The Effect of Mate Selection Skills Training (MSST) on the Male Students' Interest in Marriage

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Abstract

Youth’s high interest in marriage is one of the factors that decrease the marriage age. This study aimed to increase the students' interest in marriage based on an intervention program of mate selection skills training. It was a quasi-experimental study with pre-test and post-test design and control group. The statistical population consisted of all male students residing at University of Isfahan dormitory, of whom, 30 students were selected and included in two control and experimental groups. After pre-test, experimental group received mate selection skills training for 8 sessions for 2 months (16 hours). The control group received no training. Students’ Interest in Marriage Questionnaire (Heidari et al, 2004) was used to measure the interest in marriage. Data were analyzed using SPSS-18. The results showed that interest in marriage is affected by mate selection skills training and total score of interest in marriage significantly increased in experimental group but this difference was significant in subscales of attitude towards marriage consequences, preparation for marriage and practical willingness to marriage in terms of interest in marriage. There was no significant difference in terms of subscales between marriage feedback and marriage obstacles. Results also showed that mate selection skills training affect the students’ interest in marriage. Thus, holding the training courses are recommended for youth on the verge of marriage.

Keywords: Mate Selection Skills Training, Interest in Marriage, Preparation for Marriage.
Introduction

Marriage and family experts, including Olson et al (1999) emphasize on preparation before marriage. They believe that having logical expectations in mutual life is mainly emphasized in preparation for getting married and its enrichment program. Olson et al. believe that because individuals’ relationships tend to emotional than logical before marriage, this affects their choice; so individual and group training and consultation for couples giving them the opportunity to clarify their unrealistic expectations and vague thoughts unlike romantic atmosphere between them.

Blood (1976) considers preparation for marriage as one of the important research areas in family that has been neglected. He asks experts to study in this field. However, little research has been done on this issue and there are few studies on the factors influencing the individual’s perception of preparation for marriage (Badgar, 2005). The preparation is a tendency, being ready, that is beyond the action and control or modifies the behavior (Blumer, 2005). Preparation can be used to explain and measure the certain type of behavior. Awareness of preparation provides the predictability of behavior that can occur in the case of activated readiness. Therefore, preparation for marriage is an important indicator to get married and is the time for taking action towards formal marriage. Mate selection including the preparation to marriage is not determined by one factor but multiple factors play a role in preparation for marriage and they occur in several levels including individual, family, and socio-demographic levels (Holman and Li., 1997). Individual preparation for marriage implicitly includes competence and skills necessary to accept the marriage challenges. Underlying readiness includes familial and social preparation and demographic characteristics (age, education, and occupation). Investigating the necessary competences for marriage has a long history in family research. Many previous studies on family have been focused on determining the documents, properties, and experiences, which are related to the person’s ability to maintain a successful marital life (Carroll et al., 2006).

One of the important findings shows that the quality of premarital skills training is an important indicator to predict a successful marriage. One of the skills that are taught before getting married in premarital programs for creating a healthy familial structure is attitude towards mate selection before marriage. Healthy families can be formed by modifying negative attitudes and training them (Brunstein, et al., 1996). In fact, mate selection is affected by people’s attitudes towards the characteristics of a certain person, marriage, its special ceremony, and consequences (Melton & Thomas, 1976). Individual’s attitudes towards marriage can be positive or negative. These attitudes reflect what the people say, hear, and they affect the individual perceptions on the surrounding world. Attitudes consist of major components regarding marriage, control the marital problems, and affect the possibility of marriage and determination of marriage time (Bowench, 2012).

Willingness and interest in opposite sex, which is the basis of marriage, is subject to the biological conditions of development. The time of this willingness is called as puberty, but not all people get married during the pubertal period, since the marital relationship is subject to the
collective agreements. Social rules governing marriage mainly determine the marriage time. Distance between marriage and puberty take different forms in different periods and is affected by various factors (Mahmoodiyan, 2004) including People’s interest in marriage (Demir, 2013). Interest in marriage represents a person’s willingness to marriage and is an important indicator for marriage (Heydari, et al., 2004). Interest in marriage is a positive or negative response that a person shows towards marriage and its consequences. In recent literature, this issue that interest in marriage causes a good sense to create a friendly relationship and strengthen the fundamental values and beliefs among couples to live together has been considerably taken into consideration (Stutzer & Frey, 2004).

Interest in marriage is consistent with preparation for marriage (Blood, 1976). Interest in marriage consists of four dimensions including marriage expectation, preparation for marriage, attitude towards the marriage consequences and marriage obstacles (Heydari, et al., 2004). Borowski and Tambling (2015) examined the beliefs and expectations of couples after participating in the training course of premarital beliefs and unreasonable expectations of couples.

Jeyson (2006) concluded that couples who received premarital training have 31% less chance for the divorce. Experts suggest that it is better for couples to begin such programs six month to one year before marriage. Stanley et al (2006), in a study entitled “premarital training, marital quality, and stability” randomly selected a large sample from four US states that have moderate socioeconomic status. The results showed that participants in premarital training significantly indicate the higher levels of satisfaction and commitment in marriage and lower levels of conflict and reduced divorce rate than control group.

Different social, cultural, and psychological factors affect people's attitudes towards marriage and mate selection. This study purely focused on the personal-psychological factors. Personal-psychological issues are a series of personality traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations of an individual that affects his/her decisions during life. One of the most important of them is mate selection skills training. Mate selection skills are a series of skills, which are used in the process of marriage and mate selection. In order to define the mate selection skills, first, the selection skills are defined, and then mate selection skills are developed. The order of selection skills is a set of skills that empower the individual to understand the matter, analyze the situation, and find a way to reach his or her goal(s) (Jones, 2006). According to this definition, mate selection skills help people to recognize the importance of mate selection and analysis based on identifying individual characteristics (personality, interest, values, emotional intelligence, attachment, differentiation, schemas, and intimacy) and make an appropriate choice.

Appropriate mate selection plays a major role in a successful marriage and family happiness. Family experts believe that many family problems arise from lack of notification channels, precipitancy, and lack of detailed studies in the selection stage, undue reliance on intermediaries’ statements, ignoring some of the weaknesses or justifying them, magnification of unimportant characteristics, carelessness to necessary qualities and in some cases deliberate deception.
(Bostan, 2004). Not ready to marry leads to frustration and failure. Marriage is a risky action and one of the most important life decisions, which affects people's future life and can be the most satisfying or disappointing life experience. Preparation for marriage, right and wrong reasons for marriage, recognizing the appropriate partner, the warning signs in marriage, paying attention to original family health and etc. (Sadeghi, 2003) are among cases that are considered in the process of mate selection.

Accordingly, it seems that mate selection skills training can help students towards a better choice. As a result, this study examines that if mate selection trainings affect the students’ interest in marriage. Given that men usually select their partners rather than being selected by their partners, training of these skills in male group can have broader effects. Therefore, the research hypotheses are as follows:
1. Mate selection training affects the male students’ interest in marriage.
2. Mate selection training affects the male students' marriage feedback.
3. Mate selection training affects the attitude towards the male students' marriage consequences.
4. Mate selection training affects male students' preparation and practical willingness to marriage.
5. Mate selection training affects the male students' marriage obstacles.

Method
Statistical population and Sampling

This is a quasi-experimental design with pre-test, post-test, and control group study. The statistical population includes all of the male students residing at Isfahan University dormitories. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of training on the interest and attitude towards marriage, the convenience sampling method was used for male students residing at University of Isfahan dormitories in 2015-16. Inclusion criterions include being at least 18 years old, residing at Isfahan University dormitories, obtaining the informed consent to participate in the training course, cooperation, and participation up to the end of training course, and having no history of previous marriage. Training courses were initially held in the dormitory. Then, 30 eligible volunteers were randomly included in two control and experimental groups of 15 persons and pretest was taken from two groups on equal conditions. After pretest, the experimental group was trained under mate selection skills for 8 sessions during 2 months (16 hours) and control group received no training. At the end of the course, post-test was conducted for two groups.

Research Instrument
Students’ Interest in Marriage Questionnaire (SIMQ): Heydari et al (2004) developed this questionnaire for evaluating the students’ interest in marriage. This questionnaire includes 24 questions in which 23 items are scored based on Likert scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) and one additional question is for golden age of marriage and asks what is the best age for marriage according to the students. The high score in this test shows high interest in marriage. This questionnaire was conducted on 779 students of Shahid Beheshti University and four factors were identified for it using exploratory factor analysis. These four factors include: 1.
Marriage feedback, 2. Preparation and willingness to marriage, 3. Attitudes towards the marriage consequences, 4. Marriage obstacles. Content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by five professors of psychology at Shahid Beheshti University, and validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by factor analysis. Reliability of this questionnaire was calculated as 0.77 using retest method on the students of Shahid Beheshti University.

**Course content of mate selection skills training**
The research literature related to mate selection skills in books, journals, theses, and scientific databases were used to develop the mate selection skills. Then, these skills were classified using the content analysis method and finally, a series of mate selection skills was developed. In preparation of training course content, all of the national and international documents regarding mate selection and marriage such as books, journals, theses and scientific databases published from 2005 to 2015, as well as books, journals, thesis and scientific databases of 1990 - 2015 were selected as statistical population. Sampling and analysis of contexts continued until saturation of content. Finally, training course content was prepared from analysis of 48 national and international scientific resources. Course content of mate selection skills training is as follows:

**Table 1: Course content of mate selection skills training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Objectives and content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First session</td>
<td>Introducing, expressing the rationale for</td>
<td>In this session, while introducing members of the group and consultant, the pretest questionnaires were initially completed by members. A thorough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>treatment, familiarity with the concept of</td>
<td>explanation of meetings, topics, and trends was presented. Members are justified about group rules and obligations. Mate selection skills were presented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mate selection skills and initial assessments</td>
<td>Attitude and interest in marriage and mate selection efficacy questionnaires were distributed to complete for members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second session</td>
<td>The need for timely marriage</td>
<td>The importance of marriage, reasons, right and wrong motives for marriage, the benefits of marriage, the appropriate age for marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third session</td>
<td>self-scrutiny in marriage</td>
<td>Understanding your beliefs and attitudes, understanding your expectations from marriage, assessing preparedness for marriage and recognizing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personality traits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth session</td>
<td>Understanding individual criteria in mate</td>
<td>Recognizing mate selection criteria, identifying appropriate and inappropriate criteria in mate selection, role of personality traits in mate selection,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>selection</td>
<td>assessing and equally importance of partnership in different cultural, economic, educational, religious dimensions and so on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fifth session  Mate selection methods  Traditional mate selection, the advantages and disadvantages of this method, modern mate selection, assessing the advantages and disadvantages of this method, introducing a suitable method and a combination of traditional and modern methods in mate selection, identifying limiting beliefs in mate selection, inappropriate practices of marriage.

Sixth session  Proposing to somebody  The importance of proposing in creating a basic understanding, appropriate procedures for matchmaking, inappropriate procedures for matchmaking, research on marriage.

Seventh session  Recognizing the partner and his/her family  Recognizing the essential features in mate selection, recognizing the negative and dangerous warning signs in mate selection, paying attention to injuries of mate selection process, recognizing of spouse’s family.

Eighth session  Summary and final assessment  Summary of previous sessions, conducting post-test in the experimental group and distributing the questionnaires among the control group, appreciating the subjects for cooperation.

Data analysis
In this study, data were analyzed using SPSS-18 and descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (univariate and multivariate analysis of covariance) were used to test the hypotheses.

Results
There were 40% of students with the bachelor’s degree and 60% with the master’s degree in the control and experimental groups. In experimental group, 20% were employed and 80% were unemployed. In the control group, 26.66% were employed and 73.33% were unemployed. The average age of students in experimental group was $22.66 \pm 2.84$ and in control group was $22.66 \pm 2.41$. In table 2, the mean and standard deviations of variables have been reported in terms of two experimental and control groups in pre-test and post-test stages.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviations of variables in experimental and control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Test phase</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total score of interest in marriage</td>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>81.80</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>82.93</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>83.46</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage feedback</td>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>27.33</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>28.80</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Normality or non-normality of the data should be considered in data analysis and statistical tests. Given that, parametric tests are inferentially higher than the nonparametric tests, so implementation of parametric tests is preferable before confirming the pre-assumptions. Assessing the normality of data and comparability of the control and experimental groups in pretest and posttest are necessary pre-assumptions of variance and covariance analysis. To verify the normality of data, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used. The results showed that research variables are not significant at $P \leq 0.05$. Therefore, the distribution of scores error of variables is normal and parametric tests can be implemented. The results of Shapiro-Wilk tests were calculated for interest in marriage variable in pretest stage ($P = 0.140, 0.947$) and posttest ($P = 0.123, 0.945$).

Levin test was used in order to verify if pretest and posttest scores of control group are comparable. The Levin test results also showed that the interest in marriage ($F=0.631, P=0.434$) is not significant at confidence level of 95%. Therefore, research groups are comparable with each other.

Given the confirmation of assumptions, univariate covariance analysis can be used to compare two groups in the interest in marriage. In table 3, the results of covariance analysis test are reported for first hypothesis.

First hypothesis: Mate selection skills training affect the students’ interest in marriage.

<p>| Table 3: Summary of covariance analysis results of comparison the interest in marriage |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change resource</th>
<th>S.S</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>M.S</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modified model</td>
<td>175.103</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>87.552</td>
<td>10.266</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>138.803</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>138.803</td>
<td>16.276</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>60.567</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60.567</td>
<td>7.102</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen in Table 3, there is a significant difference between groups in interest in marriage (sig=0.013) and it was observed that 20.8% of pretest and posttest mean differences of interest in marriage in experimental group (increased mean, according to the results of table 2) relates to the mate selection skills training. Accordingly, it can be said that mate selection skills training significantly affects the students’ interest in marriage in experimental group than control group.

The second hypothesis: Mate selection training affects the male students' marriage feedback.

The third hypothesis: Mate selection training affects the attitude towards the male students' marriage consequences.

The fourth hypothesis: Mate selection training affects male students' preparation and practical willingness to marriage.

Fifth hypothesis Mate selection training affects the male students' marriage obstacles.

Given that, the multivariate covariance analysis is the most appropriate test for assessing the multivariate intervention hypotheses in a single instrument, this method has been used to investigate the mate selection skills effectiveness on interest in marriage aspect.

Table 4: The results of multivariate covariance analysis for assessing the significance of mate selection skills training on the interest in marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pillai’s trace Test</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df₁</th>
<th>df₂</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>Eta square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interest in marriage dimensions</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>2.017</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilk’s Lambda Test</td>
<td>0.722</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawley-Hotelling test</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy’s Largest Root Test</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significant levels of all components show that there is no significant difference at least in one of the control and experimental group tests. To find out the accurate results for any of subscales, the resulting covariance analysis has been presented in table 4. Covariance analysis shows that if this non-difference relates to all of the subscales or shows that which level has or has no significant difference.

Table 5: Results of multivariate covariance analysis for assessing the effectiveness of mate selection skills training on the interest in marriage dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsidiary questions</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Total square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>Eta square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1</td>
<td>Marriage feedback</td>
<td>5.116</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.116</td>
<td>2.151</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Attitude towards the marriage consequences</td>
<td>5.224</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.224</td>
<td>5.430</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>Preparation and practical willingness</td>
<td>5.641</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.641</td>
<td>4.443</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of multivariate covariance analysis in table 5 show that there is significant difference between attitudes towards the marriage consequences (third hypothesis) \((\text{sig} = 0.029)\) and preparation and interest in marriage (forth hypothesis) \((\text{sig} = 0.046)\) in pretest and posttest of experimental group than control group and it is the result of the intervention of mate selection skills training. There is no significant differences between subscales of marriage feedback (second hypothesis) \((\text{sig} = 0.155)\) and marriage obstacles (fifth obstacles) \((\text{sig} = 0.166)\).

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate effectiveness of mate selection skills training on the interest in marriage in a sample of male students at University of Isfahan. In this section, research hypotheses are assessed. The results of first hypothesis show that there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest of the control and experimental group in the interest in marriage. The results also showed that 20.8\% of mean difference of the interest in marriage pretest and posttest in the experimental group relates to the mate selection skills training. As shown in the table 2, the mean variable of interest in marriage in the experimental group increased from 81.80 in pretest to 85.66 in posttest but in the control group, the pretest and posttest of the interest in marriage variable were 82.93 and 83.46 respectively and there was no significant difference. Accordingly, it can be concluded that mate selection skills training increases the male students’ interest in marriage. In the literature review, there was no study on the effectiveness of mate selection skills training on the interest in marriage. However, the results of the similar studies are consistent with those of this study; for example, previous studies showed that pre-marital training influences on the marital satisfaction after marriage (Mansourniya et al., 2011) and recognition of the realistic expectations from the marriage (Yazdan Panah Ahmad Abadi, 2012; Fatehizade & Ahmadi, 2009).

In explaining the results, it can be said that mate selection skills training affects the male students' increased interest in marriage and this is due to the content of the training period. Emphasizing the necessity and importance of marriage, emphasizing the marriage at an appropriate time, getting to know the mate selection methods, self-scrutiny, and familiarity with the individual criteria in mate selection are among the issues of the mate selection skills training courses and it may increase the interest in marriage in experimental group. The second hypothesis (the mate selection skills training affects the male students’ marriage feedback) showed that the mate selection skills training has no effect on the male students’ marriage feedback. In fact, the second hypothesis is rejected. No study mainly focused on this issue in literature. It can be said in explaining the rejection of the hypothesis that the marriage feedback can be influenced by different factors rather than mate selection skills training. Social factors such as social attitudes towards marriage, values, and sanctity of marriage in society and family traditions are among issues that affect the marriage feedback that have not been addressed in the mate selection skills training content of the study.
The results of the third hypothesis (mate selection skills training affects the male students’ attitude towards the marriage consequences) showed that mate selection skills training affects the male students’ attitude towards the marriage consequences. In fact, the third hypothesis was confirmed. The results of the study are consistent with those of Rafiei et al (2005) and Karami et al (2004) studies. Karami et al (2004) assessed the effectiveness of group counseling based on rational, emotional, and behavioral approach on the dysfunctional attitudes towards the mate selection of boys and girls. The results showed that mean scores of the dysfunctional attitudes towards the mate selection has significantly decreased in the experimental group. In addition, the results of the covariance analysis revealed that the mean scores of the irrational beliefs subscales in the attitudes towards mate selection (faith in love, experience-orientation, idealism, opposite seeking, simplistic viewpoint, optimistic belief) has significantly decreased.

The existence of contents such as recognition of attitudes, expectations, and realistic beliefs in mate selection and recognizing the dysfunctional beliefs in the mate selection skills training course are among the issues that are directly related to the individual’s attitude in the mate selection. It is expected that the training courses have positive effects on the realistic attitude of the people towards the mate selection field.

The result of the forth hypothesis showed that mate selection skills training influences male students’ preparation and interest in marriage. In fact, the fourth hypothesis is confirmed. No study mainly focused on this issue in literature. In explaining the confirmation of hypothesis, it can be emphasized on the cases included in the mate selection skills training course. The skills training of self-scrutiny, familiarity with interest in marriage and emphasis on the importance and necessity of marriage are among issues that are directly related to the students’ practical interest in marriage and they increase their practical interest in marriage.

The result of the fifth hypothesis showed that mate selection skills training have no effect on the male students’ marriage obstacles. In fact, the fifth hypothesis is rejected. There is no study in relation to the mate selection skills training on the decreased marriage obstacles and most studies have focused on identifying marriage obstacles. For example, the lack of having a permanent job and job security (Rashvand, 2004), unemployment, economic development, willingness to education at high levels, changing the extended family to the core family to the extended family (Shahabi, 1994), are some of the obstacles to marriage. Another study showed that individual obstacles are considered as the most important marriage obstacles of students. Among individual obstacles, physical or mental illness and lack of interest in the opposite party are considered the marriage obstacles. Among the religious and cultural barriers, parties’ religious differences, among social barriers, drug addiction and among economic barriers, the income of spouse and formal marriage expenses and celebration of marriage are considered as the most important marriage obstacles (Atashzadeh, 1997).

In explaining the rejection of the hypothesis, it can be said that lack of job and income, lack of welfare in social level and economic problems in society are among marriage obstacles for young people and there is no measure to deal with these problems in the mate selection skills.
training course. It seems that mate selection and marriage is not only a personal discussion that can encourage young individuals to get married by a series of trainings but also it is a social, cultural, and religious discussion that should be considered from all aspects. Training courses for the boys, lack of research on the mate selection skills training, attention to the psychological dimension of mate selection and ignoring the social, cultural and economic variables on mate selection are some of the research limitations of this study so results should be cautiously generalized. It is suggested that in the future studies, limitations of this study are covered. In addition, holding the mate selection skills training courses is recommended to the young individuals on the verge of marriage in order to have an appropriate and informed choice.
References


