

Original Paper

Readiness for Marriage and Contributory Factors in Premarital Counseling Attendee in Tehran, Iran



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Marriage is a sacred institution for childbearing and is the continuation of generations. Marriage readiness is a key factor in a person's decision to marry and an important predictor of marital satisfaction and marriage consolidation.

Objective: This study aimed to determine the readiness for marriage in people referring to the premarital counseling centers in Tehran, Iran, and identify the associated sociodemographic factors.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted on 492 individuals (246 couples) who were referred to the premarital counseling centers affiliated with Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in 2021. They were selected using cluster and convenience sampling methods. The instrument was the criteria for marriage readiness questionnaire (CMRQ). Statistical analyzes was done using descriptive statistics, independent t-test, analysis of variance, Pearson's correlation test, and linear regression. $P<0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Results: The mean age of men and women was 29.12 ± 4.98 and 26 ± 5.88 years, respectively. Mean total CMRQ score was 132.98 ± 10.29 . Mean score of women was significantly higher than that of men (132.98 ± 9.40 vs 128.85 ± 10.72 ; $P=0.001$). According to the regression analysis, female gender had a significant association with interpersonal competence ($\beta=2.48$, 95% CI; 2.0096%, 2.9504%, $P=0.013$), norm compliance ($\beta=1.10$, 95% CI; 0.4336%, 1.7664%, $P=0.001$), role transitions ($\beta=0.83$, 95% CI; 0.0852%, 1.5748%, $P=0.031$) and family capacities ($\beta=1.81$, 95% CI; 1.2024%, 2.4176%, $P=0.001$). Employment was significantly associated with the family capacities score ($\beta=0.82$, 95% CI; 0.0984%, 1.5452%, $P=0.029$). There was no significant difference in total CMRQ scores by age, educational level, or occupation.

Keywords:

Marriage, Readiness, Couples, Characteristics

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Conclusion: Given men's lower readiness for marriage and the fact that more than half of the participants had a university education, educational interventions should be provided during the school year at universities to improve students' readiness for marriage, especially for male students, so they receive accurate information about successful marriage. Also, by expanding marriage counseling centers and promoting their activities, we can increase the desire and readiness of young people referred to them for premarital counseling.

Highlights

- Marriage readiness is relatively high among individuals referred to premarital counseling centers in Tehran.
- Men had lower readiness for marriage than women.
- Female gender can predict the scores of all domains of marriage readiness, except for sexual experiences.

Plain Language Summary

Marriage readiness requires appropriate age, physical, financial, psychological, emotional, social, moral, and interpersonal readiness. The present study aimed to determine the marriage readiness of people in Tehran and identify the associated sociodemographic factors. In this regard, participants who intended to marry completed the questionnaires. The results showed high readiness scores among participants, with women's scores higher than men's. The female gender was significantly associated with scores on interpersonal competence, intrapersonal competence, norm compliance, role transitions, and family capacities. According to the findings, it is recommended that educational interventions should be provided during the school year at universities to improve students' readiness for marriage, especially for male students, so that they receive accurate information about successful marriage. Also, by expanding marriage counseling centers and promoting their activities, we can increase the desire and readiness of young people referred to them for premarital counseling.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important events in a person's life, a turning point, and the foundation for building a family. In many countries, it is the only accepted institution for childbearing [1]. This important event in human life affects the health of couples [2] and is an important determinant of their physical health and even mortality [3]. Readiness for and attitudes about marriage are key variables in an individual's decision to marry, and are important predictors of subsequent marital satisfaction [4]. Premarital counseling programs can improve attitudes towards marriage [5]. Premarital counseling is a relatively new approach that is being implemented in many countries to prepare young men and women for living together, prevent dissatisfaction and failure in marital life, and have a suitable marriage [6, 7]. It allows them to start living together with greater awareness and knowledge about themselves and their future spouse, as well as the importance and goals of marriage

[8]. There are many studies in this field, and their results indicate a significant increase in couples' knowledge and awareness after counseling [9]. A study showed that couples who received premarital counseling had a 31% lower risk of marriage failure [7, 10]. According to statistics from the National Organization for Civil Registration of Iran, over the last 4 years, 1 in 4 marriages has ended in divorce [11]. Marriage requires specific skills and resources, including internal preparations (such as emotional readiness, social readiness, emotional health, being of sufficient age, relationships with the opposite sex, readiness to accept responsibilities) and external preparations (such as financial readiness, planning for various responsibilities) [12]. In other studies, individual factors, couples' relationships, couples' family, cultural/social/economic factors, religiosity, job, spouse's job, and field of study have been considered as factors related to the success of marriage [13]. Factors such as moral readiness, marriage planning, interpersonal readiness, readiness for life skills, mental/financial/physical/intellectual readiness [14] as well as commitment to the relationship are essential for marriage preparation

[15]. Although marriage readiness is crucial for creating healthy marriages and reducing divorce rates [16, 17], most young people ignore it and are unaware of its importance [18]. On the other hand, various factors can be related to readiness for marriage. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the level of readiness for marriage and its relationship with sociodemographic factors among individuals with the intention to marry, attending premarital counseling centers in Tehran, Iran.

Materials and Methods

This is a cross-sectional study. The study population consists of all individuals referring to the premarital counseling centers affiliated with **Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences**, Tehran, Iran, in 2021. Of these, on 492 individuals (246 couples) with the intention to marry were selected. The sample size was determined based on the highest standard deviation for marriage readiness ($SD=4$) reported in Bestooh et al.'s study [19], a 95% Confidence Level (CI), and a 0.5 error probability. Sampling was carried out using a cluster sampling method in two stages. In the first stage, four premarital counseling centers were randomly selected from among 14 centers. In the second stage, samples were selected from each center using convenience sampling. In this regard, 62 individuals were selected from the first center, 62 from the second center, 62 from the third center, and 60 from the fourth center. Inclusion criteria were Iranian nationality, no prior marriage experience, and the ability to read and write in Persian.

The data collection tools were a sociodemographic form (surveying age, gender, educational level, and occupation) and the criteria for marriage readiness questionnaire (CMRQ) developed by Carroll et al. [20] with 39 items and six domains: Norm compliance (7 items), family capacities (8 items), role transitions (6 items), intrapersonal competence (6 items), interpersonal competence (8 items), and sexual experience (4 items). The scoring is as follows: 1 (not important), 2 (less important), 3 (quite important), and 4 (very important). The total score ranges from 39 to 156, with higher scores indicating greater levels of marriage readiness. The Persian version of this tool has been validated by Bestooh et al. [19]. The Cronbach's α coefficient values for the six domains ranged from 0.80 to 0.82; the overall scale's coefficient is 0.86.

To collect data, after obtaining the necessary permits, the researcher visited the selected premarital counseling centers daily, except on holidays, and sampling was conducted according to the inclusion criteria. During

sampling, the study objectives and methods were first explained to the participants and when they were willing to participate in the study, an informed consent form was signed by them. The questionnaires were completed independently by both spouses. Sampling continued from May to September 2021.

Data analysis was performed in SPSS software, version 21. Initially, the data were reported using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, Mean \pm SD. After examining the normality of the data (using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), independent t-tests and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to compare the CMRQ scores between men and women, between employed and unemployed individuals, and between individuals with different levels of education. To examine the relationship between individuals' age and the CMRQ score, the Pearson correlation test was used. Linear regression analysis was used to identify the factors predicting the CMRQ score. The significance level was set at 0.05.

Results

Among 492 individuals (246 couples), most of the women were in the age group of 20-24 years (mean age $=26\pm5.88$), and most of the men were in the age group of 25-29 years (mean age $=29.12\pm4.98$ years). Most of the women (68.2%) and men (68.7%) had university education, and few women (10.2%) and men (8.9%) had lower than high school education. Also, 98% of men and 53.2% of women were employed (Table 1).

The total CMRQ score was 132.98 ± 10.29 , ranging from 90 to 155. The descriptive statistics for the CMRQ domains are presented in Table 2. To compare the domains, since their score ranges were not equal, the average scores were first calculated as percentages to make them comparable. The two factors "norm compliance" and "intrapersonal competence" had the highest scores of 84.33 and 84.87, respectively, while the "sexual experience" domain had the lowest score (56.26).

According to the independent t-test results shown in Table 3, across all domains, women's average scores were significantly higher than men's ($P=0.01$), except for the domains of role transitions and sexual experience, where no significant difference was observed. The mean total CMRQ score in women was 132.98 ± 9.4 , and in men was 128.85 ± 10.72 . The independent t-test results shown in Table 3 indicated that this difference was statistically significant ($P=0.001$).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (n=246 couples)

Variables	No. (%)	
	Women (n=246)	Men (n=246)
Age (y)	15-19	36(14.6)
	20-24	74(30.1)
	25-29	68(27.6)
	30-34	40(16.3)
	35-39	26(10.6)
	40-44	2(0.8)
Educational level	Under diploma	25(10.2)
	Diploma	53(21.6)
	Academic	167(68.2)
Occupation	Employed	131(53.2)
	Unemployed	115(46.8)

Figure 1 is a dot chart showing the correlation between the total CMRQ score and age. The Pearson correlation test results showed no statistically significant relationship between them. The results of the one-way ANOVA test did not show a significant difference in the mean total CMRQ score based on educational level. The mean total CMRQ score in employed individuals was 130.64 ± 10.39 , and in unemployed individuals was 131.58 ± 10.04 . According to the result of the independent t-test, there was no significant difference.

The results of regression analysis showed that only the sex variable had a significant association with the total CMRQ score ($P=0.001$). The total score in women was 5.67 units higher than that in men. Regarding the CMRQ domains, the female gender had a significant association with intrapersonal competence ($P=0.001$). Its score in women was 1.05 units higher than that in men. Also, it had a significant association with norm compliance ($P=0.001$). Its score in women was 1.1 units higher than that in men. Educational level had also had a sig-

nificant association with norm compliance; the score in individuals with a high school diploma was 0.81 units higher than that in those with an academic degree. Sex, educational level, and occupation were significantly associated with family capacities. Its score in women was 1.81 units higher than in men. In those with lower than high school education, the family capacities score was 2.01 units higher than that in those with an academic degree; in those with a high school diploma, it was higher by 0.82 units. Moreover, the employment increased the family capacities score by 0.82 units. The female gender also had a significant association with the role transitions score ($P=0.031$). Its score in women was 0.83 units higher than that in men. None of the sociodemographic variables showed a significant association with the sexual experience score.

Overall, the female gender was the significant predictor of interpersonal competence ($\beta=2.48$, 95% CI: 2.0096%, 2.9504%, $P=0.013$), norm compliance ($\beta=1.10$, 95% CI: 0.4336%, 1.7664%, $P=0.001$), role transitions ($\beta=0.83$,

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the criteria for marriage readiness domains

Variables	Mean \pm SD	Mean Percentage (%)	Min.	Max.	Score Range
Total score	132.98 \pm 10.29	80.32	90	155	39-156
Intrapersonal competence	28.37 \pm 2.57	84.87	15	32	8-32
Interpersonal competence	21.07 \pm 2.2	83.72	12	24	6-24
Norm compliance	24.71 \pm 3.14	84.33	13	28	7-28
Role transitions	18.22 \pm 3.49	67.89	7	24	6-24
Family capacities	27.82 \pm 2.89	82.58	16	32	8-32
Sexual experience	10.74 \pm 3.13	56.26	4	16	4-16

Table 3. Distribution of criteria for marriage readiness scores based on sex

Variables	Men (n=246)		Women (n=246)		P*
	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	Range	
Total score	132.98±9.4	90-153	128.85±10.72	102-155	0.001
Intrapersonal competence	28.82±2.29	15-32	27.93±2.76	20-32	0.001
Interpersonal competence	21.31±2.04	12-24	20.82±2.33	14-24	0.012
Norm compliance	25.91±32.83	13-28	24.32±3.38	14-28	0.006
Role transitions	18.41±3.54	8-24	18.02±3.43	7-24	0.206
Family capacities	28.5±22.69	16-32	27.24±29.2	16-32	0.001
Sexual experience	10.85±3.16	4-16	10.63±3.11	4-16	0.438

*Independent t-test.

95% CI; 0.0852%, 1.5748%, P=0.031), and family capacities ($\beta=1.81$, 95% CI; 1.2024%, 2.4176%, P=0.001). Employment was the significant predictor of family capacities ($\beta=0.82$, 95% CI; 0.0984%, 1.5452%, P=0.029). These results were shown in Table 4.

Discussion

Based on the results obtained, the marriage readiness of individuals with the intention to marry in Tehran was high. This indicates that the participants consider themselves ready to accept the responsibilities and challenges of married life. This result is consistent with the

result of Karunia and Rahaju, who reported a relatively high level of marriage readiness [21]. Also, based on the findings, the total marriage readiness score of women was significantly higher than that of men, indicating that women were readier for marriage. This finding is contrary to the results of Ismail, who showed sex had no relationship with readiness for marriage [22]. It seems that, due to physiological differences and faster mental and physical maturation in women, as well as the upbringing customs in Iranian culture, women assume greater responsibility and are therefore more ready for marriage. In similar studies, women were also more ready for marriage [23, 21].

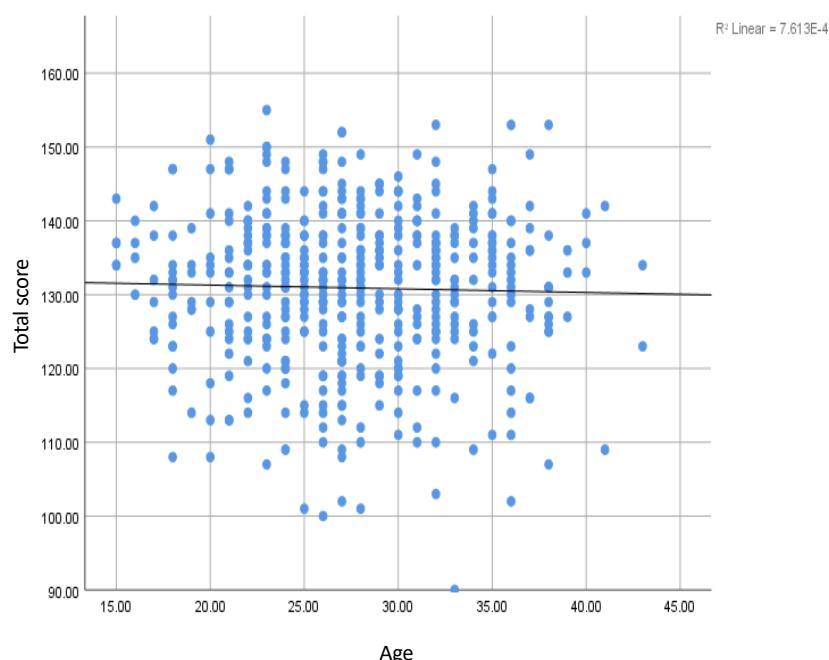

Figure 1. Total criteria for marriage readiness scores based on age

Table 4. Regression coefficients for sociodemographic factors associated with criteria for marriage readiness domain

Domains	Variables	β	SE	95% CI Lower, Upper	P
Intrapersonal competence	Constant	26.92	0.77	-	0.001
	Age (y)	0.03	0.02	-0.0092, 0.0692	0.191
	Sex	Men Women	- 1.05	- 0.28	- 0.5012, 1.5988
	Education level	Lower than high school Diploma Academic	-0.16	0.46	-1.0616, 0.7416
			-0.17	0.30	-0.758, 0.4180
			-	-	-
	Occupation	Employed Unemployed	0.13 -	0.34 -	-0.5364, 0.7964 -
	Constant	20.20	0.66	-	0.001
Interpersonal competence	Age (y)	0.02	0.02	0.0192, 0.0592	0.288
	Sex	Men Women	- 2.48	- 0.24	- 2.0096, 2.9504
	Education level	Lower than high school Diploma Academic	-0.65	0.39	-1.4144, 0.1144
			0.13	0.39	-0.6344, 0.8944
			-	-	-
	Occupation	Employed Unemployed	-0.01 -	0.29 -	-0.5784, 0.5584 -
	Constant	23.83	0.94	-	0.001
	Age (y)	-0.02	0.03	-0.0788, 0.0388	0.564
Norm compliance	Sex	Men Women	- 1.10	- 0.34	- 0.4336, 1.7664
	Education level	Lower than high school Diploma Academic	0.94	0.56	-0.1576, 2.0376
			0.81	0.37	0.0848, 1.5352
			-	-	-
	Occupation	Employed Unemployed	0.68 -	0.42 -	-0.1432, 1.5032 -
	Constant	16.24	1.06	-	0.001
	Age (y)	0.04	0.03	-0.0188, 0.0988	0.226
	Sex	Men Women	- 0.83	- 0.38	- 0.0852, 1.5748
Role transitions	Education level	Lower than high school Diploma Academic	-0.64	0.62	-1.8552, 0.5752
			-0.33	0.41	-1.1336, 0.4736
			-	-	-
	Occupation	Employed Unemployed	0.74 -	0.47 -	-0.1812, 1.6612 -
	Constant	25.89	0.83	-	0.001
	Age (y)	0.002	0.03	-0.0568, 0.0608	0.951
	Sex	Men Women	- 1.81	- 0.31	- 1.2024, 2.4176
	Education level	Lower than high school Diploma Academic	2.01	0.49	1.0496, 2.9704
			0.82	0.32	0.1928, 1.4472
			-	-	-
Family capacities	Occupation	Employed Unemployed	0.82 -	0.32 -	-0.0984, 1.5452 -
	Constant	25.89	0.83	-	0.001
	Age (y)	0.002	0.03	-0.0568, 0.0608	0.951
	Sex	Men Women	- 1.81	- 0.31	- 1.2024, 2.4176
	Education level	Lower than high school Diploma Academic	2.01	0.49	1.0496, 2.9704
			0.82	0.32	0.1928, 1.4472
			-	-	-
	Occupation	Employed Unemployed	0.82 -	0.32 -	-0.0984, 1.5452 -

Domains	Variables	β	SE	95% CI Lower, Upper	P
Sexual experience	Constant	11.13	0.94	-	0.001
	Age (y)	-0.03	0.03	-0.0888, 0.0288	0.350
	Sex	Men	-	-	-
		Women	0.28	0.05	-0.406, 0.966
	Education level	Lower than high school	0.21	0.56	-0.8876, 1.3076
		Diploma	0.28	0.37	-0.4452, 1.0052
		Academic	-	-	-
	Occupation	Employed	0.19	0.42	-0.6332, 1.0132
		Unemployed	-	-	-

Marriage, as a step into living with a partner, requires intrapersonal competence, and the more this competence a person has, the higher their readiness for marriage. Our results regarding intrapersonal competence are consistent with the results of Mousavi and Gholinasab [24]. Interpersonal competence, which is related to individuals' moral health, was also identified in a similar study as an important criterion for marriage readiness [25]. In our study, the average score of family capacities was 27.82, which is close to the score reported by Bestooh et al. (23.26) [19]. After marriage, couples have specific responsibilities, and they are expected to fulfill them well. In the study by Stinnette [26], marital competence was identified as one of the keys to successful marriage or readiness for marriage.

According to the results, the score of role transitions domain, which includes role change priorities such as having a job, buying a house, completing education, was 18.22. This is close to the score reported in Bestooh et al.'s study [19]. Financial problems and concerns about career, education, and housing are among the most important issues related to preparation for marriage [27]. Participants' scores in the norm compliance domain were high. People who comply with social norms, observe the rules, and behave more responsibly within social frameworks also adhere to norms regarding marriage and married life, and enter the stage of family formation more easily. The sexual experience domain had a lower score than other domains of marriage readiness in our study. According to Lacey et al. [28], sexual desire is significantly associated with measures of readiness for marriage. Carroll et al. showed that having sexual experience helps to have a better married life in the future [29]. In our study, participants who reported readiness were in their mid-thirties. A study by Gholamaliee et al. showed that people living in urban areas marry at older ages [30]. The results are also consistent with the results of other studies [29-32]. Older people have greater emotional maturity, more social experience, and more

suitable jobs and income; therefore, they are better prepared to marry.

In our study, no significant difference was found in the total score of marriage readiness based on educational level; all participants considered education a prerequisite for marriage readiness, which is consistent with the results of similar studies [33, 29]. Education can improve communication skills and self-confidence, and it is generally believed that educated people have a higher social status. Our results showed no significant difference in the total score of marriage readiness based on occupation (employed/unemployed), which is contrary to the results of similar studies [29, 33, 34]. Having a stable job is important for a man to be ready for marriage. Perhaps since the premarital counseling centers were located in areas where residents were economically better off, having a job was not a criterion for marriage readiness. Among the sociodemographic variables, only sex (female gender) showed a significant association with role transitions, consistent with results of other studies [35, 36].

One limitation of this study is that, since it was conducted in Tehran and the samples were selected from premarital counseling centers, the findings may not be generalized to all people in Iran. Therefore, it is recommended that studies be conducted in other cities in Iran with diverse ethnic and cultural populations. Given the lower readiness of men for marriage in this study and the university education of the majority of participants, educational interventions can be designed and implemented at universities for male students to improve their readiness, tailored to the age and conditions of the students. In addition, holding marriage preparation classes with the presence of both sexes at universities can be effective in increasing their understanding of marriage and their readiness for it. The expansion of marriage counseling centers can greatly help young

people make marriage decisions with greater preparation.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran (Code: IR.SBMU.PHNS.REC.1400.018). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their information.

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Authors' contributions

Study design: Sima Shahrokhi Nia, Tayebeh Marashi, and Nastaran Keshavarz; Data collection: Sima Shahrokhi Nia; Statistical analyses: Mahshid Namdari; Writing the original draft: Sima Shahrokhi Nia and Tayebeh Marashi; Review, editing, and final approval: All authors.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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