

Journal of legal and social studies

Issn: 2507-7333

Eissn: 2676-1742

**The Role of Associations and Counseling Centers in Enhancing Marital Stability
and Reducing Early Divorce Among Young Couples and Newlyweds**

Larabi Mohammed^{1*}, Djaafoura Moussab ²

¹Social Empowerment and Sustainable Development Lab in the Desert
Environment, Amar Thelidji University of Laghouat (Algeria), email:
Med.larabi@lagh-univ.dz

²Social Empowerment and Sustainable Development Lab in the Desert
Environment, Amar Thelidji University of Laghouat (Algeria), email:
m.djaafoura@lagh-univ.dz

Date of send: 01 / 12 / 2025	date of acceptance: 01 / 02 /2026	Date of Publication: 01/03/2026
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***Corresponding author**

Abstract:

Divorce is considered a social phenomenon that occurs as a result of the spouses' failure to achieve compatibility and mutual understanding, leading to the destabilization and fragmentation of the family. This, in turn, leaves negative impacts on the structure of society and its social functions. Consequently, many countries around the world such as the United States, several Islamic countries like Malaysia, and Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Jordan have adopted specialized premarital education programs. These programs have demonstrated varying degrees of positive outcomes, largely due to differences in cultural and social characteristics across the societies in which they were implemented.

This article aims to explore the role of family associations and programs for counseling and family support in reducing early divorce, with a focus on global, regional, and Arab efforts in this field. It also highlights the challenges facing these efforts and future directions for enhancing their effectiveness.

Keywords: Associations; individuals preparing for marriage; counseling and guidance programs; early divorce.

Introduction

The modern family has undergone profound and rapid transformations as a result of successive social and cultural changes that have clearly influenced various aspects of family life. These shifts have not been limited to lifestyle patterns but have also extended to the nature of interactive relationships among family members, creating new dynamics within the family unit. This impact stems from the emergence of new concepts and values that did not previously exist, in addition to the evolving traditional roles that were once assigned to each member of the family, aligning them with the demands of contemporary life. Such transformations have compelled individuals to redefine their roles in accordance with rapidly changing societal and economic conditions, contributing to a restructuring of the family's social fabric in a way that corresponds to the nature of modern living.

Since building a family is among the most complex and significant undertakings in a person's life, it is essential to devote special attention to the scientific and systematic preparation required to form a stable family capable of confronting challenges. Training and counseling in this domain are similar to practical training in any other field; their purpose is to prevent errors and avoid repeating negative experiences that may lead to family instability or disintegration. This underscores the need to design premarital education programs, especially given the growing discourse in recent years on the importance of preparing young people for this critical stage in their lives. Such preparation is not limited to providing information about marital life; rather, it extends to raising awareness among youth about the foundational principles necessary for building a successful marital relationship. This includes equipping them with mechanisms for choosing the right partner and understanding the essential skills needed to overcome conflicts and reduce the problems that may

arise between spouses considered among the most important pillars of a stable marriage.

Problem Statement

The stage of family formation is considered one of the most significant phases in an individual's life, due to the central role the family plays in building and sustaining cohesive societies. The family is not merely a gathering of individuals; rather, it is a social institution that requires solid foundations to ensure its success and stability. Establishing such an institution demands profound knowledge and experience from both spouses, as young men and women face numerous challenges and responsibilities.

A young man must understand how to be a responsible husband and an effective father who creates an environment characterized by respect and mutual understanding. Likewise, a young woman needs to acquire the knowledge necessary to be a devoted wife and an aware mother capable of properly raising her children. Such understanding can only be achieved through training and education prior to entering marital life.

The lack of awareness regarding the importance of a proper marriage and family stability is one of the key factors contributing to the rise in divorce rates, making it a prominent challenge in contemporary society. Misconceptions surrounding marriage and family formation becoming increasingly widespread among younger generations have contributed to the alarming increase in early divorce, which affects various social levels. Early divorce, particularly among individuals in their twenties, has become a social issue that threatens the foundation of marital life and impacts family stability. This phenomenon reflects a social reality that necessitates urgent intervention to correct misunderstandings and establish sound principles for building stable and cohesive families capable of confronting modern challenges.

The concept of premarital counseling and guidance dates back to the 1930s in the United States, where it emerged in response to an increasing need to improve family stability within society. Since then, the idea of premarital preparation has evolved and adopted a scientific approach beginning in the 1970s, which provided this field with an organized scientific framework and led to the emergence of specialized programs designed to prepare individuals for marriage in a more comprehensive manner.

Today, these preparatory programs have become widely recognized and are based on scientific studies and practical methodologies that enable individuals to develop a deeper understanding of the requirements of marital life. They are supervised by specialists in psychology, sociology, and family studies to ensure a marital life grounded in mutual understanding and respect, ultimately contributing to the stability of family relationships (Afifi, Abdel Khaleq Mohamed, How society is organized: methodology and scientific practice 2012). In addition, marriage-support associations can provide couples with valuable resources, workshops, and retreats that focus on enhancing communication, trust, and emotional intimacy within the relationship. Through these initiatives, couples can

proactively address issues, build a strong foundation for their marriage, and reduce the likelihood of divorce (Shamblen, Gluck and Wubbenhorst 386-404.)

Significance of the Study

- The significance of this study lies in exploring how family counseling programs can contribute to improving marital satisfaction, thereby enhancing marital stability and reducing divorce rates among newlywed couples.
- Improving dyadic adjustment among couples following the training provided to them, which helps strengthen mutual understanding and harmony between spouses.
- Highlighting the importance of marital education programs in preventing divorce and improving marital relationships by providing couples with the necessary tools to address challenges that may lead to family breakdown.
- Emphasizing the most prominent global programs and associations involved in marital education across diverse cultures to ensure their effectiveness across various cultural backgrounds.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the impact of social relationships and support networks on marital satisfaction.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of guidance programs in providing support and direction for individuals preparing for marriage as well as for newlywed couples.
- To identify how associations and counseling centers can strengthen marital bonds and reduce the likelihood of divorce.
- To examine the most successful experiences in family counseling and guidance.

Conceptual Definitions of the Study

Role:

“Role refers to the behavior of individuals while performing specific tasks within the functions they undertake.” (Afifi, Abdel Khaleq Mohamed, How society is organized: methodology and scientific practice 2012)

Associations:

Organizations or institutions often nonprofit or charitable that work to support and promote social causes such as family counseling and assisting individuals preparing for marriage.

Counseling and Guidance Programs:

These refer to initiatives offered by institutions (including religious institutions) aimed at preparing individuals who are about to get married by providing information and knowledge related to marital and family relationships.

Individuals Preparing for Marriage:

A group of young people at marriageable age whose attitudes and perceptions are influenced by various environmental variables or inherited customs and traditions. Some possess positive attitudes and require reinforcement, while others hold negative perceptions about marriage that must

be modified or changed to ensure the success of marital and family life later on. (Abdel Fattah, Khaled Ramadan 2017)

Premarital Preparation:

The enhancement of positive capacities and potentials, and the modification of negative attitudes among individuals preparing for marriage through a set of counseling services offered to both genders at marriageable age. These services include courses, experiences, and knowledge anything that equips individuals for marital life before entering it. They address how to select the appropriate partner, how to confront the challenges that may arise in family life, and the optimal methods for raising and educating children, in alignment with the values and culture of the society in which the preparation process takes place (Al-Dhuwaibi, Amira Mohammed Ghaleb 2020)

Marriage:

A divine system affirmed by religious doctrines as the foundation of human life, and a social institution characterized by continuity and adherence to social norms (Sanaa, Al-Khouly 2012).

Operational Definition of Newlyweds:

Newlyweds are those who have recently begun their marital life and face challenges related to adjusting to new changes. These challenges include building the marital relationship, improving communication, dividing roles, and managing difficulties or crises that may arise during the early stages of marriage necessitating support and counseling to adapt to this transitional period. In marital studies, a marriage duration of less than one year is a specific classification focusing on the bridal couple. This category is of particular interest to researchers because it allows for the examination of the initial stages of marriage and the related factors that may affect the couple's relationship and individual well-being (Karney).

Early Divorce:

The termination of a marital relationship between a man and a woman in the early stage of marriage, typically from its beginning until the end of the first year. The causes vary and may be attributed to the husband, the wife, or both, and may stem from direct or indirect factors. Social and cultural variables also play a significant role in contributing to early divorce. (Ibrahim, Basant Mahmoud Ali 2008)

Theoretical Approach

In this study, we adopt a sociological perspective based on Structural Family Therapy Theory as a training framework aimed at preparing individuals intending to marry, in order to reduce divorce cases within Algerian society. This theory interprets individuals' behaviors through the dominant religious and social values and beliefs, highlighting the importance of understanding family dynamics and the problems that often arise from negative communication or dysfunctional interactions among family members.

Health-related challenges faced by family members are also considered part of the difficulties affecting family cohesion. The theory emphasizes the necessity of establishing a shared understanding and a flexible response to changing life

demands as a means of overcoming these challenges. Moreover, the theory supports efforts to reconstruct the family structure with the aim of enhancing communication and care among family members as part of a comprehensive family therapeutic process (Khatatna Sami 2012).

Previous Studies

Numerous studies have addressed the importance of developing preventive programs within the field of social work to support families, enhance their stability, and improve family life through initiatives aimed at enabling families to acquire practical knowledge and skills that promote their cohesion. Below is an overview of selected studies relevant to this topic:

Parker (2003)

This study emphasized the necessity of designing educational programs targeting family life and establishing effective mechanisms for disseminating and broadly implementing these programs, with particular focus on enhancing marital adjustment and family cohesion (Parker)

Sara Abdel Rahman Madallal (2017)

Titled "*A Proposed Program for Preparing Individuals Intending to Marry in Light of Global Experiences and the Specificity of Palestinian Society*," this study presents a proposed program for premarital preparation tailored to Palestinian society while drawing from global models. Conducted at An-Najah National University, the study aimed to develop a culturally relevant model to help prevent marital problems. The research was motivated by the rising divorce rate which had reached 47% prior to consummation in the West Bank.

The sample consisted of unmarried individuals in the West Bank, focusing on their need for premarital preparation programs. The study employed a descriptive methodology and used interviews and archival data collection, incorporating the perspectives of judges and family counseling experts.

The findings demonstrated a clear need for a premarital preparation program that integrates essential components such as rights and responsibilities and partner communication.

Al-Turki (2019)

This study aimed to propose a counseling program that addresses the various dimensions of familial silence an issue that can lead to significant problems such as weakened communication between spouses and reduced marital satisfaction, ultimately resulting in feelings of neglect and lack of appreciation. The results indicated the effectiveness of counseling programs designed to address family silence, showing their success in enhancing communication skills among families in Kuwaiti society. The study recommended tailoring these programs to suit diverse cultures, emphasizing improved understanding between spouses through counseling programs that enhance cultural awareness and develop effective communication skills.

Klibi (2019)

This study sought to clarify the legitimacy and necessity of requiring premarital preparation courses in Palestine from the perspective of Islamic law. It examined the religious rulings pertaining to family and marriage while analyzing

the actual needs of young people preparing for marriage and the role such a course could play in improving their readiness for marital life.

Using an inductive analytical method, and relying on official reports on divorce rates, the study found that the causes of divorce include both traditional and modern factors, such as improper use of digital communication. Based on these findings, the study recommended mandating premarital preparation courses to ensure sufficient readiness, while also acknowledging the challenges that may arise in implementing this requirement.

Noura Abu Al-Soud Hassan Mohammed Al-Haddad (2020)

This study examines the role of group dialogue programs in social group work and their impact on improving the knowledge of young women preparing for marriage regarding early divorce. It highlights the importance of raising awareness about risks that may lead to early divorce.

The study indicates that family interference, marital relationship difficulties, and poor character are among the primary causes of early divorce. It also emphasizes the need for media and community institutions to collaborate in transforming information about divorce into practical tools aimed at correcting misconceptions ultimately improving the behavior of individuals preparing for marriage and reducing divorce rates. The study further recommends developing educational and awareness programs that clearly define the responsibilities of each individual in fostering a positive marital culture.

Hassan Bousersoub (2021)

This study aimed to explore the extent to which premarital preparation courses contribute to reducing divorce particularly early divorce in Algerian society. Using a descriptive analytical method, data were collected through program description forms and personal interviews.

The findings showed that premarital preparation courses play only a limited role in raising individuals' awareness regarding marriage planning and family building. The study recommended conducting further research on this topic and expanding the programs to include both newlyweds and individuals preparing for marriage. The results also highlighted the importance of modifying attitudes and acquiring practical skills rather than focusing solely on theoretical information, suggesting the need to improve program content to ensure effective impact in reducing divorce rates.

Commentary on Previous Studies

The reviewed studies collectively emphasize the importance of providing preparatory and counseling programs targeting individuals intending to marry, with the aim of enhancing mutual understanding and marital harmony while reducing divorce rates. Parker's study (2003) highlighted the need for designing effective programs to promote family awareness, whereas Madallal's study (2017) focused on developing a preparatory program tailored to the specific cultural context of Palestinian society in response to rising divorce rates.

Al-Turki's study (2019) distinguished itself by concentrating on familial silence and recommended adapting counseling programs that enhance communication between spouses. Meanwhile, Klibi's study (2019) examined the

necessity of premarital preparation courses from a religious perspective to better equip young individuals for marital life. Al-Haddad's study (2020) stressed the importance of conducting further research on this topic and expanding such programs to include both newlyweds and individuals preparing for marriage. Finally, Bousersoub's study (2021) concluded that the current role of premarital courses remains limited, recommending their development to include attitude modification and the acquisition of practical skills that contribute to family stability.

Exploring Common Causes of Divorce Among Newlyweds:

Associations and counseling programs also provide a safe space for couples to explore and address underlying issues that may contribute to marital conflict. These programs often delve into the root causes of disputes, helping couples identify unhealthy patterns of behavior or communication that may negatively impact their relationship. By examining these issues more deeply, couples can gain insight into their individual needs and expectations, fostering a more empathetic and understanding partnership (Kaur).

Associations and counseling programs can also assist newly married couples in developing conflict-resolution strategies tailored to their specific challenges. Through activities such as role-playing exercises, communication workshops, and mediation techniques, couples can learn how to manage conflicts and disagreements effectively and constructively. By acquiring these skills, spouses become better equipped to navigate difficult situations and maintain a healthy and harmonious relationship. Moreover, associations and counseling programs enable couples to cultivate a strong sense of mutual respect and appreciation. This focus on personal growth significantly contributes to overall stability and the longevity of the marriage, thereby reducing the likelihood of divorce among newlyweds.

The Role of Social Associations in Preserving Family Bonds and Enhancing Marital Stability:

Social associations also play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of community and belonging among couples seeking to strengthen their marriage. These organizations often organize events, seminars, and group activities that allow couples to connect with like-minded individuals who are equally committed to building healthy and lasting relationships. By promoting a supportive environment in which couples can share their experiences, challenges, and successes, these associations help create a network of mutual encouragement and understanding.

Through frequent collaboration with experienced counselors and therapists, associations are able to provide specialized services tailored to the unique needs of each couple. Individual counseling sessions allow couples to delve deeper into personal issues, past traumas, or unresolved conflicts that may be affecting their relationship. Addressing these underlying issues in a safe and confidential environment has been shown to yield positive outcomes for couples with generally healthy relationships over the long term, while producing even better short-term results for couples experiencing significant difficulties following

intervention (Blanchard 203–214). This process enables couples to work toward compatibility and reconciliation, ultimately strengthening their bond and reducing the risk of divorce.

Associations also offer financial assistance programs or access to legal counseling for couples facing economic challenges or legal issues that may strain their marriage. By providing practical support during times of need, these associations demonstrate a commitment to helping couples overcome obstacles and build a solid foundation for their future together. Through a comprehensive approach that addresses the emotional, social, and practical dimensions of marriage, associations make a substantial contribution to reducing divorce rates and promoting long-term marital success among newlyweds.

The Contribution of Counseling and Guidance Programs to Reducing Divorce Rates

In addition to the tangible benefits of counseling programs in reducing divorce rates among newly married couples, the emotional support they provide is invaluable. These programs offer a safe environment in which couples can express their feelings, concerns, and frustrations. Through open and honest communication facilitated by trained counselors and specialists, couples are able to address persistent and complex issues and work toward resolving challenges that may affect their relationship.

By fostering a nurturing environment where vulnerability is embraced, and by incorporating techniques such as mindfulness practices, stress-management strategies, and conflict-resolution skills, these programs equip couples with the tools needed to navigate challenges effectively through enhanced self-awareness and emotional regulation.

A representative study conducted across four U.S. states found that participation in premarital education was associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction and commitment, fewer conflicts, and reduced likelihood of divorce. The findings indicate that these benefits extend across a wide range of couples, regardless of race, income, or education level (Stanley,, Amato, and ohnson 117 -126)

Overall, the role of associations and counseling programs in reducing divorce among newly married couples extends beyond merely offering support and guidance; it encompasses a comprehensive approach to fostering healthy and sustainable marriages. By addressing the emotional and psychological dimensions of marital life, these programs ultimately reduce the likelihood of divorce and enhance marital satisfaction and well-being.

Relationship education programs include a structured classification that helps address the needs of couples in various circumstances and relational patterns. These programs can be categorized into three main groups under the broader term “relationship education” (Rhoades 169–200.), as follows:

1. Couple Enhancement Programs

These programs aim to improve levels of marital satisfaction.

2. Communication Programs

Designed to teach couples effective communication skills.

3. Prevention Programs

These are divided into three group :

1. **Universal prevention programs** for all couples, typically initiated when couples are young and generally satisfied.
2. **Selective intervention programs** targeting couples at risk of distress or divorce.
3. **Indicated programs** for couples already experiencing early signs of marital distress.

These program categories are structured to meet the diverse needs of couples based on their varying levels of risk, making them valuable tools for promoting relational health and well being (H. Benson & S. Callan(Eds.))

Examples of Successful Models

Family and marital therapy is an important field within mental health and counseling, aimed at improving relationships and resolving conflicts within families and between spouses. Numerous international organizations and institutions provide professional standards, training programs, and resources to support practitioners in this discipline. The following is an overview of some prominent global programs and associations that contribute to the advancement of family therapy practices and offer guidance for professionals.

The “Relationship Enhancement (RE)” Program

Developed by Guerney at Pennsylvania State University in 1978, the Relationship Enhancement Program is considered one of the early counseling models designed for premarital couples. The program focuses on strengthening positive aspects between partners before marriage by developing nine essential skills: giving, caring, honesty, harmony, empathy, understanding, trust, sharing, and openness. Its primary goal is to enhance the couple’s ability to manage conflicts and pressures that may arise in their relationship.

Multiple studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of this program, showing significant improvements in communication skills and relationship quality among participants compared to those who did not take part. As such, the program is recognized as a key tool for promoting healthy relationships among couples (Stahmann 104-116).

The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP)

Developed by Markman and his colleagues at the University of Denver, the PREP program focuses on addressing negative aspects within marital relationships that may contribute to separation or divorce. The program aims to develop partners’ skills in managing conflicts and teaches them how to deal with core issues within a framework of commitment and forgiveness. It also seeks to revitalize intimacy and enhance recreational and bonding activities between partners.

This program has been considered highly effective based on several long-term studies spanning three to five years, which revealed significant improvements in positive communication among couples, as well as increased marital satisfaction. PREP is classified as a preventive program due to its focus on addressing potential problems before they occur, which has contributed to its

widespread global adoption thanks to its strong effectiveness and positive outcomes for participants (Laurenceau, Stanley and Olmos 933–943)

The Canadian Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CAMFT)

The Canadian Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CAMFT) is a major organization in Canada that sets professional standards for marital and family therapy. CAMFT supports therapists by establishing a strict code of ethics, providing professional guidelines, and offering continuous education opportunities. The association aims to ensure that practitioners are well-equipped to handle the complex challenges of family dynamics.

CAMFT offers various resources, including workshops, certifications, and conferences, while also working to raise public awareness about the benefits of family therapy particularly in enhancing communication and resolving conflicts within families and marital relationships (CAMFT)

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT)

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) is one of the most prominent organizations providing guidelines and standards for practitioners of marital and family therapy, offering extensive training and professional resources. Established in 1942, the association promotes the development of high standards of practice, ethics, and competence within the field of marriage and family therapy.

AAMFT offers certifications and accreditations for educational programs, along with a wide range of professional resources. It also supports ongoing professional development through conferences, webinars, and research funding. The association's stringent standards ensure that practitioners are well-equipped to work effectively with diverse families and couples, addressing issues such as trauma, addiction, mental health disorders, and relational dysfunction (AAMFT)

Relate Centre

Relate is one of the oldest and largest charitable organizations in the United Kingdom offering counseling for family and marital relationships. Since its establishment in 1938, it has served as a cornerstone in the field of family and marital counseling. The organization provides a wide range of services, including counseling for couples, families, and individuals.

In addition to therapeutic services, Relate is committed to advancing relationship education through training courses and workshops for both professionals and the general public. Its impact extends to supporting individuals facing challenges such as separation, conflict resolution, and communication issues. The organization offers essential resources aimed at promoting healthy relationships across diverse population groups (Relate)

Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia is a nonprofit organization that provides counseling services for families and individuals, in addition to educational and training programs aimed at strengthening family relationships. With a focus on improving family dynamics and individual well-being, the organization offers a wide range of services, including conflict resolution, parenting support, and relationship education.

Relationships Australia also plays an active role in delivering educational programs and training for both professionals and the general public. The organization aims to help families and individuals build stronger and healthier relationships and often collaborates with local governments and other organizations to provide accessible services (Australia).

The South African Institute for Family Counselling (SAIFC)

The South African Institute for Family Counselling (SAIFC) provides specialized training for family therapy practitioners. The institute offers advanced training programs designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of therapists working with families and individuals.

In addition, SAIFC delivers counseling services addressing a wide range of challenges faced by families in South Africa, including psychological trauma, domestic violence, and marital conflict. The institute also organizes workshops and seminars for both experienced practitioners and newcomers to the field.

Through these efforts, SAIFC aims to promote the importance of family therapy as a critical tool in supporting the well-being of individuals and families within the unique social and cultural context of South Africa (SAIFC).

Malaysia's Experience in Family Guidance

The Malaysian government, under the leadership of Mahathir Mohamad, developed the idea of establishing specialized centers for preparing individuals intending to marry known as the "*marriage license*" initiative. These centers offer mandatory courses, referred to as "*premarital counseling*," for Malay Muslims. This initiative contributed to a significant reduction in the divorce rate, dropping from 32% to 7% within eight years.

These courses aim to educate couples on the practical aspects of marriage, including mutual understanding, love, and marital rights according to Islamic teachings. They also provide guidance on sexual education, financial planning, and strategies to prevent financial crises that may lead to divorce.

Additionally, the Malaysian government offers financial incentives to help couples manage economic challenges. This contributed to a reduction in the divorce rate to 7% by the year 2000 an achievement that highlights the potential of government-led interventions in promoting family stability.

The Family Counseling Centre in Singapore (FAMCHAM)

Singapore has made significant strides in promoting family stability through counseling and guidance initiatives. The Family Counseling Centre (FAMCHAM) is a prominent institution providing counseling services to individuals and families. These services include relationship counseling, marital therapy, and individual counseling for those facing family-related difficulties.

FAMCHAM also offers training programs and workshops aimed at strengthening family relationships. These programs are designed to address common issues such as communication problems, financial stress, and interpersonal conflicts, with the overall goal of fostering stronger and healthier families (FAMCHAM).

Models from Arab Countries

Several Arab countries have recognized the importance of supporting and strengthening family dynamics through specialized counseling and development programs. These initiatives provide counseling services, training courses, and various interventions aimed at addressing family-related issues, reducing divorce rates, and fostering stable family environments across the Arab world.

Al-Mawaddah Society for Family Development (Saudi Arabia)

Founded in 2003 in the Makkah region, Al-Mawaddah Society for Family Development is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, training, and guiding families to achieve stability through sustainable developmental initiatives. The society strives to build a generation of well-informed families capable of confronting modern challenges and promoting a healthy family environment for children even in cases of parental separation.

It also aims to be the leading reference for family issues and to contribute to the goals of the National Transformation Program. Since its establishment, the society has helped improve the lives of more than 500,000 families (Official website - Al Mawadda)

Aisha Yateem Family Counseling Center (Bahrain)

The Aisha Yateem Family Counseling Center is a leading institution that provides free counseling services with an emphasis on advanced therapeutic techniques. The center offers a wide range of services, including psychological counseling, social support, and educational guidance, with a particular focus on issues related to women and families.

Its work includes raising awareness about common family problems and empowering individuals with the tools and knowledge needed to confront personal and familial challenges. Additionally, the center plays a significant role in improving women's mental health, addressing domestic violence and marital conflict, and supporting child welfare making it a cornerstone of Bahrain's efforts to strengthen family relationships .

The National Council for Family Affairs (Jordan)

The National Council for Family Affairs plays a central role in shaping family policy and promoting family well-being through research, advocacy, and education. The council organizes regional workshops to raise awareness about the importance of family counseling in the Arab world. These workshops provide a platform for discussing the challenges facing modern families, such as shifting social norms, economic pressures, and intergenerational conflicts (National Council for Family Affairs)

Wifaq Family Consulting Center (Qatar)

Established in 2002, the Wifaq Family Consulting Center in Qatar is a leading organization dedicated to strengthening marital and family bonds and preventing family breakdown. The center offers a range of services, including psychological, social, educational, and legal counseling, addressing issues such as marital conflict, parental separation, and post-divorce support.

Wifaq provides its services free of charge to all citizens and residents of Qatar, ensuring that counseling is accessible regardless of financial status. In addition to marital and family counseling, the center offers premarital counseling

and specialized post-divorce guidance. It is staffed by a team of qualified and experienced counselors and specialists (Family Counseling Center Wefaq).

Family Counseling Centers – Family Development Department (United Arab Emirates)

The Family Development Department in the United Arab Emirates oversees a network of family counseling centers dedicated to promoting family cohesion and resolving domestic issues. These centers provide counseling services to individuals and families, addressing problems such as neglect, abuse, and poor communication factors that often lie at the root of marital conflict.

By offering free and accessible counseling services, the Family Development Department ensures that families across the UAE receive the support they need to maintain healthy relationships and overcome challenges (Family Development Department and its branches).

Models of Family Counseling and Guidance Associations in Algeria

Family counseling centers in Algeria focus on providing support and guidance to families with the aim of enhancing stability and addressing challenges they may encounter. These centers are distributed across various provinces and offer diverse services, including psychological and social counseling, as well as training courses and awareness workshops.

The Algerian Association for Guidance and Reform

Founded in 1989, the Algerian Association for Guidance and Reform is a non-governmental organization with a social, educational, and cultural mission. The association strives to contribute to the civilizational development of the nation, foster personal growth, promote women's advancement, and protect Algerian families. It operates an extensive network of offices and branches, consisting of 48 provincial offices and approximately 700 local branches across different regions of Algeria (Guidance and Reform Association).

The Experience of Al-Zohour “Al-Hidaya” Association

Al-Zohour “Al-Hidaya” Association is one of the prominent charitable organizations in the province of Oran, distinguished by its social approach aimed at providing various programs that enhance the quality of life within the local community. The association's programs include organizing premarital preparation courses, offering support to families in need, assisting in resolving marital conflicts, and providing care for individuals with chronic illnesses.

Additionally, the association organizes Ramadan iftar meals, oversees orphan care, and manages kindergarten services. Its headquarters are distributed across three main areas of Oran east, central, and west thus broadening the reach of its services. The association is supported by a specialized board consisting of academics and professionals from diverse backgrounds, which enhances its effectiveness and capacity to achieve its objectives.

Family Counseling Centers for Reconciliation

These centers were established through cooperation between the Ministry of Women, Family Affairs, and Childhood; the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments; and the Ministry of National Solidarity. Their aim is to provide counseling and guidance to Algerian families. The centers seek to strengthen

family relationships, resolve conflicts among family members, and ultimately contribute to social stability within Algerian society (Ministry of National Solidarity)

Noor Association for Women, Children, and Families

Founded in 2019 in Algeria, the Noor Association for Women, Children, and Families is a charitable organization dedicated to improving the well-being of Algerian families through providing psychological, educational, social, and legal services. The association focuses on enhancing family stability by supporting women and children and addressing issues such as family breakdown, internet addiction, and marital problems.

The association offers various programs, including premarital preparation courses, support for craftswomen, and the provision of health and social services. It also organizes awareness and religious events aimed at promoting Algerian cultural heritage. Despite financial challenges, the association continues its mission through initiatives such as the “Kafaf” project, which supports women economically, and “Dirou Bhali,” a donation campaign for families in need (Noor Association for Women, Children and Family).

Challenges and Barriers to Effective Awareness Programs

There are several obstacles and barriers that hinder the effectiveness of programs aimed at increasing awareness among couples. The most prominent of these challenges include:

First Challenge:

Social stigma associated with seeking help, limited access to counseling centers, and cultural norms that discourage open communication about marital issues.

Second Challenge:

A lack of evidence-based interventions, along with a scarcity of studies exploring marital satisfaction and the factors influencing relationship stability among low-income and middle-income groups.

Third Challenge:

The absence of a unified regulatory framework, as counseling offices are licensed by different authorities. Without a central regulatory body overseeing them, discrepancies may arise in service quality, transparency, and adherence to professional standards in family counseling.

Fourth Challenge:

Insufficient monitoring, supervision, and continuous evaluation of counseling office performance, which may result in clients not receiving the level of service they expect or deserve.

Fifth Challenge:

The lack of widely adopted quality standards, leading some centers and associations to provide substandard services, leaving clients with no clear recourse for addressing deficiencies.

Sixth Challenge:

Insufficient focus on non-material gains, particularly in private, non-governmental centers. The primary goal should be supporting families in facing

their challenges, with a clear emphasis on service quality and ethical professional practice (World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). Mental health and psychosocial support: Barriers to access and quality improvement. Geneva: WHO).

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. Highlighting the importance of relationship education, as it can help strengthen marital bonds and equip individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain their relationships.
2. Providing techniques for effective communication between partners, including clear emotional expression and active listening.
3. Offering guidance on how to manage conflicts effectively, such as establishing rules for handling disagreements and selecting an appropriate time and place for discussions.
4. Implementing daily practices—such as engaging in shared activities—to enhance the relationship and strengthen emotional bonds between spouses.
5. Encouraging couples to celebrate achievements and special moments to reinforce their relationship and cultivate a sense of connectedness.
6. Emphasizing that having the proper knowledge and skills significantly increases a couple's ability to resolve marital problems.
7. Establishing family counseling and guidance offices within personal status courts, enabling judges to refer disputing parties to these services before a divorce decision is made.
8. Allocating funding to support programs that have demonstrated scientific effectiveness.
9. Conducting more long-term research to better understand the factors influencing marital relationships.
10. Addressing the limited participation of couples most at risk of divorce particularly low-income families and rural populations due to challenges in accessing counseling services, which lowers the overall efficiency and effectiveness of current programs.
11. Directing research efforts toward studying cultural and social factors that influence marital relationships to ensure comprehensive and impactful findings.

Conclusion

Despite the efforts invested in premarital and marital health initiatives, initial findings indicate limited and modest effects on the stability and quality of marital relationships, particularly among the targeted groups. This highlights the need to reconsider the design and implementation of such programs by grounding them in robust and comprehensive scientific evidence. Developing a deeper understanding of the factors that influence marital stability can help inform the creation of improved intervention programs and policies aimed at supporting couples in navigating the challenges of marriage ultimately contributing to stronger and more resilient relationships.

In conclusion, fostering stable and harmonious marital relationships requires a structured and comprehensive approach to premarital education. Such

education, provided prior to the conclusion of the marriage contract, serves as a proactive measure to mitigate rising divorce rates. It equips individuals intending to marry with essential knowledge and skills, including the legal frameworks of marriage, administrative procedures, and the principles of marital jurisprudence. Additionally, the program emphasizes cultivating love and mutual understanding within the family, promoting healthy reproductive practices, managing family conflicts constructively, and reinforcing core values and shared rights and responsibilities.

To institutionalize this initiative, it is essential to mandate the completion of premarital education as a prerequisite for marriage. Issuing a certificate verifying attendance in premarital education would ensure that couples are adequately prepared for the responsibilities and challenges of marital life. This approach not only strengthens the foundation of marital bonds but also contributes to the broader societal goal of cultivating resilient, value-based families. By prioritizing education at the outset, societies can take a significant step toward fostering enduring marital relationships and reducing the risks of marital discord.

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