The Effectiveness of an Online Marriage Preparation Program

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Marriage preparation programs contribute significantly to greater couple satisfaction and enhanced spirituality, yet little is known about the effects of online versions of these programs. This study was conducted in Slovenia and examined the short-term effects of an online marriage preparation program on daily spiritual experiences, relationship satisfaction, and overall well-being. The study included 384 participants, 173 men and 211 women, who completed DSES, CSI, and WHO5 questionnaires before and after participating in the online marriage preparation program. The results show that participants' ratings of daily spiritual experiences ($p<0.001$), relationship satisfaction ($p<0.001$) and general well-being ($p<0.001$) improved in a statistically significant manner immediately after the intervention. This study confirms the short-term effectiveness of this type of online marriage preparation program as an important approach to improving daily spiritual experiences, relationship satisfaction, and overall well-being. For future research, it would be advisable to also investigate the long-term effects of such an online program compared to traditional marriage preparation programs.

Keywords: *marriage preparation, online program, overall well-being, relationship satisfaction, spiritual experiences.*

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*Introduction****

Marriage preparation programs are an important preventive factor against divorce and marital conflict, as research shows.[1] Spirituality plays a key role in religious marriage preparation programs, as studies show that spiritual or religious practice is a significant factor in the quality of intimate relationships.[2] Religious practice has an indirect effect on a couples' well-being by facilitating the sharing of common values and strengthening relational commitment.[3]

A study by Klausli and Gross examining participants' experiences found that the program positively impacted them by promoting more positive thinking about intimate relationships, deepening understanding of marriage as a vocation, and improving communication.[4] Premarital programs play a critical role in reducing later problems and potential marriage breakdown by emphasizing the importance of mutual communication and helping couples identify potential sources of support.[5]

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[1] Cf. W Kim HALFORD et al., Best Practice in Couple Relationship Education, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 29 (2023) 3, 385-406, 385; Scott M. STANLEY et al., Premarital Education, Marital Quality, and Marital Stability: Findings From a Large, Random Household Survey, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20 (2006) 1, 117-126, 117; Christian GOSTEČNIK et al., Milost odpuščanja v zakonskem odnosu [Mercy of Forgiveness in Marital Relationship], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 71 (2011) 4, 595-606, 295; Barbara SIMONIČ et al., Čustvena avtonomija in spoprijemanje s stresom v povezavi z religioznim soočanjem ob ločitvi [Emotional Autonomy and Coping with Stress in Correlation with Religious Coping in the Face of Divorce], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 78 (2017) 1, 219-235, 219.

[2] Cf. Annette MAHONEY, Religion in Families, 1999-2009: A Relational Spirituality Framework, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72 (2010) 4, 805-827, 805-820; Piotr ROSZAK, Robert RECZKOWSKI, Paweł WRÓBLEWSKI, Religion and Cognitive Safety: Pastoral and Psychological Implications, *Pastoral Psychology*, 73 (2024) 367-377, 370-373.

[3] Cf. Randal D. DAY, Alan ACOCK, Marital Well-being and Religiousness as Mediated by Relational Virtue and Equality, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75 (2013) 1, 164-177, 164.

[4] Cf. Julia KLAUSLI, Christopher GROSS, Premarital Education in the Catholic Church: Exploring Retrospective Perceptions of Effectiveness of a Theologically Oriented Program on Relational and Spiritual Outcomes, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 49 (2021) 2, 177-191; see also: David KRANER, Conflict as a Challenge for Personal Growth in the Educational Team, *Seminare*, 44 (2023) 1, 69-81; *ibid*., Sodobni učitelj, komunikacija in resonanca v odnosih [The Modern Teacher, Communication, and Resonance in Relationships], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 83 (2023) 1, 227-239.

[5] Cf. Scott M. STANLEY, Making a Case for Premarital Education, *Family Relations*, 50 (2001) 3, 272-280, 272-278; Sławomir TYKARSKI, Znaczenie posiadania dojrzałej osobowości u osób przygotowujących się do małżeństwa – szkic psychologiczny z uwzględnieniem wątku pastoralnego [The Importance of a Mature Personality for People Preparing for Marriage – A Psychological Sketch in a Pastoral Aspect], *Teologia i Człowiek*, 41 (2018) 1, 117-136; César

A comprehensive U.S. study conducted with random samples in four Central American countries found that participation in marriage preparation programs was associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction and commitment, lower levels of conflict, and lower likelihood of divorce. These findings were consistent across different ethnicities, incomes, and education levels, suggesting that participation in such programs is beneficial for a wide range of couples.[6]

Fawcett and colleagues used meta-analytic methods to examine a large body of evaluative research on marriage preparation programs and found that these programs are effective in improving communication between couples. Studies that used observational data rather than self-report showed greater effects.[7] The positive outcomes of marriage preparation programs also depend on the leaders or facilitators of the programs.[8] This study compared 31 Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) leaders and found that the effectiveness of the program also depended on the quality of the working alliance between the leader and participants, as this significantly predicted changes in relationship satisfaction and trust. Participants reported more positive communication when they experienced a stronger working alliance with their leader.

In Slovenia, couples who intend to marry in the Catholic Church must usually attend a marriage preparation course. All courses must be approved by the respective dioceses and adhere to the documents of the Catholic Church and the Slovenian Bishops' Conference. The basic church documents include: *Familiaris Consortio*[9], *Catechism of the Catholic Church*[10], *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*[11], *Amoris Laetitia*[12], the *Final Document of the Plenary*

IZQUIERDO, »He Worked with Human Hands«. Work as Human Action and Christ's Action, *Scientia et Fides*, 12 (2024) 2, 245-264.

6 Cf. Stanley et al., *Premarital Education…*, 119-122.

7 Cf. Elizabeth B. FAWCETT et al., Do Premarital Education Programs Really Work? A Meta-analytic Study, *Family Relations*, 59 (2010) 3, 232-239, 232-236.

8 Cf. Jesse OWEN et al., The Role of Leaders' Working Alliance in Premarital Education, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25 (2011) 1, 49-57, 49-55.

9 JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio* (1981), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html (07.08.2025).

10 Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993), https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (10.08.2025).

11 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_08121995_human-sexuality_en.html (07.08.2025).

12 FRANCIS, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Lætitia* (2016) https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf (10.08.2025).

Assembly of the Church in Slovenia[13] and the *Guidelines for Direct and Indirect Preparation for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony*[14].

The latter document summarizes all previous key documents of the Church and specifies that the preparation must cover five areas of content: 1. relationships; 2. marriage as a sacrament: theology of the body, theology of marriage and marital spirituality; 3. education and life in a Christian family; 4. responsible parenthood and transmission of life; 5. the celebration of marriage.

There are many marriage preparation courses in the Slovenian church, which differ in their form. As a rule, they take the form of lectures by trained speakers and testimonies from married couples. Each diocese ensures that there are enough courses available and that different formats are offered. The courses vary in the number of sessions: a. Five sessions of two hours each from Monday to Friday or on five consecutive Fridays or other days. b. Four sessions of two hours each on Mondays and Tuesdays or on other days. c. Three sessions of two hours each on consecutive Sunday afternoons per month. d. Two sessions on Saturday evenings and three on Sunday mornings. 3. Eight meetings with an interval of 14 days.[15]

The marriage community »Najina pot« offers a one-year marriage preparation program in the form of a group for engaged couples (up to twenty couples) that meets every two weeks from October to May. This is not a passive lecture format, but a group in which everyone is actively involved. Participants think about a particular topic at home, discuss it as a couple and then share their views with the group in the sessions.[16]

Iskreni.net has been offering an e-marriage preparation program since 2004. This is a three-month program that enables couples to prepare for marriage in online groups and on a weekend together. The program is led by married couples and spiritual leaders. It is a combination of online and face-to-face meetings.[17]

[13] *Sklepni dokument Plenarnega zbora Cerkve na Slovenskem Izberi življenje* [Final Document of the Plenary Assembly of the Church in Slovenia Choose Life] (2002), https://nadskofija-ljubljana.si/pastorala/wp-content/uploads/Sklepni-dokument-PZ.pdf (12.08.2025).

[14] Slovenska škofovska konferenca, *Smernice za bližnjo in neposredno pripravo na zakrament sv. zakona* [Guidelines for Direct and Indirect Preparation for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony] (2020), https://katoliska-cerkev.si/media/datoteke/Dokumenti%20in%20publikacije/SMERNICE%20PNZ_FINAL_MAJ%202020.pdf (15.08.2025).

[15] Cf. Nadškofija Ljubljana – Urad za družino, Informacije in termini [Information and Dates] (2025), https://nadskofija-ljubljana.si/druzina/priprava-na-krscanski-zakon/bliznja-priprava/informacije-in-termini (12. 08.2025). The same applies in other dioceses within the Church in Slovenia.

[16] Cf. Najina pot, *Šola za zakon* [School of Marriage] (2025), https://najina-pot.rkc.si/index.php/content/display/4/sola-za-zakon/20 (15.08.2025).

[17] Cf. Iskreni.net, E-priprava na zakon [E-preparation for Marriage] (2025), https://www.iskreni.net/programi/e-priprava-na-zakon/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwqMO0BhA8EiwAFTLgIN3p0u7uAnoE9eMyNjJCyqxbDwXgyMr9yo_skiIgBt4xQX5u8FcnjBoCTIgQAvD_BwE (16.08.2025).

The Saint Ignatius Retreat House ran a weekend marriage preparation program beginning with the 2020 pandemic to June 2024. It consisted of two sessions on Friday afternoon, four on Saturday and three on Sunday morning.[18]

The online format of marriage preparation programs has several advantages over traditional alternatives when it comes to reaching couples. A study by Chalmers examined the online format of a marriage preparation program during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that participants responded positively to the intervention. The research confirmed that the online adaptation of the program is an important preventive factor, especially to mitigate the decline in marriages in times of crisis when traditional formats are not available.[19]

Although online marriage preparation programs offer several practical advantages, especially in terms of accessibility, empirical research on their effectiveness remains limited. A meta-analytical study examined online programs published up to 2020 and found only nine studies on four different online programs.[20] These studies evaluated the effectiveness of online formats in improving self-reported relationship satisfaction, engagement, confidence, communication skills, and, to a lesser extent, emotional and behavioral problems such as anxiety, depression, anger, stress, aggression, and problematic alcohol use.[21] Among these programs, ePREP program was the only evidence-based preventive intervention specifically designed to enhance relationships through structured conflict resolution skills.[22] Despite the growing availability of online marriage preparation programs, there remains a clear research gap regarding their effects on spiritual experiences, relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being, particularly within a religious and pastoral context.

[18] Cf. IGNACIJEV DOM DUHOVNOSTI, *Priprava na zakon* [Preparation for Marriage] (2024), https://ignacijevdom.si/priprava-na-zakon/ (01.07.2025).

[19] Cf. Jennifer Harley CHALMERS, Online Marriage Education During COVID-19 Home Lockdown: A Multiple-Baseline Single-Case Experimental Design, *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 14 (2020) 2, 150-168, 150-165.

[20] Cf. Allison MEGALE, Emily PETERSON, Myrna L. FRIEDLANDER, How Effective is Online Couple Relationship Education? A Systematic Meta-Content Review, *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 44 (2020) 3, 294-304, 294-301.

[21] These things are, of course, interrelated, as a relational aspect is essential to all of them in one way or another. This can be clearly seen in the case of depression, which Hartmut Rosa defines as the absence of an authentic relationship, or, in terms of his theory of resonance, as the blockage, muteness and deafness of the resonance channels and, in this sense, alienation from the environment and the world. Cf. Bojan ŽALEC, Bivanjsko upanje, smisel in resonanca [Existential Hope and Meaning of Life, and Resonance], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 81 (2021) 4, 825-834, 829.

[22] Cf. Howard J. MARKMAN, Kenneth I. PARGAMENT, Nalini TARAKESHWAR, Aaron B. SWANK, A Randomized Clinical Trial of the Effectiveness of Premarital Intervention: Moderators of Divorce Outcomes, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27 (2013) 1, 165-172, 165-170.

1. Research Problem and Question

This study focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of an online marriage preparation course held at the Saint Ignatius Retreat House in Ljubljana. The course was held on Friday afternoon from 17:00 to 19:30 and included an introductory session and a testimony of a married couple. On Saturday, the course started at 8:30 am and ended at 6:15 pm. It included four testimonies/lectures, each lasting an hour and a half, with appropriate breaks in between. On Sunday, the course began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 1:30 p.m. with two testimonies/lectures. The content of the testimonies/lectures was based on the guidelines of the Slovenian Bishops' Conference.[23] Four couples, a doctor and a priest took part in the preparation. During each talk/testimony, there were at least five fixed times when each couple was invited to discuss the proposed topic or question in private. This ensured that the couples were actively involved and not just passively listening. In this way, the course complied with the Slovenian Bishops' Conference guideline:

> »The program should provide sufficient time for discussion and specific exercises that couples can work on together. The preparation is an opportunity for couples to address issues that they would not normally discuss.«[24]

In this study, we investigated whether individuals who participated in such premarital education would report changes in spiritual experiences, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. Although spirituality and a sacred understanding of marriage are generally associated with better marital outcomes, there is still a dearth of research examining the effectiveness of such online programs on spiritual practice, relationship quality, and psychological well-being.[25]

The purpose of the study was to determine whether the online marriage preparation method is an effective approach that significantly influences the frequency and intensity of daily spiritual experiences, relationship satisfaction, and overall well-being of program participants. To this end, we formulated the research hypothesis that participants' spiritual experiences, relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being would improve significantly after completing the online marriage preparation program.

[23] Cf. Slovenska škofovska konferenca, *Smernice za bližnjo…*
[24] *Ibid*., No. 10.
[25] Cf. Annette MAHONEY et al., Religion in the Home in the 1980s and 1990s: A Meta-Analytic Review and Conceptual Analysis of Links Between Religion, Marriage, and Parenting, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15 (2002) 4, 559-596, 559.

2. Method

2.1 Participants and procedure

The study comprised 384 participants, including 173 men and 211 women. The mean age of participants was 29.8 years (SD = 5.5) ranging from 20 to 61 years. The average age of men was 31.1 years (SD = 5.7), that of the women was 28.7 years (SD = 5.3). A total of 28 participants (7.3 %) had vocational training, 89 (23.2 %) had a high school diploma, 119 (31.0 %) had a college or bachelor's degree, 110 (28.6 %) had a university or college of applied sciences degree and 38 participants (9.9 %) had a scientific master's or doctoral degree. Most participants (N = 362; 91.6 %) were Catholic, 7 (1.8 %) were atheist, 5 (1.3 %) believed in a higher power, 4 (1.0 %) were Protestant, 1 (0.3 %) was Muslim and 1 (0.3 %) was Jewish.

The present study used a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design. The study population consisted of 242 couples who participated in an online marriage preparation program between November 2023 and May 2024. Participants completed an online questionnaire 1KA (https://1ka.teof.uni–lj.si/) before and after the program. The data were analyzed using univariate and bivariate statistical methods in the Jamovi software.[26] The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess normality, and the non-parametric Wilcoxon W test evaluated differences between the first and second measurements. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

2.2 Measurement instruments

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) measures the frequency and intensity of daily spiritual experiences and was developed to assess how often individuals encounter spiritual feelings and experiences.[27] The questionnaire consists of 16 items addressing various aspects of spirituality and religiosity. The scale demonstrates strong internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha (α) ranging from 0.94 to 0.96. In the current sample, excellent reliability was also achieved, with a coefficient of 0.95.[28]

[26] Cf. The jamovi project, *Jamovi (Version 2.5)* [Computer Software], https://www.jamovi.org (07.08.2025).

[27] Cf. Lynn G. UNDERWOOD, The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Overview and Results, *Religions*, 2 (2011) 1, 29-50.

[28] Cf. Christopher G. ELLISON, Daisy FAN, Daily Spiritual Experiences and Psychological Well-being Among US Adults, *Social Indicators Research*, 88 (2008) 247-271; Lynn G. UNDERWOOD, Jeanne A. TERESI, The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Development, Theoretical Description, Reliability, Exploratory Factor Analysis, and Preliminary Construct Validity Using Health-Related Data, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 24 (2011) 1, 22-33.

The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) is a self-report instrument that measures the global assessment of a person's relationship with their intimate partner.[29] The shortest version, consisting of 4 items, was used. The first item was rated on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = very unhappy; 6 = perfect), and the remaining three items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = not at all happy; 5 = perfect). The item scores are summed, with higher total scores indicating greater overall satisfaction with the partner (total score range: 0 to 21). The reliability of the questionnaire, measured using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.84 in the sample examined.

The Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) is a short self-report instrument measuring mental well-being.[30] It consists of five statements relating to the past two weeks. Each statement is rated on a 6-point scale, with higher scores indicating better mental well-being. Respondents rate the statements on a 6-point Likert scale, from 0 (not present) to 5 (always present). The total score ranks from 0 to 25, with higher scores reflecting better well-being and well-being. A total score of less than 13 indicates low well-being and suggests the need for further testing with a depression diagnostic instrument. The WHO-5 has been found to have adequate validity in screening for depression and in measuring outcomes in clinical trials. Item response theory analyses in studies of younger persons and elderly persons indicate that the measure has good construct validity as a unidimensional scale measuring well-being in these populations. Internal reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was 0.82 in our study.

3. Results

Figure 1 shows the self-reported level of religiosity. Most women (39.1%) and men (24.6%) described themselves as religious. Slightly fewer participants categorized their faith as weaker (women: 13.0 %; men: 13.7 %). A slightly higher percentage of men (3.5 %) than women (2.5 %) classified their faith as very strong, and slightly more men (2.1 %) than women (1.1 %) described their faith as non-existent.

When asked how often they engaged in various practices for their spiritual growth, participants most frequently reported praying structured prayers. The largest group (N = 108; 38.4%) practiced this form of prayer at least once a week or a few times a month, while 37 (13.2%) prayed every day. A similar trend was observed with personal prayer and attending Mass: 14% (N=41) of participants prayed personally and attended Mass daily, while 37% engaged in these

[29] Cf. James L. FUNK, Ronald D. ROGGE, *The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI)*, Michigan, Fetzer Institute, 2007.

[30] Cf. Christian W. TOPP et al., The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: A Systematic Review of the Literature, *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 84 (2015) 3, 167-176.

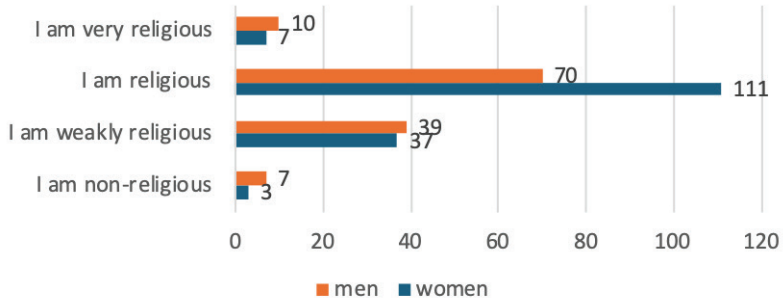

Figure 1: Self-reported level of religiosity by gender of participants

Note. Due to missing data, Figure 1 presents responses from 274 participants.

practices at least once a month or several times a week. Prayer before meals was practiced by 15 participants (5.3%), while 56 (19.8%) did so at least once a week or several times a month. 73 participants (25.8%) did not practice this prayer, and the remaining participants (N=139) did so occasionally. As shown in Table 1, participation in spiritual retreats was the least common spiritual growth practice, with 193 participants reporting they had never participated. Slightly fewer participants (N=178) had never experienced spiritual direction, while 137 participants had never read the Word of God, and 98 had never read spiritual literature. At least once a year or more often, 35.6% (N=100) of participants received the sacrament of confession, while 46.3% (N = 130) received it at least once every six months or more frequently. 51 participants (18.1%) had never received the sacrament of confession.

Table 1: Frequency of practicing different paths for spiritual growth (N=284)

	M	*Mdn*	*SD*
Praying structured prayers (e.g., the Our Father)	4,1	5,0	2,2
Personal prayer in your own words	3,9	5,0	2,4
Attending Mass	3,6	4,0	1,6
Prayer before and after meals	2,7	3,0	2,3
Reading spiritual literature	1,7	1,0	1,9
The sacrament of confession	1,4	1,0	1,2
Prayerful reading of the Word of God	1,3	1,0	1,7
Spiritual direction	0,8	0,0	1,4
Spiritual retreats	0,5	0,0	1,1

Notes: *n*–numerous; *M-mean; Mdn-median; SD-standard deviation.*

After completing the online marriage preparation program, participants reported statistically significant improvements in their faith, relationship satisfaction, and overall well-being (Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the initial and final measurement

	n	*M*	*Mdn*	*SD*	*SE*
DSES initial	259	55,4	57	16,1	0,96
DSES final	259	59,0	61	16,1	0,96
CSI initial	276	12,8	12	3,9	0,23
CSI final	276	21,3	22	2,4	0,14
WHO initial	278	19,4	20	3,8	0,23
WHO final	278	21,0	22	2,7	0,16

Notes: *n*–numerous; *M-mean*; *Mdn-median*; *SD*-standard deviation; *SE*-standard error.

Table 3: Testing the difference between the initial and final measurement

Initial – final	Wilcoxon *W*	*p*		Effect size
DSES	10337[b]	< 0,001	Rank biserial correlation	-0,422
CSI	257[a]	< 0,001	Rank biserial correlation	-0,986
WHO	8850[c]	< 0,001	Rank biserial correlation	-0,431

Notes. DSES-The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale; CSI-The Couples Satisfaction Index; WHO-wellbeing; p-statistical significance; H_a μ initial measurement – final measurement≠ 0; [a] 5 pairs of values were tied; [b] 17 pairs of values were tied; [c] 29 pairs of values were tied.

4. Discussion

The aim of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of an online marriage preparation program. We found that participants reported statistically significant improvements in their expressed faith after completing the program, even though most participants had already described themselves as religious on the initial measure in which we assessed their level of religiosity and spiritual practice. This suggests that participants had even stronger feelings and experiences of spirituality after the program. Pargament and Mahoney suggest that testimonies about the sanctity of marriage can motivate couples to invest more in their relationship.[31] Insights into the sanctity of marriage are associated with spirituality, as well as relational and psychological well-being.[32] The results of our study confirm the effectiveness of the online program conducted at the Saint Ignatius Retreat Housein Ljubljana, which is run by the Slovenian Province of the Society of Jesus.

[31] Cf. Kenneth I. PARGAMENT, Annette MAHONEY, Theory: »Sacred Matters: Sanctification as a Vital Topic for the Psychology of Religion«, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 15 (2005) 3, 179-198, 181-192.

[32] Cf. Annette MAHONEY et al., Marriage and the Spiritual Realm: The Role of Proximal and Distal Religious Constructs in Marital Functioning, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 13 (1999) 3, 321-338, 321-330.

Participants also reported improved relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being after completing the marriage preparation program, although the program did not explicitly focus on relationship issues, interpersonal problems, or psychological experiences. This finding is consistent with the study by Rhoades et al., which also found that brief online interventions play an important role for couples, especially low-income couples, including young couples at the beginning of their careers and couples with lower levels of education.[33] Marriage preparation programs typically provide immediate and short-term benefits for participants, particularly in improving interpersonal skills and overall relationship quality.[34] Previous research has also shown that these programs are beneficial to couples' well-being, a finding that is further supported by the results of our study.[35]

The online format of marriage preparation has proven to be effective. A study by Spencer and Anderson, which reviewed 12 publications on the effects of online relationship education programs, found that online programs significantly improved relationship satisfaction, communication skills, relationship confidence, and positive relationship traits and decreased negative relationship traits. The study showed that both online and traditional marriage education programs resulted in positive changes that exceeded those of the control group.[36] However, there was no difference in the magnitude of change between traditional and online interventions.

5. Limitations of the study

The following limitations should be carefully considered when interpreting the results and planning future research in this area. The study is a quasi-experimental one-group study with no control group. This means that we cannot definitively claim that the observed changes in faith, relationship satisfaction, and overall well-being are directly attributable to the online marriage prepara-

[33] Cf. Galena K. RHOADES, Maggie O'REILLY TRETER, Kayla KNOPP, *Evaluation of OurRelationship and ePREP Online Couple Relationship Education Programs*, Denver, University of Denver, 2020, 10-59.

[34] Cf. Jason S. CARROLL, William J. DOHERTY, Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research, *Family Relations*, 52 (2003) 2,105-118.

[35] Cf. Galena K. RHOADES et al., Can Marriage Education Mitigate the Risks Associated With Premarital Cohabitation?, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29 (2015) 3, 500-506, 500-504; Stanley et al., *Premarital Education…*, 117; Hannah C. WILLIAMSON et al., Does Premarital Education Decrease or Increase Couples' Later Help-Seeking?, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28 (2014) 1, 112-117, 112.

[36] Cf. Chelsea M. SPENCER, Jared R. ANDERSON, Online Relationship Education Programs Improve Individual and Relationship Functioning: A Meta-Analytic Review, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 47 (2021) 2, 485-500, 485.

tion program because we did not compare participants to a control group that did not participate in the program. Participants self-enrolled in the online program, which may indicate that they were already more motivated to improve their faith and relationship, which may have influenced the results. Data were collected using self-assessment questionnaires, which may introduce bias due to social desirability or subjective perceptions of their own experiences. We measured the impact of the program immediately after its completion, so it is not possible to assess the long-term effects of the program on the variables measured. The study participants were exclusively from the Catholic population of Slovenia and participated in a single online program, so the results cannot be generalized to the entire population, especially not to other cultural and religious groups.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of the study, we can conclude that the results provide an initial insight into the potential effectiveness of online marriage preparation programs. The findings indicate statistically significant improvements in daily spiritual experiences, relationship satisfaction, and overall well-being among participants. These findings reflect short-term effects measured immediately after program completion and should therefore be interpreted with caution regarding long-term outcomes.

Online marriage preparation programs aim to ensure that

»participants clearly understand the graces they receive through holy matrimony, the responsibilities involved, what is expected of them as a Christian couple in the Church, and what they can receive from the Church«.[37]

Online access to educational resources for preparing couples for married life and nurturing their relationship seems more necessary now than ever. The results also highlight the benefits of spiritual and relational testimonies and emphasize the need to improve communication and satisfaction in the relationship between the future spouses as well as in their relationship with God.[38]

[37] Slovenska škofovska konferenca, *Smernice za bližnjo…*, no. 18.

[38] Cf. Javier BARRAYCOA, The Transformation of Individualism and Loneliness in Times of Pandemics, *Scientia et Fides*, 11 (2023) 1, 187-195, 189-193.

Tanja Pate* – Ivan Platovnjak**

Učinkovitost internetskog programa priprave za brak

Sažetak

Programi priprave za brak značajno doprinose većem zadovoljstvu u paru i produbljenju duhovnosti, no malo su poznati učinci internetskih verzija ovih programa. Ovo je istraživanje provedeno u Sloveniji te je ispitalo kratkoročne učinke internetskog programa priprave za brak na svakodnevna duhovna iskustva, zadovoljstvo odnosom i opću dobrobit. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 384 ispitanika, 173 muškarca i 211 žena, koji su ispunili upitnike DSES, CSI i WHO5 prije i nakon sudjelovanja u internetskom programu priprave za brak. Rezultati pokazuju da su se procjene sudionika o svakodnevnim duhovnim iskustvima ($p<0,001$), zadovoljstvu odnosom ($p<0,001$) i općoj dobrobiti ($p<0,001$) statistički značajno poboljšale neposredno nakon sudjelovanja. Ovo istraživanje potvrđuje kratkoročnu učinkovitost ovakvog tipa internetskog programa priprave za brak kao važnog pristupa za unaprjeđenje svakodnevnih duhovnih iskustava, zadovoljstva odnosom i opće dobrobiti. Za buduća istraživanja bilo bi preporučljivo ispitati i dugoročne učinke ovakvog internetskog programa u usporedbi s tradicionalnim programima priprave za brak.

Ključne riječi: duhovna iskustva, internetski program, opća dobrobit, priprava za brak, zadovoljstvo odnosom.

(*na hrv. prev.* Berislav Čović)

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