

# Effectiveness of PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program for Married Couples

Rex Johnson, Ph.D.  
Biola University

## Abstract

*This is a study of 22 couples who took an extended PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program (named MarriageCare) and the couples completed over 30 two-hour sessions. As part of the program, they took the PE couple assessment and completed the skill building and over 10 PE couple exercises. The findings indicated that the couples improved significantly on the 9 core categories in PREPARE-ENRICH as assessed using individual scores and couple agreement scores. In addition, the couples improved their couple type and more couples became the most happy type called Vitalized (from 9% to 36%). Also, the most unhappy couple types of Conflicted & Devitalized greatly decreased (from 59% to 23%). In summary, the PE Group Program had a very positive impact on many aspects of the couple's relationship.*

## Brief Overview of Premarital Education Programs:

While some studies have been done with married couples attending enrichment programs, considerable research has been done with preparing premarital couples for marriage. Studies have found that premarital education programs improve couple satisfaction, lower destructive conflict and increase commitment. These programs also have been found to reduce the rate of divorce by 31% (Stanley, et al. 2006).

In a meta-analysis of 13 studies of premarital programs, Carroll and Doherty (2003) found that in 12 out the 13 studies the premarital program had a significant and positive impact on the couples' relationship. The mean effect size was .80, which means that 79% of the couples who had a premarital program scored than those that did not have a program.

Studies done to assess the impact of the PREPARE-ENRICH Program have been done with premarital couples that were seen as a couple, but not in a group. These studies have found that the PREPARE ENRICH Program had a very positive impact on the couples and it significantly improves their relationship skills and satisfaction (Knutson and Olson, 2003). As part of the PE program, couples take

the PE couple assessment and are taught relationship skills (communication, conflict resolution, stress management, balancing cohesion and flexibility).

### **Brief Overview of Marital Group Programs:**

Programs for marriage education are usually done in a group setting and they have been found to significantly improve marital satisfaction in the couples. There are a variety of group programs for married couples and they include the PREP Program by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley and Susan Blumberg (2010), Couple Communication Program by Sherod and Phyllis Miller (2003), the PAIRS Program (Gordon and Durana, 1999) and PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program (Olson and Olson, 2010).

Some of the most relevant studies of Group Programs based on PREPARE-ENRICH were done using the *Empowering Couples Group Program* and the *Couple Checkup Group Program*. Arnold (2004) used the Empowering Couple Program in a weekend format with 29 couples that were randomly assigned to enrichment weekend or a wait-list control. Satisfaction increased significantly for the couple and the wife. On the ENRICH scales, the females increased on 9 of 13 scales, the male on 2 of 13 and the couple on 6 of 13 scales. Over one-third of the couples increased their couple type, which is important. Ninety percent of the couples would highly recommend the program to other couples.

Burleson (2004) also used the Empowering Couples Program in a weekly format with 43 couples. At post-test, couples and females significantly improved on all 17 scales and males improved in 14 of the 17 scales. Almost half of the couples increased their couple type, demonstrating increased satisfaction. All of the high risk couples, the Devitalized type, moved one or two types higher. All of the couples would recommend the program to other couples.

Meier (2010) used the Couple Checkup Group Program and compared it with a Self-Directed approach where couples used it on their own. Compared with the Control group, both the Group Program and Self-Directed Program significantly improved on 8 out of the 10 ENRICH categories. Over 87 percent of the individuals (108 out of 124) would recommend the course to their friends.

Futris and colleagues (2011) offer the PREPARE Program to premarital couples in a one day group and a series of conjoint sessions—which is the more typical format used with PREPARE ENRICH. Couples in both groups had positive gains in knowledge, felt more confident in their relationship, used more positive conflict

management behaviors and felt more satisfied with their relationship. There was no difference in the impact of the program for the two approaches.

Childs (2009) did a comprehensive review of eight marriage preparation programs. The PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program was rated first in Content with a score of 92% and the Instruction Process score was 90%. The overall Content score was based on four criteria: theory and research (97%), context (82%), practice (96%) and premarital predictors (88%). The overall Instruction Process was based on two criteria and the scores for those two areas for Teaching Plans was 88% and for Presentation was (92%).

This study is important because it evaluated the PE Group Program for married couples. The couples in this study ranged from those were happily married to unhappily married, with a few couples that were very happy. This study is also important since it used many of the couple exercises and taught the important relationship skills of communication and conflict resolution.

### **Overview of the PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program:**

While the overall name of the program was called “MarriageCare” in the church, it was built on the foundation of the PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program. The program was offered over the course of a year and participants attended at least 30 two-hour programs. All the couples took PREPARE-ENRICH and received the *Couple Report* for groups, which is more user friendly and less detailed than the *Facilitator’s Report*.

During the course of the year, couples were taught the following relationship skills: assertiveness, active listening, conflict resolution and balancing closeness & flexibility. They also completed the following couple exercises in the *Couple Workbook*: *daily dialogue & daily compliments, balancing priorities, how to take a time out, seeking and granting forgiveness, managing expectations, mapping your relationship, SCOPE out your personality and the balancing Closeness and Flexibility exercises.*

### **Participants in Program:**

This study included 28 married couples who took the PREPARE-ENRICH couple assessment and participated in the group program over the course of one year. On the post-test, four couples moved or declined taking the assessment again and two couples were too late in taking the assessment to be included in this study. The

final sample included 22 couples who completed the pre and post-testing and participated in about 30 two-hour sessions.

## Results:

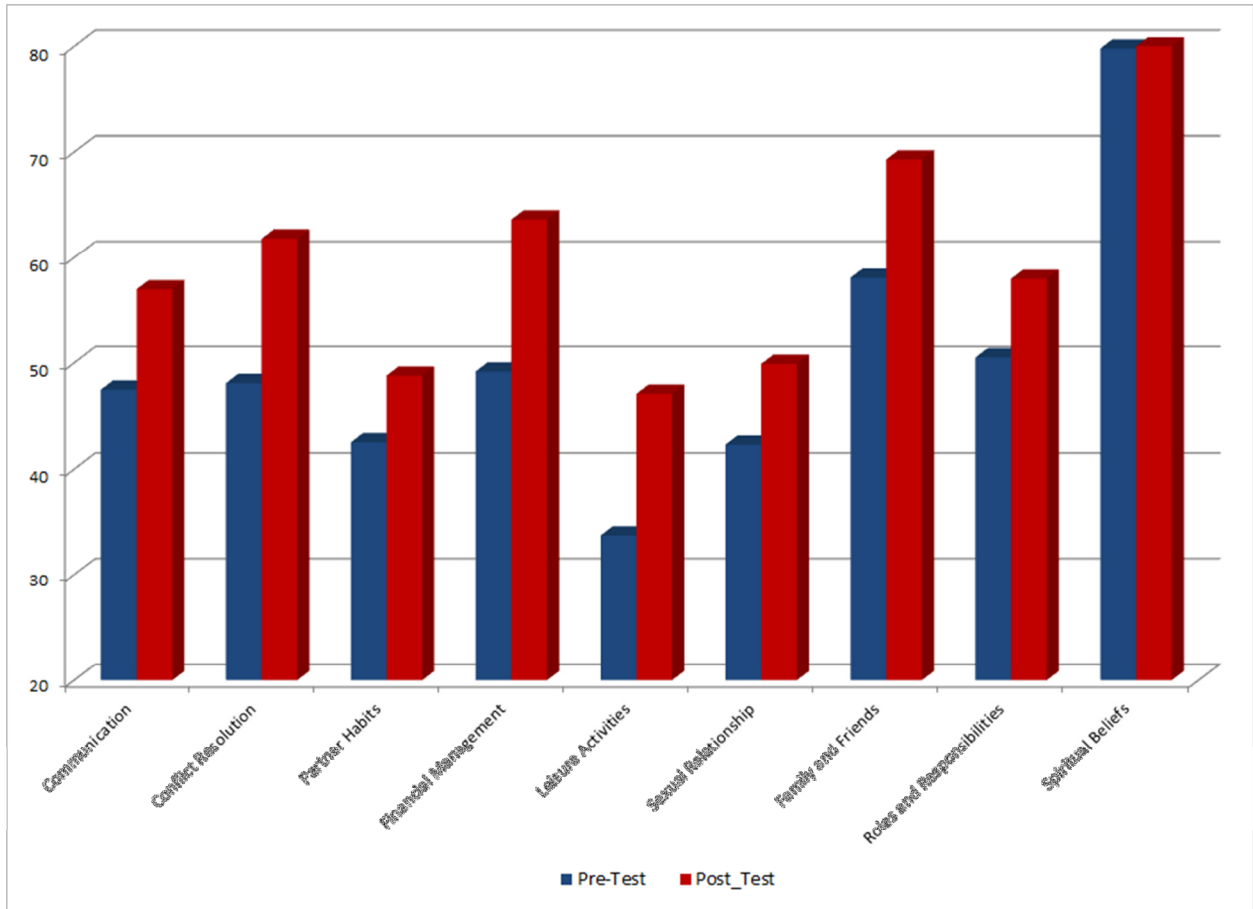
Pre and post-test analysis was done using the nine core PREPARE-ENRICH categories. The results showed significant increases in the post-test scores for all nine categories using scored data at the individual level and couple level. See Table 1 for more details and Figures 1 and 2 for a graphic summary.

**Table 1: PREPARE ENRICH—Pre-test and Post-test Analysis\***

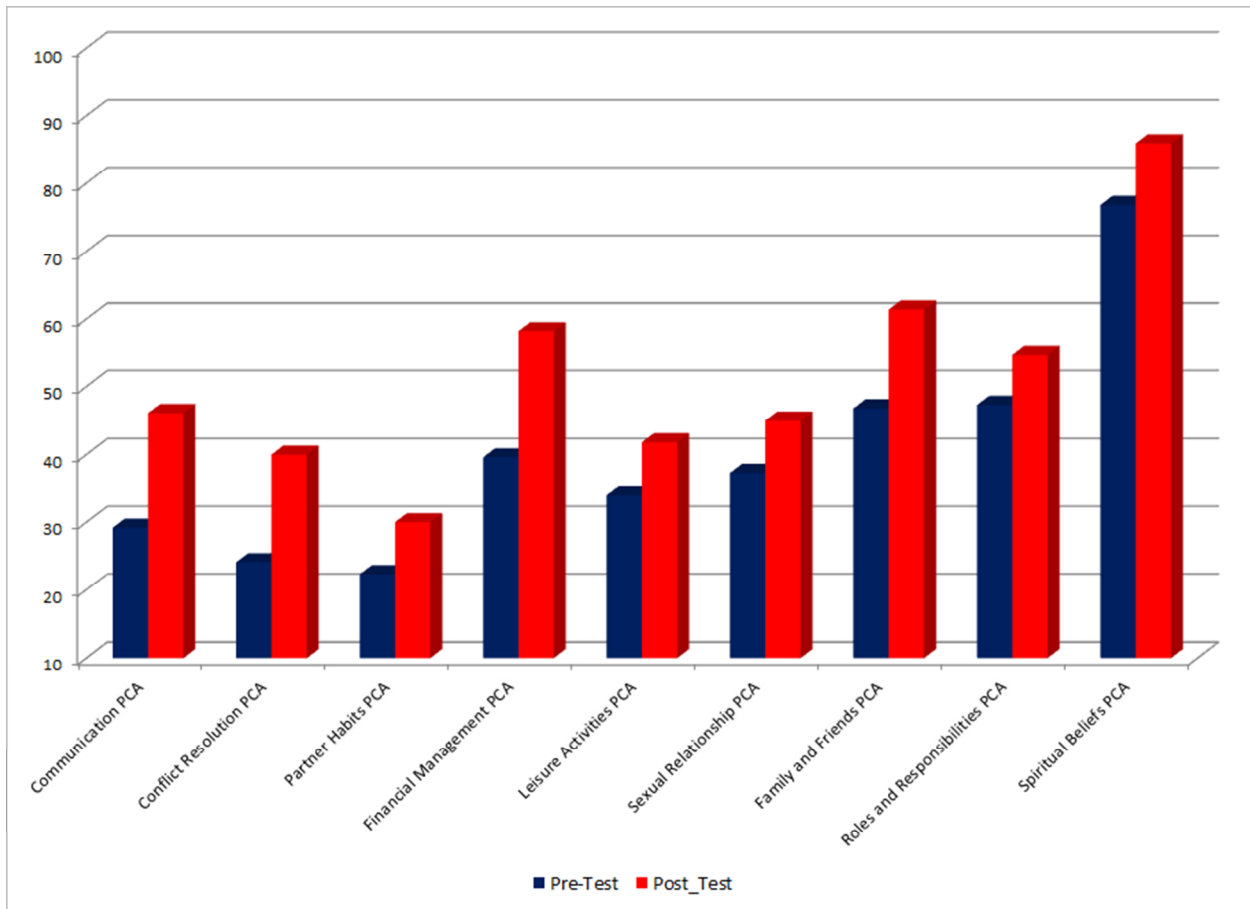
Category	Individual Scores (n = 44 persons)		Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) (n = 22 couples)	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Communication	47.5	57.0	29.2	46.1
Conflict Resol.	48.1	61.8	24.1	40.0
Partner Habits	42.5	48.8	22.3	30.0
Financial Man.	49.2	63.6	39.6	58.2
Leisure Act.	33.7	47.1	34.1	41.8
Sexual Relat.	42.3	49.9	37.3	45.0
Family & Friends	58.1	69.3	46.8	61.4
Roles & Resp.	50.5	58.0	47.3	54.6
Spiritual Beliefs	79.8	86.7	76.8	85.9

---

\* Based on a t-test analysis using Individual scores, all categories were significantly higher at post-test (p .001). For the couple scores (PCA), all the categories were significantly higher at post-test (p .05).



**Figure 1: Pre and Post-test on PREPARE-ENRICH—Individual Scores**



**Figure 2: Pre & Post-test on PREPARE-ENRICH—Couple Scores**

### **Couple Typology Analysis:**

Using the couple typology scores for couples from PREPARE-ENRICH, an analysis was done of pre- and post-test changes. The five couple types from PE were created using cluster analysis of the positive couple agreement (PCA) scores. There are five types of patterns for married couples and they are the following (from most to least satisfied with their marriage): *Vitalized, Harmonious, Congenial, Conflicted and Devitalized.*

Table 2 provides a summary of the couple types for the 22 couples before and after the program. Before the program (at pre-test), more of the couples were Congenial, Conflicted and Devitalized, while after the program more of were Vitalized and Congenial.

**Table 2: Couple Types Before & After Program**  
**POST-TEST**

	Vitalized	Harmonious	Conventional	Conflicted	Devitalized	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>PRE-TEST</b>							
Vitalized	2					2	10
Harmonious						0	0
Conventional	2		4	1		7	32
Conflicted	2	1	3	1	1	8	35
Devitalized	1		2		2	5	23
n	7	1	9	2	3	22	
%	32	5	41	10	13		100%

More specifically, for the more happily married couple types, at pre-test only 9 percent of the couples were Vitalized or Harmonious, but that increased to 36 percent at post-test (see Table 3). Conversely for the more unhappy couples, 59 percent of the couples were Conflicted or Devitalized at the beginning of the program, but their numbers decreased to 23 percent at post-testing.

**Table 3: Changes in Couple Types after Program**

<b>Couple Type</b>	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Vitalized & Harmonious	2	9%	8	36%
Conventional	7	32%	9	41%
Conflicted & Devitalized	13	59%	5	23%
	——	——	——	——
	22	100%	22	100%

In summary, these results clearly demonstrate that the PE Group Program had a very positive impact on the specific areas of the relationship and on the overall type of the couples' relationship.

**References:**

Arnold, R. W. V. (2004). Empowering Couples Program for Married Couples. *Marriage & Family Journal*, 7, 237-253.

Burleson, T. (2004). Effectiveness of Empowering Couples Program. Unpublished study.

Carroll, J.S. & Doherty, W.J. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family Relations*, 52, 105-118.

Childs, G. (2009). Marriage preparation marriage education programs: An evaluation of essential elements. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University.



- Futris, T.G., A.W. Barton, T.M. Aholou & D.M. Seponski (2011). The impact of PREPARE on engaged couples: Variations by delivery format. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 10, 69-86.
- Gordon, L. (1999). PAIRS Program. In Berger, R. & Hannah, M.T. *Preventive Approaches in Couple Therapy*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel.
- Knutson, L. & Olson, D. H. (2003) Effectiveness of PREPARE Program with premarital couples in a community setting. *Marriage & Family Journal*, 6, 529-546.
- Mabry, D.M. (2015). *PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program: Impacting a Local Church*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Ashland, Ohio: Ashland Theological Seminary.
- Markman, H., Stanley, S. & Blumberg, S. (2010) *Fighting for Your Marriage: PREP Program (3<sup>rd</sup>)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Meier, W. (2010). *The Couple Checkup: Evaluating a new Marriage Enrichment Intervention*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Denver, CO: Denver Seminary.
- Miller, S. and P. (1999). Couple Communication Program. In Berger, R. & Hannah, M.T. *Preventive Approaches in Couple Therapy*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel.
- Olson, D.H. & Olson, A.K. (2010). *PREPARE-ENRICH Group Program*. Roseville, MN: Life Innovations, Inc.
- Stanley, S.M., C.A. Johnson, P.R. Amato & H.J. Markman (2006). Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: Findings from a large, random household survey. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 117-126.