line and cultural and emotional togetherness (Yıldırım, 2021). An analysis of programs and studies conducted on family education in Türkiye shows that such work began in the 1980s (Kılıç, 2010). Yalçın (2010) examined the effect of the SYMBIS program on the satisfaction couples derive from their relationships. According to Duran (2010), the PREP program was found to be beneficial in developing couples' communication skills and relationship stability but insufficient in developing positive communication styles regarding conflict.

According to a study by Avcı (2018), the "Marriage Preparation Program" has a sustained impact on university students' couple relationships and relationship stability. According to Yılmaz's (2009) study, couples who participated in a premarital relationship development program using the SYMBIS model reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction levels compared to non-participants. A study by Şen (2009) found that couples voluntarily participated in the training believing it would contribute to their marriage and reported benefits such as improved communication and

conflict resolution skills. According to Kaplan (2018)'s study, the knowledge level of newly married women on premarital sexual health issues was measured to examine its effect on marital adjustment. It was concluded that it was effective in increasing their knowledge levels but had no effect on their marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction in the short term. Recent theses have also revealed similar themes. In Caner's (2024) master's thesis, it was found that there is a significant relationship between single individuals' marriage anxiety and their perception of premarital education; factors such as age, romantic relationship status, and exposure to divorce in the immediate environment were shown to affect anxiety levels, while perceptions of education differed according to variables such as gender and economic status. In Yüksektepe's (2023) doctoral thesis, educators evaluated premarital education as a protective and preventive approach, emphasizing that such programs strengthen couples' communication and reduce the risk of divorce.

The premarital education program of the Ministry of Family and Social Services, which is the subject of our study, consists of four modules: Communication and Life Skills in Marriage, Family Law, Marriage and Health, and the Educator's Handbook (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2012). These modules are designed for trainers who are experts in their fields and contain information to facilitate the implementation of the program by educators. This information includes practical techniques, pedagogical approaches, and objectives appropriate to the theme of the module. The first module, "Educator's Handbook," contains information on the program content for educators of the family education program. The book "Communication and Life Skills in Marriage" addresses love-centered relationships within the family, especially the most difficult early stages of marriage, the basic criteria for ensuring the couple's peace of mind, the causes of crisis situations, and ways to resolve them. Other modules include the "Family Law Guide" and "Marriage and Health" books (Alpaydın, 2012). The programs are implemented face-to-face, using a group-focused method, and are carried out primarily in social service centers,



municipalities, marriage offices, or family counseling units of muftiships. The presentation materials included in the basic handbook have been revised according to the standards of the relevant General Directorate and prepared with attention to gender equality (Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2012).

As of the end of July 2024, the Ministry of Family and Social Services has reached 483,223 people through its Family Education Program (AEP), 219,741 people through Pre-Marriage Education, and 9,162 people through Family Counseling and Divorce Process Counseling. The Ministry of Family and Social Services prepared a pre-marital education program in 2012, and the target for participation in these trainings has been raised in the 2025 Presidential program. In order to achieve this goal, it is also targeted to increase participation in the trainings, monitor them, and even conduct satisfaction surveys (T.C. Presidency, 2025). Furthermore, 2025 has been declared the "Year of the Family" to make the Turkish family structure more dynamic. To this end, the Family and Youth Fund has been established. One of the conditions for benefiting from the fund is the obligation to participate in pre-marital education (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2025). For this reason, the rate of participation in pre-marital education will increase. In Türkiye, pre-marital education programs are implemented in a comprehensive, multi-actor structure with the contribution of various official institutions of the central government and local administrations.

Although studies on the premarital period are quite limited in the literature, there are more studies aimed at supporting the marital relationships of couples during the marriage period. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the content and effectiveness of premarital education programs implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services in Türkiye. In our study, the premarital education programs provided by the Ministry of Family and Social Services of the Republic of Türkiye since 2012 were evaluated through one-on-one interviews with the individuals who prepared and implemented the programs and the participants. In this context, it is significant as the first study to examine the Ministry's marriage education programs from three perspectives. Analyzing

these programs, which are widely implemented in Türkiye but have been evaluated only to a limited extent, in terms of their content, methodology, and cultural adaptation contributes to the literature and provides guidance to policy makers.

## Research Method

This study is one of the few examples in the literature analyzing premarital education programs conducted by the Ministry of Family and Social Services in Türkiye, as also supported by previous works in the Turkish context (e.g., Yalçın, 2010; Duran, 2010; Avcı, 2018; Yılmaz, 2009; Şen, 2009). The interview method, which is a qualitative research method, was used to collect data in this study.

In this study, a semi-structured in-depth interview technique was used because it allows for the collection of more in-depth information on the research topic in line with the research design, enables focus on the research topic, maintains the relevance of the interviews to the main theme, and provides greater flexibility in the interview process.

To address the research problem from multiple dimensions, the "data triangulation" method was used by gathering opinions from three different groups (individuals participating in the training, trainers, and program). Data triangulation is broadly defined as examining and evaluating perspectives on a research problem from at least "3" different viewpoints and gathering the opinions of different parties (Williamson, 2005).

The study group was formed using maximum diversity sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods. The participants included individuals who had attended premarital education, instructors, and trainers. Detailed demographic information is presented in Table 1. Participants were selected from individuals who had been involved in these education programs in different years and in various districts of Istanbul. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached in participant profiles and response content (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Due to personal data restrictions, participants could only be reached through official permits from the Ministry, enabling access to those who received, delivered, or

implemented the training. These difficulties were limited to the data collection stage and did not appear as separate findings.

In terms of limitations, the research was restricted to premarital education programs affiliated with the Ministry of Family and Social Services, which limited access. Individuals were reached through social media and personal networks, but when sufficient numbers could not be reached, official meetings and permissions were obtained from the Ministry to interview individuals in different years and positions. This strengthened the quality of the study in terms of sample diversity. Thus, sample diversity was ensured by selecting individuals who received the training at different times, such as those who received it 2 years ago and those who received it 9 years ago, and those who received it in different locations.

The data collection process was completed in 2021. Since then, no structural changes have been made to the content of the premarital education program. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals participating in the study, and their identity information was kept confidential. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of I.Ü. Sosyal ve Beseri Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu with decision number 214891. Due to pandemic conditions, 12 interviews were conducted via Zoom, while 16 were carried out face-to-face. The interviews lasted between 20 and 80 minutes, with a total of 559 minutes of written data collected. Because the duration varied considerably depending on the participants' level of expression, providing an exact average would not be meaningful. A total of 28 individuals were interviewed for the study. In line with the principles of voluntariness and confidentiality, no audio recordings were made because several participants did not consent to recording; instead, reliability was ensured through member checking and detailed note-taking. This method is based on the participant verification (member checking) strategy recommended to increase data reliability in qualitative research. Participant verification is an effective technique to ensure that the participant's statements are correctly understood and reflected by the researcher. After the interviews were taken in detail, the conversations were classified, analyzed, and edited.

The interview data obtained during the data analysis process was subsequently analyzed using content analysis. MaxQDA 2022 software was used in this process. Participants' personal information and similar responses were classified and coded to identify recurring patterns. Thematic analysis was conducted to capture the underlying meanings within the qualitative data. This process allowed the data to be systematically structured and interpreted without reducing it to numerical representations. The coding process was carried out in the following steps: Open coding: The interview transcripts were read individually, and meaningful statements were converted into codes. The codes were created inductively, based directly on the data.



*Figure 1. Code Cloud*

The purpose of providing the code cloud is to visually illustrate the most frequently recurring concepts that emerged during the interviews. This visual representation complements the thematic analysis by making it easier for the reader to grasp the relative prominence of certain codes and to see the general distribution of ideas expressed by the participants. Thematization: Codes were grouped according to their similarities to identify prominent themes. The main themes that emerged in this study are as follows: communication skills, perception of education, sexuality and health education, roles and responsibilities, the impact of education on marital adjustment, male participation, motivations for participation, and awareness issues. After the coding process, the codes forming the themes were represented visually. For this purpose, a code cloud was created based on the codes frequently used by the participants. The code cloud provides

a visual representation of the most frequently repeated concepts and thematic areas.

To enhance validity and reliability in the study, the coding process was conducted by the researcher, and the themes and codes were submitted for peer review. In addition, the themes were shared with the participants and participant validation was also carried out through feedback. With this analysis process, the data was systematically structured and made analyzable. These processes enabled the research to be structured in a holistic, systematic, and transparent manner.

## Research Findings

In order to achieve the objective of the research, some supplementary information was collected from the participants interviewed. Within this framework, data was obtained on the participants' basic demographic characteristics, educational backgrounds, professional statuses, and income levels. Interviews were conducted with a total of 28 individuals residing in various districts of Istanbul and coming from different occupational groups. The participants included individuals currently in education, trainers, and instructors.

*Table 1: Descriptive Information About the Study Group*

| Code | Status of Participant | Occupation            | Educational Status | Gender |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------|
| K1   | Participant           | Service Staff         | High School        | Female |
| K2   | Participant           | Academic              | Doctor             | Female |
| K3   | Participant           | Academic              | Doctor             | Male   |
| K4   | Instructor            | Education Coordinator | Bachelor           | Female |
| K5   | Participant           | Staff                 | Bachelor's Degree  | Female |
| K6   | Instructor            | Psychologist          | Bachelor           | Male   |
| K7   | Participant           | Social Worker         | Master's Degree    | Female |
| K8   | Participant           | Psychologist          | Master's Degree    | Female |
| K9   | Participant           | Academic              | Doctor             | Female |
| K10  | Participant           | Social Worker         | Bachelor           | Female |
| K11  | Participant           | Computer Operator     | Bachelor           | Male   |

|     |             |                            |                   |        |
|-----|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------|
| K12 | Participant | Security                   | High School       | Female |
| K13 | Participant | Computer operator          | Open education    | Female |
| K14 | Participant | Service Staff              | High School       | Female |
| K15 | Participant | Staff                      | Bachelor's Degree | Female |
| K16 | Instructor  | Psychologist               | Master's Degree   | Female |
| K17 | Trainer     | Department Head            | Master's Degree   | Female |
| K18 | Trainer     | Department Head            | Master's Degree   | Male   |
| K19 | Participant | Staff                      | Bachelor          | Male   |
| K20 | Participant | Staff                      | Bachelor          | Female |
| K21 | Participant | Staff                      | Bachelor's Degree | Female |
| K22 | Trainer     | Academic                   | Doctor            | Male   |
| K23 | Participant | Academic                   | Doctor            | Male   |
| K24 | Participant | Staff                      | Bachelor          | Female |
| K25 | Instructor  | Staff                      | Bachelor's Degree | Female |
| K26 | Trainer     | Department Head            | Doctor            | Male   |
| K27 | Trainer     | Department Head            | Bachelor          | Female |
| K28 | Participant | Social Services Specialist | Bachelor          | Female |

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 19 participants, including their occupations, educational levels, gender, roles in the program, and marital status. It is understood that the vast majority of participants have an income level at or below the minimum wage, while a small number earn above this level.

The analysis of the qualitative interviews revealed ten themes in total: motivations for participating in education, communication skills, sexuality education, role and responsibility sharing, crisis management, conflict management, psychological structure of the opposite sex, family law, the impact of education on marital harmony, and the dissemination of education. However, since this article is derived from a doctoral dissertation, only the themes most relevant to the scope of this study are presented and discussed here.

These themes aim to reveal assessments of the current state of the training provided, general perceptions, and shortcomings encountered in the training processes. Based on the commonalities in

participants' responses, these themes offer valuable insights for making the current training more effective. Below, the findings obtained within the framework of these themes are presented, supported by participant opinions.

When examining participants' motivations for attending the training, it was observed that different reasons were effective for both the organizers and the participants. In general, a significant portion of the participants attended out of curiosity about the content of the training:

*"I wanted to participate in such a training before marriage, I was curious." (K28)*

Some participants view the training more as an awareness-raising experience. For example, one participant stated that newly married individuals go through the process without being aware of the problems, and expressed that the training is beneficial in terms of raising this kind of awareness:

*"When you are newly married, there are many things you don't know. The training helps you recognize and tolerate these gaps in knowledge" (K5)*

This type of feedback shows that the training is effective not only in transferring knowledge to participants but also in creating self-awareness. Some participants joined the program thinking that the training could contribute to their children's future marriages rather than their own. These participants consider the training an important tool for intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Some participants stated that they only participated in the training as an activity. These individuals believe that the training was insufficient in terms of content and that the presentation format did not ensure permanence. Such criticisms reveal different perceptions regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the training content. However, most participants stated that they participated in the training consciously and willingly. It is understood that participation was motivated by different reasons such as curiosity, awareness, preparation for the future, and personal development.

The trainers and facilitators who prepared the training define the main objective of the program as raising awareness about marriage. It is also stated that the training functions within the scope of guidance and preventive services. Indeed, one trainer stated the following:

*"The aim was to provide protective, preventive services or raise awareness. To prepare engaged couples who thought they knew most things for marriage." (K4)*

As stated, this shows that participants had low expectations at the beginning, but their perceptions changed during the training process. It is emphasized that the training not only serves to impart knowledge, but also to anticipate possible risks and direct participants to support mechanisms. One trainer summarized the scope of the process as follows:

*"The goal here is to raise awareness among families, close information gaps, and develop their ability to find solutions that will make family life easier. To create sensitivity and ensure awareness." (K18)*

Within the scope of the awareness theme of the training, participants made certain statements. According to some participants, the program's basic approach appears to be shaped around the axes of awareness, information, and guidance. The training is not a type of crisis intervention or treatment-focused; rather, it is more preventive and guiding in nature (Alpaydın, 2012). It is understood that training programs, which do not aim to fully educate couples, provide individuals with basic information and guide them in their search for more information.

The training focuses on key concepts with high representational power rather than problem solving and provides preparation for potential difficulties in married life. One of the corporate representatives organizing the training summarizes this point as follows:

*"This training helps participants realize that individual or relational difficulties are normal; we strive to raise awareness by encouraging them to seek professional help as soon as possible, without exaggerating the issue." (K27)*

A study conducted on divorced couples in Türkiye found that if couples had received premarital education, they would have been able to resolve their problems more easily (Sürerbiçer, 2008). The education addresses potential problems that may arise in marriage and offers couples solutions, thereby ensuring that marriages remain healthy and happy.



The participants interviewed stated that they had received education in the fields of law, communication, and health, although the order of importance varied. However, the sections that stood out in each individual's mind and fell within their area of interest differed according to their own interests, concerns, and personal needs.

**Table 2. Interviewers' Educational Content**

| <b>Educational Content</b>                  | <b>Number of People</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Communication                               | 12                      |
| Conflict Management                         | 8                       |
| Roles                                       | 6                       |
| Sexuality                                   | 6                       |
| KCPY (Opposite Sex Psychological Structure) | 4                       |
| Law                                         | 2                       |
| Health                                      | 1                       |
| Financial Matters                           | 1                       |

When participants were asked which topics in the training content attracted their attention the most, several areas of interest emerged. The majority of participants emphasized the importance of the "communication" module, describing it as the most memorable and useful part of the training. Other frequently highlighted areas included "conflict management," "role and responsibility sharing," and "sexuality." In contrast, legal issues, general health, and financial topics were rarely mentioned. Notably, participants felt that the topic of sexuality, although included in the health module, was not addressed in sufficient depth and was considered somewhat superficial.

In general, it was observed that participants benefited most from the communication module. Experts stated that they did not encounter any difficulties in processing this module. While the communication module was prominent in terms of content and application, the health and legal themes were kept shorter and had a limited impact. The following points were raised regarding the communication module:

*"Relationships were the most important part. Education has a positive impact on how you maintain the relationship and how you establish that communication."* (K7)

Communication skills are considered one of the most critical skills for the sustainability of marriage. Indeed, couples' ability to maintain a harmonious marriage depends on their ability to effectively resolve problems in mutual communication. Communication deficiencies or errors are at the root of most problems experienced in marriage (Markman et al., 2022). One of the participants drew attention to this situation with the following statement:

*"Crisis management is the most important part. We benefited most from the communication aspect. The communication-related parts affected our marital harmony."* (K11)

Crisis management, a sub-theme of the communication theme, was particularly emphasized by the participants. It was noted that proper communication is critical during crises, that other topics can be learned individually, but that the communication module is more effective when guided by an expert. This module strengthens the awareness aspect of the training by enabling the identification of communication problems. Conflict management, another sub-module of the communication theme, is another important module that provides the skill of managing crisis moments in marriage in a healthy way. Participants stated that they experienced the contribution of this training in their practical lives. One trainer explained this topic as follows:

*"I think conflict management in marriage is the most essential topic. Most people know about the other topics. Even our cleaning lady is familiar with most things from social media. But conflict and crisis management is a special topic."* (K9)

Various studies have also shown that premarital education strengthens skills such as communication and conflict management, that these skills last for at least six months to three years, that relationship quality improves, and that it encourages couples to think about their future (Duran & Hamamcı, 2011; Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

The psychological makeup of the opposite sex is one of the topics highlighted as important in the training. One participant points out that a lack of

sufficient knowledge on this subject can cause problems in maintaining marriages:

*"Is there a problem with the psychological makeup of the opposite sex? You don't know. That's why couples need to undergo psychological testing before getting married. Most people don't even show that they are schizophrenic; most people don't show whether they are mentally healthy or not."* (K12)

According to Tarhan (2011), recognizing and accepting the psychological differences between women and men is the first step toward a healthy relationship. This awareness facilitates the rebuilding of mutual expectations and creates an environment conducive to establishing a more harmonious marital relationship. Sections on the psychological makeup of the opposite sex are crucial in training programs and are considered essential for maintaining healthy marriages.

Another prominent theme in education is the sharing of roles and responsibilities. The traditional division of labor shaped by gender roles has undergone a transformation with women's participation in the workforce. Participants noted that this change has had an impact on marital dynamics:

*"We never said woman or man. We said spouses. There are responsibilities in marriage. At work, my car needs to be washed, ironing needs to be done. When most of these responsibilities are taken on by one spouse, marital discord begins."* (K17)

According to the TAY research conducted by TÜİK (2021), 32.2% of divorces are caused by irresponsible and indifferent behavior. Therefore, in the context of Turkish society, including topics such as role and responsibility sharing in premartial education ensures that relationships are built on healthier foundations.

Sexuality is the most fundamental topic addressed in education. Sexuality is one of the most fundamental elements of marriage and is among the critical modules of education. Most participants stated that this topic is covered superficially in education and needs to be addressed in greater depth:

*"In traditional upbringing, women are treated differently from men. Sexuality is not accepted as normal. I don't think men know much about it either. I consider*

*sexuality education important. It is associated with carnal desires, which are seen as materialistic."* (K2)

Sexuality, a difficult topic to discuss in society, should be included in education as one of the fundamental purposes of marriage. Some participants expressed their views on privacy, a sub-theme of sexuality, and stated that they were reluctant to discuss this topic in a group setting, especially women:

*"I don't feel comfortable discussing private matters in front of everyone. Perhaps it would be better if these topics were discussed separately for men and women"* (K16)

The sexuality module is a module that participants are reluctant to discuss. One of the trainers expresses this as follows:

*"In marriages, it actually comes down to communication problems, but underneath that lies vaginismus or other sexual difficulties, sexual problems, or sexual violence. That's why sexual issues can be discussed in more detail."* (K4)

According to the participant and the trainers in general, the sexual health module is very important, but it is not given enough space in the training. One of the trainers also stated that the module on sexual health was not covered sufficiently. They stated that there was a lack of volunteer experts on the subject. In this context, the training should be enriched in the sections related to sexual health.

Another theme of the training, family law, did not receive sufficient interest from participants. According to participants, the information in this section could easily be obtained from books or consultants.

The theme of marital harmony is one of the most critical themes of the study. A large proportion of participants stated that the training encouraged empathetic thinking and positively affected their marital harmony, while some stated that its effect was limited. There are also participants who believe that participation in the training reflects the value placed on marriage and therefore has a positive effect:

*"Actually, beyond what you learn in this training, you are aware that you have a high level of awareness that you are positively engaged in something like this*

*shows that you are highly aware of your positive attitude toward participating in such a thing." (K23)*

Attaching value to marriage, setting aside time for its improvement, and even considering it important enough to participate in training can be seen as a form of mental preparation. One of the educators providing premarital training expresses the contribution of such training to marital harmony as follows:

*"The training positively affects marital harmony. There is no scientific data, but there has been feedback about it. Since there are those who ask how we can navigate conflicts, I think it positively affects marital harmony." (K6)*

The instructors involved in delivering the training programs have the opportunity to meet with participants one-on-one both during and after the training, allowing them to observe the impact of the training. While some believe these training programs have a positive effect on marital harmony, others believe they are ineffective. These training programs are awareness-focused initiatives that serve a protective and preventive function. Some studies in the literature indicate that the divorce rate among couples who participate in premarital programs is 30% lower (Stanley, 2006). Since there is no follow-up system for couples who participate in premarital training focused on the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the sustainability of marriages as a result of the training is unknown. In this context, the impact of the education on marital adjustment can only be known based on the individuals' own statements.

The theme of expanding education is being developed by the participants. Participants and trainers have made various suggestions to make education more widespread. These include making the training mandatory before marriage applications, encouraging couples to participate, making the sexuality module more comprehensive, increasing the duration of the training, advertising on TV screens, presenting awards and gifts at the end of the training, and making this training mandatory. Participants who believe that the training should be made mandatory express its necessity as follows:

*"Before marriage, they require a chest X-ray from the doctor. Before examining the lungs, examine the mind.*

*Women are oppressed in every way. These trainings should be mandatory before marriage." (K14)*

The Turkish Grand National Assembly's Commission on Violence Against Women brought up the issue of mandatory premarital education for couples and a proposal to investigate individuals' history of violence and obtain a psychological report suitable for marriage. Thus, it is proposed that marriage proceedings begin with a psychological report, similar to a blood test (Ensonhaber, 2024). However, the implementation of this study has not yet begun. Another educator recommends regarding the format of the education:

*"The state will make it a policy. For example, meetings will be held under the supervision of the village head or at the municipality. Because our people have such a tendency. They go when the state calls." (K25)*

According to the trainer, making the training mandatory by the state will increase participation. Making the training mandatory is open to debate in terms of benefits and harms. Participation in the training can be supported through incentives and advertising. However, making it mandatory may cause people to lose interest in the training. In order for the training to become more widespread and reach more people, the majority of participants stated that it should be made mandatory for marriage procedures.

*"Generally, people get in line at the marriage offices. A condition could be set that they must have taken such a training course before getting in line. There could be such incentives for those who participate in the training." (K3)*

The participant selection process is crucial for the effectiveness of premarital education programs. Preparing these programs specifically for couples applying for marriage will ensure that the right target audience is reached and that the content is conveyed accurately. However, one instructor noted that couples were unaware of the program due to insufficient promotion. Therefore, dissemination strategies should be prioritized. In addition, mass media, especially television, will be effective in increasing the visibility of the program (TIAK, 2024). The media power possessed by the state can be turned into an effective tool for the dissemination of educational programs that support the institution of the family. An instructor who

supports this view expresses the impact of television in this context with the following words:

*"For example, AEP advertisements should be increased on TRT. Short promotional films should be made. For example, advertisements should be filmed featuring role models beloved by the public, celebrities who set an example with their marriages." (K26)*

If these educational programs are promoted through celebrities who exemplify marriage, participation rates could increase and it could positively contribute to the seriousness of the education in the eyes of society.

Press campaigns conducted through such role models will increase individuals' interest in educational content and their level of engagement. Participating trainers emphasize the power of television to reach audiences, stating that messages conveyed through series, films, and social media can be much more lasting than those delivered in formal classroom settings:

*"They get it from TV series, they get it from television, they get it from commercials. An average Hollywood movie can have a greater impact than hundreds of hours of education you would provide through your family education program throughout the year." (K18)*

Today, the behaviors, clothing styles, preferences, and lifestyles of characters appearing on screens and social media are in high demand in society and influence social norms. With the "Family and Child-Friendly Production and Series Incentive Awards," 15 million TL in support was provided in 2023 for productions that align with family values (Özdener, 2023). Similarly, the declaration published at the Media and Family Values Workshop held in 2021 recommended promoting healthy relationship models, discouraging distorted relationships, and encouraging productions that uphold family values (Family Workshop, 2021).

Other initiatives undertaken to strengthen the institution of the family include the Family and Youth Fund, established in 2023. Family-focused projects and social support initiatives have been implemented through the Fund. Within the scope of the "Vision Document and Action Plan for the Protection and Strengthening of the Family" announced in 2024, strategic goals have been set in five thematic areas: digitalization, social welfare,

demographic transformation, environment, and disaster management. In this context, 2025 has been declared the "Year of the Family" (T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2025). Thus, it is planned to introduce new applications that will address family policies with a multidimensional approach.

## Discussion

Marriage is not only one of the important milestones in the personal life cycle, but also a very important institution for the healthy functioning and continuity of social structures. In the context of Turkish society, marriage and family hold a central role, both culturally and socially, and are often considered inseparable concepts. Marriage in Turkish society is more than just the union of two individuals; it is a structure that ensures the intergenerational transmission of cultural, moral, and religious values through the institution of the family. Pre-marital education is a protective, guiding practice that supports the sustainability of the institution of marriage and increases social welfare.

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of premarital education programs offered by the Ministry of Family and Social Services of the Republic of Turkey in terms of content, implementation, and participant experiences. Findings from data collected using qualitative methods reveal that the majority of participants developed awareness about the education, particularly showing openness to acquiring knowledge on topics such as communication, sexual health, and conflict management. The majority of participants viewed the communication and conflict management modules as the most beneficial sections. This finding is consistent with studies in the literature showing that premarital education improves couples' communication skills and increases long-term relationship satisfaction (Duran & Hamamcı, 2011; Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Stanley, 2006). Furthermore, research indicating that communication gaps form the basis of problems experienced in marriages further reinforces the importance of this education (Markman et al., 2022). Some studies state that premarital education is particularly effective in terms of increasing couples' communication skills and



developing their conflict resolution skills (Galbraith, 2007; Jakubowski, 2004). A limited number of studies conducted specifically in Turkey (Yıldız, 2016; Avcı, 2018; Yılmaz, 2009) indicate that premarital education supports couples in developing their awareness and increasing their relationship satisfaction. Other findings obtained in the study indicate that some participants found certain modules of the education insufficient. It was emphasized that the existing content, particularly on health, law, and sexuality, needs to be improved. This situation should be considered a factor that negatively affects the impact of the education in practice.

The sexuality module is considered the most critical module by participants, yet it has not been sufficiently addressed. Participants found it difficult to be open about this topic, particularly due to perceptions of privacy and social norms. This situation is consistent with the importance of the sexuality module in education, as noted in the literature (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013). Awareness of the psychological structure of the opposite sex and social gender roles is also an important finding. Participants' statements that they do not sufficiently understand the psychological structure of the opposite sex and that this causes problems in their relationships support Tarhan's (2011) view that accepting psychological differences is a fundamental step in healthy relationships. Furthermore, the fact that TÜİK (2021) data shows that sharing responsibilities is an important cause of separation in marriages highlights the critical importance of the role and responsibility module. Another finding, that education contributes positively to marital adjustment, is consistent with the literature, although its effect is limited in some cases. There are studies showing that premarital education programs reduce divorce rates (Stanley, 2006). However, since there are no long-term follow-ups of these programs, it is not possible to see their long-term effects in Turkey.

When examining participants' motivations for attending the training, we observe a strong focus on personal curiosity, the need for awareness, and preparation for marriage. The general consensus among trainers and facilitators is that the training emphasizes preventive and protective aspects, highlighting the value of acquiring this knowledge

during the preparatory phase to ensure long-lasting and strong marriages. They suggest that this approach can positively contribute to marital harmony.

One of the study's original and significant contributions to the literature is that it includes the views not only of individuals receiving the training but also of the trainers delivering the training and the designers developing the format, thereby offering a multi-layered evaluation opportunity. The study differs from similar research in the field by providing a multi-layered analysis of the premarital education process. However, the lack of an empirical and institutional system capable of measuring the long-term effects of education and its impact on marital adjustment means that the evaluations conducted are based on subjective experiences. Therefore, the long-term effects of education should be observed, and improvements should be made by following up on feedback.

This study also offers some recommendations for the dissemination of education based on the participants' views. It should be added to elective courses at universities, supported with incentives before marriage applications, processed on digital platforms, and disseminated through public service announcements, social media content, and famous influencers to reach individuals in many segments of society who are in the pre-marriage or post-marriage stages. Furthermore, the Western literature-heavy content of the program should be updated in line with values specific to Turkish culture. Prior research has shown that work-family dynamics and marital stability differ across cultural contexts (Jiao & Grzywacz, 2024), and recent large-scale cross-cultural findings further indicate that the predictors of marital satisfaction vary significantly depending on cultural characteristics such as individualism, gender equality, and power distance (Grau, Miketta, Ebbeler, & Banse, 2025). Considering these insights, adapting the program to the local cultural dynamics would make the training more acceptable, applicable, and easier for couples to adopt. In conclusion, the findings of the study show strong consistency with the literature.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, a multidimensional approach must be adopted for premarital education to be effective. In this context, various recommendations can be made for implementing the education:

1. Dissemination strategies
  - At the university level: An elective course can be offered to senior students to raise awareness about healthy relationships, partner selection, and decision-making before entering professional life.
  - The education should be available both in person and online.
  - By providing information at marriage offices, couples can be directed to training, and in this context, the validity of training received not only from municipalities but also from various institutions such as public education centers, muftiships, non-governmental organizations, and family health centers can be ensured.
  - In order to reach a wider audience with education, through mass media: An indirect but continuous learning experience can be provided through television and social media.
2. Content development strategies
  - Educational content should be separated from the focus on Western values and updated in a socio-culturally and pedagogically compatible manner, in line with Turkish social structure and culture.
  - In particular, sexuality, law, and health models should be restructured in a more detailed and multidisciplinary manner.
  - Topics such as crisis management in education, role and responsibility sharing, and the psychological structure of women and men should be covered in greater detail, and new presentation techniques should be utilized.
3. Monitoring and evaluation strategies

- A data system should be developed within the Ministry of Family and Social Services to track post-education returns and their effects.
- Psychological screenings conducted during the education process should identify individuals with psychological distress at a level that would prevent marriage, and they should be informed accordingly.
- Policies should be developed that provide various financial incentives and advantages to increase participation in premarital education.
- Participants' changes in marital status and relational support situations should be monitored to ensure the empirical evaluation of the programs.

In conclusion, it is believed that premarital education programs within the scope of the family education program organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Services can offer multifaceted contributions to both individuals and society. However, for these contributions to be sustainable, the content of these education programs must be updated socio-culturally and pedagogically. Intuitive insights gained from such qualitative data are highly valuable in developing future-oriented policies. However, it should not be forgotten that these insights must be supported by concrete data in order to be generalized. Furthermore, these educational programs must reach their target audience through multiple communication channels. Updating the content of these educational programs based on pedagogical principles while taking cultural sensitivities into account and disseminating their applications will not only improve the quality of individual relationships but also contribute significantly to building a society composed of healthy families.

## Declarations

**Funding:** *No funding was received for conducting this study.*

**Conflicts of Interest:** *The author declares no conflict of interest.*

**Ethical Approval:** *This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Istanbul University, Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Decision No: 214891).*

**Informed Consent:** *Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was strictly maintained.*

**Data Availability:** *The datasets generated and analyzed during the study are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality restrictions but are available from the author on reasonable request.*

**AI Disclosure:** *No artificial intelligence-based tools or applications were used in the preparation of this study. All content of the study was produced by the author in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.*

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