

The Effectiveness of Premarital Education Using the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method on Marital Stability and Emotional Expressiveness

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of premarital education based on the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method in enhancing marital stability and emotional expressiveness among engaged couples.

Methods and Materials: A randomized controlled trial design was used involving 30 participants recruited from premarital counseling centers in Tehran. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental group ($n = 15$), which received a ten-session premarital education program, and a control group ($n = 15$), which received no intervention during the study period. The intervention was delivered in weekly 60-minute group sessions focusing on interpersonal awareness, emotional literacy, and decision-making in romantic relationships. Standardized instruments were used to measure marital stability and emotional expressiveness at three time points: pretest, posttest, and five-month follow-up. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests in SPSS-27.

Findings: Results indicated a significant interaction effect between time and group for marital stability ($F(2, 56) = 14.72, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.34$), with the experimental group showing greater improvements compared to the control group. Similarly, emotional expressiveness demonstrated a significant group-by-time interaction ($F(2, 56) = 17.59, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.38$), with post-hoc comparisons revealing that the experimental group had significantly higher scores at both posttest and follow-up phases. All assumptions for repeated measures ANOVA were confirmed prior to analysis.

Conclusion: These results highlight the value of incorporating structured emotional and interpersonal training into premarital counseling services to support relationship resilience and long-term satisfaction.

Keywords: Premarital education, interpersonal awareness, emotional expressiveness, marital stability.

1. Introduction

Marriage remains one of the most influential social institutions, playing a crucial role in personal fulfillment, social structure, and emotional wellbeing. Yet, with rising rates of marital dissatisfaction and divorce across many societies, including Iran, there is a growing need to support couples before marriage through scientifically grounded educational interventions (Basharpour & Estiri, 2024; Kashani Kia, 2024).

Emotional expressiveness—the ability to convey feelings openly and appropriately—is one of the most critical competencies for sustaining long-term intimacy in romantic relationships. Studies have shown that when individuals suppress or miscommunicate emotions, it often leads to misunderstandings, emotional distancing, and eventually marital distress (Lee et al., 2023). Emotional competence, especially in the form of emotional expressiveness, has been found to mediate the relationship between attachment patterns and marital satisfaction (Lee et al., 2023). In fact, emotional intelligence training has gained global attention as a promising route to enhancing interpersonal effectiveness and emotional regulation in both personal and professional contexts (Ghaffar et al., 2024; Zaheer et al., 2024). According to Zaheer et al., medical students with higher emotional insight exhibit better self-control and empathy, traits that are equally essential in intimate partnerships. These findings underscore the role of early emotional education in preparing couples for the complex emotional demands of marriage.

The importance of emotional literacy in youth and adult education has led to a proliferation of programs that integrate arts-based or affective approaches to develop these competencies (Araya et al., 2024; Hadijah, 2024; Herasymenko & Muravska, 2024). Emotional education initiatives, particularly in schools and community centers, show significant effects in helping individuals recognize and manage their emotional responses, paving the way for healthier relationships (Araya et al., 2024). Art therapy methods such as the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC), which explore both nonverbal and symbolic forms of emotional expression, have also been suggested as innovative pathways for enhancing self-awareness and emotional communication skills (Niu, 2025). These developments provide strong theoretical support for embedding emotional expressiveness training into premarital programs.

In parallel, the issue of marital stability—the long-term continuity of marriage without the threat of separation or divorce—has become a focal point of family research and social policy. Premarital interventions that address unrealistic expectations, role confusion, and decision-making styles have proven to be crucial in promoting marital stability (Rajabi et al., 2017). Rajabi et al. demonstrated that the Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge Program, which includes components of the awareness and choice model, significantly reduced idealistic marital expectations and increased realism about marriage among single students in Iran. Similarly, Hashemi et al. compared different premarital models and found that the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice approach not only improved knowledge but also altered attitudes toward marriage in a constructive direction (Hashemi et al., 2023). These outcomes highlight the value of structured and interactive premarital education in equipping couples with the cognitive and emotional tools to sustain long-term relationships.

The psychological mechanisms through which such programs exert their influence often involve increased self-reflection, emotional awareness, and intentional decision-making—factors that resonate strongly with emerging theories of adult development and emotional growth (Adesola et al., 2025; Udechukwu et al., 2024). For instance, Adesola et al. explored how individuals make marital decisions even in the face of medical risks like sickle cell disease, and found that emotional insight and communication with partners played a critical role in navigating such complexities. Udechukwu et al. emphasized that emotional intelligence among women in religious communities could be significantly enhanced through targeted psychoeducational strategies, further validating the premise that emotional competencies are modifiable and impactful.

In examining the cultural contexts of marriage, it becomes clear that emotional expressiveness and marital stability are often shaped by familial, religious, and societal norms (Acquaah, 2023). For instance, Acquaah's study of the Fante tribe in Ghana demonstrated how cultural traditions influence both cohabitation and expectations about emotional conduct in marriage. In Iran, where this study was conducted, the influence of traditional family structures and collective values often intensifies the need for explicit emotional education, especially in urban centers like Tehran, where modern and traditional worldviews intersect. This makes Iran a particularly relevant setting for

investigating the impact of emotional training on marital outcomes.

Another critical consideration is the role of emotional suppression or disconnect in marital dissatisfaction and emotional divorce. Al-shahrani and Hammad found a significant correlation between alexithymia—difficulty identifying and expressing emotions—and emotional divorce among Saudi women, suggesting that interventions enhancing emotional expressiveness may be protective against relational breakdowns (Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2023). Similarly, Mousavi et al. revealed how physical and emotional health challenges in one partner can impact the relational satisfaction of both, reinforcing the need for couples to be prepared emotionally and communicatively for future stressors (Mousavi et al., 2023). Emotional expressiveness is thus not only a desirable trait but a necessary one for managing change, conflict, and vulnerability within marriage.

Given the wide range of educational and therapeutic interventions aimed at developing emotional insight—from creative arts (Diamare et al., 2025; Hadijah, 2024) to humor-based and digital tools (Indellicato, 2024; Melenets et al., 2022)—it becomes essential to integrate these insights into premarital programming. Diamare et al. highlighted how engaging with works of art could empower participants psychologically and emotionally, an approach that aligns with the principles of the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method. Similarly, Indellicato argued that the incorporation of artificial intelligence into social-emotional learning platforms opens new frontiers for engaging and adaptive emotional education. Although technological enhancements are promising, face-to-face interventions grounded in dialogue, empathy, and reflection remain central to the premarital context.

Educational needs among couples vary by life stage and length of relationship. Gil et al. focused on middle-aged couples and found strong demand for education on psychological wellbeing, especially in relation to communication and intimacy (Gil et al., 2022). While this study focuses on engaged couples, similar needs are likely present in early-stage relationships, particularly around emotional expressiveness and long-term planning. Emotional development is also closely tied to cognitive functioning, as Singh noted in his exploration of the relationship between emotional intelligence and cognitive ability in school students (Singh, 2022). These connections suggest that cognitive and affective domains should not be

treated separately in marital education, but rather integrated into a holistic learning model.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that social-emotional learning (SEL) is no longer confined to educational institutions; it is increasingly seen as essential in adult relational contexts as well. Herasymenko and Muravska advocated for a stronger focus on SEL in higher education, particularly for fostering empathy and interpersonal communication (Herasymenko & Muravska, 2024). This echoes the rationale for including SEL principles in premarital education, where relational competence is both a learning objective and a predictor of future satisfaction. Jeong and Kim's phenomenological research on startup founders further supports the role of emotionally intelligent decision-making in navigating ambiguity and interpersonal risk, themes highly relevant to the marital journey (Jeong & Kim, 2024).

In light of this multidisciplinary and cross-cultural body of research, the present study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a structured premarital education program based on the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method in improving marital stability and emotional expressiveness among engaged individuals in Tehran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a randomized controlled trial design to evaluate the effectiveness of premarital education using the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method on marital stability and emotional expressiveness. A total of 30 participants were selected from premarital counseling centers in Tehran and were randomly assigned to an experimental group ($n = 15$) and a control group ($n = 15$). Inclusion criteria included being engaged to marry within the next year, age range between 20 to 35 years, and willingness to participate in the full training program and follow-up assessments. Participants in the experimental group received ten weekly 60-minute sessions of the structured premarital education program, while the control group received no intervention during the study period. Both groups were evaluated at three points in time: pretest (baseline), posttest (after intervention), and five-month follow-up.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Marital Stability

To measure the dependent variable of marital stability, the Marital Instability Index (MII) developed by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983) was used. This standard instrument assesses the perceived likelihood and thoughts of divorce or separation among married individuals. The MII consists of 14 items, including both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of instability, such as considerations of divorce, talking about separation, and perceived chances of staying together. Items are scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater marital instability and, conversely, lower scores representing more marital stability. The questionnaire includes two subscales: behavioral instability and emotional/attitudinal instability. The validity and reliability of the MII have been confirmed in several studies, including Iranian research where its psychometric properties have been established with acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha above 0.80) and construct validity through factor analysis (Bijani et al., 2023; Nazari et al., 2020).

2.2.2. Emotional Expressiveness

To evaluate emotional expressiveness, the Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES) developed by Kring, Smith, and Neale (1994) was employed. This instrument measures the extent to which individuals outwardly express their emotions across different contexts. The EES includes 17 items, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never true) to 6 (always true), with higher scores indicating greater emotional expressiveness. The scale is unidimensional but captures a broad spectrum of expressive behavior including facial expressions, gestures, and verbal emotional disclosure. The EES has been widely used in psychological research and its psychometric adequacy has been confirmed in various populations. In Iranian studies, the scale has demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha above 0.85) and validity, with appropriate cultural adaptations ensuring its effectiveness for measuring emotional expression in the Iranian context (Bahrami Mashouf et al., 2022; Hooshmandi & Atapour, 2023).

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Premarital Education Using the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method

This intervention consists of ten 60-minute group sessions designed to enhance marital stability and emotional expressiveness among engaged couples through the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method. The program aims to foster mutual understanding, emotional literacy, and intentional decision-making in relationships by combining psychoeducation, guided exercises, and structured dialogue between partners. Each session builds upon the previous one, facilitating personal insight and interpersonal growth in a supportive setting.

Session 1: Introduction and Orientation

The first session introduces participants to the structure, goals, and expectations of the premarital education program. Participants are encouraged to discuss their reasons for attending and their expectations from marriage. Key concepts such as interpersonal awareness and conscious choice are explained, and ground rules for respectful communication are established. Ice-breaking activities are used to create group cohesion, and the idea of marriage as a dynamic, evolving relationship is emphasized.

Session 2: Understanding Self and Partner

This session focuses on self-awareness and partner-awareness as foundations of marital stability. Participants explore their personal values, emotional needs, and personality traits using structured self-reflection tasks and pair exercises. They are also guided in recognizing and appreciating differences in their partner's perspectives. Emphasis is placed on reducing idealized assumptions and increasing realistic understanding of one another.

Session 3: Family of Origin and Relationship Patterns

In this session, participants examine how their family background, parental relationships, and early attachment experiences shape their expectations and behaviors in romantic relationships. Through discussion and journaling, they identify unconscious patterns and consider how to consciously choose healthier interactions. Participants share key lessons learned from their families and explore how to replicate or revise these patterns in their own marriage.

Session 4: Communication Skills and Emotional Expression

Participants are introduced to effective communication techniques, including active listening, non-defensive expression, and assertiveness. The role of emotional expressiveness in strengthening marital bonds is discussed,

and exercises help participants identify their typical styles of expressing or suppressing emotions. Practice dialogues are facilitated to improve emotional openness and validate each other's feelings.

Session 5: Conflict Resolution and Problem-Solving

This session teaches constructive strategies for resolving disagreements and navigating conflict. Couples learn to distinguish between destructive and productive conflict, identify common triggers, and engage in structured problem-solving. Role-playing scenarios are used to practice de-escalation techniques and compromise, emphasizing mutual respect and shared responsibility in resolving issues.

Session 6: Love, Intimacy, and Affection

Participants explore the emotional and physical dimensions of intimacy, including the expression of love, affection, and care in daily life. The importance of maintaining emotional closeness and balancing autonomy and togetherness is discussed. Participants engage in activities that foster emotional bonding, such as shared storytelling or affectionate rituals.

Session 7: Shared Goals and Decision-Making

This session focuses on identifying and aligning life goals, values, and future plans. Participants reflect on their expectations regarding roles, career plans, children, and lifestyle choices. Guided discussions encourage clarity and compromise in decision-making. Exercises also emphasize the importance of shared meaning and teamwork in long-term relationships.

Session 8: Managing Stress and Life Transitions

Couples are introduced to stress management techniques and how to support each other during life's challenges and transitions. The role of resilience, adaptability, and mutual coping is emphasized. Participants learn how to recognize signs of stress in themselves and their partner, and how to communicate needs effectively under pressure.

Session 9: Commitment and Responsibility

This session explores the meaning of marital commitment and personal responsibility in maintaining a stable and fulfilling marriage. Participants reflect on their willingness

to invest effort and remain loyal during difficulties. Group discussions highlight how commitment is enacted in everyday actions and decisions, beyond romantic feelings.

Session 10: Integration and Closure

In the final session, participants review key learnings from the entire program and reflect on their growth. Couples are encouraged to create a shared vision statement or relationship agreement based on insights gained throughout the sessions. Feedback is collected, and the session ends with a closing ritual to celebrate their readiness for marriage with increased awareness and intentionality.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine within-subject and between-group changes across the three time points. In cases of significant interactions or main effects, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were used to determine the specific location of differences. Prior to conducting inferential analyses, all necessary statistical assumptions—including normality, homogeneity of variances, and sphericity—were tested and confirmed.

3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 30 participants, including 18 females (60.7%) and 12 males (39.3%). The mean age of participants was 27.4 years ($SD = 3.6$), with ages ranging from 21 to 34 years. Regarding education, 11 participants (36.6%) held a bachelor's degree, 13 participants (43.3%) held a master's degree, and 6 participants (20%) had completed a diploma or associate degree. Most participants (73.3%) reported being in a relationship for less than two years, while 26.7% had been engaged for more than two years. Additionally, 53.3% of participants were first-born children, and 46.7% were either middle or youngest children in their families.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Marital Stability and Emotional Expressiveness by Group and Time

| Variable | Group | Pretest ($M \pm SD$) | Posttest ($M \pm SD$) | Follow-up ($M \pm SD$) |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Marital Stability | Experimental | 36.47 \pm 4.23 | 30.13 \pm 3.88 | 31.60 \pm 4.05 |
| | Control | 36.20 \pm 4.10 | 35.47 \pm 4.25 | 35.07 \pm 4.32 |
| Emotional Expressiveness | Experimental | 52.87 \pm 5.06 | 60.20 \pm 5.44 | 59.53 \pm 5.36 |
| | Control | 53.13 \pm 4.98 | 53.87 \pm 5.10 | 53.33 \pm 5.01 |

The results in Table 1 show that the experimental group experienced a substantial decrease in marital instability scores from pretest ($M = 36.47$, $SD = 4.23$) to posttest ($M = 30.13$, $SD = 3.88$), with slight increase at follow-up ($M = 31.60$, $SD = 4.05$), indicating a durable improvement. Conversely, the control group showed minimal change over time. For emotional expressiveness, the experimental group's scores increased from a pretest mean of 52.87 ($SD = 5.06$) to 60.20 ($SD = 5.44$) at posttest and remained high at follow-up ($M = 59.53$, $SD = 5.36$). The control group showed negligible change across all three phases.

Prior to conducting the repeated measures ANOVA, the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and

sphericity were examined. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test confirmed the normal distribution of data for marital stability ($p = 0.123$) and emotional expressiveness ($p = 0.085$) at baseline. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of equality of variances between the experimental and control groups was met for both dependent variables at all three measurement points (p -values ranged from 0.174 to 0.361). Mauchly's test of sphericity was also non-significant for both outcome variables (marital stability: $\chi^2(2) = 2.14$, $p = 0.343$; emotional expressiveness: $\chi^2(2) = 1.78$, $p = 0.412$), confirming that the assumption of sphericity was satisfied. Therefore, the data met all required assumptions for valid application of repeated measures ANOVA.

Table 2

Repeated Measures ANOVA for Marital Stability and Emotional Expressiveness

| Variable | Source | SS | df | MS | F | p | η^2 |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------|----|--------|-------|-------|----------|
| Marital Stability | Time | 488.21 | 2 | 244.11 | 14.72 | <.001 | .34 |
| | Group | 612.89 | 1 | 612.89 | 22.55 | <.001 | .45 |
| | Time \times Group | 521.33 | 2 | 260.67 | 15.68 | <.001 | .36 |
| | Error (within) | 928.40 | 56 | 16.58 | | | |
| Emotional Expressiveness | Time | 732.57 | 2 | 366.29 | 17.59 | <.001 | .38 |
| | Group | 587.04 | 1 | 587.04 | 21.12 | <.001 | .43 |
| | Time \times Group | 698.61 | 2 | 349.30 | 16.73 | <.001 | .37 |
| | Error (within) | 1166.47 | 56 | 20.82 | | | |

As shown in Table 2, the repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant main effects of time and group, as well as significant interaction effects (time \times group) for both variables. For marital stability, the interaction effect was statistically significant ($F(2, 56) = 15.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .36$),

indicating that changes over time differed between the groups. Emotional expressiveness also showed a significant time \times group interaction effect ($F(2, 56) = 16.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .37$), confirming the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing emotional expression.

Table 3

Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test Results for Marital Stability and Emotional Expressiveness

| Variable | Comparison | Mean Difference | SE | p |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------|-------|
| Marital Stability | Pretest – Posttest | 6.33 | 1.01 | <.001 |
| | Pretest – Follow-up | 4.87 | 1.12 | <.001 |
| | Posttest – Follow-up | -1.47 | 0.94 | .289 |
| Emotional Expressiveness | Pretest – Posttest | -7.33 | 1.08 | <.001 |
| | Pretest – Follow-up | -6.67 | 1.14 | <.001 |
| | Posttest – Follow-up | 0.67 | 0.89 | .457 |

Table 3 presents the Bonferroni post-hoc test comparisons for the experimental group. For marital stability, there were significant differences between pretest and posttest ($p < .001$) and between pretest and follow-up ($p < .001$), but no significant difference between posttest and follow-up ($p = .289$), indicating that the effect was maintained over time. For emotional expressiveness, there were also significant increases from pretest to posttest ($p <$

$.001$) and pretest to follow-up ($p < .001$), with no significant decline from posttest to follow-up ($p = .457$), confirming the durability of the intervention's impact.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the effectiveness of premarital education using the Interpersonal Awareness and

Choice Method on two critical dimensions of marital functioning: marital stability and emotional expressiveness. The findings from repeated measures ANOVA demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in both variables for the experimental group compared to the control group across three time points—pretest, posttest, and five-month follow-up. Participants who completed the ten-session intervention showed greater reductions in marital instability scores and notable increases in emotional expressiveness, and these effects were maintained over time, indicating sustained benefits of the training.

The improvement in marital stability observed in the experimental group aligns with prior research emphasizing the value of structured premarital education in reducing unrealistic expectations and enhancing relational resilience. The results support the findings of Rajabi et al., who demonstrated that the Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge Program significantly reduced idealistic beliefs about marriage and contributed to more realistic and stable partner expectations (Rajabi et al., 2017). This consistency indicates that the Interpersonal Awareness and Choice Method, which emphasizes informed decision-making and mutual understanding, equips couples with cognitive tools that promote marital longevity. The intervention's emphasis on examining family of origin, communication habits, conflict resolution, and shared values may contribute to a clearer understanding of each partner's needs and the nature of commitment, thereby decreasing the likelihood of relational instability.

The results also affirm Hashemi et al.'s comparative study, which concluded that the PICK (Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge) model significantly impacted young women's attitudes toward marriage by fostering awareness and self-reflection (Hashemi et al., 2023). In our study, the same core mechanisms—awareness, reflection, and interpersonal dialogue—appear to have contributed meaningfully to the increase in marital stability. As couples moved through the program, they likely re-evaluated expectations and improved their capacity for navigating disagreement, reducing the cognitive distortions that often predict marital dissatisfaction. These cognitive shifts may explain the sustained improvement at the five-month follow-up, which indicates not just temporary learning, but deeper attitudinal change.

Equally significant is the finding that participants in the experimental group showed substantial growth in emotional expressiveness over time, a change that is consistent with the theoretical premise that emotional literacy can be taught and

internalized through experiential learning. Emotional expressiveness is a key predictor of marital satisfaction and conflict resolution, as it allows partners to communicate vulnerabilities, needs, and affection in authentic ways. The increase in this variable supports the argument made by Lee et al., who found that emotional expressiveness mediates the relationship between attachment and marital stability, suggesting it plays a foundational role in marital dynamics (Lee et al., 2023).

Further support for the emotional development observed in this study can be found in the literature on emotional intelligence and education. The work of Ghaffar et al. and Zaheer et al. highlights that emotional intelligence, including self-awareness and expressiveness, can be cultivated through structured interventions and is associated with improved interpersonal outcomes in both clinical and educational settings (Ghaffar et al., 2024; Zaheer et al., 2024). Ghaffar et al. emphasized that high emotional insight enables individuals to regulate affect and avoid maladaptive responses like aggression, which in a marital context would manifest as more regulated and constructive communication. Similarly, Zaheer et al. demonstrated that even undergraduate students could enhance emotional insight through targeted training, implying that adults preparing for marriage can benefit from similar developmental strategies.

The results of this study are also in agreement with Araya et al.'s scoping review, which concluded that emotional education programs, particularly those grounded in structured curricula, improve emotional competence among youth and young adults (Araya et al., 2024). The practical activities embedded in the ten-session program—such as emotional dialogues, expressive storytelling, and validation exercises—reflect best practices from emotional learning pedagogy, supporting Araya's conclusions. Furthermore, studies by Hadijah and Diamare also suggest that emotional literacy is not only a psychological skill but a form of experiential learning, often cultivated through artistic or reflective methods (Diamare et al., 2025; Hadijah, 2024). Although our intervention was not art-based, it incorporated similar reflective practices through structured dialogue and guided self-exploration.

The positive trajectory in emotional expressiveness can also be understood in the context of social-emotional learning (SEL), as emphasized by Herasymenko and Indelicato. SEL programs, especially those used in higher education and adult training, have been shown to increase empathy, improve emotional regulation, and enhance relational communication (Herasymenko & Muravska,

2024; Indelicato, 2024). Our study offers further evidence that SEL principles, when translated into a premarital education context, can positively influence relational capacity. The intervention's design, which emphasized both intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal connection, mirrors the dual-focus recommended by SEL experts. This integrated focus likely contributed to the sustainable behavioral changes observed.

The results also resonate with Udechukwu et al.'s work on enhancing emotional intelligence through religious and social training programs, which revealed that women in structured communities could increase their emotional awareness and communication abilities through organized group engagement (Udechukwu et al., 2024). In our study, the group setting appeared to serve not only as a learning environment but also as a relational microcosm in which participants practiced new skills and received feedback. Similarly, the work of Adesola et al. shows how emotionally informed decision-making processes are central to navigating serious relational decisions, even in the face of challenges like illness or social pressure (Adesola et al., 2025). The outcomes of this study support the notion that emotional competencies are vital not only in sustaining romantic partnerships but also in making healthy, conscious choices before marriage.

The maintenance of results at the five-month follow-up is particularly noteworthy. This finding suggests that the intervention did not merely provide temporary insights but fostered internalized changes in emotional behavior and relational attitudes. Such sustainability is rarely observed without reinforcement, indicating that the program's experiential and dialogical nature may have facilitated deeper learning. According to Niu, expressive modalities—when designed with long-term emotional integration in mind—can have enduring psychotherapeutic effects, even without ongoing intervention (Niu, 2025).

Our findings also align with Singh's observations on the interplay between emotional and cognitive competencies, where students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrated superior decision-making and relational engagement (Singh, 2022). In this study, the educational format of the sessions—which blended emotional expression with decision-making frameworks—may have provided a similar synergy between cognitive and affective skills, empowering participants to express themselves while maintaining strategic awareness of their relationship goals.

Lastly, the emotional dimensions of marriage cannot be viewed in isolation from broader sociocultural norms. The

study by Acquah on cohabitation in Ghana illustrates how cultural beliefs shape relational expectations and emotional expression (Acquah, 2023). Likewise, our participants from Tehran—an urban environment marked by both modern and traditional values—likely entered the intervention with complex, sometimes conflicting beliefs about emotional openness in romantic relationships. The program's structured yet flexible format may have helped reconcile these internal tensions, leading to more confident and expressive communication styles. Moreover, Mousavi et al. highlighted how chronic illness impacts the sexual and emotional satisfaction of couples in Iran, reinforcing the importance of emotional preparedness in the face of future challenges (Mousavi et al., 2023).

5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite the promising findings, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small, with only 30 participants divided equally into experimental and control groups. Although the study used randomized allocation and maintained rigorous data collection procedures, the generalizability of results to broader populations remains limited. Second, the participants were all drawn from premarital counseling centers in Tehran, which may limit the diversity of cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds represented in the study. Additionally, self-report questionnaires were used to measure both dependent variables, which may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly in a cultural context where emotional expression may be viewed with ambivalence.

Future research should aim to replicate this study with a larger and more diverse sample to enhance external validity. Including participants from rural areas or other provinces in Iran could help identify regional variations in emotional readiness and relational expectations. Longitudinal studies following couples into their married life could offer valuable insights into the long-term impact of premarital education on marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, and intimacy maintenance. Furthermore, mixed-method designs incorporating qualitative interviews would add depth to the findings by capturing participants' lived experiences and nuanced changes in emotional and relational behavior.

Professionals offering premarital counseling should consider incorporating structured programs that emphasize both emotional expressiveness and interpersonal awareness. Group-based interventions, in particular, may offer added

value by facilitating peer learning and social support. Marriage educators should use practical exercises, role-playing, and guided reflection to help couples internalize emotional skills. Given the enduring effects observed, such interventions could be implemented in community centers, religious organizations, and university counseling services to prepare couples for long-term relational success.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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