



PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL PREMARITAL INTERVENTION: A 12-WEEK 'GET YOURSELF READY FOR MARRIAGE' PROGRAM FOR ENHANCING INDIVIDUAL READINESS AND RELATIONAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of a psychoeducational premarital intervention the Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRFM) 12-week program on enhancing individual readiness and relational competence among Nigerian adults preparing for marriage. Employing a qualitative research design, 28 participants aged 21–45 engaged in the program delivered through digital platforms including Zoom, YouTube, WhatsApp, and email. Data were collected via open-ended questionnaires, reflective exercises, and in-depth interviews with certified counselors, and analyzed thematically. Findings showed three interrelated themes such as Mindset Shifts and Self-Awareness, Value Reorientation and Relational Growth and Transformative Impact of Psychoeducational Preparation. The study concludes that psychoeducational premarital interventions such as GYRFM provide an effective, culturally relevant, and scalable model for equipping individuals with the skills and mindset required for successful marriages.

Keywords: *Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRFM), Psychoeducation, Premarital Intervention, Relational Competence, Individual Readiness, Nigeria*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The increasing global rates of marital dissatisfaction, delayed marriages, and divorce underscore a pressing need for targeted premarital interventions that foster emotional maturity, self-awareness, and relational competence. Marriage is widely regarded as a critical developmental milestone across many cultures, including in Nigeria, where it holds deep socio-cultural, spiritual, and familial significance. Yet, the rising rates of marital dissatisfaction, separation, and divorce among Nigerian couples suggest that the transition into marriage is often undertaken with limited psychological and emotional preparation. Traditional premarital education in Nigeria has predominantly emphasized religious doctrines, medical screening (e.g., HIV, genotype compatibility), and couple-based counseling interventions. However, these approaches tend to overlook the crucial phase of individual psychological readiness, which involves self-awareness, identity clarity, cognitive flexibility, and emotional maturity.

In Nigeria, shifting socio-cultural dynamics, rising divorce rates, and increased exposure to modern relationship ideals have created a critical need for premarital interventions that go beyond couple-based counseling. While several studies have examined issues such as genotype compatibility, cohabitation, and early marriage decisions among Nigerian youth and adults (Efobi et al., 2021), less attention has been paid to individualized premarital programs that foster intrapersonal growth and psychological readiness for marital commitment. Many Nigerian adults, especially those approaching marriage, lack structured platforms to explore their personality, emotional patterns, and belief systems factors that strongly influence long-term marital stability (John & Deborah, 2019).

Recent literature has also indicated that high marital expectations and psychological unpreparedness contribute to marital dissatisfaction among Nigerian adults, particularly those in non-formal education settings (Yusuf & Alkali, 2022). While premarital education is often tied to health or genetic screening, comprehensive psychosocial programs that prepare individuals irrespective of current relationship status for the demands of marriage remain under-researched and under-implemented in Nigeria. Emerging adulthood a common phase in which most Nigerians begin contemplating marriage is characterized by identity exploration, instability, and increasing autonomy. Nigerian young adults are faced with diverse pressures, from family expectations to cultural norms, that influence marital decisions. Yet many lacks the tools and platforms to critically assess their own relational patterns, unresolved emotional wounds, or personality traits that may affect long-term marital success. Scholars have highlighted how early marriage, inadequate preparation, and mismatched expectations can significantly undermine relationship satisfaction and marital outcomes (Efobi et al., 2021).

To address this psychosocial gap, the Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRM) Program was developed by the author as a 12-week structured premarital curriculum grounded in counseling psychology. Unlike traditional models, the GYRM program is tailored for individuals whether single, dating, or engaged to develop insight into their psychological makeup, relational patterns, and readiness for marital commitment. The program is designed to help

participants identify self-sabotaging beliefs, shift dysfunctional paradigms, and gain practical tools for building healthy relationships. This study therefore addresses that gap by evaluating the Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRM) Program, a 12-week psychoeducational intervention designed to enhance self-awareness, relational decision-making, and personal readiness for marriage.

Research Questions

The following questions are designed to guide this study:

1. How do participants in the Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRFM) program describe their initial beliefs, fears, and challenges regarding relationships and marriage prior to the intervention?
2. In what ways does the GYRFM program influence participants' perceptions of values, compatibility, and partner selection in relationships?
3. What specific "aha moments" or mindset shifts do participants report as a result of engaging with the GYRFM program, and how do these contribute to their understanding of relational competence?
4. How does participation in the GYRFM program foster personal growth, self-awareness, and emotional healing among individuals preparing for marriage?
5. How do participants perceive the relevance and effectiveness of the GYRFM program compared to traditional premarital counseling approaches in Nigeria?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Premarital Readiness and Marital Outcomes

Research consistently highlights premarital readiness as a vital predictor of marital quality, stability, and longevity. Premarital readiness is often described as a multidimensional construct, encompassing intrapersonal maturity, interpersonal competence, and socio-cultural preparedness. Intrapersonal readiness involves self-awareness, emotional regulation, and realistic expectations about marriage. Interpersonal readiness includes communication, empathy, boundary-setting, and conflict management. These elements contribute directly to marital satisfaction and resilience against stressors (Yusuf & Alkali, 2022). Several recent studies support the role of premarital psychological preparedness in sustaining marriage. For instance, emotional maturity has been linked to improved marital quality and reduced marital conflict, with couples who demonstrate higher readiness reporting greater satisfaction and stability (Cao et al., 2017). Similarly, research indicates that premarital self-knowledge and mutual understanding of partner expectations act as buffers against divorce and maladaptive relational patterns (Rauer, et al., 2018).

Importantly, studies emphasize that marital readiness extends beyond structural markers such as financial stability or age. While economic capacity and social approval remain important, particularly in collectivist cultures, they cannot replace the necessity of psychological maturity (Jia et al, 2025). Yet, in the Nigerian context, readiness is often narrowly interpreted by these external standards, overlooking internal growth and relational competence. This discrepancy suggests a cultural gap in how readiness is conceptualized and operationalized. Furthermore, Evidence shows that individuals who engage in premarital preparation such as developing coping mechanisms, clarifying personal values, and strengthening interpersonal skills report not only higher marital satisfaction but also better mental health outcomes (Robles, 2014). Thus, marital readiness serves a dual function: supporting relational success and promoting individual psychological wellbeing.

Limitations of Traditional Premarital Counselling in Nigeria

Premarital counseling is widely acknowledged as a preventive tool that enhances marital stability and equips couples for lifelong partnership. In Nigeria, however, traditional premarital education is predominantly organized by religious institutions, with churches and mosques offering structured programs. These sessions primarily emphasize moral guidance, reproductive health, and medical compatibility such as genotype testing, HIV screening, and fertility checks (Adesina et al., 2022). While such focus on physical and moral readiness is valuable, it often neglects critical aspects of psychological self-awareness and emotional competence that strongly predict marital satisfaction.

One limitation of traditional counseling is its didactic nature. Studies indicate that Nigerian premarital counseling often relies on prescriptive advice rather than interactive or experiential learning. This restricts opportunities for individuals to reflect on personal histories, family-of-origin issues, or unresolved trauma that may influence future relationships (Okonkwo, 2020). Consequently, many couples enter marriage with unexamined emotional baggage, which may resurface during marital conflict. Additionally, these programs tend to adopt a "one-size-fits-all" approach,

overlooking individual differences in personality, attachment styles, and communication patterns. Emerging research emphasizes the importance of tailoring premarital interventions to individual psychological needs, as generic content may not adequately address underlying vulnerabilities or strengths (Harris et al., 2022). Without addressing such individual variation, the effectiveness of counseling in preventing marital dissatisfaction is diminished.

Another challenge is the cultural framing of premarital readiness. Within Nigerian society, marital preparation is often defined by external milestones such as financial independence, fertility prospects, and social approval. This contrasts with global perspectives where psychological maturity, conflict resolution, and mutual expectations are emphasized (Akinyemi & Ilesanmi, 2021). Consequently, young adults may undervalue the role of emotional intelligence and self-awareness in fostering marital stability. Another challenge is, while religious institutions provide widespread access to counseling, their frameworks are often limited by doctrinal constraints. Topics such as mental health, sexual communication, or gender equity may be underemphasized or avoided entirely due to cultural or religious sensitivities (Tonah, 2024). This restricts the comprehensiveness of premarital preparation and leaves critical relational competencies underdeveloped necessitating an urgent need of shift toward more holistic and individualized premarital interventions.

Emerging Need for Individual-Centered Premarital Interventions

Traditional premarital counseling has largely focused on couples, overlooking the importance of preparing individuals for marriage before they enter a relationship. Individual-centered premarital interventions emphasize self-awareness, emotional regulation, and the internal work necessary for building and sustaining healthy marriages. This approach argues that one cannot contribute effectively to a partnership without first understanding personal values, relational expectations, and emotional triggers (Baghaei & Mahmoodabadi, 2025). Evidence from other contexts highlights the effectiveness of such individual preparation. For example, studies show that individuals who receive training in emotional intelligence and self-reflection demonstrate higher relational competence, improved communication, and greater marital satisfaction (Jahangirzade, 2024; Miller & Wright, 2020). By confronting limiting beliefs, resolving past trauma, and aligning personal goals with relational expectations, individuals develop resilience that strengthens future partnerships.

Research further indicates that decision-making about marriage is enhanced when individuals engage in premarital interventions before entering long-term commitments. A study of young adults demonstrated that those who had undergone individualized premarital education were more deliberate in partner selection and less likely to idealize relationships, reducing their risk of early divorce (Adeyemi, 2021; Fincham & Beach, 2020). Such findings suggest that individual-centered readiness fosters clarity and intentionality in relational commitments. Despite these global insights, empirical evidence on individualized premarital interventions in Nigeria remains limited. Most Nigerian programs still emphasize medical, moral, and reproductive factors, neglecting psychological and emotional dimensions. Consequently, many young adults enter marriage with unresolved personal challenges that later strain their unions (Amadi, 2020; Osei-Tutu & Amoateng, 2020). Addressing this gap by implementing individual-centered interventions could strengthen marital resilience in the Nigerian context, particularly given rising divorce rates and marital instability.

Relevance of Counseling Psychology Approaches

Counseling psychology provides a valuable framework for strengthening premarital interventions by integrating evidence-based theories into marriage preparation. The GYRM program, for example, draws on cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), attachment theory, and personality theory to equip individuals with practical tools for relationship success. These frameworks address psychological and relational challenges often neglected in traditional Nigerian premarital counseling. CBT principles are particularly effective in helping individuals identify and restructure maladaptive beliefs about marriage and relationships. Research shows that cognitive restructuring reduces negative relational patterns, enhances communication, and increases marital satisfaction (Alghamdi, 2020). By teaching individuals to challenge irrational fears and expectations, CBT enhances resilience in navigating marital conflict.

Attachment theory also plays a critical role in premarital readiness. Studies have shown that insecure attachment styles are linked to relationship anxiety, jealousy, and communication breakdowns (Li & Chan, 2020). Integrating attachment-focused interventions helps individuals understand their relational tendencies and adopt healthier intimacy patterns, thereby strengthening marital bonds. Personality theory further enhances premarital preparation by fostering

self-awareness and partner understanding. Evidence suggests that personality traits, such as agreeableness and conscientiousness, are significant predictors of marital satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). By helping individuals explore their personalities, premarital programs can promote better partner matching and more adaptive communication strategies.

Importantly, embedding these counseling psychology approaches in culturally relevant education enhances their effectiveness. Scholars argue that adapting CBT, attachment, and personality-based strategies to align with Nigerian cultural norms increases acceptance and long-term sustainability (Adebanjo, 2021). This culturally sensitive integration ensures that psychological frameworks resonate with participants' lived experiences, increasing their practical utility.

In summary, counseling psychology approaches provide robust tools for premarital interventions. By combining CBT, attachment theory, and personality exploration, programs like GYRM can foster self-awareness, healthy intimacy, and adaptive relational behaviors. When adapted to cultural contexts such as Nigeria, these approaches hold significant promise for reducing marital instability and enhancing long-term relational wellbeing.

Theoretical Review

Attachment Theory: Attachment theory, originally developed by Bowlby (1969), has been widely applied to adult romantic relationships, suggesting that early attachment experiences influence later relationship behaviors and expectations. Recent scholarship underscores its significance in predicting marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, and commitment stability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Securely attached individuals are more likely to communicate effectively, regulate emotions, and sustain healthy intimacy, while insecurely attached individuals may struggle with fear of abandonment, avoidance, or mistrust. In the Nigerian context, cultural and familial dynamics often intersect with attachment styles, shaping how adults navigate courtship and marital readiness (Onyedibe et al., 2020). Thus, attachment theory provides an essential lens for examining how unresolved childhood experiences may undermine readiness for marriage as focus in the GYRM program carried out in this study.

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT): Cognitive-behavioral theory emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in shaping emotions and behaviors. Dysfunctional beliefs about marriage such as equating marriage with self-worth or assuming conflict is destructive can negatively influence relationship decisions. CBT interventions aim to identify, challenge, and restructure such maladaptive cognitions to promote healthier relational behaviors (Beck, 2019). Empirical studies have shown CBT-based premarital interventions to be effective in enhancing relational competence, self-awareness, and decision-making (Harris & Curtis, 2020). Within Nigeria, where socio-cultural expectations may pressure individuals into premature marital commitments, CBT offers a structured framework for addressing distorted cognitions and fostering more intentional choices about marriage.

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory: Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1950) highlights "intimacy versus isolation" as the key developmental task of young adulthood. Successfully navigating this stage involves the ability to form meaningful, reciprocal relationships without losing one's sense of identity. Failure to resolve this stage often leads to isolation, unfulfilled intimacy, or dysfunctional partnerships. Recent studies validate Erikson's framework in contemporary relational contexts, showing that personal identity clarity predicts readiness for marriage and long-term satisfaction (Syed & McLean, 2018). Nigerian young adults, negotiating between traditional expectations and modern ideals, often face unique challenges in balancing autonomy with relational interdependence (Efobi et al., 2021). Erikson's theory thus frames marital readiness not only as a social expectation but also as a psychosocial milestone.

Theoretical Framework and Its Application

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining attachment theory, cognitive-behavioral theory, and Erikson's psychosocial theory. Together, these frameworks provide a multi-layered understanding of marital readiness: attachment theory explains the relational and emotional foundations of intimacy, CBT addresses cognitive distortions and belief systems that shape relational choices, and Erikson's framework situates marital readiness within a developmental life-span context. The integration of these perspectives ensures that the Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRFM) program addresses both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of preparedness, reflecting a holistic approach consistent with counseling psychology.

The GYRM program operationalizes these theories through its 12-week curriculum. Attachment theory is reflected in modules addressing trauma, childhood dysfunction, and family dynamics, enabling participants to understand how past experiences shape present relational behaviors. CBT is applied in sessions such as self-awareness assessments



and working through the 27 most ignored questions, where participants identify and reframe maladaptive thought patterns. Erikson's psychosocial framework informs modules like transitioning from single to married and separate, unique, and whole, which emphasize identity consolidation as a precursor to marital commitment. By grounding the program in these theories, this study addresses a critical research gap in Nigeria, where premarital education often prioritizes medical and religious perspectives while neglecting psychological readiness.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, subjective meaning-making, and transformative processes dimensions that cannot be fully captured by quantitative metrics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to research on intimate and relational topics such as marriage readiness, because these areas are shaped by personal histories, cultural frameworks, and emotional narratives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rather than reducing readiness to measurable variables, this approach explore understanding of how participants internalized and applied program content to their lives. In addition, the study design was interpretivist in orientation, assuming that reality is socially constructed and that understanding must be co-created between researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given the intervention's focus on psychosocial preparation, the study employed semi-structured interviews and open-ended written reflections as the primary methods of data collection. These techniques provided flexibility, depth, and participant agency in shaping the narratives while ensuring consistency across the research process (Kallio et al., 2016).

Participants

The target population consisted of Nigerian adults aged 21–45, either single or engaged, who expressed clear intent to marry within one to three years. This group was purposively selected because they represented individuals most likely to benefit from premarital interventions. Purposive sampling, a common strategy in qualitative research, was used to identify participants who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Recruitment was carried out through online advertisements, religious networks, and premarital counseling referrals, ensuring diversity across socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. A total of 84 participants initially registered for the 12-week program; however, attrition led to 28 participants completing the program in full. Completion was defined by attending at least 10 of the 12 weekly sessions, submitting reflective tasks, and participating in the final debriefing with qualified counselors.

The final sample size aligns with recommendations for qualitative inquiry, which emphasizes data saturation over statistical representation (Guest et al., 2020). By the time 28 participants completed the program, thematic saturation was achieved, as no substantially new themes were emerging from additional interviews or reflections.

Program Delivery and Context

The GYRFM program was delivered digitally over 12 weeks through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities. Participants engaged with content on multiple platforms:

Zoom: weekly interactive group discussions with facilitators.

YouTube: recorded lectures for flexible access.

WhatsApp: peer support, reminders, and informal reflections.

Email and Facebook: distribution of reading materials and supplementary resources.

Although the delivery was hybrid, the research component concentrated on open-ended reflective assignments (submitted weekly via email/WhatsApp) and semi-structured interviews during the final debriefing. The program's structure emphasized progressive development, beginning with personal self-assessment, moving to partner selection and relational skills, and culminating in advanced topics such as conflict resolution and trauma-informed insights. This developmental flow provided a rich context for participants' reflections, enhancing the quality of qualitative data collected.

Data Collection Instruments

Each week, participants completed short written reflections in response to open-ended prompts distributed via email. These questions encouraged participants to connect weekly content to their personal histories, current relational



attitudes, and perceived readiness for marriage. Open-ended questioning is widely used in qualitative research because it elicits unrestricted responses, allowing participants to articulate meanings in their own terms (Patton, 2015).

At the end of the program, participants engaged in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with qualified counseling practitioners. The interview guide included core questions about self-awareness, emotional readiness, and perceived program impact but also allowed flexibility for follow-up questions. This balance between structure and openness ensured comparability across interviews while also enabling the capture of unique perspectives (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Counselors were trained to conduct interviews ethically and sensitively, recognizing the deeply personal nature of marital readiness discussions. Their expertise also ensured that interviews remained supportive and reflective rather than evaluative.

Data Analysis

Data from both open-ended reflections and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). The analysis followed a six-phase framework where the researcher began with familiarization, repeatedly reading transcripts and participant reflections to immerse themselves in the data. During initial coding, descriptive and interpretive codes were applied to segments of text highlighting readiness, transformation, or challenges. These codes were then organized into broader categories in the theme development stage, producing clusters such as self-awareness growth, emotional regulation, cultural expectations, and relational competence. In the reviewing themes stage, the emerging themes were compared against the dataset to ensure coherence and uniqueness, after which they were defined and named to reflect the essence of participants' experiences. Finally, in the reporting phase, illustrative quotes were selected to substantiate findings. Throughout the process, NVivo 12 software was used to manage coding and theme development, enhancing transparency and analytic rigor (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019).

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure rigor in qualitative research, this study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources (weekly reflections and interviews) and the use of experienced counselors as interviewers. Member checking was also employed: participants received summaries of their interviews for verification. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the program structure, participant demographics, and cultural context, enabling readers to assess relevance to other contexts (Tracy, 2010). Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of decisions made during coding and theme refinement. Confirmability was addressed through reflexivity, with researchers documenting their assumptions and potential biases in analytic memos. These strategies collectively ensured that the findings were not only grounded in participants' accounts but also transparent and methodologically sound.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The sociodemographic profile of the respondents showed a diverse representation across gender, age, religion, tribe, and regional location. A majority of participants were female, reflecting the tendency for women to show greater interest in premarital counseling and personal development programs, while men constituted a smaller but significant portion of the study population. The age distribution was largely concentrated among young adults between 25 and 35 years, the typical age bracket for marital readiness in Nigeria, with a smaller proportion in the early 20s and late 30s. In terms of religion, respondents were drawn from both of Nigeria's dominant faiths Christianity and Islam with Christians forming the majority and Muslims also well represented, underscoring the interfaith relevance of premarital preparation. Ethnically, the participants spanned multiple Nigerian tribes including Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and minority groups, thereby reflecting the country's cultural plurality. This wide geographical and cultural spread demonstrates that the program engaged individuals from varying sociocultural contexts, enabling richer insights into how premarital readiness is shaped by intersections of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, and regional identity in Nigeria.

1. Self Awareness

Analysis from the data collected showed that participants entered the GYRFM program with deeply ingrained fears, cultural assumptions, and relational misconceptions that reflected both personal experiences (e.g., failed relationships,

parental marriages, trauma) and social narratives (e.g., religious discourses, media portrayals of marriage). Here are some of the themes that emerge from the analysis:

Fear and Distrust of Marriage appeared strongly: Several participants described marriage as a “scam” or “dreadful,” reflecting both societal cynicism and personal trauma. However, exposure to self-awareness exercises and counseling reframed marriage as a journey of growth and possibility. One participant noted:

“My biggest fear is that love is a scam... I wasn't ready to take the risk. But thank God for the GYRFM I am now in a process of all-round growth.”

This indicates a transition from avoidance to empowerment.

Cultural and Power Beliefs also shifted significantly: Beliefs that marriage is a hierarchical relationship where “your opinion doesn't count” or “husband is superior” were challenged through psychoeducational content and counseling. As one participant recalled,

“When you marry, your opinion don't count... your identity is lost as a person... your happiness depends on someone.”

Post-program, participants emphasized equality and self-worth, suggesting the intervention disrupted harmful patriarchal narratives.

Fear of Choosing Wrong Partner transformed from perceiving partner selection as “luck” to recognizing it as a process requiring intentional compatibility, communication, and values alignment. This shift illustrates how the program equipped participants with decision-making frameworks rather than leaving outcomes to chance.

Marriage is work: Across multiple narratives, participants highlighted that marriage is “work” and requires teamwork. For example, one explained:

“I have come to understand that good marriage requires work. And that means I need to be fulfilling my part to make it work. We are a team and not in a competition.”

This reframing reflects the program's effectiveness in promoting agency, shared responsibility, and realistic expectations. Therefore, the GYRFM program accelerated a transformation in participants' beliefs about marriage, helping them shift from fear, cultural myths, and unrealistic expectations toward growth, communication, and intentional effort.

2. The “Aha” Moments in the Programme

The GYRFM program provided participants with transformative “aha” moments that reshaped their thinking about themselves, relationships, and marriage. These insights can be grouped into three broad categories: personal growth, relational understanding, and cultural reframing.

Personal Growth through Self-Discovery and Healing: Many participants discovered the importance of knowing themselves before committing to marriage. Assessment tests and reflective exercises helped them recognize blind spots and areas of growth. As one participant put it:

“For me I would say during the filling of the assessment form... knowing you don't know yourself and definitely not prepared for such journey.”

Similarly, trauma-focused sessions enabled deep healing, with participants confronting painful past experiences and emerging with newfound freedom:

“For the first time in my life I called the person that caused me trauma. The bitterness was not there, the anger can't find it.”

These personal breakthroughs positioned participants to enter marriage with greater emotional maturity.

Relational Understanding and Redefined Expectations: Several participants experienced paradigm shifts about relationships, realizing marriage is not about control, hierarchy, or luck, but about intentionality, compatibility, and mutual respect. One striking realization was around gender roles, where a participant explained:

*“I realized that there is a difference between ‘Head’ of the house and ‘Leader.’
A wife can be a leader in an area where she has more capacity than her husband.”*

This indicates a move away from rigid patriarchal assumptions toward more flexible, capacity-based leadership within marriage.

Cultural and Societal Beliefs Reframed: Interactive sessions on culture, beliefs, and singleness challenged long-held assumptions participants inherited from religious and cultural institutions. For example, redefining singleness as wholeness rather than lack was pivotal:

"Our happiness as singles lies in knowing who we are and accepting it."

Additionally, participants gained autonomy in shaping family culture rather than conforming to societal expectations:

"We need to decide the culture of our family... What works in society might not work for us."

2. Mindset Shift

Analysis of data collected showed a profound mindset shift among participants, showing how the GYRFM program reshaped their frameworks for approaching relationships.

Values as the Cornerstone of Relationships: Participants emphasized that shared values now guide their choice of partners and how they navigate relationships. As one participant explained:

"It is values that speak to a person's character... Thus, I now approach relationships based on shared values, not feelings, vibes, circumstances or even trauma."

This demonstrates a move from superficial compatibility to a deeper, principle-based approach.

Self-Awareness and Wholeness Over Dependency: A major transformation was seen in how participants view themselves in relationships. Rather than seeking completion in a partner, they embraced self-sufficiency and complementarity:

"This shift from 'I need someone to complete me' to 'I want someone to complement me' completely changes how I choose a partner, set boundaries, and handle conflicts."

This indicates growing emotional independence and readiness for healthy partnerships.

Communication, Patience, and Empathy as Skills: Instead of focusing only on romance or attraction, participants now emphasise skills like communication, patience, and empathy as central to relational success. For instance, one noted:

"I've come to realize that effective communication is key to building strong relationships."

Another reflected on self-regulation:

"Learning to be more patient and understand that I cannot change my partner. Instead I need to work on myself."

These insights suggest participants now view relationships as dynamic, skill-dependent, and growth-oriented.

Equality and Mutual Effort in Marriage: Participants also embraced equality and mutual responsibility as essential principles for marital harmony. As expressed:

"When we start with the premise that we are all equal, regardless of our gender, we lay the groundwork for relationships built on trust, empathy, and understanding."

This reflects a departure from rigid hierarchies to a more collaborative vision of marriage.

3. Deep Reflections

The reflections reveal that the GYRFM Program created multi-layered personal transformation for participants as they now perceived marriage in different ways:

Marriage as a Partnership, Not an Event: Instead of seeing marriage as just a cultural milestone, participants began to understand it as teamwork rooted in friendship and intentional effort. One participant reflected:

"I now see marriage should be about teamwork and friendship. One should be intentional in making one's marriage work."

Deepened Self-Awareness: Several responses pointed to participants realizing their own unreadiness or gaps in self-knowledge. For instance:

"I'm more self aware that I really don't know me and I thought I did."

This suggests that the program prompted honest self-reflection, a crucial foundation for relational health.

Shift from Idealism to Realism: The course disrupted cultural myths that glorify weddings while ignoring marriage's realities. As one participant put it:

"This programme opened my eyes to the reality of marriage being deeper than it looks on the cover."

Practical Tools and Skills: Rather than abstract lessons, participants described acquiring actionable strategies especially communication and conflict management.

"It has changed my view on communication, I've seen that communication is of top priority in every relationship."

Based on the analysis above, many saw the program as shaping them beyond relationships, influencing mindset, self-worth, and life direction. This suggests that GYRFM served not only as premarital preparation but also as a personal development program with relational applications.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

Initial Beliefs about Marriage and Relationships

The initial data revealed that many participants entered the program with idealistic and culturally-influenced views of marriage, often shaped by religious doctrines, family expectations, or societal norms. For example, some participants believed marriage was primarily about fulfilling societal milestones or spiritual obligations rather than requiring deliberate personal and relational preparation. Others viewed roles in marriage as rigidly gendered, with the husband positioned as "head," echoing traditional patriarchal structures.

This finding aligns with studies showing that in many African societies, including Nigeria, cultural and religious narratives heavily influence marital expectations (Adeoye & Olatunji, 2021). Research by Yusuf and Alkali (2022) similarly observed that young Nigerians often define readiness for marriage using external markers age, income, or social approval rather than psychological maturity or relational competence. Such orientations can lead to disillusionment when couples encounter the complex realities of marital life. Interestingly, this alligns with international findings. A U.S.-based study by Fincham and Stanley (2020) found that individuals who hold rigid, idealized expectations about marriage tend to report lower marital satisfaction, as such expectations often clash with reality. Similarly, in their study of premarital attitudes in sub-Saharan Africa, Osei-Tutu and Boateng (2020) underlined how cultural myths (e.g., the belief that love alone sustains marriage) perpetuate relational vulnerabilities, especially among younger couples.

However, not all literature fully aligns with these findings. For instance, Onwuameze (2021) argued that while cultural and religious frameworks can be restrictive, they may also provide stability and shared meaning for couples when balanced with personal growth. This suggests that cultural values should not be entirely dismissed but rather integrated with modern psychological understandings of readiness. The implication here is that initial marital expectations matter greatly for marital outcomes, but when they are rooted in external validation rather than intrapersonal maturity, they may become obstacles rather than assets. This reinforces the argument made by Ojedokun et al. (2020), who stressed that marital preparation in Nigeria must go beyond genetic testing or religious classes to include emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and personal identity work.

"Aha" Moments and Mindset Shifts During the Program

The second theme that emerged from the qualitative data centered on participants' "aha" moments critical turning points in their understanding of self, relationships, and marriage. These insights often came during counseling sessions, assessments, or interactive discussions. For example, one participant explained, *"I always thought singleness meant being unmarried. I never defined it to mean being whole, unique, and complete. I now understand that happiness as singles lies in knowing who we are and accepting it."* Another reflected on cultural and religious restrictions around sexual intimacy, realizing that, *"one's sex life in marriage should be based on agreement with one's spouse, not just what church doctrine prescribes."*

These reflections reveal that the program created opportunities for cognitive reframing, where participants challenged long-held cultural or religious assumptions and replaced them with more adaptive, person-centered beliefs. This aligns with the findings of Fincham and Stanley (2020), who noted that premarital programs offering structured reflection

lead to transformative shifts in personal and relational mindsets. Similarly, Adeoye and Olatunji (2021) found that when Nigerian youth were exposed to guided counseling, they began to critically interrogate cultural norms around gender roles and marriage. The theme of self-awareness and personal growth also stood out. Several participants mentioned that assessment tools and counseling revealed blind spots in their personality and readiness. One noted, *"knowing you don't know yourself and definitely not prepared for such a journey"* was a powerful realization. This resonates with Ojedokun et al. (2020), who emphasized that premarital education is incomplete if it neglects individual self-discovery and emotional intelligence. Internationally, Hawkins and Fackrell (2020) documented similar outcomes, showing that couples who underwent reflective premarital interventions reported greater clarity about themselves and their partners, which enhanced long-term relationship satisfaction.

Another striking subtheme was the redefinition of power and leadership in marriage. A participant explained, *"My aha moment was when I realized there is a difference between 'Head' of the house and 'Leader.' A wife can lead in an area where she has more capacity than her husband."* This challenges patriarchal models dominant in African contexts and echoes research by Osei-Tutu and Boateng (2020), who noted that younger Africans are increasingly reconstructing marital roles toward more egalitarian partnerships. While this shift has faced resistance from traditional institutions, it aligns with global literature on the positive outcomes of shared decision-making in marriage (Fincham & Stanley, 2020). The program also assisted healing from childhood trauma, which participants recognized as shaping their adult relational behavior. One recounted how a trauma debrief session, *"unveiled the things that hurt me... for the first time in my life I called the person that caused me trauma."* This supports the work of Yusuf and Alkali (2022), who argued that unresolved trauma is a hidden barrier to marital readiness in Nigeria. Studies in counseling psychology (Johnson & Zuccarini, 2020) confirm that addressing trauma before marriage enhances relational resilience. What makes this finding especially important is its contextual specificity: in a Nigerian setting where premarital preparation is often limited to genetic counseling or religious instruction, participants demonstrated that comprehensive psychoeducational programs can produce profound personal and relational transformation.

New Perspectives on Approaching Relationships

The third theme that emerged from participants' responses was the development of new perspectives on how to approach relationships. Before the program, many participants described beliefs rooted in fear, cultural conditioning, or misconceptions about marriage. However, by the end of the intervention, they articulated new frameworks for relationship building anchored on shared values, communication, self-awareness, and mutual respect.

One participant described a fundamental mindset shift: *"Hmm one thing I now see differently is this shift from 'I need someone to complete me' to 'I want someone to complement me.'"* This reflects a reorientation away from dependency-driven relationships toward interdependence, echoing the findings of Markman, Rhoades, and Stanley (2019), who argue that successful marriages are built not on one partner completing the other but on two whole individuals bringing complementary strengths. Similarly, Oladipo and Balogun (2021) found that Nigerian youth who participated in premarital counseling showed higher appreciation for individuality within relationships, suggesting that self-sufficiency is critical to marital resilience.

Another recurring perspective shift was the recognition of values as the foundation of relationships. Several participants emphasized that they must now approach relationships with defined values and ensure alignment with potential partners. As one noted, *"I now see that majority of the heartache people experience in relationships and marriage is because of a lack of a clearly defined value system."* This finding aligns with Stanley et al. (2020), who documented that couples who share core values report higher satisfaction and lower conflict. In the Nigerian context, Adejumo (2020) similarly observed that value alignment, more than socioeconomic status or even religious similarity, predicts long-term stability in marriages.

Communication also emerged as a critical shift. Participants expressed learning that *"effective communication is key to building strong relationships,"* and that listening and expressing needs clearly prevents conflicts. This resonates with Gottman and Silver's (2015) widely cited research on marital stability, which identifies communication as one of the most reliable predictors of relational success. Within African studies, Ofole and Agokei (2019) confirmed that couples trained in communication skills prior to marriage reported fewer misunderstandings and higher marital satisfaction within the first five years.

Another critical perspective shift related to understanding others through empathy. Several participants emphasized that instead of judging partners by their actions, they now considered their upbringing, trauma, or cultural background. One explained, *"I must not judge anyone by their actions but consider where they are coming from, background, past*

experience, trauma, environment and everything that might have shaped them.” This insight mirrors findings by Yusuf and Alkali (2022), who argued that empathy and trauma-informed perspectives reduce marital conflict. Internationally, Fincham and Stanley (2020) similarly noted that adopting a holistic understanding of partners improves conflict resolution and enhances intimacy.

Finally, participants recognized the importance of intentionality and maturity in approaching relationships. Comments such as *“A successful marriage takes two mature people who want to work and who will also put in the work”* underscore the realization that marriage requires sustained effort rather than chance or luck. This echoes Larson and Holman’s (2020) model of premarital predictors, which emphasizes intentionality, maturity, and shared commitment as stronger predictors of marital quality than attraction or compatibility alone. Taken together, this theme highlights that the program facilitated a significant cognitive and emotional reframing of how relationships should be approached. Participants moved from fear, dependency, and cultural stereotypes toward values-based, communicative, empathetic, and intentional frameworks for relationships.

Personal Growth, Self-Awareness, and Transformation

The fourth major theme identified in this study was the profound personal growth and self-awareness participants experienced through the Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRFM) program. Across responses, participants emphasized that the intervention helped them recognize their strengths, confront their weaknesses, and reframe deeply ingrained beliefs. This self-discovery process not only improved their readiness for marriage but also enhanced their overall psychological well-being and relational competence.

One participant captured this theme powerfully, stating: *“This program gave language to many of the thoughts and mindsets I had been wrestling with internally. It answered so many questions I carried and brought a sense of clarity I didn’t know I needed.”* Such reflections highlight how the intervention functioned as both an educational and therapeutic process, providing participants with conceptual tools to understand themselves and their relationships. This finding aligns with Winter Plumb et al. (2020), who argue that premarital interventions are most effective when they go beyond communication skills to foster deeper levels of self-awareness and personal reflection.

Several participants acknowledged that they entered the program with little awareness of their own readiness for marriage. As one noted: *“I’m more self-aware that I really don’t know me and I thought I did.”* This recognition underscores the importance of psychological preparedness, which scholars such as Fincham and Beach (2019) identify as a key determinant of marital stability. In the Nigerian context, where premarital preparation is often narrowly focused on cultural rites or medical compatibility (Adebayo, 2020), the GYRFM program appears to have addressed a critical gap by helping participants explore the psychological and emotional dimensions of readiness.

Another recurring theme within personal growth was healing from past trauma and unlearning dysfunctional beliefs. A participant shared: *“For the first time in my life, I called the person that caused me trauma. The bitterness was not there, the anger can’t find it.”* This transformative outcome reflects the therapeutic dimensions embedded in the program’s trauma-informed approach. Scholars such as Johnson (2020) argue that unresolved trauma often manifests in adult intimate relationships, leading to conflict and instability. By creating safe spaces for self-exploration and guided counseling, the program helped participants address these underlying issues, a process consistent with the findings of Miller et al. (2020) on trauma-informed premarital counseling.

The program also fostered self-efficacy and empowerment. Multiple participants reported shifts toward owning responsibility for their actions and cultivating independence. For instance, one declared: *“I own my happiness, I love myself, I am responsible for all my actions. I am trauma free.”* This newfound sense of agency resonates with Bandura’s (1997) concept of self-efficacy, which has been shown to predict not only individual well-being but also relational resilience. In the marital context, Adejumo (2020) emphasizes that individuals who enter marriage with strong self-efficacy are better equipped to manage conflicts and sustain commitment.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that participants experienced renewed clarity about marriage as teamwork rather than competition. A respondent stated: *“This program has changed me in so many ways...instead of me channeling my energy in trying to change my husband, I should work on myself and give him the time and grace to work on himself if he wants to.”* This insight mirrors the relational frameworks suggested by Markman, Rhoades, and Stanley (2020), who emphasize that focusing on personal growth rather than changing one’s partner predicts long-term marital satisfaction. Participants reported increases in self-awareness, emotional intelligence, trauma healing, and personal responsibility all of which are consistent with the literature on predictors of marital success (Stanley et al., 2020). These findings highlight the transformative potential of individual-centered premarital interventions in preparing



adults for healthy, sustainable marriages, particularly in contexts where traditional premarital counseling often neglects personal growth.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the impact of an individual-centered premarital counseling program Get Yourself Ready for Marriage (GYRFM) on participants' perceptions, self-awareness, and relational readiness. The findings reveal that beyond traditional medical, cultural, or religious premarital requirements, what individuals need most is psychological preparation, emotional healing, and the development of relational competencies. Participants reported increased self-understanding, recognition of the role of values, improved communication, and a more egalitarian perspective on relationships and marriage. These findings affirm the transformative potential of structured premarital counseling grounded in counseling psychology frameworks.

From a theoretical perspective, the study aligns with cognitive-behavioral, attachment, and trauma-informed approaches, showing that interventions targeting cognition, self-perception, and relational patterns can reshape how individuals approach intimate partnerships. At the same time, the findings challenge the adequacy of culturally dominant narratives that prioritize external conformity over internal preparedness. This contributes to global debates on how premarital interventions can effectively balance cultural relevance with psychological empowerment.

In light of these findings, several recommendations emerge. First, there is a need to integrate individual-centered premarital programs into mainstream premarital education across cultural and religious settings. Such programs should go beyond surface-level preparation to address the deeper emotional, psychological, and relational needs of individuals. Second, counseling psychology frameworks should be embedded in premarital education curricula, equipping counselors and participants with practical tools for conflict resolution, communication, and self-regulation. Third, policy frameworks at both national and organizational levels should support premarital preparedness as a public health and social stability priority, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility of such interventions. Fourth, interventions must actively challenge harmful cultural and gendered narratives while promoting teamwork, mutual respect, and value-driven relational choices. Finally, further research is required to examine the long-term effects of individual-centered premarital counseling on marital outcomes, as well as comparative analyses between traditional and counseling-based models.

This study however has demonstrated that effective premarital preparation requires a paradigm shift: from focusing solely on external compatibility checks to equipping individuals with the psychological, emotional, and interpersonal skills needed for sustainable relationships. By implementing counseling-based, value-driven, and culturally relevant premarital programs, stakeholders including policymakers, religious leaders, counselors, and educators can help individuals enter marriage not only prepared for its challenges but empowered to build healthy, lasting, and fulfilling unions.

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