

The Effectiveness of Pre-marital Program “PREP” in the Relationships of undergraduate couples in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Pre-marital counselling is designed to enhance premarital relationships as leading to more satisfactory and stable marriages with the intended consequence of preventing divorce. Pre-marital education programs are knowledge and skills-based training applications. The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is an empirical intervention program to support the prevention of marital distress and divorce with short and long term effectiveness. PPEP is one of the intervention programs that promote pre-marriage counselling. The literature review shows that little is known about pre-marital counselling and no prior research in Sri Lanka has evaluated the effectiveness of PREP on the relationships of undergraduate couples. The data were collected using the mixed method approach comprising of pre-test and post-test quantitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This research selected 15 undergraduate heterosexual couples (15 females and 15 male) from the University of Peradeniya for the quantitative analysis and 3 couples were selected for the qualitative analysis. The T-Test and thematic analysis were adopted as the data analysis method. The research findings indicated that the T-Test was significant at <0.05 level indicating the program was successful. Moreover, there was a significant difference between before and after PREP ($t=15.040$, $p<0.00025$) in lessening vulnerability and risk in marriage by strengthening protective factors among the couples. The mean score of the 15 university undergraduate couples for the test was 146.13 (SD=14.738) before the PREP program and it increased to a mean of 176.47 (SD=6.892) after they had participated in the PREP program. Couples stated that premarital programs are necessary for their lives and they recommended the PREP program for both married and unmarried couples.

Keywords: Pre-marital counselling, PREP program, Pre-marital programs, Effectiveness, Pre-marital couples, Marriage

Introduction

“Marriage is a social construct, and therefore, by definition, an external (outside) influence. It is normal, but not natural. Humankind has existed for hundreds of thousands of years. The institution of marriage, on the other hand, is just centuries old. Marriage is a contract where the husband provides shelter and security in exchange for sexual exclusivity. This way, there is no doubt as to the identity of the father of any children born during the marriage. Nowadays, we have highly accurate paternity tests that determine parentage” (Antonino, 2016).

Marriage counselling methods have been developed and tested over the years, allowing you to choose the right type of marriage therapy to address your relationship's unique set of issues. It is also called couples therapy. Marriage counselling helps couples of all types recognize and resolve conflicts and improve their relationship. Through marriage counselling, you can make thoughtful decisions about rebuilding and strengthening your relationship. Pre and post - marriage are the two types of marriage counselling.

When considering the history of pre-marital counselling, its beginnings can be traced to the west. First, it originated within the church and other religious places, and then it developed to the state of premarital education programs. Some of the techniques and therapies used in premarital education programs are related to the field of counselling. But in Sri Lanka, It has not gained a wider attraction among couples.

The purpose of this research is to find out the effectiveness of the premarital program, PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) on the relationship of couples. Premarital counselling generally refers to a process designed to enhance and enrich premarital relationships leading to more satisfactory and stable marriages with the intended consequence being to prevent divorce (Stahmann, 2000).

In 2004, Dr Jayatunge published a book named “*Psychological Counselling*”. According to his book, pre-marital counselling was defined

as an "intervention" which takes place at the initial stage of the family development lifestyle. As such, its goals are more likely to be preventive and educational rather than remedial and therapeutic. The aims of pre-marital counselling are developing persona; making awareness in the couples about the implications of their decision to marry, discussing aspects of themselves and their partner that may affect their marriage, acquiring functional communication skills, help couples to gain insight into themselves and their relationship, negotiate contracts to compromise and to make joint decisions, train couples in problem-solving process".

"Pre-marital education programs are best defined as knowledge and skills-based training procedure which aims at providing couples with information on ways to improve their relationship once they are married" (Senediak, 1990, as cited in Carroll & Doherty, 2003, p 13).

Prevention & Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is a community or school-based program. It is for married and pre-marital couples and is designed to encourage couples to improve their bonds by learning communication strategies, identify and resolve concerns together, develop and improve their relationship. Evaluations of PREP provides some evidence that participation in the program is associated with lower rates of pre-marital breakups and improved marital satisfaction, increased positive communication and decreased negative communication.

PREP utilizes cognitive behavioural therapy techniques to improve couples' relationships. During the intervention period, a trained consultant facilitates the program which typically includes three to eight couples. The topics that are addressed in PREP are, improving communication, enhancing conflict resolution skills, strengthening commitment and friendship, exploring sexuality and sensuality, developing problem-solving skills and fostering emotional supportiveness. More than 19,000 leaders have been trained to deliver PREP at various community-based centres, military bases, prisons, universities and religious organizations across the United States. (Prevention & Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), 2015).

Objectives of this research

The key goals of this research are to use premarital counselling to increase positive communication among undergraduate couples. The sub-objectives that the research was used are,

- To help couples maintain marital satisfaction
- To increase awareness among couples about the importance of premarital counselling.
- To measure the effectiveness of the premarital program, (PREP) among the undergraduate couples at the University of Peradeniya.

Significance of this research

First, this research is timely. The way human beings experience marriage and relationships breakups and the way of acting towards it can vary. Currently, we are witnessing many crime incidents and suicide resulting from divorce cases, misunderstanding of couples, lack of good and communication system between the spouses. Therefore, I think premarital counselling or pre-marital education programs are necessary to develop valid and reliable information and knowledge to build healthy relationships. Then, it is needed to make the people aware of the need for pre-marital counselling in society.

Secondly, there is a rare amount of research in Sri Lanka in the given topic area. Society has a risk of marital distress and divorce. This study provides the opportunity to recollect the relationship problems positively. The research findings can be used to help people in many ways as allowing people to rethink their rewards critically, identifying the personal strength within. The people around can also gain knowledge of breakup by providing their support. The research can be a complement to the Sri Lankan research gap.

Thirdly, the pre-marital counselling program can provide educational awareness for couples on marriage and lives which is timely and valued. These programs are focused mainly on educational support and technique.

This study will use PREP as an intervention. It is one of the best pre-marital educational programs in the world. It consists of eleven lessons with practical activities focusing on the couples.

Additionally, the following significant aspects can also be seen in the present study. Pre-marital Counseling and Pre-marital education can create solutions for marital distress, divorce and other problems in marriages benefiting both pre-marital and married couples.

Literature Review

The review of literature presents and evaluates existing research. The review focuses on the relationships of arguments, methods, and theoretical frameworks between different sources. It also asks what is missing from existing research or what else could be said. According to the above definition, the review of literature in the present study extends through a few subtopics.

The first is a discussion of marriage. Marriage is shown as a divine, precious, purposeful and beautiful experience, relationship and lifelong bonding between two mature individuals (Male & Female), based on certain familial, social, cultural, religious and spiritual principles aiming to maintain our progeny, family and society. A successful married life can be achieved through pre-marital counselling programs. Therefore, the second subtopic is pre-marital counselling.

In the discussion of the topic, it was proved that pre-marital counselling can be one of the most enriching experiences of a couples' life. This experience is set up to help them uncover aspects of their future spouse of which they may be unaware of it may confirm their beliefs about him or her. Either way, pre-marital counselling is a valuable process. Many couples have found that completing a rigorous pre-marital counselling program gives them a greater sense of peace before heading into marriage. Furthermore, the two research articles mentioned below prove this.

The concept of pre-marital education is discussed next. The research, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Premarital Education: A review of*

outcome research by Carroll J.S and Doherty W.J in 2003 found that due to the high rates of marital distress and divorce numerous scholars, educators and policymakers have advocated for premarital programs. (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). They try to present a comprehensive and critical evaluation of this research literature about the effectiveness of premarital education. They used 12 experimental and quasi-experimental studies, 10 non-experimental studies and two ex-post-facto studies. They suggested that a pre-marital education program is generally effective in producing immediate results. And it is effective for all couples, in strengthening marriages and preventing divorce. Finally, they said that couples who participated in the premarital program are at no greater risk for marital difficulties than couples who don't participate in such programs (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

Kelper Amanda (2015) in, *Marital Satisfaction: The impact of Pre-marital and couples counselling* describes the connection between pre-marital and marital counselling and marital satisfaction for couples. They used a cross-sectional design and the chi-square analysis for measuring data. They selected 20 individuals who were previously married and currently married as samples. They found that spouses who participated in Pre-marital counselling have a higher level of marital satisfaction and less rate of divorce.

The other main reason is the lack of research done about pre-marital counselling and pre-marital programs in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this topic has to be discussed to prevent marital distress and divorce for both married and unmarried couples.

A discussion of pre-marital couples who are ready to get married is the fourth sub-topic. There are four types of premarital couples; vitalized, harmonious, traditional and conflict. The present research focuses all four categories because pre-marital counselling program affects all.

The PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) is selected for this research among other Pre-marital programs (PREP, PREPARE, RELATE, PAIRS, REP, CAE, etc.). PREP pre-marital program is a new approach to the conventional pessimistic viewpoint of

building a good marriage life or preventing divorce. PREP is a type of education program and focuses on the enhancement of relationships of couples in aspects of sex, money, economics, love, commitment, friendship etc. It is a kind of program with sessions, not therapy (Prevention & Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), 2015)

Renick et al. founded that the positive side of the PREP program in the article named "*The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP): An empirically-based preventive Intervention for couples*". They showed PREP is an empirically based intervention to prevent marital distress and divorce and to discuss the distinction between primary prevention programs and therapeutic intervention. They used 135 pre-marital couples with 3 sessions in 3-4 months by measuring self-report inventories. They asked couples to complete questionnaires and to engage in videotaped interaction tasks. Finally, it was identified that who participated in PREP has maintained significantly more stable relationship than the other couples (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992).

In the other section, the research revealed that the pre-marital counselling had applied for lay volunteer leaders with qualitative observations and pre-post measured with the learning of concept, communication etc. Renick Blumberg (1992) revealed that the premarital program PREP was applied for couples to prevent marital distress and divorce.

Some of the researches talked about the pre-marital education programs. There are various kinds of premarital programs (Types Of Premarital Education Program, 2016). Some evaluate the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs with a Meta-analytic review of outcome research (Carrol & Doherty, 2004). The research summarizes some reasons why the present research is emphasized on the PREP program.

In contrast, pre-marital education programs appear to be effective at improving couple communication with studies that employed observational measures rather than self-report measures producing large effects. Still, given the mixed, modest results, there is ample room and a

real need to improve the practice of premarital education (Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard, & Carroll, 2010)

Lastly, the present researcher is decided to conduct the study on the PREP program design for pre-marital couples because the research article of Gureny (2003), explains that, why couples are enrolled in PREP faced. According to his research PREP program is statistically significant in having a lower chance of premarital breakups, four to five years later. It was the main program that prevention and enhancement were implemented.

Finally, based on the general summary of the previous literature, the present researcher is determined to conduct the study on "The effectiveness of pre-marital counselling program, PREP on the relationship of undergraduate couples". The research is carried out to examine the "The effectiveness of the pre-marital program, the PREP on the relationship of couples". Furthermore, it also tries to answer if the PREP fits with the couples?

The summary of the review of the literature shows that the researchers depict many findings of the research topic. The main aim of the research is to examine the connection between the main variables of the research. There are two main variables according to the research. They are the pre-marital counselling program (PREP) and the pre-marital couples. The present research is ready to find out how the above variables affect each other.

Methodology

Research Design

The current research was carried out in the mixed-method approach. Data were collected using the following methods.

- Quantitative - Pre Questionnaires & post questionnaires
- Qualitative - Semi-structured Interviews

According to the analysis path,

- T-test analysis with SPSS for quantitative data
- Thematic analysis for qualitative data was used for the analysis of data gathered from both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews

In this research, pre and post questionnaires and the PREP program was used to gather primary data. Additionally, the research used interviews for collecting data from participants. A portable audio recorder was used to tape the interviews.

Sample

The research has employed convenient sampling techniques. The researcher is intended to draw a sample of 15 heterosexual couples (15 males and 15 females) from participants representing 3 couples (3 male and 3 female) for interviews. The sample was selected purposely by paying attention to the participants who hoped to get engaged within one year.

Tools/ Apparatus

The research utilized a questionnaire to measure the effectiveness of the pre-marital program, the PREP among the relationship of couples in Sri Lanka. It used the free Online Marriage Premarital Couple Matching Compatibility Assessment Test, a State-of-the-Art & Scientific Premarital Compatibility Assessment Method by Dr Purushothaman. It includes 100 items with the Likert scale (Purushothaman, 2006). However, the present researcher chooses only 40 items that affect the research topic. The questionnaires (both pre and post) contain five categories as follows.

- 1 Introduction to Premarital counselling
- 2 Expectations in marriage
- 3 Friendship, commitment & having fun
- 4 Safety/ structure and communication
- 5 Sensual and sexual relationships

Then, the PREP was developed by Dr. Markman and Stanley is one of the most comprehensively researched marriage enhancement programs in the world. PREP has created fourteen lessons. The core content of PREP includes two key areas lowering risk and raising protection. The lowering risk is as follows: *interaction danger signs, communication, key issues and conflict management, problem-solving, expectation clarification, and forgiveness making it happen* and the raising protection are as follows: *commitment, priorities and sacrifice, preserving friendship, keeping fun alive, sensuality and sexuality, spiritual and religious intimacy and core belief exploration*. The goal of PREP is to lessen vulnerability and risk in marriage by strengthening protective factors. The fourteen lessons are listed with information adapted from the PREP couple's manual, 2006. (Bath, 2010)

Procedure

First, the research formulated a research question with the desired research data and formulating questions for the interview. Then, the present study referred to the journal articles, books and studies that are relevant to the research topic and selected the sample.

When doing the PREP Program, a pilot was conducted before moving the PREP program-related questionnaire. The chosen 15 couples were asked to sit in a classroom and answer the questionnaire separately. A little introduction of the program was given with consent forms to the couples. Then the 15 pretest questionnaires were given. The researcher explained the PREP program and asked to do some activities related to it. Then, in the middle of the program, the researcher asked them some questions and discussed them. Sometimes both the girl and the boy practised some activities like speaking and listening techniques in 10-minute activities. Lastly, the present researcher gave pretest questionnaires 2 hours after they participate in the above. Finally, the data were analyzed.

In the present research, in semi-structured interviews, interviewees were given open-ended questions for 30-40 minutes and portable audio recording devices were used to record the interview and data will be

transcribed with Microsoft word Program selecting the 3 couples who participated in the above PREP program. Then, after 2 hours of the PREP program, the research asked questions related to the semi-structured interview. While interviewing them, the study observed their behaviours and attitudes about the research topic and asked questions and discussed it with others.

Data Analysis

Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. T-test was calculated for the entire sample (n-15) with questionnaires. Thematic analysis was used for analyzing semi-structured interview data.

Results/Analysis

According to the research, fifteen undergraduates were given a Pre-test questionnaire before the PREP program and the mean obtained was 146.13(SD=14.738). After they had participated in the PREP program and the same test questionnaires were given to them as a POST test. The mean achieved was 176.47 (SD=6.892).

A T-Test was conducted with the pre and post-test results and it was statically significant at < 0.05 level indicating that the program was successful ($t=15.040$, $p<0.00025$) in reducing the vulnerability and risk in marriage by strengthening protective factors among couples. The protective factors were commitment, priorities and sacrifice, preserving friendship, keeping fun alive and sensuality, sexuality, spiritual and religion, intimacy and core beliefs. A paired sample t-test conducted a significant difference to compare before the condition of the PREP program and after the condition of the PREP program. It depicts there was a statistically significant difference in the score of before PREP program ($M=146.13$, $SD=14.738$) and the after PREP program ($M=176.47$, $SD=6.892$) condition; $t(29) = -15.040$, $P=0.000$ ”

There was a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test. These results suggest that the PREP program has a positive effect on couples before marriage. We can now see the above statistics confirmed by sub-themes according to the questionnaire. Except for sub-themes (introduction to premarital counselling, marriage, security, structure and

communication, friendship, communication and entertainment, pornography or sex), samples of the couple are analyzed with the T-test. It also represents a significant difference.

The aim is to identify the effectiveness of the pre-marital program on the relationship of undergraduate couples at the University of Peradeniya. The qualitative part of the study was based on semi-structured interviews. In the semi-structured interviews, some of the participants in the PREP program were asked about their experience of participating in the PREP program. They were also asked about the sub-content of premarital counselling and their experience with premarital counselling. The data analysis section highlights five main themes and sub-themes. It includes a questionnaire related to the PREP program, couples' views on the PREP program, the need for pre-marital programs, the benefits of attending the PREP program, and suggestions on pre-marital counselling.

According to the analysis, the T-test analysis confirms the significant difference in risk and risk reduction in marriages by strengthening the safety factors between the couples. On the other hand, the thematic analysis of this research emphasized that the positive attitudes and behaviour under the above sub-themes with pre-marital couples.

Discussion

First, considering the findings, the research seeks to explain how it came about and what caused it, and the success of the PREP program and the factors that influence it. The research shows that the PREP has a positive effect on these undergraduate couples according to the T-Test analysis.

The present research thinks that the PREP program could be covered all lessons with couples. There were 14 lessons and those lessons were completed by interviewees. They had no clear idea before they submitted the PREP. It proved to be a beautiful quiz but they followed all the lessons because the quantitative analysis can show a significant difference from the whole test. According to the couples who followed all the lessons, the overall test alone did not show a significant difference, then the sub-themes are relevant to the questionnaire which represented a significant difference between the pre and post period. This is because

the PREP program had a good sub-theme reaching them. The couples can succeed with the PREP program. All subthemes contribute to the success of the program.

PREP is a concept of Western culture. In the western context, marriage, commitment, sexuality, pornography, premarital counselling, premarital treatment and techniques are discussed and the American research shows that Sri Lankan marriage is different from that of the western. But according to the T-Test analysis mentioned in Chapter Four, PREP was successful. Therefore, we can say that there are some similarities in marriage between Sri Lanka and western countries. It confirms that PREP's knowledge, themes, techniques and concepts are relevant to Sri Lanka.

We can expand it for our culture of successful marriages. The government can also give this opportunity to married and unmarried couples. I think PREP can provide an educational experience about marriage to have a happy married life. It also proved to be a sub-theme of marriage and friendship, commitment and fun.

Thus, I strongly believe that PREP can focus on our attitude, behaviour and skills. This is because the structure of the PREP program was successful with the T-test analysis. So we can use it inevitably for future generations. The second part of the thematic analysis can be discussed and the PREP program is essential for all couples. Thematic analysis is discussed one by one according to the themes.

In consideration of the history of premarital counselling, the beginnings can be traced back to the west. First, it had started at the church and other religious places. It was developed as a premarital education program later. Some techniques and therapies are related to the counselling field. But in Sri Lanka, it is not a popular topic among couples. PREP is not therapy. It is a kind of education; very much like learning to play tennis or golf. There are many ways couples can learn through the PREPs' common sense approach. Couples can learn on their own using various PREP materials including videotapes, audiotapes, and books, they can also attend public workshops ranging from Weekend

Workshops to six weekly sessions with two hours length, to One-Day workshops taught by independent PREP instructors. Couples may also be coached in the PREP approach by a private counsellor and clergy member. PREP has undergone several revisions since 1980, as the research provides up to date information on the critical factors in relationship functioning. The program is currently available in two formats. In the extended version, couples attend a weekly session and in the shorter version, they attend one day sessions. The above facts can be derived from the previous research as following.

The journal of contemporary family therapy published an article named, “*Premarital education: an assessment of program efficacy*” in 2006. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of a premarital educational program, with the secondary goal of determining if the structure (conjoint versus group) and the participants’ gender influenced program effectiveness. The goal of the 8-week intervention was to improve couples’ readiness and preparation for marriage as measured by the PREP-M. The findings suggested that the educational program achieved its stated goal (McGeorge & Carlson, 2006).

The PREP is a community or school-based program which is designed to encourage couples to improve their bonds by learning communication strategies, identifying and resolving concerns together, and developing and improving their relationship. Furthermore, it teaches couples communication skills and ground rules for handling conflict and promoting intimacy to prevent future marital problems and divorce.

The PREP was developed by Dr Markman and Stanley and is one of the most comprehensively researched marriage enhancement programs in the world. PREP has fourteen lessons. The core content of PREP includes two key areas; lowering risk and raising protection. The lowering risk component comprises of: *interaction danger signs, communication, key issues in conflict management, problem-solving, expectation clarification, and forgiveness* and the raising protection component comprises: *commitment, priorities and sacrifice, preserving friendship,*

keeping fun alive, sensuality and sexuality, spiritual and religious intimacy and core belief exploration. The goal of PREP is to lessen vulnerability and risk in marriage by strengthening protective factors.

The benefits of participating in the prep Program

The current study follows some advantages of western culture and there are some advantages which discuss the couples that show similarities in western researches. Western researches show that the main advantage is effective communication or positive communication among couples. The following advantages which are explained by the couples and the previous research are proved. PREP is the educational experiencing of the program, the use of the speak-listener technique and CBT is the main path of PREP, solving the problem as a team gives many benefits for the couples and encourage them to improve their bonds by learning communication strategies. Therefore, PREP is the most suitable program for couples and it always can change the behaviour of couples. This education is important for all couples who are married and unmarried. It also benefits the school children.

The necessity of Pre-marriage programs

Research shows that couples should participate in the PREP program one year before they get married. That is because the current Sri Lankan society accepts the necessity of PREP. The DS office and other government or non-government organizations should contribute because they have good motivation and also PREP had good effectiveness for them because the content of PREP has a clear positive image.

Suggestions

The pre-Marriage counselling field is spreading a broad area hence, it is more helpful for the couples and it always affects society. The current study records, some practical activities related PREP program. The current study hints at the ways to practice some implications as mentioned below.

In Sri Lanka, people should be aware of premarital counselling services provided by the religious places (temple, church, Kovil, Mosque)

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic country and it practices various religions. According to the PREP Program pre-marriage counselling is necessary to strengthen the societal bonds. Therefore PREP can also be initiated by religious places like temples, churches, Kovil and mosques. These religious places have various types of perspectives and visions.

Understanding how cultural issues affect a relationship is an advantage of pre-marriage counselling as it explains how the family of origin and cultural beliefs affect the partners and their relationships. It also affects day-to-day behaviours such as eating, working, and managing money. Religious leaders can promote activities and programs about pre-marital counselling at their places of worship.

The Department of education can update the psychological counselling course's syllabus focusing on pre-marriage counselling and marriage counselling.

Premarital counselling is a substantial component of marriage counselling. We know that many counselling courses offer abnormal psychology, development psychology, child psychology, and other applied psychology fields but do not focus on marriage counselling or pre-marriage counselling.

Pre-marriage counselling is a necessary field for all human beings because it teaches cooperation in society and between family members. It also teaches safety, positive communication, and sensuality. It is strongly believed that school counselling courses offered by the education department should update their curriculum by including pre-marital and marital counselling.

The government should train counsellors in the field of marital counselling

The next proposal is primarily concerned with employment opportunities. The current research studies focus on the fact that there are two opportunities for graduates and students at vocational institutions such as the VTA (Vocational Training Authority) and the TO (Technical

College). Graduates who have completed a degree in psychology or counselling should be trained at the Divisional Secretariat, the Family Counselor, the Attorney General's Office, the marriage counsellor. This series of courses can be updated and train the student.

16+ students in schools should be provided with the knowledge in premarital counselling

School counselling plays a major role in Sri Lanka nowadays because it is always focused on our future generation and teacher's role. The education system allows maintaining the perfect pupil covering a broad area. Students of age 13-19 and 16+ always try to change and imitate others. We should make them aware of society because they are developing physically, mentally and socially. Some students are curious about marriage, sex, future targets, selecting a partner and balancing the marriage life. School counselling should focus on pre-marriage counselling, Students after O/L, get engaged without any awareness. Therefore they should be given pre-marriage counselling.

At the rural level, free counselling services should be established with trained counsellors for couples getting married.

Sri Lanka does not have adequate counselling centres in both rural and urban areas. The government should set up a free counselling service or A centre through the Attorney General's Office to promote pre-marital counselling. There are also difficulties in their marriage. So they need good services to do that. Marriage counsellors can promote pre-wedding programs such as PREP. The government should have a good structure to build an advisory system collaborating with the *Grama Niladhari* offices, the Attorney General's Office, the Secretariat, and non-governmental organizations.

Finally, premarital counselling is an opportunity for marriage education. The couples learn to nurture their relationship over a lifetime. They learn communication techniques and tools that nurture intimacy and how to turn conflict into an opportunity to build understanding and a richer connection. The counselling describes the patterns of a lifelong relationship, including information on periods that are typically high-

stress in a marriage. The specific areas such as work-life integration, time management, children, money, spirituality, sex, support system, infidelity prevention, and extended family that often challenge marriages are described.

Recommendations for future research

Similar studies should be replicated in different ethnic and social groups to overcome the issue of lack of studies in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka does not have adequate research on premarital counselling. Future research should focus on this area. 15 Sinhalese couples were selected from the faculty of arts at the University of Peradeniya. Similar research based on ethnic groups such as Tamils, Muslims and Christians will be conducted. Various social groups like schools, NGOs, apparel industry workers, rural individuals will also be used for research. Researchers can use a larger sample size to obtain different types of data.

Conducting similar research using a different premarital program such as PREPARE, FOCUS etc.

PREP is one of the pre-marriage counselling programs. It is not the only program designed for couples. Western research shows that different counselling such as FOCCUS (facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study), PAP (Premarital Assessment Program), PCI (Premarital Communication Inventory), and PREPARE (Premarital Personal AND Relationship Evaluation), RELATE (Relationship Evaluation has achieved robust scientific validity) and SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts) can be done on couples. Therefore the current study urges doing research based on various kinds of premarital programs for couples.

Ideas for Future research topics

Future research can measure the satisfaction from various premarital programs mentioned above and compare the effectiveness of the PREP program with them. Further, comparison can be identified with various premarital programs other than the PREP program.

Limitation of the study

Qualitative data cannot be generalized

The qualitative path that has been used here has a limited sample. Therefore the qualitative data cannot be generalized.

Time limitation

The PREP program is large, therefore the current study did it simply to accommodate it easily. Conducting the program had time but explaining.

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