

Adventures in Marriage: An Intensive Weekend Marriage Enrichment Program For Military Couples

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Abstract

This presentation describes the *Adventures in Marriage* (AIM) program and presents findings of a preliminary evaluation of the achievement toward program outcomes, implemented as an intensive weekend retreat among a sample of married military couples. The preliminary evaluation examined the immediate and long-term achievement toward program outcomes of the AIM weekend program among military couples.

Primary hypothesis: An AIM intensive weekend marriage enrichment program targeting married military couples will improve participants' communication skills, conflict resolution, perspective taking, and emotional management.

Overview of AIM

AIM is an empirically-informed, skills-based marriage education program, co-authored by Richard Albertson (Live the Life) and Lori H. Gordan, the author of PAIRS (Turner & Gordan, 1995). The **overall intended impact** of AIM is a reduction of the divorce rate and increase in the marriage rate. Typical dosage is 8-12 hours.

Intended outcomes include a) decreased intent to divorce, b) increased communication/conflict resolution skills, c) improved perspective taking abilities, and d) increased emotional management. Each AIM unit contains research-based content with interactive skill-building exercises, as summarized below:

- **Unit 1: Meet the Need.** Introduction to the Program, Design Your Own Paradise, CARESS Assessment, Relationship Road Map, Level and Congruent exercise.
- **Unit 2: Bonding 101.** Daily Temperature Reading, Natural Cycle of Relationships, Heart to Heart
- **Unit 3: Searching for "Us".** Anatomy of Conflict, Personality Assessment, Stress Styles, The Power of Us
- **Unit 4: High Brain vs. Low Brain.** Dirty Fighting, Relational Brain, "Stuff It" Role Play, Taking Out the Trash

Findings from pre/post tests and follow-up suggest that most military couples who participated in the **Adventures in Marriage (AIM)** intensive weekend enrichment program reported significant improvement in **communication skills, conflict resolution, perspective taking, and emotional management.**

Figure 1 Estimated marginal means of APO for men and women

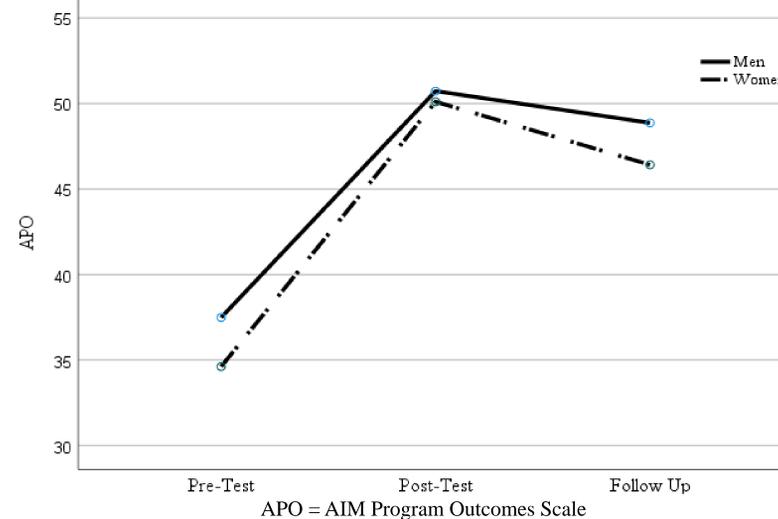


Table 1 Descriptive statistics of study variables

	M(SD)
<i>Men</i>	
1. APO Pre-test	43.41(11.91)
2. APO Post-test	58.56(6.80)
3. APO Follow-up	57.73(8.89)
<i>Women</i>	
1. APO Pre-test	41.30(13.02)
2. APO Post-test	59.07(7.09)
3. APO Follow-up	54.80(13.92)

Note: * $p \leq .001$; APO = AIM Program Outcomes measure

Table 2 Repeated measures ANOVA results

	SS	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
<i>Men</i>						
Between Groups	394697.19	1	394697.19	3828.93	.00	.98
Within Groups	6472.67	1.68	3856.89	79.09	.00	.56
Error	5074	106.61	47.59			
<i>Women</i>						
Between Groups	584784.74	1	584784.74	3064.04	.00	.97
Within Groups	13357.49	1.79	7341.11	123.43	.00	.55
Error	10930.51	183.77	59.48			

Method

Sample. Participants were recruited to the AIM weekend through military bases in Texas, Florida, and New Mexico. The retreats were held at hotels near the military bases. The sample included 515 married heterosexual couples (N=1030) in which one of the spouses was active-duty military. Participants received 8 hours of the AIM curriculum throughout the weekend.

Measures: AIM Program Outcomes (APO) scale, an anonymous retrospective pre-post measure to evaluate program outcomes before and after the weekend retreat that included 12-items, each of which addressed a targeted outcome for the AIM curriculum. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency for men ($\alpha=.94$) and women ($\alpha=.94$). Couples who consented to provide an email were sent an anonymous follow-up questionnaire 6-12 months after completing the weekend, yielding a total of 365 responses (35%).

Analyses. Primary analysis included a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the average APO scores among men and women at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up.

Results

- Results demonstrated a statistically significant difference in APO scores over time for men $F(1.68,1)=79.09, p=.00$ and women $F(1.79,1)=123.43, p=.00$ (Table 2).
- Partial eta squared revealed a moderate effect size for men ($\eta^2 =.56$) and women ($\eta^2 =.55$).
- Post-hoc analyses with a Bonferroni adjustment suggest APO scores for all participants were significantly higher from pre- to post-test and follow-up.
- Participants scores decreased from post-test to follow-up but remained significantly higher than pre-test at follow-up (Figure 1).
- Significant gender differences were discovered in the pre-test and follow-up scores through an independent samples t-test. Women reported significantly lower scores on the APO at both the pre-test and follow-up compared to the men in the sample.
- Results revealed that participants had the greatest effects immediately following the program. Although the participants reported lower APO scores at follow-up, there were still significantly higher improvements at follow-up compared to the pre-test.

Discussion

This study provided preliminary support of the AIM curriculum as an intensive weekend marriage education program for use with married heterosexual military couples. Because this was a preliminary evaluation, it consisted of a non-experimental study design. Results can inform marital education researchers and practitioners of the utility of using this format with military couples.

References

Turner, L., & Gordon, L. H. (1995). PAIRS (Practical application of intimate relationship skills): An integrative approach to intimate relationship change through a psychoeducational program, *Journal of Couples Therapy*, 5(1-2), 37-53. https://doi.org/10.1300/J036v05n01_05

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