

# Effectiveness of Adlerian-based Educational Program on Decision Making Problems of Spouse Selection and Attitude Toward Marriage and Divorce among Children of Divorced Parents

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## Abstract

**Background:** One of the most important complications of parental divorce for children is uncertainty about marriage and its outcomes and, in the next step, doubts about decision-making about choosing a suitable spouse. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Adlerian-based educational program on the problems of choosing a spouse and attitude toward marriage and divorce among children of divorced parents.

**Methods:** This quasi-experimental study was conducted based on a pretest-posttest control group design and follow-up. The statistical population of this study consisted of all divorced youths referring to a counseling center in Tehran, Iran, 60 of whom were selected by convenience sampling method and randomly divided into two groups of 30 experimental and control. Premarital education was conducted based on the communication training program for the experimental group. Before the intervention and the final session, pre-test and post-test were taken, and follow-up was performed 45 days after the post-test. The tools used to collect the data included Shiloh and Shenhav-Sheffer in 2004 (2004), Marriage Attitude Scale (1998), and Attitude Toward Divorce (1986). The gathered data were analyzed in SPSS software (version 22) using one-way covariance analysis.

**Results:** The results showed that the Adlerian-based educational program was effective in choosing a spouse ( $P < 0.01$ ), attitude toward marriage ( $P < 0.01$ ), and attitude toward divorce ( $P < 0.01$ ) among youths of divorced parents.

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that the Adlerian-based educational program was effective in increasing attitude toward marriage and decreasing decision problems and attitude toward divorce among youths of divorced parents.

**Keywords:** Child, Divorce, Marriage, Spouses, Decision-making

## Introduction

Family is the smallest social unit whose stability or instability affects family members and society, and the collapse of this small unit sometimes has devastating effects on children (1). The occurrence of divorce has increased in recent years, and today, more than ever, it has become the most common solution for a failed marriage (2). According to the Civil Registry Organization, the divorce rate has always been rising and increasing (3). Increasing divorce rates have important implications for children since children's psychological well-being goes through transitional periods, such as divorce, which has attracted the attention of researchers and mental health professionals (4). Divorce and living in a single-parent family are associated with an increase in stressful events, causing adjustment problems in children (5). According to the literature review, children's incompatibility with their parents' divorce can have detrimental and destructive effects on their psychological functioning and even their physical condition (6).

The results of studies show that children of divorced families have more emotional, behavioral, and cognitive problems than children in normal families (7).

Divorce also permanently undermines family and relationships between children and parents, which often leads to destructive methods of conflict management, reduced social competence for children, premature loss of virginity, and a lack of masculinity for adults. It also leads to more dating problems, more cohabitation, more divorce rates, higher expectations of divorce in later life, and a greater reduction in child desire (8). Divorce leads to disruption of parent-child relationships, continued discord between ex-spouses, loss of emotional support, economic problems, and an increase in the number of other negative lives. Moreover, divorce undermines the health and survival of children. It also increases behavioral, emotional, and psychiatric risks, including depression and decreased self-esteem, and even suicide (9).

One of the most important complications of parental divorce for children is uncertainty about marriage and its outcomes and, in the next step, doubts about decision making about choosing a suitable spouse (10). Difficulties in choosing a spouse or making decisions in romantic relationships, such as starting a period of familiarity or ending a relationship, have important long-term consequences. Unsuccessful romantic decisions are among the most common sorrows in life (11). The quality of decision-making can have a profound impact on children's life and quality of life. The physical attractiveness of the partner and the relationship with him/her can make the person fall in love with someone who is imprinted in his mind as an ideal spouse (12). Lack of informed decision-making (slippage) can be the basis for entering into a relationship and moving towards it, such as marriage or sex (13).

Throughout childhood, family experiences play a vital role in building children's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations (14), since children learn what marriage and family life should be like by observing parents' marital relationships. Attitude toward divorce means one's thoughts and interests toward divorce and its consequences. The findings of various pieces of research have shown that parental values, behaviors, and attitudes are significantly related to adolescents' beliefs and attitudes toward marriage and divorce. The experience of parental divorce may cause a child to consider the importance of commitment meaningless and see the family foundation as negative. According to the intergenerational transmission theory, children inherit values and norms from their parents and pass them on to the next generations. According to this theory, divorce and lack of trust in a marriage and its results and, consequently, decision-making problems will be passed on to their children from divorced parents as a value and norm (15).

In addition to looking at divorce, attitudes toward marriage are also involved in the fields of attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of individuals. Attitude toward marriage pays much attention to cognitive and subjective phenomena because lack of attention to these dimensions and phenomena can lead to marital distress in couples. The literature on beliefs in relationships shows that beliefs are linked to behaviors and feelings (16). Beliefs influence our ways of feeling and lead our responses to situations that, in turn, affect the satisfaction we feel about life and relationships. In this context, it is reasonable to change beliefs and other sensitive issues about marriage before marriage because people can hardly reasonably assess their expectations as soon as they get married. The National Center for Healthy Marriage Research also states that premarital preparation can effectively reduce divorce and support healthy marriage. Lack of preparation for

marriage and wrong attitudes should be identified in premarital education since adequate premarital preparation positively affects not only marriage but also humans and future generations (17).

### Objectives

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Adlerian-based educational program in the problems of choosing a spouse and attitude toward marriage and divorce among youths of divorced parents.

### Methods

The present quasi-experimental study was conducted based on a pretest-posttest control group design with follow-up. The statistical population of this study consisted of all youths from divorced families referring to one of the counseling centers in Tehran, Iran. The cases referred to the counseling centers for premarital counseling and were registered to attend these meetings based on the researcher's call. The sample size was determined at 30 subjects using a confidence interval of 0.25, alpha of 0.05, and power of was 0.80 for each group. A total of 60 adults with divorced parents were selected by convenience sampling method based on obtaining a score of a standard deviation lower than the average from the questionnaire of decision-making problems in choosing a spouse and attitude toward marriage. Afterward, the cases were randomly assigned into two groups of experimental and control (n=30 each). The inclusion criteria were obtaining a standard deviation lower than the average from the questionnaire of decision-making problems in choosing a spouse and attitude toward marriage, being in the age range of 18-25 years, lacking a history of marriage, and not attending the workshop or marriage training session. On the other hand, the subjects who had a history of marriage or previous marriage, used other psychological treatments, and were more than two sessions absent from the educational program were excluded from the research.

Regarding the ethical considerations, the participants were informed of the right to leave the study at any time. Moreover, all participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality in this study, and the researchers themselves conducted all questionnaires to ensure the process. The Adlerian-based premarital education program was performed in six 90-minute sessions twice a week for the experimental group, emphasizing the principles and techniques of the communication training program. A pre-test was performed before the administration of any educational intervention. On the last day of the training session, the experimental group received the post-test, while the control group test was performed 1 day after the test of the experimental group. The follow-up test was performed on the participants of

the experimental and control groups again 45 days after the completion of the training course.

**Table 1- Summary of the protocol for Adlerian-based premarital education sessions**

Sessions	Content
<b>Grow personal awareness about marriage</b>	The goal is to increase and grow individual knowledge. Check expectations about marriage and what it takes to succeed.
<b>Know yourself and your marriage</b>	Diagnosis and training of cognition. Who you are and what you enter into your marriage, and what causes controversy? Identify personality styles and their effect on marriage.
<b>Main Families</b>	Identify how your ideas are formed in your family. A glimpse of the original family (how the original family affects your marriage and the formation of a new family).
<b>Communication</b>	Identify the vital and complex nature of communication. Learn about social-individual style.
<b>Conflict Management</b>	Recognize that the solution to conflicts can be solved well by creating intimacy. Identify your conflict styles and learn general principles and strategies for solving problems.
<b>Cooperation</b>	Insight that marriage is an obligation that requires cooperation from both sides to succeed. Learn the components of collaboration and identify homework.

### Mate-Selection Questionnaire

This 43-item questionnaire was developed by Shiloh and Shenhav-Sheffer in 2004 to evaluate and categorize decision-making problems in choosing a spouse. The questionnaire consists of 3 subscales, namely lack of preparedness, lack of information, and unconquerable information. The items are rated on a 9-point Likert scale from 1=does not apply to me to 9=applies well to me, with a higher score indicating more difficulties in decision-making. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the lack of preparedness, lack of information, and unconquerable information subscales were 0.93, 0.65, 0.91, and 0.89 for the total score, respectively. The fit indices obtained on 200 divorced youths were goodness of fit index (GFI)=0.92, adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)=0.90, comparative fit index (CFI)=0.97, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=0.05, indicating the optimal fit of the data with the measurement model (18). Moreover, the reliability of this tool was estimated at 0.93 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient method.

### Attitude Toward Marriage Scale

This questionnaire designed by Park and Rosén in 1998 to assess attitudes toward marriage. This tool is scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=fully agreeable to 5=completely disagree, with the highest and lowest scores obtained at 92 and 23, respectively, which having higher scores in this scale shows a positive attitude toward marriage. The validity of this scale was calculated at 0.77 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the test-retest coefficient or the two-time coefficient of the implementation of this scale was obtained at 0.86. The fit index obtained on 200 divorced youths was GFI=0.97, AGFI=0.95, CFI=0.99, RMSEA=0.04, indicating the optimal fit of the data with the measurement model (19). Furthermore, the reliability of this tool was calculated at 0.82 using

### Decision-Difficulties

Cronbach's alpha coefficient method.

### Attitude Toward Divorce

This instrument, developed by Kinard and Grad in 1986 to assessing attitude towards divorce. The indicators of this variable include happiness in marriage, loyalty, and the importance of marriage. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=completely disagreed to 5=fully agree, with a higher score indicating a positive attitude toward divorce. This 12-item questionnaire consists of 5 items related to loyalty (items 1, 3, 6, 7, and 8), 3 items related to happiness (items 2, 5, and 12), and 4 items related to the importance of marriage (items 4, 9, 10, and 11). The reliability of this scale determined at was 0.77 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient method, and the test-retest reliability coefficient of this scale was obtained at 0.86 (20). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was estimated at 0.79 for this tool in the present study.

The collected data were analyzed in SPSS software (version 22) using descriptive statistics, such as mean (standard deviation), frequency distribution table, and inferential statistics of one-way ANCOVA covariance analysis.

### Results

According to the results of demographic information, 14 (46.7%) and 16 (53.3%) cases were respectively girls and boys in the experimental group,

while 20 (66.7%) and 10 (33.3%) subjects were girls and boys in the control group, respectively. Moreover, the minimum and maximum ages of adults with divorced parents were 18 and 25 years, respectively. The mean age scores of the participants in the experimental and control groups were estimated at 21.10±2.47 and 22.48±2.97 years, respectively. In this section, descriptive indicators, including minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of research variables, are presented.

**Table 2- Summary of descriptive statistics for research variables**

Group	Dependent variable	Time	M	SD
Experimental	Attitudes toward divorce	Pre-test	47.80	2.85
		Post-test	23.86	2.41
		Follow-up	22.26	2.25
	Attitudes toward marriage	Pre-test	50.33	6.06
		Post-test	86.13	3.90
		Follow-up	87.13	5.69
	Decision problems	Pre-test	237.86	29.50
		Post-test	166	15.80
		Follow-up	153.86	16.80
Control	Attitudes toward divorce	Pre-test	43.40	3.56
		Post-test	45.80	4.02
		Follow-up	50.86	2.66
	Attitudes toward marriage	Pre-test	47.53	4.82
		Post-test	44	5.02
		Follow-up	42.93	3.10
	Decision problems	Pre-test	280.06	20.36
		Post-test	306.53	24.20
		Follow-up	284.13	15.87

One of the most important assumptions of multivariate analysis is a normal distribution of variables. To investigate normality, there are several methods, among which the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method was used in this study. The results showed that Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics for divorce attitude ( $z=130$ ), attitude toward marriage ( $z=208$ ), and decision-making process ( $z=104$ ) were significant at the significant level of 0.053, respectively.

Another important assumption for covariance analysis is that the relationship between covariance and the dependent variable is the same, indicated by the same slope on the regression line. In other words, regression lines for each group should be the same in

the research. The heterogeneous and unequal slope shows that there is

an interaction between variables and educational methods. If there is a significant interaction between covariance variables and factors, then the covariance analysis results are misleading, and therefore, they should not be calculated. The interaction of covariance (pre-tests) and dependent variables (post-tests) at the factors' levels are not significant. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of slopes of the regression line is established. Mbox value (107.21) at a level greater than 05.05 does not make any difference. Consequently, the homogeneity assumption of variance-covariance matrices is established.

**Table 3 – Results of multivariate covariance analysis tests**

Effect	Test	Value	F	Df hypothesis	Df error	P	Eta
Group	Pillai's effect	1.128	17.67	6	82	0.001	0.56
	Wilks Lambda	0.022	76.18	6	80	0.001	0.85
	Hotelling effect	37.304	242.47	6	78	0.001	0.94
	Roy's largest root	37.12	507.33	3	41	0.001	0.97

The results contained in Table 3 show that groups have a significant difference in at least one of the dependent variables. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a significant difference between the communication and Adlerian education groups and

the control group in at least one of the dependent variables. Multivariate analysis of covariance on dependent variables has been used to determine the difference.

**Table 4- Results of multivariate analysis of covariance independent variables**

Dependent variables	SS	df	MS	F	P	Eta
Attitudes toward divorce	16,318.57	2	8,159.28	433.05	0.001	0.95
Attitudes toward marriage	4,180.57	2	2,090.28	210.49	0.001	0.90
Decision problems	210,120.53	2	100,560.26	321.24	0.001	0.93

Based on the results of Table 4, the F ratio of multivariate analysis of covariance of the two Adlerian and communicative groups in the dependent variables of divorce attitude ( $F=433.05$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), attitude toward marriage ( $F=210.499$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), and decision-making process ( $F=221.24$ ,  $P<0.01$ ) were significant. This means that experimental methods have affected dependent variables. Moreover, the size index shows the effect of experimental methods on dependent variables. Tukey's follow-up test (paired comparison of groups) was used to determine which groups differed from the variables mentioned above.

## Discussion

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of an Adlerian-based educational program on the problems of choosing a spouse and attitude toward marriage and divorce among youths of divorced parents, which was revealed to be effective. According to the intergenerational transmission theory, attitudes toward divorce are passed from parents to children (21). According to the intergenerational transmission theory, children inherit positive attitudes from their parents toward divorce. These attitudes can play a decisive and important role in youths' decision-making and attitude (22). Accordingly, individuals in this program are taught how to live based on the origin family (i.e., divorced parents). Young people can specify challenging topics in their families and decide on these topics in their lives. Furthermore, individuals in the communication training section learn how family communication patterns affect their relationships (23). The program is designed to prepare people for a healthy marriage in the future. For example, in the training section, collaboration and division of tasks lead to greater intimacy and increased self-esteem, expression of feelings of belonging to one another, a sense of confidence in each other, and encouragement (24).

In collaboration, the program will teach participants how to build healthy relationships in the future. They tend to decide and agree with each other and discuss the division of tasks. Couples who are not balanced and conflicted with taking power with each other, which causes one side to gain power beyond the other, one part determines the loser's role and the other part quickly determines the victorious role (parents of divorced children). In an unhealthy couple relationship, one of the parties uses their power too much to take control in a power-seeking way. On the other hand, couples may face each other and fight over similar things and constantly insist on their own opinions (25-26).

The results showed a significant difference between the experimental group (receiving Adlerian-based training) and the control group in

terms of decision-making problems. This means that Adlerian-based premarital education led to a decrease in attitudes toward divorce in the experimental group, compared to the control group. This finding is in line with those reported in studies conducted by Collardeau and Ehrenberg (6), Cui et al. (8), Johnson (17), Jamshidian (24), Markman et al. (25), Omidvar et al. (26), and Pourmarzi et al. (27).

In explaining this finding, it can be said that decision-making problems consist of three different types (29). The first type of decision-making problem is the lack of preparedness. The Adlerian-based education program can prepare single individuals with such skills as conflict management, cooperation, and accountability (30). With the help of the principles of cooperation, the program teaches people that cooperation and communication can lead to an increase in intimacy, increase in self-esteem, expression of feelings of belonging to each other, feeling confident in each other, encouraging each other, and increasing preparation for a healthy marriage. This program also eliminates this lack of preparedness by training responsibility and helps create readiness and responsibility and understand what responsibilities exist in cohabitation and the future.

The second type of decision-making problem is the existence of conflicting information. In explaining this section, it can be said that since the children of divorced families have used perfect life patterns (parents), they have incorrect information about cohabitation. This training program can correct this false information in the family of origin, which contradicts conventional information, and provide the recipient with the necessary insights to review and correct this information so that individuals themselves can decide whether their input information is correct or not. Finally, the third type of decision-making problem is the lack of information. This program uses its first and second components, namely self-awareness and awareness about marriage, to give the person this insight and recognition to obtain the right information about themselves and marriage. As a result, this insight will repair, add, and receive new information, and consequently, solve decision-making problems or reduce them.

Considering that the Adlerian-based education program can be a suitable method for reducing decision-making problems in choosing a spouse and increasing positive attitude toward the marriage of children from divorced families, it is suggested that psychologists and counselors affiliated with the Psychology Organization use the findings of this study. It is also recommended that this educational method be provided by private counseling centers affiliated with various organizations, such as the armed forces and the judiciary for all children from

divorced families. Moreover, considering that one of the most important limitations of this study was its statistical population, i.e. children from divorced families, it is suggested that this type of research be conducted on children from different families, including conflicting families.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that Adlerian-based educational program was effective in increasing attitude toward marriage and decreasing decision-making problems and attitude toward divorce of youths of divorced parents.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

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