

# Life Skills in Marriage: A Sociological Study on Premarital Counselling and Marital Satisfaction

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**Abstract:** In the context of rising divorce rates and increasing marital conflict in Kerala, this study examines the significance of life skills and premarital counselling in fostering healthy marital relationships. The objectives of the study were to assess awareness of life skills among married individuals, analyze the impact of premarital counselling on marital satisfaction, and explore gender-based differences in decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution. A qualitative research design was used, involving in-depth interviews with participants from Malappuram and Kozhikode districts, including both those who had received premarital counselling and those who had not. Findings reveal that most individuals lacked life skills education, and many were unprepared for the emotional, sexual, and social demands of marriage. Those who had received counselling showed higher levels of empathy, better communication, healthier conflict resolution, and greater marital satisfaction. In contrast, those without such preparation experienced misunderstandings, forced sexual encounters, lack of decision-making power, and domestic conflict. The study emphasizes the urgent need for integrating life skills and premarital education into schools and community programs.

**Keywords:** Life Skills, Marriage, Premarital Counselling, Marital Satisfaction, Communication Skill, Gender Role, Decision-Making, Emotional Intelligence, Marital Adjustment, Family and Society.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a universally recognized social institution that serves as the cornerstone of family and societal structure. While traditions, roles, and expectations surrounding marriage vary across cultures, the fundamental objective remains the same: to create a stable and supportive partnership. However, as society modernizes, marriages are increasingly challenged by poor communication, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of mutual understanding.

Life skills help couples identify the underlying reasons for their problems and use more constructive methods for coping with them. In fact, life skills help couples convey their messages more accurately and effectively. The systematic practice of these skills makes individuals incorporate this behaviour into their behaviour repository and use it in conflicting situations (Ali Hosseinkhanzadeh (2012) The Effects of Life Skills Training on Marital Satisfaction).

Life skills emerge as essential tools for navigating marital life effectively. Life skills refer to a broad set of adaptive and positive behaviours including communication, empathy, decision-making, and problem-solving that enable individuals to handle the demands of everyday life. These skills, when applied within a marital relationship, help partners understand one another, resolve conflicts constructively, and maintain emotional intimacy.

Premarital counselling plays a pivotal role in equipping couples with these skills before they enter marriage. By offering guidance on topics such as relationship roles, financial planning, conflict resolution, and emotional expression, counselling helps couples prepare for the realities of married life. Unfortunately, awareness and accessibility of such counselling remain limited in many parts of society.

This article examines the importance of life skills and premarital counselling in shaping successful marital relationships, with a focus on qualitative insights drawn from

the Malabar region of Kerala. It underscores the need for early intervention and education to build resilient, fulfilling partnerships in a rapidly changing world.

#### A. Objectives :

##### ➤ General Objectives:

- To study the importance of life skills in a Marital relationship
- To study the advantages of life skills in premarital counseling

##### ➤ Specific Objectives:

- To understand how couples acquire life skills before marriage and it's need
- To understand the ways of acquiring life skills
- To analyse the lack of life skills and problems in married life

## II. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of life skills and premarital counselling in marital relationships. The research focused on individuals from Malappuram and Kozhikode districts in Kerala, India. A total of 30 married participants were selected using convenience sampling, comprising individuals who had undergone premarital counselling and those who had not.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews focused on participants' awareness of life skills, experiences in marital life, and perceptions of premarital counselling. The conversations were conducted in the participants' native language (Malayalam) and later translated for analysis.

Secondary data sources included existing literature, online resources, and relevant research articles on life skills and marital dynamics.

## III. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This study explored the role of life skills and premarital counselling in shaping marital relationships.

##### ➤ Awareness of Life Skills Prior to Marriage

The findings revealed that awareness of life skills was generally low among participants, especially among those who had not undergone premarital counselling. Several women reported receiving advice from parents focusing on obedience and household responsibilities, rather than training in communication, emotional management, or decision-making.

Interviews with married individuals revealed significant gaps in awareness and acquisition of life skills prior to marriage. A majority of respondents admitted that they had not received formal training or education in life skills either in schools, colleges, or through family guidance. Most participants learned about marital expectations informally through parental advice, which often emphasized obedience to in-laws, maintaining household duties, and deference to the partner's decisions, particularly for women. Decision-making autonomy was notably absent for many, leading to emotional dependence and lack of self-confidence.

Although some participants received basic life skills exposure through college programs like NSS activities, these sessions were often insufficient. Only a few individuals proactively sought knowledge through books, social media, and personal studies. Even among those who had access to premarital counselling, gaps persisted—particularly in the areas of problem-solving and stress management. Communication skills were more commonly addressed, leading to relatively better interaction between partners; however, deep emotional skills such as empathy remained largely underdeveloped.

A consistent finding was the lack of awareness regarding sexual health and marital intimacy. Many participants, despite being educated, derived their understanding of sexual relationships from pornography or unrealistic media portrayals, leading to distorted expectations and dissatisfaction within marriage. Premarital counselling was found to be effective in correcting such misconceptions, but its reach remains limited. There is a strong societal misconception that only individuals lacking sexual knowledge or facing problems need counselling, deterring many from seeking help.

Participants who had access to basic life skills training through college programs (e.g., NSS activities, counselling sessions) demonstrated greater self-awareness, better communication with partners, and more adaptive coping strategies in married life.

##### ➤ The Role of Premarital Counselling

Those who attended premarital counselling sessions (particularly through colleges, churches, or youth programs) reported significant benefits:

- Better understanding of partner expectations,
- Improved communication skills,
- Greater openness about emotional and sexual needs,
- Reduced unrealistic expectations about marital life.
- Participants emphasized that premarital counselling helped correct misconceptions drawn from media portrayals of romantic or sexual relationships.

### ➤ *Gendered Differences in Problem-Solving and Decision-Making*

The study found that women were more likely to defer decision-making to their husbands, especially when they lacked prior training in decision-making skills. Conversely, couples exposed to life skills training tended to share responsibilities more democratically.

### ➤ *Psychological and Sexual Well-being*

Participants who underwent counselling reported greater psychological resilience and a more realistic, respectful understanding of sexual relationships. Those without counselling often faced unmet expectations, dissatisfaction, or emotional distress.

Many respondents emphasized the importance of understanding one's partner physically, including differences in stress responses, health conditions, and sexual expectations. A recurring theme was the lack of open conversations about sexual and reproductive health before marriage. Premarital counselling was found to reduce misconceptions shaped by pornography and unrealistic media portrayals. It also supported awareness of sensitive health issues such as menstruation, PCOD/PCOS, and pregnancy-related stress. Several participants acknowledged that counselling encouraged mutual respect in sexual life and helped develop healthier expectations.

Psychological well-being in marriage often depends on emotional openness and mutual support. Many individuals reported experiencing stress, anger, and anxiety due to their partner's inability or reluctance to express emotional concerns. Respondents who had received counselling were more emotionally expressive and supportive, while their partners who lacked such training often struggled with communication. Counselling was shown to reduce emotional misunderstandings and encourage healthier emotional sharing, thereby improving mental well-being in the relationship.

### ➤ *Communication and Conflict Resolution*

A majority of participants highlighted communication as the most critical life skill in sustaining marriage. Those trained in communication techniques were better able to express their needs, listen actively, and resolve conflicts without escalation. In contrast, lack of communication often led to misunderstandings, stress, and emotional distance.

Spouses marital management skills were associated with an increase in their marital satisfaction (actor effects) except for husband's soothing and alleviation skills. Husband's tolerance and empathy were also related to an increase in the wife's marital satisfaction (partner effects) and had significant interactions with the relationship between the wife's stress and her marital satisfaction (Pei-Fen Li and K.A.S. Wickrama(2014) Stressful Life Events, Marital Satisfaction, and Marital Management Skills of Taiwanese Couples).

### ➤ *Key Benefits of Life Skills and Counselling*

#### • *Understanding Each Other*

Communication emerged as the most important life skill for sustaining a healthy marriage. Respondents who had received counselling were more willing to express their feelings and address their partner's stress or concerns. However, a gap remained where partners lacked mutual understanding, particularly concerning emotional and physical needs. Counselling helps bridge this gap by encouraging empathy and open dialogue.

#### • *Solving Problems Independently*

Decision-making and problem-solving are vital components of marital life. Respondents with no training often relied solely on their partner for decisions, reflecting dependency and lack of self-confidence. In contrast, those who received life skills education demonstrated greater independence and teamwork in resolving conflicts. Counselling helped individuals take ownership of their problems and make informed decisions collaboratively.

#### • *Awareness of Pregnancy and Childbirth*

Marriage, often associated with procreation, requires couples to be aware of reproductive responsibilities. Counselling helped reduce anxiety surrounding pregnancy and provided critical information on family planning and emotional preparation. Respondents noted that understanding reproductive health helped them support their partners better during pregnancy and postpartum periods.

### ➤ *Marital Problems and the Importance of Premarital Counselling*

In contemporary Kerala, divorce rates have risen significantly, with over 35% increase compared to previous years. The data reveals that major causes include lack of communication, unrealistic expectations, domestic violence, ego clashes, alcohol abuse, and sexual incompatibility. Marital adjustment is a process more than being a trait or behaviour that indicates conformity of wife and husband when interacting with each other .

Marital satisfaction in marital adjustment as one of deepest and basic pleasure of human life while lack of this important point causes pain and discomfort (Shahrbanoo Naghdi Babae And Shahrbanoo Ghahari (2012) "Effectiveness of Communication Skills Training on Intimacy and Marital Adjustment Among Marital Relationship). Many respondents confirmed that the absence of life skills and premarital counselling left them unprepared for the emotional, psychological, and social challenges of married life. Women, in particular, reported experiencing control, restricted decision-making, and forced sexual relations due to their partner's lack of empathy or understanding. Some shared experiences of being pressured into sex based on unrealistic expectations shaped by pornography, which caused distress

and trauma. Several also noted that emotional detachment, lack of mutual support, and unshared financial or personal stressors contributed to communication breakdowns and long-term dissatisfaction. Respondents who had received counselling described improved communication, better conflict resolution, stronger decision-making, and a more empathetic understanding of their partner's emotions and limitations. They reported fewer and less intense conflicts, and an ability to resolve issues more respectfully and collaboratively. Counselling was also found effective in fostering respect between partners and their In-laws, reducing the negative social dynamics that often fuel domestic stress. Importantly, several respondents emphasized that lack of life skills—especially communication, empathy, and stress management—was the underlying cause of most marital issues and, in many cases, divorce. Many participants agreed that premarital counselling empowers individuals—particularly women—to make informed decisions, assert boundaries, and escape toxic or abusive environments. Yet, the data also revealed that men are significantly less likely to attend premarital counselling, often due to the misconception that such programs are meant only for women or those with problems. This reluctance, combined with societal stigma, continues to limit the effectiveness of these programs. Therefore, integrating life skills education and premarital counselling into formal education systems and community outreach can be a powerful strategy to reduce marital conflicts, enhance mutual understanding, and prevent the emotional and social costs of divorce.

#### IV. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Generally those who received premarital counseling, problems were significantly lower.
- Most people know only about communication skills. They don't know about other skills like problem solving, decision making, empathy etc.
- Christian community is providing premarital counselling for all individual to receive sanction from church authorities.
- If a Catholic must attended premarital counselling before marriage
- Few Women get knowledge related to married life by reading magazines.
- There is still a misconception in the society that people who do not have sexual knowledge then go to the premarital counselling.
- Both men and women haven't the empathetic thinking to look at their partner's problems from their point of view.
- Generally women don't even talk about health problems like PCOD, PCOS.
- Premarital counselling change the wrong expectations and misconceptions about sex.
- Both men and women experience the tendency to be hesitant to ask their partner's preferences in sexual life.

- Highly educated peoples try to understand the importance of life skills from books, writings, video and social media.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Pre-marriage counselling is a process through which person can determine whether he or she is ready to marry. The purpose of pre-marriage counselling is to help the couple understand each other, listen to each other and learn how to communicate with each other. It will help a person to understand his or her partner's personality, values and beliefs. It also helps to person identify any problems that may exist in your relationship or family background that might be holding his/her partner back from being able to love and commit to him. Premarital counseling provides life skills training to the individuals. It makes it possible to understand the partner and move the relationship forward without any problems. But majority of the persons can't attending premarital counselling. Premarital counselling helps to improve the communications between the partners and set realistic goals for marriage. It also helps to develop conflict-resolution skills. A positive attitude is established between the couples with the help of premarital counselling. Premarital counseling helps in building a strong bond between the partners. These are about being able to communicate effectively with each other so that your needs are understood and met. These are about having a close relationship with each other where there is mutual respect and trust between the couple.

The research problem therefore divorce cases are increasing at an alarming rate in Kerala. Various reasons like Physical, psychological, & sexual abuse, addictions, adjustment problems can lead to divorce. The prime objective of the research is to analyze the role of premarital counselling to strengthen the relationship between couples and resolved the problems. Specified area go deep with the effects of premarital counselling and life skills training in marital relationship.

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