

Effectiveness of PREPARE Program with Premarital Couples in Community Settings

Luke Knutson & David H. Olson

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the PREPARE Program (Version 2000) with 134 premarital couples in three groups: the **PREPARE Program group** (59 couples who received an average of four feedback sessions), the **PREPARE No Feedback group** (27 couples who received feedback after the post-test), and the **Control group** (48 couples who received PREPARE and feedback after the post-test).

Professionals who were already trained in the PREPARE program volunteered to participate in the study and they were randomly assigned to offer one of the three groups. They received no special or additional training on the PREPARE Program. They offered the PREPARE Program in their own setting, which was often churches and some counseling centers.

On the *Couple Satisfaction Scale*, both the PREPARE Groups significantly increased their satisfaction, while there was no change in the Control Group. Both PREPARE Groups made improvements in several important relationship skills (communication & conflict resolution) and relationship areas (roles, couple closeness & flexibility).

Significant changes were made in the *couple types* only in the **PREPARE Program group** and *not* the **PREPARE No Feedback group**. In the PREPARE Program group, the number of Vitalized couples (the most satisfied type) increased by 52% from pre to post-test. Over half (55%) of the three other couple types (Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted) increased one or more levels. For the highest risk couples, the Conflicted types, 83% moved to a more positive couple type. This is important since Vitalized couples are usually very happily married and have the lowest divorce rate, while Conflicted couples are very unhappily married and have the highest divorce rate.

Overall, the PREPARE Program had a significant impact on 90% of the couples and only 6 out of 59 (10%) moved to a lower couple type. Therefore, the PREPARE Program is a very useful prevention program for increasing marital satisfaction and reducing divorce.

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Brief Description of PREPARE Program

The *PREPARE Program (Version 2000)* was developed to help counselors and clergy work more effectively with premarital couples. Each couple completed a PREPARE inventory, consisting of 30 background questions and 165 items. Based on their responses, a 15 page Computer Report was created that the counselor uses in the sessions with the couple.

The couples in the PREPARE Program received an average of 4 two hour counseling sessions with a range of 3-6. The feedback sessions integrated the data from the Computer Report and the six couple feedback exercises. The six couple exercises are designed to help the couple:

- Explore their relationship strengths and growth areas
- Strengthen their communication skills
- Resolve conflicts using the Ten Step Model
- Explore their family of origin
- Develop a workable budget and financial plan
- Develop their personal, couple and family goals

Professionals Offering Programs

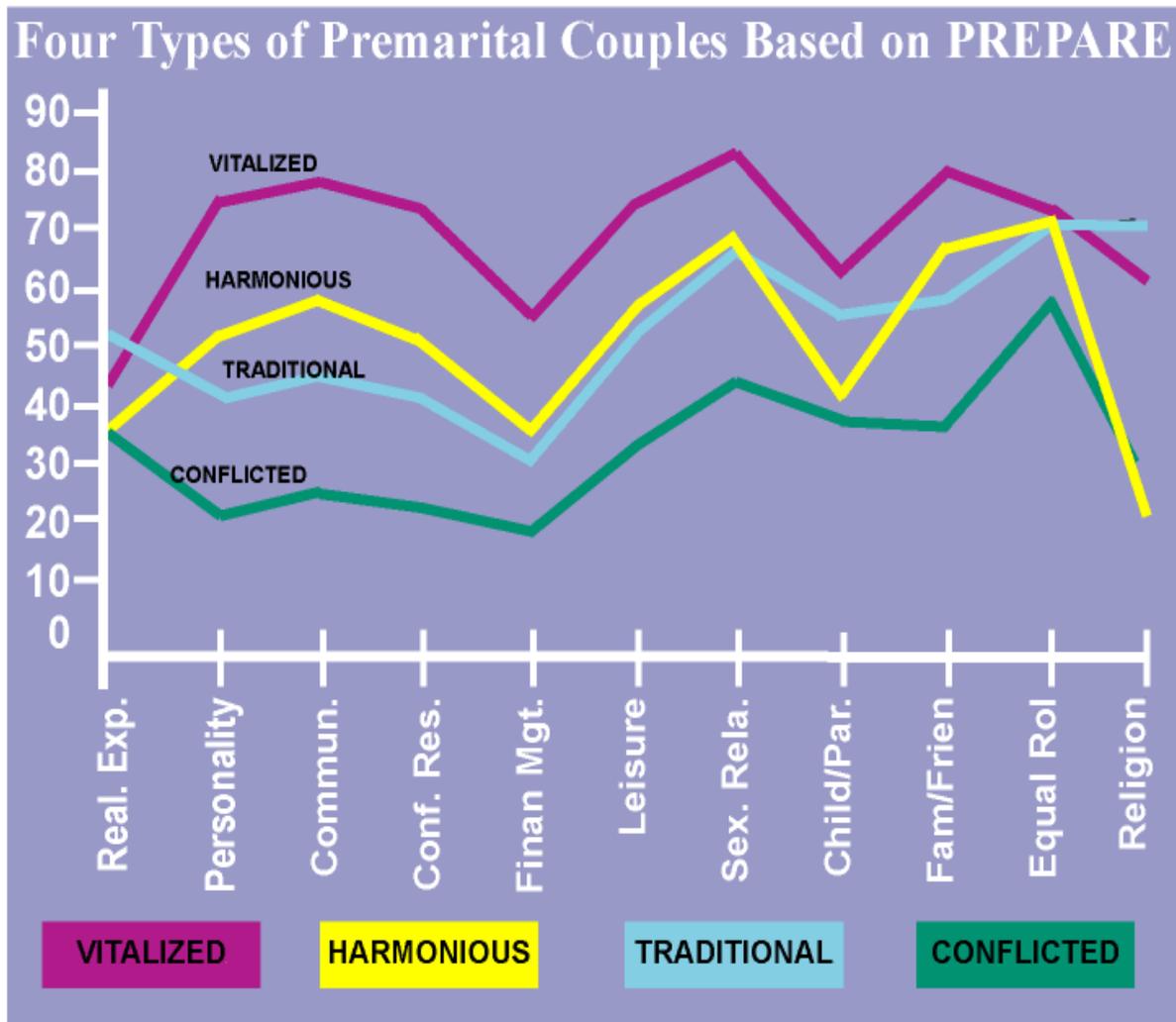
Professionals who were already trained in the PREPARE/ENRICH program, volunteered to participate in the study and were randomly assigned to offer one of the three groups. These professionals (70% clergy, 30% professional counselors) had an average of seven years of experience with the PREPARE Program. They had no special training other than the required one-day workshop that all PREPARE/ENRICH counselors attend.

Four Types of Premarital Couples

Using the PREPARE Couple Inventory, four types of premarital couples have been identified and they are: *Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional and Conflicted*. Studies have shown that the Vitalized are the happiest and have the lowest rate of divorce and the Conflicted are the least satisfied and most often get divorced (Fowers, Montel, and Olson, 1996).

Changes in Couple Types

One of the major advantages of this outcome study is that the pre/post data were analyzed in terms of the couples' typological change rather than traditional single variable analysis (see Figure 1). Significant changes were made in the couple types only in the *PREPARE Program group* and *not* the *PREPARE No Feedback group*.



In the *PREPARE Program group*, the number of Vitalized couples (the most satisfied type) increased by 52% from pre to post-test. Over half (55%) of the three other couple types (Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted) increased one or more levels. Over one quarter (29%) increased two couple type levels (mostly Traditional to Vitalized). For the highest risk couples, the Conflicted types, 83% moved to a more positive couple type.

Changes on PREPARE Scales

The following analysis was done using Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) scores. The PCA score indicates the level of positive agreement partners report in each of the content areas. It is a percentage score based on the number of responses on which partners agree on a positive issue.

The *PREPARE Program* group showed significant change, from pre-test to post-test, in eight of thirteen content categories. Significant changes occurred on *marriage expectations, communication, financial management, children and parenting, family and friends, couple closeness, couple flexibility and spiritual beliefs.*

The *PREPARE No Feedback* group also showed significant change in eight of thirteen categories on many of the same categories as the *PREPARE Program* group. It appears that simply taking a couple inventory stimulates a couple to talk about important aspects of their relationship and even begin resolving some issues. This was stimulated, in part, because they knew they would not get feedback until after the study was completed.

Changes from Professionals' Perspective

The *PREPARE Program* group counselors were asked to evaluate the couples improvement over the course of counseling. On a 5-point Likert scale, the counselors reported that the couples “*Generally Improved*” (4) on their communication, conflict resolution, and their personal couple, and family goals.

Changes from Couples' Perspective

The couples who took the *PREPARE Program* also reported their view of the counseling sessions on a 5-point Likert scale. They reported that all six of the *PREPARE* couple exercises were “*Generally Useful*” (4) to “*Very Useful*” (5). Overall, the counseling sessions were “*Very Useful.*” These couples also had positive things to say about their experience with the *PREPARE Program* including comments such as:

“We were not as ready for marriage as we thought we were. We will have a greater probability of having a successful marriage because of this counseling.”

“We had talked about most things, but this gave us tools to deal with conflicts in the future. It also cleared up some issues we already had & helped us deal with them.”

“Sessions were very useful. Gave a better insight on what the partners expected of each other, what they thought of themselves. Brought up issues that one didn't realize bothered the other as much as it did. Now, we will be able to move on better & help each other achieve goals.”

For more information about the *PREPARE Program* visit Life Innovations website at: <http://www.lifeinnovations.com>

Table 1: Types of Couples in PREPARE Program Group at Pre and Post-Test

		POST-TEST				Total	%
		Vitalized	Harmonious	Traditional	Conflicted		
P R E T E S T	Vitalized	17 (81%)	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	0	21	35.6
	Harmonious	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	0	0	7	11.9
	Traditional	10 (40%)	1 (4%)	12 (48%)	2 (8%)	25	42.4
	Conflicted	0	1 (16.5%)	4 (67%)	1 (16.5%)	6	10.2
Total		32	5	19	3	59	
%		54.2	8.5	32.2	5.1		100

 = Couple increases one couple type or more

 = Couple stays the same at pre and post

 = Couple decreases one couple type or more