

# The Effect of the “Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)” Program on Improving Communication and Increasing Intimacy in Couples About to Marry

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### Article Info

#### Article type:

Original Research

#### Section:

Clinical Psychology

#### How to cite this article:

Sadat Dashti Khavidaki, S., Rasouli, M., & Jarareh, J. (2026). The Effect of the “Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)” Program on Improving Communication and Increasing Intimacy in Couples About to Marry. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 4, 1-11.

<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.cp.psyxenus.4624>



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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) program on improving communication patterns and increasing intimacy among couples about to marry. The research employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group and a follow-up phase. The statistical population consisted of all engaged couples who attended Pars Ravan, Khorshid Farda, and Armaghan-e Zendegi Counseling Centers in Karaj during the last quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025. Using convenience sampling, 40 participants (20 couples) were selected and randomly assigned to an experimental group, which received the six-session Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) intervention, and a control group that received no treatment. Data were collected using the Couple Intimacy Questionnaire (Vonden Broeck & Bertman, 1995) and the Couple Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen & Salaway, 1984). Data analysis was conducted using multivariate analysis of variance with repeated measures (MANOVA) via SPSS version 23. The results revealed that the BLC program significantly increased intimacy and mutual constructive communication while decreasing mutual avoidance and demand/withdraw communication styles in the experimental group compared to the control group ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally, no significant differences were found between posttest and follow-up scores, indicating that the observed improvements were stable over time. The between-group and within-group analyses showed significant interaction effects of time and group on intimacy and communication variables, confirming the effectiveness and persistence of the intervention’s impact. The findings demonstrate that the Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) program is an effective intervention for enhancing intimacy and improving communication among premarital couples.

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**Keywords:** *intimacy, communication improvement, Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)*

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## 1. Introduction

The quality and stability of intimate relationships represent a central domain in the study of human well-being and psychological adjustment. Healthy romantic relationships are characterized by emotional intimacy, mutual understanding, and effective communication, all of which contribute to long-term satisfaction and relational resilience (Segal, 2015). In contrast, couples who lack the skills necessary to navigate interpersonal challenges often experience conflict, emotional distance, and eventual relational dissolution (Blanchard et al., 2021). Within the past decade, researchers and clinicians have increasingly emphasized preventive and educational interventions aimed at strengthening couple relationships before marriage. Among these, the *Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)* program has emerged as a promising approach that integrates attachment theory, communication enhancement, and emotional regulation to promote sustainable intimacy and mutual growth (Soleimani et al., 2022).

Premarital education programs aim to equip couples with essential relational competencies, such as emotional regulation, empathy, constructive conflict management, and intimacy building (Carlson et al., 2020). These programs are grounded in systemic family theory, attachment theory, and social learning frameworks that conceptualize relationship quality as a dynamic process influenced by communication patterns and partner responsiveness (Clyde et al., 2020). In the context of preventive interventions, premarital relationship enrichment not only mitigates potential marital distress but also enhances partners' relational efficacy and adaptability over time (Strader et al., 2019). The *Building a Lasting Connection* model, initially introduced as an educational and therapeutic framework for engaged couples, aims to foster deep emotional connection through evidence-based exercises focusing on trust, shared goals, and secure attachment (Lou-Barton, 2022).

Attachment theory provides a critical foundation for understanding the mechanisms underlying intimacy and relationship maintenance (Venezia, 2023). According to this framework, secure attachment facilitates emotional

openness and adaptive coping in romantic contexts, whereas insecure attachment contributes to avoidance, anxiety, and maladaptive conflict cycles (Xiang et al., 2024). Premarital programs such as BLC therefore prioritize identifying and modifying attachment-related behaviors that hinder emotional connection. Studies indicate that couples with secure attachment styles report greater relationship satisfaction and resilience when confronted with stressors (Kanter et al., 2022). Conversely, maladaptive attachment patterns often perpetuate withdrawal or demand behaviors that erode communication quality (Davari & Rajabpour Farokhani, 2024).

Communication has been identified as one of the most influential predictors of relationship satisfaction and longevity (Powell & Wielick, 2024). Positive communication patterns promote mutual respect and trust, while maladaptive forms—such as avoidance, criticism, or defensiveness—are associated with relational distress and dissolution (Kanter et al., 2022). Research demonstrates that interventions enhancing communication skills yield significant improvements in emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction (Doostkam et al., 2021). Effective premarital communication training fosters the ability to express emotions constructively, manage conflicts productively, and strengthen empathy within the couple's interactional system (Hessaari, 2024). In this regard, the BLC program provides a structured framework for developing relational mindfulness, perspective-taking, and active listening skills—core elements that protect couples from later relational deterioration (Sutoko, 2024).

A major advantage of structured relationship-building programs such as BLC lies in their multidimensional approach, which integrates psychological education, skill training, and behavioral practice. As shown in comparative studies, educational programs emphasizing emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and cooperative problem-solving significantly improve marital satisfaction and commitment (Habibi et al., 2022). Similarly, relationship enrichment interventions based on systemic approaches, such as the Gorney Communication Enhancement System, have demonstrated effectiveness in improving family

functioning and spousal cooperation (Doostkam et al., 2021; Hessaari, 2024). These findings support the theoretical premise that strengthening pre-marital relational foundations enhances later marital adjustment and overall life satisfaction (Kazemnezhad & Mohammadi, 2021).

The *Building a Lasting Connection* model operates through multiple mechanisms, including the recognition of emotional needs, differentiation between self and partner experiences, and the cultivation of secure relational patterns (Lou-Barton, 2022). Empirical evaluations of the BLC program highlight its positive influence on intimacy, empathy, and communication competence among engaged couples (Soleimani et al., 2022; Talebi et al., 2023). For instance, studies comparing the BLC model with other premarital frameworks, such as the SYMBIS model, have demonstrated that BLC training yields more significant improvements in sexual intimacy and relational satisfaction (Talebi et al., 2023). This superiority has been attributed to BLC's deep focus on emotional bonding and shared relational meaning, rather than solely cognitive-behavioral adjustments.

Emotional intimacy is not merely an outcome but an ongoing process sustained by empathy, mutual validation, and shared emotional expression (Rostami et al., 2025). Research in emotional communication underscores that the ability to attune to a partner's affective state predicts both immediate relationship satisfaction and long-term commitment (Roring, 2025). Within the BLC framework, emotional intimacy is cultivated through exercises that encourage vulnerability, trust, and supportive communication (Segal, 2015). The relational mechanisms underlying these outcomes can be understood through the attachment-emotional bond continuum, where couples learn to co-regulate emotions during relational stressors and reinforce a sense of mutual security (Venezia, 2023).

Another core dimension of the BLC approach concerns conflict management. Unresolved conflicts, if left untreated, can lead to communication breakdowns and emotional disengagement (Carlson et al., 2020). Empirical studies on conflict resolution within couple interventions show that training in constructive communication significantly reduces maladaptive behaviors such as withdrawal, defensiveness, and escalation (Davari & Rajabpour Farokhani, 2024). The BLC model incorporates structured exercises that teach couples to identify destructive interaction cycles and replace them with collaborative problem-solving patterns (Tavakoli et al., 2023). Through guided discussions and experiential techniques, couples learn how to de-escalate tension and

sustain emotional connection during disagreements—a key factor in long-term relationship stability (Powell & Wielick, 2024).

Cultural context also plays a crucial role in the success of relationship interventions. In collectivist societies, family expectations, social norms, and religious values heavily influence marital relationships and communication patterns (Mousavi et al., 2024). Culturally adapted models of relationship education that integrate local values with evidence-based psychological frameworks are therefore essential (Pakrooh, 2023). The adaptation of the BLC model for Iranian couples has yielded encouraging results, demonstrating improvements in flexibility, family functioning, and relational adjustment (Bahari et al., 2021; Pakrooh, 2023). Moreover, the integration of spiritual and cultural components enhances the program's relevance and acceptability within diverse populations (Mousavi et al., 2024).

Premarital education grounded in both attachment theory and cultural adaptation provides an effective foundation for relational stability. Research indicates that couples who participate in structured premarital training report higher marital satisfaction, commitment, and resilience during the first years of marriage (Habibi et al., 2022; Yousefi et al., 2016). Moreover, interventions such as BLC that incorporate experiential learning foster deeper internalization of relational values and behaviors compared to purely didactic methods (Clyde et al., 2020; Roring, 2025). By emphasizing self-awareness, shared meaning-making, and empathetic understanding, these programs prepare couples to navigate the inevitable challenges of marital life with greater adaptability and trust (Kanter et al., 2022).

Recent meta-analytic findings affirm that communication quality remains the strongest predictor of long-term relationship satisfaction and dissolution risk (Kanter et al., 2022). Insecure attachment and poor communication patterns often interact to create cycles of avoidance, criticism, and withdrawal, which undermine marital stability (Xiang et al., 2024). The BLC program directly addresses these vulnerabilities through exercises targeting emotional regulation, self-disclosure, and collaborative goal setting (Lou-Barton, 2022). Furthermore, it emphasizes building shared rituals and traditions that reinforce emotional bonds over time—a factor empirically linked to marital longevity (Strader et al., 2019).

Beyond relational outcomes, interventions like BLC also enhance psychological well-being and reduce distress symptoms among participants (Habibi et al., 2022).

Research has shown that emotional connection within intimate partnerships serves as a protective factor against anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Segal, 2015). Moreover, fostering secure attachment and communication efficacy contributes to greater life satisfaction and overall mental health (Blanchard et al., 2021). Thus, the BLC framework not only strengthens marital relationships but also serves as a preventive psychological intervention with broader implications for emotional well-being and social functioning (Carlson et al., 2020).

While prior studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of diverse relationship enhancement programs such as PREP, RE, and EFT-based models, few have examined the longitudinal effects of BLC on premarital couples using experimental methodologies (Lou-Barton, 2022; Soleimani et al., 2022). Given the increasing prevalence of relational instability and divorce among newlyweds, there is a pressing need to evaluate empirically grounded, culturally sensitive interventions designed to promote enduring emotional bonds and communication competence (Bahari et al., 2021; Tavakoli et al., 2023).

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the *Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)* program on improving communication and increasing intimacy among couples about to marry.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed an experimental design using repeated measures. Each group was assessed three times: the first measurement involved administering a pretest before the training; the second measurement was conducted one week after completing the experimental intervention and required training sessions; and the third measurement took place three months after the interventions (treatments) as part of the follow-up stage.

The statistical population of the study consisted of all couples about to marry who referred to the Pars Ravan, Khorshid Farda, and Armaghan-e Zendegi Counseling Centers in Karaj during the last quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025.

Considering that the minimum required sample size for experimental studies based on the sample size formula is 15 participants, a total of 40 eligible participants who met the inclusion criteria and provided informed consent after the therapist's explanation were selected through convenience

sampling. They were then randomly assigned to two groups (20 participants in each group) using a lottery method.

#### Inclusion Criteria:

1. A minimum education level of a high school diploma.
2. First-time marriage for both partners.
3. Engagement period status of the couples.
4. Absence of major psychological disorders (self-reported).
5. Absence of chronic physical illnesses (self-reported).
6. No substance abuse at the time of the study (self-reported).
7. Obtaining a score at least one standard deviation below the mean on the Intimacy, Communication Patterns, and Problem-Solving Questionnaires.

#### Exclusion Criteria:

1. Initiation of separation or divorce.
2. Absence from more than two consecutive or three nonconsecutive sessions.
3. Receiving any concurrent psychological interventions.
4. History of receiving other psychological treatments such as cognitive-behavioral therapy for any psychological disorder within the past year.
5. Use of any psychotropic medication or pharmacotherapy for at least six months before the initial assessment and interview, which also resulted in exclusion from the study.
6. If, during the intervention, a participant expressed unwillingness to continue the sessions or was found not to meet the inclusion criteria, they were excluded from the study.

### 2.2. Measures

**Couple Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ):** This questionnaire was developed by Vonden Broeck and Bertman (1995) and consists of 56 items assessing levels of marital agreement, honesty, affection, and commitment between partners. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4. The total score for each dimension is obtained by summing the relevant item scores. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by Vonden Broeck (1996), and the reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the subscales were reported as .76, .86, .83, .82, and .72, respectively. In a study conducted by Erfani Akbari (2007), Cronbach's alpha for all subscales exceeded .80. Construct

validity of the marital intimacy variable was assessed using convergent and divergent validity methods through simultaneous regression modeling, showing that marital intimacy could be predicted through sexual intimacy and marital conflict.

**Couple Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ):** Developed by Christensen and Salaway (1984) at the University of California, this 35-item instrument measures reciprocal communication patterns among couples. It includes three subscales: mutual constructive communication, mutual avoidance communication, and demand/withdraw communication (comprising two parts: male-demand/female-withdraw and female-demand/male-withdraw). Responses are rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 9 (very likely). The CPQ describes spousal behaviors across three stages of marital conflict: the first stage (4 items) addresses when problems arise in the relationship; the second stage (18 items) focuses on discussions of the communication problem; and the third stage (13 items) pertains to continued discussions about the issue.

Previous studies utilizing the CPQ have demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability for its subscales. Christensen and Sherk (1991) assessed the validity of the three subscales by comparing three groups of couples—non-distressed, distressed, and divorced/separated. The mutual constructive communication subscale successfully differentiated among all three groups, while the mutual avoidance and demand/withdraw subscales distinguished only between distressed and non-distressed couples. In Iran, Ebadatpour (2000) examined the validity of the CPQ by correlating its subscales with those of the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire.

### 2.3. Intervention

The Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) program was implemented based on the educational package developed by Soleimani et al. (2022), which focuses on attachment, interaction, conflict management, physical connection, shared goals, and marital consolidation. The intervention consisted of six weekly two-hour sessions designed to strengthen emotional bonds and communication between engaged couples. The first session introduced participants to the foundations of attachment theory, attachment styles (secure, insecure, avoidant, and anxious), and their influence

on adult romantic relationships. The second session emphasized enhancing communication skills and fostering a deeper understanding of love through techniques such as emotional expression, active listening, empathy, and speaker–listener exercises. The third session focused on identifying and managing negative interaction cycles by helping couples recognize destructive behavioral patterns and learn intervention techniques to replace them with positive exchanges. The fourth session addressed sexual differences and needs within marital relationships by creating a safe environment for discussing sexual expectations, intimacy-building techniques, and gender-based emotional differences. The fifth session promoted cooperation and coordination in relationships through identifying shared roles, developing teamwork skills, and cultivating a sense of joint responsibility in solving challenges. The final session aimed to establish marital rituals that sustain long-term love by encouraging couples to design personal traditions, celebrate shared milestones, and engage in joint activities that reinforce emotional and relational connection.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of variance with repeated measures were used for data analysis, employing SPSS software version 23.

## 3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of participants in both the Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) and control groups indicated similar distributions across age and gender. In the BLC group, 45% of participants were between 20 and 30 years old ( $n = 9$ ), 40% were between 31 and 40 years old ( $n = 8$ ), and 15% were above 40 years old ( $n = 3$ ). In the control group, 45% were aged 20 to 30 years ( $n = 9$ ), 35% were aged 31 to 40 years ( $n = 7$ ), and 20% were above 40 years ( $n = 4$ ). Regarding gender, both groups had equal representation, with 50% female ( $n = 10$ ) and 50% male ( $n = 10$ ) participants. These findings demonstrate that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of demographic characteristics.

In this section, a statistical description of the research variables is first presented, and the potential differences between the groups across various measurement stages are examined.



**Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Intimacy and Communication by Measurement Stage and Group*

Group	Variable	Index	Pretest	Posttest	Follow-up
Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)	Intimacy	Mean	148.15	189.80	191.30
		SD	14.45	14.79	17.44
		Skewness	0.48	-0.37	-1.53
		Kurtosis	1.72	-0.30	1.46
Control	Intimacy	Mean	149.55	146.20	149.55
		SD	14.41	15.56	19.70
		Skewness	-0.04	0.17	-0.59
		Kurtosis	0.67	-1.09	-0.78
Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)	Mutual Constructive Communication	Mean	19.50	28.25	26.90
		SD	3.59	3.95	3.04
		Skewness	-0.15	1.10	-0.11
		Kurtosis	-0.88	0.75	-0.21
Control	Mutual Constructive Communication	Mean	19.25	18.50	18.45
		SD	3.43	3.20	4.14
		Skewness	-0.06	0.08	0.64
		Kurtosis	-0.63	-0.25	-0.10
Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)	Mutual Avoidance Communication	Mean	85.70	63.90	64.25
		SD	12.61	14.73	8.19
		Skewness	-0.10	-0.38	0.72
		Kurtosis	-0.29	0.54	-0.16
Control	Mutual Avoidance Communication	Mean	84.50	84.95	84.70
		SD	11.12	18.81	20.99
		Skewness	0.16	0.13	-0.26
		Kurtosis	-0.37	-0.94	-0.80
Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)	Demand/Withdraw Communication	Mean	55.30	43.60	44.35
		SD	7.21	5.48	5.86
		Skewness	1.35	0.12	-0.89
		Kurtosis	1.39	-0.85	-0.04
Control	Demand/Withdraw Communication	Mean	55.25	54.85	54.90
		SD	6.62	10.22	9.85
		Skewness	1.06	1.18	1.38
		Kurtosis	1.11	1.64	2.31

The descriptive statistics for the communication scale presented in Table 1 show the pretest and posttest scores for both the experimental and control groups. As observed, the mean scores in the Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) group increased from pretest to posttest. Based on the results, it can be inferred that the Building a Lasting

Connection (BLC) program contributed to the improvement of communication components and intimacy among couples about to marry.

A summary of the main between-group effects is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*One-Way Between-Group ANOVA for Intimacy and Communication Components*

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Effect Size
Intimacy	Between groups	23492.008	1	23492.008	40.191	.0001	.514
Mutual Constructive Communication	Between groups	1134.675	1	1134.675	45.043	.0001	.542
Mutual Avoidance Communication	Between groups	5413.633	1	5413.633	10.651	.002	.219
Demand/Withdraw Communication	Between groups	1576.875	1	1576.875	10.341	.003	.214

According to the results in Table 2, the calculated F-values for the between-group factor were statistically

significant at the .05 level for all intimacy and communication components ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, there were

significant differences in the overall mean scores of intimacy and communication components between the Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) and control groups.

A summary of the main within-group effects is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***One-Way Within-Group ANOVA for Intimacy and Communication Components Using the Greenhouse–Geisser Correction*

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Effect Size
Intimacy	Time	11174.450	1.941	5756.834	55.786	.0001	.595
Mutual Constructive Communication	Time	365.067	1.481	246.470	27.580	.0001	.421
Mutual Avoidance Communication	Time	3024.650	1.735	1743.769	17.576	.0001	.316
Demand/Withdraw Communication	Time	915.800	1.206	759.678	32.431	.0001	.460

The results presented in Table 3 show that for the within-group factor, the calculated F-values for the time effect (pretest, posttest, and follow-up) were significant at the .05 level for all communication components ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, there were significant differences in the mean pretest, posttest, and follow-up scores of intimacy and communication components across the time stages. Bonferroni post hoc tests were conducted to examine the mean differences across time. The results indicated

significant differences between the pretest and posttest, as well as between the pretest and follow-up stages in the Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) group ( $p < .05$ ). Moreover, no significant differences were found between posttest and follow-up scores for intimacy and communication components in the Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) group, indicating that the improvements in communication components remained stable over time ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 4***One-Way Interaction ANOVA for Intimacy and Communication Components*

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Effect Size
Intimacy	Time $\times$ Group	12967.817	1.941	6680.738	64.739	.0001	.630
Mutual Constructive Communication	Time $\times$ Group	530.600	1.481	358.228	40.085	.0001	.513
Mutual Avoidance Communication	Time $\times$ Group	3213.817	1.735	1852.827	18.675	.0001	.330
Demand/Withdraw Communication	Time $\times$ Group	801.800	1.206	665.112	28.394	.0001	.428

According to the results in Table 4, the calculated F-values for the interaction between time (pretest, posttest, and follow-up) and group were statistically significant at the .05 level for all communication components ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, there were significant differences between the mean pretest, posttest, and follow-up scores of intimacy and communication components across the two groups (Building a Lasting Connection (BLC) and control).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of the *Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)* program on improving communication patterns and enhancing intimacy among couples about to marry. The results revealed significant increases in intimacy and mutual constructive communication, alongside significant reductions in mutual avoidance and demand/withdraw communication styles in the experimental group compared to the control group. Furthermore, these improvements were sustained at the three-month follow-up, suggesting that the BLC program fostered stable and long-term relational gains. These findings align with previous evidence that structured

premarital interventions based on attachment and communication theories can meaningfully improve relational functioning and emotional closeness among couples (Lou-Barton, 2022; Soleimani et al., 2022; Talebi et al., 2023).

The observed enhancement in intimacy following the BLC intervention underscores the program's effectiveness in strengthening the emotional bond between partners. Intimacy, as defined in relational psychology, encompasses mutual understanding, emotional closeness, and the capacity for vulnerability within a relationship (Segal, 2015). The present findings are consistent with those reported by (Talebi et al., 2023), who demonstrated that premarital education based on the BLC and SYMBIS models significantly improved sexual intimacy and emotional closeness in newly engaged couples. Similarly, (Pakrooh, 2023) found that participation in BLC sessions increased emotional flexibility and family functioning among couples with obsessive relational patterns. These outcomes collectively suggest that the experiential nature of BLC—emphasizing open communication, empathy, and emotional safety—provides a



powerful mechanism for promoting intimacy development in couples at the pre-marital stage.

The results regarding communication improvement indicate that BLC training effectively increased mutual constructive communication while reducing avoidance and demand/withdraw interaction patterns. Such findings are in line with (Kanter et al., 2022), who confirmed through a meta-analysis that effective couple communication predicts long-term relationship quality and reduces the likelihood of dissolution. By incorporating skills such as active listening, assertive expression, and emotional regulation, the BLC model enables couples to navigate relational stressors constructively. (Davari & Rajabpour Farokhani, 2024) further corroborated this by showing that couples trained in communication skills using Gottman's model reported higher relationship quality, supporting the general principle that communication-focused interventions yield measurable improvements in relational satisfaction and adaptability.

Another key result of the present study was the sustained effect of BLC across the follow-up stage, suggesting that participants internalized and maintained the relational skills they acquired. This durability mirrors the findings of (Habibi et al., 2022), who reported that the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) had long-term benefits on marital commitment and quality of life in married women. Similarly, (Doostkam et al., 2021) demonstrated that the Gorney Communication Enhancement System produced stable improvements in marital satisfaction and family functioning among employed women. These findings indicate that relationship education grounded in experiential learning and behavioral reinforcement—such as the BLC framework—can foster lasting cognitive and emotional changes in interpersonal dynamics.

The present study's findings are also theoretically supported by attachment theory, which emphasizes that secure emotional bonds facilitate open communication and relational stability (Venezia, 2023). By promoting secure attachment behaviors, the BLC program helps partners manage fear of rejection and develop a mutual sense of safety—key precursors to emotional intimacy. Research by (Xiang et al., 2024) on partner accommodation in couples with posttraumatic stress disorder further supports this, revealing that secure emotional accommodation leads to greater satisfaction and emotional stability in intimate relationships. The BLC model operationalizes these theoretical principles by teaching couples how to respond to each other's emotional cues with empathy and attunement,

thus fostering an environment where both partners feel valued and understood.

Furthermore, the reduction in mutual avoidance communication and demand/withdraw patterns found in this study indicates that BLC promotes healthier conflict management strategies. This result aligns with (Powell & Wielick, 2024), who highlighted that emotionally focused interventions grounded in attachment principles effectively reduce defensive interaction cycles and promote constructive problem-solving. Likewise, (Tavakoli et al., 2023) demonstrated that integrating the BLC educational package with mentalization-based therapy improved attachment behaviors and sexual satisfaction in insecure spouses, further confirming that addressing emotional understanding and self-other differentiation can lead to more adaptive communication outcomes.

In addition, (Clyde et al., 2020) emphasized the necessity of revising premarital interventions to better address contemporary relationship challenges such as emotional detachment and digital communication barriers. The BLC model meets this need by integrating emotional intelligence, empathy training, and mindfulness-oriented techniques, which are particularly relevant in modern relationships characterized by technological mediation and time constraints. Similarly, (Carlson et al., 2020) argued that relationship education programs that emphasize proactive prevention of distress through emotional bonding and communication enhancement have the greatest long-term impact—a finding clearly reflected in the sustained improvements observed in the present study.

The positive results observed here are also congruent with studies in cultural contexts similar to Iran, where relational interventions have been adapted to align with local social and moral frameworks (Mousavi et al., 2024). The integration of positive psychology and Islamic values within relationship programs was found to enhance communication among conflicting couples, suggesting that culturally sensitive models strengthen engagement and relevance. The Iranian adaptation of BLC appears to follow this trajectory by combining Western theoretical principles with culturally grounded practices that emphasize commitment, mutual respect, and collective well-being (Bahari et al., 2021; Pakrooh, 2023). Such culturally congruent applications may explain the high retention and satisfaction rates observed in the present sample.

Furthermore, the current results align with (Kazemnezhad & Mohammadi, 2021), who found that relationship enrichment programs significantly reduced

perfectionism and increased marital satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of psychoeducational frameworks that balance emotional awareness with behavioral change. Similarly, (Hessaari, 2024) found that training life skills based on communication enhancement systems led to improved marital satisfaction and family functioning, reinforcing the notion that structured, skill-based approaches—like BLC—can enhance both emotional and functional dimensions of marital life.

At the interpersonal level, BLC's emphasis on creating shared rituals and goals contributes to sustained relationship quality. (Strader et al., 2019) explained that creating lasting family connections through shared activities, traditions, and cooperative goals strengthens family cohesion and resilience. In the same vein, (Blanchard et al., 2021) noted that trust and consistency are foundational elements in building enduring relationships, aligning with BLC's focus on fostering reliability, predictability, and emotional commitment. The improvement in intimacy and communication reported in this study reflects the effectiveness of these principles in shaping resilient and emotionally satisfying partnerships.

The findings also complement the qualitative insights of (Roring, 2025), who examined how digital communication practices such as virtual interactions can maintain emotional intimacy. While the contexts differ, both BLC and modern technological practices share a common goal—strengthening emotional connection through intentional communication. Similarly, (Rostami et al., 2025) emphasized the role of understanding love languages in enhancing marital communication, which parallels BLC's approach of helping couples identify and express emotional needs in personalized ways. These shared mechanisms illustrate that successful relational interventions must operate at both cognitive and affective levels, targeting communication as both a behavior and a symbol of emotional security.

In line with preventive relationship science, the current study contributes to the growing body of evidence advocating for early relational interventions before marriage (Yousefi et al., 2016). The findings suggest that fostering healthy communication and intimacy during engagement can serve as a protective factor against later marital distress and divorce. As (Davari & Rajabpour Farokhani, 2024) and (Habibi et al., 2022) pointed out, relational quality established early in a marriage tends to persist over time, making early-stage interventions particularly strategic. Therefore, integrating the BLC program into premarital

counseling curricula may significantly enhance couples' preparedness for marriage and contribute to broader social well-being through the promotion of stable family systems.

Overall, the convergence between the present findings and previous literature underscores the multidimensional effectiveness of the *Building a Lasting Connection (BLC)* program. By combining principles of attachment, communication enhancement, conflict resolution, and emotional intimacy, BLC addresses the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of relational functioning. The results confirm that participants who underwent the program developed greater emotional awareness, empathy, and communication skills—core competencies that form the foundation of enduring relationships.

Despite the significant results, this study is not without limitations. First, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of findings to the wider population of engaged couples. Future research with larger, more diverse samples would enhance external validity. Second, the participants were recruited from counseling centers in one urban region, which may not represent couples from rural areas or different cultural subgroups. Third, the reliance on self-report questionnaires may introduce social desirability bias, particularly in domains related to intimacy and communication. Fourth, while a three-month follow-up period provided valuable insight into short-term retention, a longer longitudinal design would be needed to assess the durability of BLC's effects over several years of marriage. Finally, the absence of a comparative intervention group (e.g., cognitive-behavioral couple therapy or Gottman-based training) limits the ability to directly evaluate BLC's relative efficacy against other established approaches.

Future studies should aim to expand the evidence base by employing mixed-method designs that combine quantitative outcome measures with qualitative interviews to capture participants' lived experiences and emotional transformations throughout the BLC program. Comparative trials contrasting BLC with other evidence-based models—such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), PREP, or the Gottman Method—would help determine the program's unique strengths and limitations. Researchers could also explore the neural and psychophysiological correlates of emotional attunement and communication improvement following BLC participation, offering insight into underlying mechanisms of change. Additionally, cultural adaptation studies across different populations—such as newlyweds, long-term couples, or intercultural marriages—

would contribute to refining the model's cross-cultural applicability. Finally, longitudinal research following couples beyond the engagement phase into early and mid-marriage could provide valuable data on the enduring impact of BLC on marital satisfaction and family stability.

In practical terms, mental health professionals and counselors can integrate the *Building a Lasting Connection* (BLC) program into premarital education curricula to promote emotional intelligence, communication efficacy, and intimacy among couples preparing for marriage. The program's structured, experiential framework makes it adaptable for group workshops, community counseling, and online delivery platforms. Counselors should focus on cultivating empathy, teaching active listening, and guiding couples in designing shared rituals that reinforce emotional connection. Additionally, policymakers and family organizations could endorse the inclusion of such evidence-based relationship education in public health and family support initiatives, thereby contributing to the prevention of marital conflict and the promotion of resilient, emotionally connected families.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

### Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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