








Typology of the understanding of female students and their mothers about premarital relationships and relationship management strategies

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Today, premarital relationships and their meaning for young people on the verge of marriage significantly differ from previous generations. In the meantime, considering the sensitivity of the role of girls in the family and society, it seems necessary to understand their understanding of premarital relationships over time and in two generations. Therefore, the current research aimed to identify the knowledge of female students and their mothers about premarital relationships.

Method: This is an applied and qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The study sample included 17 female Ferdowsi University of Mashhad students and their mothers, who were selected purposefully. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants. In order to analyze the data, the phenomenological method and MAXQDA software was used.

Results: In this study, five main themes were identified, including 1. love in premarital relationships, 2. requirements of a healthy premarital relationship, 3. advantages of premarital relationship, 4. disadvantages of premarital relationship, and 5. premarital relationship management strategies.

Conclusion: The daughter's view of premarital relationships seems more based on emotions, and the mother's view is based on logic and realism; this difference was noticeable in the reported sub-themes. However, both emphasize the necessity of family supervision and marriage counseling.

Keywords: generational difference, love, premarital relationships, typology

1. Introduction

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are very important periods for developing intimate relationships (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). These relationships are "continuous voluntary interactions accepted by the parties" (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). Such relationships are a source for young people to seek emotional security, intimacy, and love until they are ready to make decisions about long-term commitments, such as cohabitation and marriage (Owen & Fincham, 2011). According to the theory of developmental tasks, involvement in intimate relationships is an emerging developmental task during adolescence, which eventually becomes a prominent developmental task in adulthood (Furman & Collibee, 2014).

Intimate relationships and experiences are important sources of emotional bonding and contribute to developing a positive self-concept and greater social integration (Meier & Allen, 2008). Establishing and successfully maintaining such relationships can have positive consequences in the later stages of life (Arnett, 2014), and it has been shown that it helps people's mental and physical health and, as a result, their well-being; However, such relationships have also been associated with negative consequences (Gómez-López, Viejo, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019). Unhealthy intimate relationships may be associated with various forms of violence (Viejo et al., 2016), experiencing internalizing symptoms such as depression or anxiety, poorer psychosocial functioning, or delinquency (Cui et al., 2012).

The noteworthy point in this context is that the positive consequences of intimate relationships do not happen in a social vacuum; It is essential to have a social platform that accepts such relationships and provides emotional support and understanding to young people in the face of relationship challenges (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). For this reason, the role of the family as the first small community that people enter seems to be important. Today, if premarital relationships were formed and continued with the consent of the parents and under their supervision, they are also accepted by the family and can have benefits for young people, and are more likely to lead to a successful and harmonious marriage. Nevertheless, suppose these relationships are secret or include sexual behaviors and strong and unhealthy emotional dependencies. In that case, it is condemned by the family and society and causes significant harm to young people. This is even though in the previous decades, any form of premarital relationship,

especially for girls, was illegitimate and distasteful and considered a kind of taboo (Sohrabzade & Hamami, 2014). Therefore, premarital relationships have a multifaceted nature connected with the values, norms, and culture of a society on the one hand. On the other hand, it is connected with choosing a spouse, marriage, and family. In general, it can be said that although today's young people take more active steps to marry and choose their future spouses, the role of families has become less important. However, this type of relationship with the opposite sex is still very important, and the changes that have occurred among young people have not reduced the importance of this issue among families and previous generations (Fathi, Karami Ghahi, & Pour Esmaeili, 2019).

Cultural studies related to premarital relationships in Iran show that girls and boys behave differently in these relationships; The first difference is that girls enter into premarital relationships to reach a committed relationship of marriage (Khalajabadi Farahani & Shojaei, 2013). The presence of Iranian girls in such relationships has a traditional-modern approach; This means that they enter into a relationship from a traditional point of view, aiming to convert premarital relationships into marriage and reduce anxiety caused by social pressures on unmarried girls. From the modern aspect, by expanding the values of modernity and the model of freedom in relationships, they attempt to experience such relationships (Safaei, 2011). The second difference is related to the greater vulnerability of girls in premarital relationships compared to boys (Mirzaie et al., 2018). However, we see an increase in the desire of girls to experience premarital relationships and an increase in the number of such relationships in society (Malekasgar, Mazaheri, & Sadeqi, 2017); The coincidence of entering adulthood with entering university has also made the university a suitable place to start premarital communication (Zareshahabadi & solimani, 2012). In order to better understand how girls, despite being aware of the harms of premarital relationships, are still willing to experience them, checking their understanding of such relationships seems necessary. Therefore, in the current research, we have studied female students to investigate girls' understanding of premarital relationships. In another part of the research, attention has been paid to mothers, as the previous generation who themselves once experienced emerging adulthood, and the challenges related to the intimate premarital relationship at that age in a different way. Therefore, this research aimed to answer the question of how student girls and their mothers understand premarital

relationships and what possible differences exist between the understanding of these two generations.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design and Participant

The current research method was a qualitative phenomenological type, and the experience of girls and their mothers from premarital relationships was investigated. The statistical population of the research was all female students aged 18-30 years studying at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in 2021 and their mothers 40 years and older. Purposeful and snowball method was used for sampling. In this way, 17 pairs of female children and their mothers were selected. The average age of the subjects studied was 24.8 years for girls and 49.6 years for mothers. The inclusion criteria for girls were that they had experienced at least one premarital relationship for at least one year, and the inclusion criteria for mothers were their knowledge of their daughters' premarital relationships and the process the daughter went through. In addition, both groups needed the ability to read and write, express their personal experiences, and participate in the research with their consent. Exclusion criteria for girls were having sex with a romantic partner, a history of unwanted pregnancy, or abortion. The mother's ignorance or doubt about such relationships in the girl's life was also the exclusion criteria for mothers.

At the beginning of the interview, the informed consent of the participants was obtained. The necessary information was given to them, and after collecting the demographic information, the interview questions were semi-structured. In this way, when the answers reach a state of plurality and saturation, the number of subjects has reached the quorum, which was done in this research with 17 pairs of female children and their mothers. The average time of interviews with the girl and then her mother was 120 minutes.

2.2. Measurements

2.2.1. Semi-structured Interview

In the present study, an interview was conducted with female children who had experienced premarital relationship and their mothers. The researchers asked the interview questions according to the purpose of the research and in order to identify the experience of this group of girls and

mothers. In qualitative research, the criterion of reliability is used to measure the validity and reliability of the instrument; The reliability of the tool can be measured through 4 components (Krefting, 1991). These criteria have been taken into consideration in the current research. A) In order to make the instrument valid, which is equivalent to internal validity, the research method, the method of data collection and analysis according to the phenomenon under investigation and the purpose of the research was used. Repeated questions were also used to clarify the questions and relevant details, as well as to remove the researcher's misunderstanding of the participants' words and reveal possible contradictions. b) In order to provide transferability, which is equivalent to external validity, the demographic characteristics of the participants, the time and details of the interview and the method of data analysis were described. c) Reliability, equivalent to reliability in qualitative research, was done by fully explaining the steps so that researchers can repeat it in the future. d) Verifiability in the current research was done by strictly following the model and consulting with professors and students familiar with the qualitative method of coding and data analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, the phenomenology method was used. MAXQDA version 2022 software was used to perform data analysis as best as possible. Finally, to validate the findings, the research findings were given to several professors and students familiar with the qualitative method, and they were asked to check the validity of the findings. Also, the participants were asked to compare the findings with their own experiences to ensure that the researchers understood the experiences correctly.

3. Findings and Results

In this study, to facilitate the comparison of girls' and their mothers' understanding of premarital relationships, the interview questions were the same for both groups, and five main themes were extracted from the answers of both groups. These themes are reported in Table 1 and Table 2. The main difference between the experiences of mothers and daughters was in the sub-themes and concepts reported. Due to the paired participation of mothers and their daughters in the research, the same codes used for their daughters were used in the report of mothers' quotes.

Table 1

Main themes, sub-themes and extracted codes for daughters

Main theme	Sub-theme	Concepts
Love in premarital relationships	Romantic emotions	Girls from this component in the form of emotions such as satisfaction from the relationship in private. Love: beyond loving, excessive loving of a romantic partner, the feeling of comfort from having a romantic relationship, loving one person more than oneself and the point of connection between two people.
	Romantic behaviors	Understanding and valuing each other, letting go of fears, showing your true self in front of your emotional partner, feeling good, and getting motivated for life
	The incomparability of love	Specificity of love for a romantic partner versus love for parents, the unrepeatability of a romantic relationship, the uniqueness of a romantic partner for each person, and the indescribable pleasure of the relationship in describing the uniqueness of their romantic experience
Disadvantages of premarital relationship	Awareness of families	Keeping the mother in the loop, monitoring the parents, and not hiding the relationship details from the parents
	Observance of relationship boundaries	Not exaggerating the expression of emotions, not sharing the details of life with an emotional partner, and the dislike of extreme dependence on an emotional partner
	The characteristics of a desirable emotional partner	Valuing the girl (future wife), intellectual independence, financial independence, responsibility, physical and mental health, purpose in life, favorable social position, and having a job and financial level
	Necessity of testing the emotional partner	Self-mastery, presence in different groups, assessment of emotional partners, and face-to-face meetings to evaluate emotional partners
Benefits of premarital relationship	Improvement of mental-physical health	The development of positive personality traits, peace of mind from being liked, finding a healthy lifestyle, and good physical condition
	Increased knowledge and awareness	Knowing more about oneself during the relationship, knowing the emotional partner's mood, knowing how to communicate with the opposite sex, and knowing each other's family culture
	The opportunity to choose according to the personal ideal	The girls reported that the existence of such relationships would make them better able to find the desired person for marriage and have a free choice according to their wishes
Requirements of a healthy premarital relationship	Emotional failure	Dependence and problems caused by it, depression, isolation and refusal of social relations, and reluctance to new people and relationships
	Instability and instability of the relationship	Lack of official and legal responsibility towards each other, more opportunity to hide the real self, and more opportunity to break the relationship
Premarital relationship management	Solving conflicts	Seeking help from a counselor, talking about the disputed issue, and sharing the existing dispute
	Maintaining, dynamizing, and enhancing the relationship	Taking criticism, paying attention to the needs of the other party, adapting and understanding the differences, avoiding routine and repetition in the relationship, and creating vitality and new experiences with the emotional partner
	Self-differentiation	Not sharing the details of life with friends, not interfering with families and surrounding people when disagreements occur, and having the independence to vote in important decisions

Table 2

Main themes, sub-themes and extracted codes for mothers

Main-themes	Sub-themes	Concepts
Love in premarital relationships	Romantic emotions	Empathy, affection, love, sympathy and support
	Romantic behaviors	Self-sacrifice, companionship and friendship with each other, respect for each other and prioritizing the wishes of others.
	Realism in love	The instability of romantic relationships, the lack of experience of love at a young age and the need to subside the excitement
Disadvantages of premarital relationship	Awareness of families	The necessity of notifying families, supervision of families on relationships, and the necessity of families communicating with each other
	Observance of relationship boundaries	Behaving according to the customs of the society, not having sex with each other and not having multiple relationships with different people by one or both of them.
	Emotional maturity of the parties	Acting rationally and using the experience of others, mastering emotions, observing honesty in the relationship, preserving the dignity of families and continuing the relationship in the form of an official marriage process.
	The similarity of the personal and family conditions of the parties	Common beliefs, common socio-cultural level of families, common values and red lines between boys and girls
Benefits of premarital relationship	Responsibility practice	Practicing accountability helps increase adaptability
	Increasing mutual recognition	Acquiring mutual recognition in the case of the flow of logic in the relationship

Requirements of a healthy premarital relationship	Possible damages for marriage	The loss of true love after marriage, the influence of the experienced relationship on future choices, the possibility of separation even after marriage, the fear of infamy or physical-psychological damage to the girl.
Premarital relationship management	Extreme positivity towards the emotional partner	Not seeing the faults of the other party, not being logical and rational in the relationship, emotions dominating the relationship, choosing without thinking.
	Premarital relationship management	Fixing one's own flaws and covering up the flaws of the romantic partner, cooperating to meet the needs of the other party, taking good care of the appearance of oneself and the romantic partner.
	Adherence to stereotypical female behaviors	Patience and tolerance, compatibility and mutual understanding, shortcoming of one of the parties in conflicts, avoiding malice, avoiding stubbornness and selfishness.

3.1. Love in premarital relationships

According to the reports of daughters and their mothers, love and romantic experiences are a part of premarital relationships. Thus, the first theme was their definition of love and romantic relationships.

3.1.1. Love in premarital relationships (Daughters)

The girls defined love through three sub-themes of romantic emotions, romantic behaviors, and uniqueness of love.

3.1.1.1 Romantic emotions

Girls from this component in the form of emotions such as satisfaction from the relationship in private. Love: beyond loving, excessive loving of a romantic partner, the feeling of comfort from having a romantic relationship, loving one person more than oneself and the point of connection between two people. For example, code 3: "I think love means that you feel inside yourself how good it is that someone loves you, how good it is that you have someone to love like this."

3.1.1.2 Romantic behaviors

Understanding and valuing each other, letting go of fears, showing your true self in front of your emotional partner, feeling good, and getting motivated for life were reported as romantic behaviors. For example, code 5: "I am one of the few people who, when I am in front of him, am myself, and I have no fear that he will judge me or if I say this now, he will change his opinion of me; he will not like me, he is the one with whom I have an emotional relationship."

3.1.1.3 The incomparability of love

It seems that a kind of exaggeration can be seen in girls' understanding of the incomparability of love. They reported concepts such as the specificity of love for a romantic partner

versus love for parents, the unrepeatability of a romantic relationship, the uniqueness of a romantic partner for each person, and the indescribable pleasure of the relationship in describing the uniqueness of their romantic experience. For example; Code 6: "Until you experience it, you will not realize the taste of love, the excitement it has, the fact that it transforms you."

3.1.2. Love in premarital relationships (Mothers)

Like the girls, the first theme for mothers was related to the definition of love and romantic relationship. The sub-themes of romantic emotions, romantic behaviors, and realism in love were reported in mothers' statements. It seems that the difference between girls' and mothers' understanding of love is that girls are more emotional, and mothers are more logical in defining romantic emotions and behaviors. For this reason, girls introduced love as unique, but mothers had a kind of realism towards this experience.

3.1.2.1 Romantic emotions

Empathy, affection, love, sympathy, and support were among the emotions that, according to mothers, if they exist between two people, it means the flow of love between them. For example, code 9: "The way we define love and it was the same when we were young; the same loving, stable and long loving that both men and women understand and know."

3.1.2.2 Romantic behaviors

Self-sacrifice, companionship and friendship with each other, respect for each other, and prioritizing other people's wishes for themselves were among the romantic behaviors from the mothers' point of view. For example, Code 11: "When you fall in love with someone, there should be no meaning between you and him; you forget yourself, he forgets himself; young people today are the same if their love is real."

3.1.2.3 *Realism in love*

Regarding this sub-theme, it seems that mothers are pessimistic about romantic relationships before marriage, as girls define such relationships. The mothers of the current study believed that romantic relationships are not very stable, the experience of love does not happen at a young age, and the excitement must subside. For example, Code 14: "The thing that exists now and we see among young people, many of them do not really love, girls and boys must have reached a maturity and stability, fall in love for a reason."

3.2. *Requirements of a healthy premarital relationship*

The second main theme of the research referred to the requirements of a healthy relationship before marriage. Some of these requirements seem related to the parties' families, some are related to the relationship and its quality, and some are related to the emotional partner.

3.2.1. *Requirements of a healthy premarital relationship (Daughter)*

Awareness of families, compliance with relationship boundaries, characteristics of a desirable emotional partner, and the need to test an emotional partner were among these requirements from the girls' point of view.

3.2.1.1 *Awareness of families*

The girls of the present study reported that one could be more confident about the relationship's health if such relationships are formed and continued with the knowledge of the families and their supervision. Keeping the mother in the loop, monitoring the parents, and not hiding the relationship details from the parents were among the related concepts. For example, code 10: "I believe that when both parties do not really have bad intentions, there is no need to hide from their families, they should not do this, at least they should tell their mother."

3.2.1.2 *Observance of relationship boundaries*

Not exaggerating the expression of emotions, not sharing the details of life with an emotional partner, and the dislike of extreme dependence on an emotional partner were among the examples of observing boundaries in a relationship from the girls' point of view. For example, Code 15: "You should not go too far now, you should give charity to yourself. You shouldn't depend too much on yourself until you are sure at the beginning."

3.2.1.3 *The characteristics of a desirable emotional partner*

Valuing the girl (future wife), intellectual independence, financial independence, responsibility, physical and mental health, purpose in life, favorable social position, and having a job and financial level, from the point of view of girls, the characteristics of a desirable emotional partner. For example, Code 11: "...for example, he has reached independence, now, whether he has money or thoughts, health, care about his future wife and..."

3.2.1.4 *Necessity of testing the emotional partner*

Regarding this sub-topic, the girls believed that one of the requirements of a healthy relationship is that it is possible to test the emotional partner, and as a result of these tests, they can be sure of the correctness of their choice and the correctness of the emotional partner. Self-mastery, presence in different groups, assessment of emotional partners, and face-to-face meetings to evaluate emotional partners were among the concepts related to this sub-theme. For example, Code 11: "I observed him in different places to see how he behaves in this situation, in relation to his friends, with other girls, in an official party, you should see his behavior in different places."

3.2.2. *Requirements of a healthy premarital relationship (Mother)*

The second theme extracted from the mothers' experiences was also related to the requirements of a healthy relationship, with the difference that in addition to the awareness of families and respect for the boundaries of the relationship, the emotional maturity of the parties and the compatibility of the personal and family conditions of the parties were also among these requirements.

3.2.2.1 *Awareness of families*

It seems that mothers and daughters agree on the need for families to be aware of premarital relationships. Mothers also pointed to concepts such as notifying families, family monitoring relationships, and the need for families to communicate with each other. For example, Code 7: "I think that if someone in a relationship with my daughter has good intentions, he should inform us as a family from the very beginning, even about their movements. After all, it is a familiarization period; there is no problem. However, we, the families, must know there is no danger for them."

3.2.2.2 *Observance of relationship boundaries*

In this context, it seems that examples of boundaries and boundaries are different from the point of view of mothers and daughters. Mothers regard the observance of boundaries more as behaving according to society's customs, not having sex with each other, and not having many relationships with people. For example, Code 9: "There is a red line in their relationship that they must observe; they must not have a relationship that is specific to a marital relationship."

3.2.2.3 *Emotional maturity of the parties*

Regarding this sub-theme and by comparing it with the requirements raised by girls for a healthy emotional relationship, it can be said that the focus of girls in defining a healthy relationship and its prerequisites is more focused on the emotional partner, his characteristics and ensuring the correctness of the choice. On the other hand, mothers look deeper at the issue and consider the parties involved and are responsible in forming a healthy relationship. For this reason, they have defined emotional maturity for the parties of the relationship as one of the requirements of a healthy relationship. Concepts such as acting rationally and using the experience of others, mastering emotions, observing honesty in the relationship, preserving the dignity of families, and continuing the relationship in the form of the formal process of marriage were among the examples of this maturity from the mothers' point of view. For example, Code 5: "It is not good for a relationship before marriage to last too long, especially for girls; it is better to convert it into marriage after a few months if they are suitable for each other."

3.2.2.4 *The similarity of the personal and family conditions of the parties*

This sub-theme, like the previous sub-theme, is related to mothers' attention to the role of both sides of the relationship in forming a healthy relationship. Mothers' statements reported concepts such as common beliefs, common socio-cultural level of families, common values, and red lines between boys and girls. For example, Code 11: "If we assume that this relationship is going to end in marriage, the family of the girl and the boy should be on the same level in every respect..."

3.3. *Benefits of premarital relationship*

It seems that if the girls have met the mentioned requirements in establishing a relationship before marriage, such relationships will benefit them.

3.3.1. *Benefits of premarital relationship (Daughters)*

The benefits mentioned by the girls were improving mental and physical health status, increasing awareness, and the opportunity to choose according to personal ideals.

3.3.1.1 *Improvement of mental-physical health*

The development of positive personality traits, peace of mind from being liked, finding a healthy lifestyle, and good physical condition were among the related concepts in this field. For example, code 5: "Sometimes I think to myself how nice and comforting it is to have someone who loves you; it calms me down a lot."

3.3.1.2 *Increased knowledge and awareness*

Knowing more about oneself during the relationship, knowing the emotional partner's mood, knowing how to communicate with the opposite sex, and knowing each other's family culture, among the knowledge obtained from the premarital relationship were reported. For example, code 9: "For us, whose schools are single-sex, then university and friendship with the opposite sex will teach us how to behave with the opposite sex. It is good for us for the next relationship with our future spouse, whether it is him or not."

3.3.1.3 *The opportunity to choose according to the personal ideal*

This sub-theme seems to be one of the important differences between traditional marriages and modern marriages. The girls reported that the existence of such relationships would make them better able to find the desired person for marriage and have a free choice according to their wishes. For example, Code 2: "Our grandparents or even our parents may not have had the right to choose; they should marry the person the family said. However, it is not like that for us; it is very good that you have the opportunity to get to know the other party before marriage to make a better choice."

3.3.2. *Benefits of premarital relationship (Mothers)*

Mothers participating in the research reported the benefits of such relationships in the form of two categories practicing responsibility and increasing mutual recognition.

3.3.2.1 *Responsibility practice*

In this context, mothers believed that the existence of such relationships would teach their children to accept the responsibility for their choices better, and probably in this way, they will experience more compatibility in their lives. For example, Code 8: "When you let children make their own choices, they stick to their choices better, or when they come to the hardships of life, they can tolerate them better."

3.3.2.2 *Increasing mutual recognition*

Regarding the acquisition of mutual recognition, similar to what was mentioned for the requirements of a healthy emotional relationship, mothers believed that such premarital relationships could benefit both parties. According to the mothers, if the parties of the relationship advance their communication logically, they will have the opportunity to get to know each other mutually. For example, Code 10: "Sometimes my daughter says that this relationship I have before marriage helps me get to know my partner better. They are right; behaving rationally and having a healthy relationship helps them get to know each other better."

3.4. *Disadvantages of premarital relationship*

According to the participants' experience, premarital relationships can have double aspects, some participants enjoyed the said benefits, and some suffered from the disadvantages of such relationships.

3.4.1. *Disadvantages of premarital relationship (Daughter)*

According to the girls in the second group, things like emotional failure, instability, and instability in the relationship are among these disadvantages.

3.4.1.1 *Emotional failure*

Dependence and problems caused by it, depression, isolation and refusal of social relations, and reluctance to new people and relationships were among these concepts. For example, code 6: "When you have a deep relationship

and then it ends, you are not attracted to any new person or new relationship for a long time after that, your heart wants the same one."

3.4.1.2 *Instability and instability of the relationship*

Lack of official and legal responsibility towards each other, more opportunity to hide the real self, and more opportunity to break the relationship were among the disadvantages of such relationships from the girls' point of view. For example, Code 4: "Well, in reality, we did not commit to each other, that is why it breaks up easily."

3.4.2. *Disadvantages of premarital relationship (Mother)*

Regarding the disadvantages of such relationships from the mothers' point of view, it seems that they have more foresight than these relationships, and they define the disadvantages of the relationship more in terms of possible future problems. These disadvantages were possible damage to marriage and extreme positivity towards the emotional partner.

3.4.2.1 *Possible damages for marriage*

The loss of true love after marriage, the influence of the experienced relationship on future choices, the possibility of separation even after marriage, the fear of infamy, or the physical-psychological damage to the girl were among these damages. For example, code 13: "When the premarital relationship ends unsuccessfully, in our culture, the girl gets hurt more, the people around her may make up stories behind her back, and she herself suffers more psychologically."

3.4.2.2 *Extreme positivity towards the emotional partner*

not seeing the other party's faults, not being logical and rational in the relationship, the dominance of emotions over the parties, and choosing without thinking were examples of extreme positivity towards the emotional partner. For example, Code 4: "They say that love blinds you; it was the same in my daughter's relationship; she was very excited as if she was blinded to the badness of the other party."

3.5. *Premarital relationship management*

The last theme extracted from the statements of daughters and their mothers was related to strategies that can be used to manage the relationship. While there are some advantages

and disadvantages in such relationships, according to girls and mothers, using these strategies will be useful.

3.5.1. Premarital relationship management (Daughter)

According to girls, these strategies included conflict resolution, maintenance and dynamism, relationship enhancement, and self-differentiation.

3.5.1.1 Solving conflicts

Seeking help from a counselor, talking about the disputed issue, and sharing the existing dispute was among the appropriate ways to resolve relationship conflicts from the girls' point of view. For example, code 13: "We must have a sense of belonging; for example, we never said that this is your problem, it has nothing to do with me, we tried to see what happened together to solve it."

3.5.1.2 Maintaining, dynamizing, and enhancing the relationship

Taking criticism, paying attention to the needs of the other party, adapting and understanding the differences, avoiding routine and repetition in the relationship, and creating vitality and new experiences with the emotional partner were reported as ways to strengthen the relationship. Code 1: "We shouldn't let our relationship become repetitive; it is very busy; we should go to places we haven't been together, take a class together, make an appointment to read a book together, and things like this are very interesting in my opinion."

3.5.1.3 Self-differentiation

From the point of view of girls, emotional partners must be able to make decisions on their own without the intervention of those around them to manage their relationship and not be dependent on them, Not sharing the details of life with friends, not interfering with families and surrounding people when disagreements occur, and having the independence to vote in important decisions were reported as related concepts. For example, code 10: "Sometimes our own friends may also interfere in our relationship; we should also respectfully tell them to keep the boundaries of their relationship with us."

3.5.2. Premarital relationship management (Mother)

It seems that mothers' relationship management strategies are mostly tolerance-based based on the expectations of the

previous generation of women. Observance of feminine stereotyped behaviors and resilience were among the strategies of mothers.

3.5.2.1 Adherence to stereotypical female behaviors

Fixing one's own flaws and covering up the flaws of the emotional partner, cooperating to meet the needs of the other party, and taking good care of one's appearance and that of the emotional partner were among these stereotyped behaviors. For example, code 14: "A woman should take care of the house and life and keep it alive, now it is the same in this relationship before marriage. After all, the girl should take care of the relationship, make it with the other party, cover her faults and the other party's".

3.5.2.2 Resilience

Patience and tolerance, compatibility and mutual understanding, one of the parties being short in conflicts, avoiding malice, avoiding stubbornness and selfishness were among the examples of resilience according to mothers. For example, Code 15: "The patience and tolerance of young people are very low, they should not be childish stubbornness with each other, they should observe relationship etiquette so that their relationship continues well."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted to identify the understanding of student girls and their mothers about premarital relationships; According to the findings, daughters and mothers have first considered a definition of love as a significant part of premarital relationships and some requirements for having a healthy premarital relationship. Compliance with these requirements has resulted in advantages, and ignoring them has caused them disadvantages. Finally, girls and mothers have imagined strategies to manage the premarital relationship as best as possible.

Regarding the first part of the understanding of girls and mothers, which is related to the definition of love, it can be said that although individual feelings and personality traits play a role in the experience of love, on the other hand, social conditions and structures are also effective in the emergence of this phenomenon (Malekhamadi, Mirfardi, & Mokhtari, 2019); Therefore, because mothers and daughters have been in the same cultural context, their definition of love as a part

of premarital relationships has been similar. In fact, the dominant culture in any society plays a very constructive role in forming and continuing people's lives (Moghtadai, Yousefi, & Davari Dolatabadi, 2023). Idealization of the beloved, strong desire to be with each other, friendship and kindness to each other, suffering from being away from the beloved, and a platform for searching for happiness are among the concepts. These concepts come to mind in the present research and other related research by mentioning love (Karandashev, 2016). The noteworthy point in this context is that in most Western sources, sexual desire is mentioned as part of intimate and close relationships (Manoharan & De Munck, 2017). However, in the participant's experience of the present study, it was not expressed even though such a desire existed. The roots of this can be found in the existing taboos in discussing relationships and sexual desires, especially before marriage and the parties becoming confidential.

Despite many similarities in the definition of love between mothers and daughters, according to the research participants' statements, they are different in that girls consider love unique and mothers have a kind of realism towards it. This difference can probably be explained due to their age and generational difference (Parsakia et al., 2023). The girls are on the verge of entering into a committed and long-term marriage relationship, and their statements are based on their predictions of the phenomenon of love and intimate relationship; However, mothers pass this period and describe it more maturely. It seems that with the beginning of joint life and the passing of a few years, logical love will replace the exciting love of dating and marriage; This transformation of love means a kind of rationality, logic, and benefits over emotions (Mokhtari, Kianpour, & Agha Babaei, 2016). This is probably the reason why mothers and daughters describe love differently.

In addition to the existence and necessity of love in premarital relationships, according to the findings of this research, the following are necessary to ensure the health of premarital relationships: Awareness of families, respecting relationship boundaries, emotional maturity of the parties, individual and family compatibility, the presence of desirable characteristics in the emotional partner and the need to test the emotional partner. Generally, Girls and women enter into such relationships to achieve premarital (Khalajabadi Farahani & Shojaei, 2013). Therefore, the requirements mentioned by daughters and mothers can be considered a basic form of the necessary criteria for forming a healthy marriage and choosing a spouse.

Due to the special role of marriage compared to other human relationships, which has a wider scope and has biological, economic, emotional, psychological and social dimensions (Paknejad, Mirzahouseini, & Monirpour, 2020), and the special position and role of the spouse in the quality of married life, the health of the next generations, and the formation of a healthy family, the process of choosing a spouse and the criteria related to it are also of special importance, a healthy family can be defined as a family that acts logically and realistically when facing issues, and its members deal with issues and events less emotionally and more logically (Aali & Kadivar, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary for the families, as the family of origin, to logically stand by the youth and accompany them in choosing a spouse and premarital relationships to provide a basis for forming a healthy family for the child. Therefore, as the research participants also acknowledged, it is necessary to inform the families about premarital relationships and the interaction of the parties' families with each other. In addition, through these interactions, it is possible to understand that the personal and family conditions of the parties are on the same level, as one of the requirements of a healthy relationship, which the mothers of the present study mentioned. Regarding the alignment of boys and girls for marriage or their difference from each other, there have long been different and sometimes conflicting opinions (Buss & Barnes, 1986); In general, it can be said that the amount of this difference should not reach such a level that it goes beyond the threshold of tolerance of the parties and becomes a factor for dissatisfaction (Bijari et al., 2020).

Another requirement for the premarital relationship was to observe the limits and boundaries of the relationship from two emotional and sexual dimensions. Mothers especially emphasized the prohibition of sexual intercourse and daughters emphasized the prohibition of emotional dependence. Mothers' concern seems to be more future-oriented and focused on the consequences of such relationships, including creating a negative attitude and mistrust toward marriage. Sexual relations before marriage, especially in Iranian society, have been criticized a lot, and in line with the results of the present study, many studies have emphasized the psychological and cultural damage and negative consequences of such an experience before marriage. (Ghanbaribarzain, Salmanvandy, & Fatemi, 2018; Hedayati-Moghaddam et al., 2015; Vakilian, Mousavi, & Keramat, 2014)

From the point of view of emotional boundaries and the girls' point of view, it can be said that they have a more individualistic and current-oriented view. That is, they consider lack of dependence in an emotional relationship as important and as a red line so that if they want to or need to leave the relationship, it will be less difficult for them to do so. Related researches in this field also show that if romantic relationships before marriage are not successful, a person should have enough ability to end the relationship (Khodaverdian, Khodabakhshi-koolae, & Sanagoo, 2020); Lack of emotional attachment is one of the factors that play a role in achieving this ability. Therefore, paying attention to the boundaries of emotional communication by girls and mothers can be considered as a measure to reduce the possible damage to premarital relationships for girls.

The last mentioned requirement was related to the parties present in a premarital relationship, i.e., the individual characteristics of the boy and girl. The girls only paid attention to the features necessary for a desirable emotional partner and the need to be sure of the presence of these features in him. At the same time, the mothers considered both sides of the relationship, i.e., the girl and the boy, and their maturity. Consistent with the results of the present study, it seems that the emotional partner's personality traits and his income level are two important criteria for girls (Tashan et al., 2017). Buss (1989), in his study of 18 countries of the world, including Iran, listed the necessary characteristics for a desirable emotional partner as follows: economic and income level, ambition, diligence, chastity and chastity. He points out that the first three factors are more important for women (Buss, 1989). On the other hand, in line with the mothers' statements, it is clear that both sides of the relationship must have desirable characteristics, and maturity and maturity of both is important for the relationship's health (Ghanbaribarzain, Salmanvandy, & Fatemi, 2018).

Now it seems that if the mentioned requirements are met and the premarital relationship is properly managed, it will bring benefits. The third theme of the research lists the benefits of premarital relationships. Among these benefits were mental and physical health, opportunity to gain knowledge, choice according to desire and personal criteria, and exercise for responsibility. Related studies have also pointed to such benefits; A seven-year longitudinal study on two groups of students who had mental and physical health and a similar group who lacked it showed that the ability to love and be intimate with another person is a powerful predictor of health and happiness. Young people with

difficulty establishing intimate relationships will enjoy less happiness and inner satisfaction (Vaillant, 2012).

In addition, such relationships help to know more and selectively according to the personal desires and standards of young people and in this way also provide the ground for stable internal satisfaction. Today, love has become the main basis of marriage and young people prefer to marry their favorite person they love (Hedayati, 2019). Studies show that if premarital relationships end in marriage, the love between the parties will play a significant role in the quality of their relationships and interactions (Kietäväinen-Sirén, 2011). It seems that couples who get married in a non-traditional way will experience fewer marital conflicts and even more marital satisfaction than couples who get married traditionally. In other words, in non-traditional marriages, the opportunity to work together or to be classmates in university, etc., leads to familiarity, and boys and girls can observe each other in natural and unplanned conditions; This form of familiarity ends with their recognition, intimacy and interest in each other and then the desire to be together forever, that is, a more stable marriage (Honarparvaran, 2017). According to this article, the advantage of premarital relationships can be explained from the point of view of girls and mothers; It seems that they are optimistic about such relationships because premarital relationships help the parties to be responsible for each other and their choices and their life together is more likely to remain stable in the future. It is noteworthy that families and young people should use premarital counseling in order to ensure the health of premarital relationships and subsequent marriage (Ebrahimi, Goudarzi, & Isanejad, 2019).

Despite these advantages, unfortunately, premarital relationships may also come with disadvantages. The fourth theme of the research referred to the disadvantages of these relationships. There is still no consensus on the acceptance or non-acceptance of premarital relationships, especially for girls in Iranian society. If a girl in this society fails in premarital relationships, she will probably experience its negative consequences in a double way (Mosayebi dorche, Issazadegan, & Soleymani, 2022). The conflict of mental space and diversity, lack of trust for marriage, the possibility of cheating on the future spouse and the difficulty of choosing a future spouse are among the negative consequences that were also noticed by the mothers of the present study. In addition, mothers believed that the predominance of emotions in premarital communication may be associated with a lack of attention to the negative characteristics of the other party.

Another damage that may result from a premarital relationship is a set of symptoms known as emotional failure. Experiencing emotional failure and losing intimate relationships with the opposite sex is a common phenomenon during student life and often leads to depression and academic performance decline. On the other hand, because when intimate relationships fail, women are more vulnerable than men (Asayesh, Qazinejad, & Bahonar, 2021); This imbalance causes negative consequences such as depression and anger to be greater for girls, as the girls of the present study acknowledged. Although there are individual differences in this field and each person may experience emotional failure in a mild and short-term or severe and long-term form according to their circumstances (Hirk, 2017). It seems that the lack of formal commitment of the parties to each other in premarital relationships and the ease of ending the relationship, especially from the side of men, fuel such injuries.

As the last part of the girls' and mothers' understanding of premarital relationships, we can point to the strategies they imagine to manage such relationships. According to the findings of the research, it seems that traditionalism and stereotypical roles of women have affected relationship management strategies in mothers' eyes. Mothers who participated in the research had a lower position for women than men, and therefore their strategies were more tolerance-oriented and based on gender stereotypes, while girls were more likely to believe in the equality of men and women, and their strategies were also derived from this equality. Studies show that for many centuries, in eastern cultures, men have enjoyed higher prestige and power in emotional relationships, and the position of equality between men and women in an emotional relationship has not been very meaningful (Jankowiak et al., 2015). However, in recent years, these expectations have changed and approached western culture; So that women no longer consider losing their individual independence at the cost of being in a relationship called love (Jankowiak et al., 2015). It is normal to witness less selflessness, sacrifice and forgiveness from today's women than the women of previous generations.

On the opposite side of the mothers, the girls believed that in order to manage the relationship, it is necessary for the girl and the boy to accompany each other, and both of them should try in the same proportion so that they can solve the conflicts and give vitality and promotion to the relationship. In addition, from the point of view of girls, it was necessary for both girls and boys to have achieved their ability to differentiate. Premarital relationship is not a formal

relationship, therefore, studies related to the management and promotion of such relationships are very limited. However, with the assumption that premarital relationships are the foundation of marriage, it can be said that the strategies mentioned by mothers and daughters are somehow similar to the strategies of increasing the quality of marital relationships. From this point of view, the results of the present study are consistent with the studies (KhojasteMehri, Aghaei, & Omidian, 2019; Mohsenzadeh, Moradikochi, & Khodadadi Sangdeh, 2014).

5. Limitations

Among the limitations of the research, it can be mentioned that due to the spread of the corona virus at the time of the research, the interviews were conducted over the phone, this issue may have caused the loss of some non-verbal data. The sample of the present study was the female students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and their mothers who had access to social networks. It is possible that the experiences of girls and mothers in smaller and marginal areas that do not have the possibility to use social networks or are from different cultures, have differences with the experiences of the participants of the present study, therefore, it is necessary to be careful in generalizing the results. Variables such as the quality of the parent-child relationship, the quality and stability of the parents' relationship, the emotional atmosphere of the family, the number of children and the size of the family may have affected the experience of girls and mothers from premarital relationships, which has not been addressed; Therefore, it is one of the limitations of the current research.

6. Suggestions and Applications

In this research, daughters and mothers have been examined, it is suggested that in future researches, attention should be paid to fathers' experience of daughter's premarital relationships and the difference in the experience of mothers and fathers. Also, boys' experience of premarital relationships can also be considered. The results of the present study can be used in family and marriage counseling centers to enrich pre-marital counseling, improve the quality of pre-marital relationships, and lay the foundation for a successful marriage.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics principles

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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