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PREMARITAL COUNSELING and DIVORCE

by

Michael L. Davis

FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Advisors: David Glaser, Peg Tacardon, Amy D'Aprix

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the love of my life, my wife, Deanna. For without her support and encouragement this project would not have been possible. I also dedicate this project to the couples of the world who eagerly seek and attain happiness in their relationships.

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Abstract

The concern over divorce in America has become more and more prominent in recent years. It is estimated that divorce costs society billions of dollars each year, in addition to the social costs it exacts on children and adults alike, such costs include a variety of public health problems including (but not limited to) suicide, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse.

This study reviews the relevant literature about marriage and divorce in the United States and presents research in the area of premarital counseling. Five couples were surveyed to obtain their opinions about premarital counseling and methodologies in divorce prevention. The interviews, correlated with research studies described in the literature review, support the viability of premarital counseling as a strategy for marital enhancement and divorce prevention.

The Problem of Divorce in the U.S.

Introduction

The concern over divorce in America has become increasingly widespread in recent years. It is estimated that divorce costs society billions of dollars each year, in addition to the social costs it exacts on children and adults alike, such costs include a variety of public health problems including (but not limited to) suicide, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse. This literature review presents findings on 3 major categories related to divorce: demographic data, possible causations, and strategies for divorce prevention.

Divorce Statistics

The current divorce rate in America is 4.2 per 1000 individuals, amounting to an estimated 1,135,000 divorces each year. Current statistics suggest that 48.8 percent of all marriages will eventually end in divorce (Center for Disease Control, 1998). This statistic alone is staggering yet the outlook is even more grim when desertion, abandonment, and annulments are added to the mix yielding a survival rate for any marriage of somewhere in the 30 percentile range (Gottman, 1994).

A variety of other statistics also describe the current divorce trends. When couples separate, 75% of these separations will end in divorce (Gottman, 1994). The divorce rate in the United States ranges between 50 and 67 percent (depending on the area of the U.S.). Stanton (1997), reports that the number of currently divorced adults quadrupled from 4.3 million in 1970 to 17.4 million in 1994. In 1970, 3% of all people over 18 years of age were divorced, while in 1994, that number had risen to 9%.

Other notable statistics indicate that more than 80% of divorces are the unilateral decision of one partner and a mere 20% of divorces are caused by an extramarital affair (Gallagher, 1996). According to the National Center for Health Statistics (1995), the average length for first marriages ending in divorce is 11 years for both men and women. Second marriages that end in divorce average 7.1 years for women and 7.4 for men. The average for all marriages that end in divorce is 9.8 years (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995).

Reasons for Marriage and Divorce

With regards to the whole concept of marriage and divorce, statistics and research suggest that today's society not only accepts the action of divorce; in some instances it seems to encourage it. Probably the single most powerful instrument used to make this century "the divorce century" is no fault divorce (Whitehead, 1997). As a result of no fault divorce, a couple no longer needs a reason to get out of a marriage; they can simply choose to end the marriage. The "fault label" placed on one of the individuals (e.g., "adulterer" or "abuser") is no longer needed. This law, which was first passed in California in 1970, made divorcing easier and cleaner. By 1980 all but three states had passed the no fault law.

According to Gottman (1994) some of the reasons for why and when people divorce and why they get married are very similar. One of the most notable commonalities is the age of the female at the time of marriage; younger brides tend to be more likely to divorce. A random sample in England revealed that in 44 percent of divorced couples the bride was under 20 years of age when married, compared to 28 percent for intact

marriages. In addition, this sample showed that 32 percent of the divorcing groups were pregnant at the time of marriage compared to 19 percent of the intact marriages. Gottman goes on to report that the factors of age and unplanned premarital pregnancy consistently have been identified as high risk factors for marital dissolution. These factors might suggest that the reasons why the young and pregnant get married (e.g., wanting to leave home, to do the right thing, etc.) may lead to their decision divorce later on (i.e., they married for the wrong reasons).

With regards to the earliest divorce laws, in 1667 marriage went from being sanctioned by the churches to being governed by the states. Connecticut passed the first divorce law in 1667, with grounds for divorce at that time listed as adultery, fraudulent contract, and three years of neglectful desertion or seven years of total disappearance. In 1867 Indianapolis came to be known as “the divorce Mecca,” when the divorce rate rose from 10,000 to 72,000. In 1931 the state of Nevada not only reduced residency requirements necessary to divorce but also changed the grounds for divorce to only consist of mental cruelty or incompatibility (Whitehead, 1997).

Divorce and Public Health

General Concerns. As with so many other statistics that increase with divorce, so do the statistics of single parenthood. Never before in the United States have so many children been raised by one parent while the other parent is alive (U.S. Census, 1998). In addition to this statistic, other research has shown that children from single parent families are worse off in a number of health and social arenas when compared to their counterparts in intact families (Larson, 1995). This alarming fact has awakened some

policy makers to take an extensive look at the potential increased burden that divorce, separation, and single-parenthood could place on public resources (Larson, 1995).

There is not a complete study to show the exact cost to society for marital disruption. In general, though, accumulative research has shown that both adults and children who experience a divorce are more likely to have more physical and psychological problems than individuals in intact families and these individuals undoubtedly have a higher than average utilization rate for physical and mental health services, which in turn increases the strain on our public health systems (Larson, 1995).

Schoenboren & Wilson support this notion by saying, “The surge in divorce in recent decades has probably imposed hidden health care costs on the American population” (Schoenboren & Wilson, 1988, pp 3-4). In the last few decades health care costs in the United States have skyrocketed. In 1940 health care was a mere 4 billion dollar industry; today it is estimated that health care costs well over 1 trillion dollars annually.

According to Larson (1995), the correlation between health care costs and the single-parent issue is being explored, though as of this writing, no specific dollar amount has been directly associated with the fractured family and health care costs. In addition to the aforementioned statistics, divorced and economically unsupported mothers are one of the fastest growing groups of public assistance recipients (Larson, 1995). With the commitment of federal, state, and local governments to assist these women and children, the responsibility falls to the general public in the form of raised taxes.

According to Larson (1995), current literature also indicates that children of divorced parents are more likely to exhibit delinquent or antisocial behavior compared to intact or nuclear families. Children of divorced families have an increased potential of committing

illegal offenses in which a jail sentence could be imposed. As a result, the cost to society for housing and rehabilitating, as well as the loss of potential or actual earnings for these individuals, is sizable (Larson, 1995).

It has been apparent for many years that divorce affects many aspects of one's life. Death and illness is no exception. Many industrialized countries are currently researching the assumption that married persons have overall better health and increased life expectancy than their unmarried counterparts (Larson, 1995). Larson goes on to report that a number of studies have indicated that persons who leave a marriage either by divorce or separation often have higher disease and death rates than their single or never-married counterparts.

In addition, children who experience a divorce are at an increased risk of such behaviors or acts as leaving or quitting school early or having a child at an early age (Larson, 1995). Therefore, without some intervention, the trend will likely worsen as children of divorced families will continue to be at a disadvantage compared to children of intact families and will be more likely to become the next generation of lower educated, poverty-stricken single parents (Larson, 1995). The lack of education will make it difficult to compete in the ever-changing work environment, thus many children of divorce will greatly depend on public assistance.

Socioeconomic Status. In addition to a variety of public health issues another area that is greatly impacted by divorce is socioeconomic status. A study conducted by Loh (1996) explored the impact of divorce on educational attainment and the likelihood of adult poverty. The research findings indicated that family changes had a negative impact on school completion for males and females. Parental divorce had a significant impact on

females but not males. Males were the most impacted by a family change in the teenage years while females apparently experienced low educational attainment regardless of when the family change occurred. Adult poverty status of the males apparently was not affected by family change, although the adult female poverty status was correlated with the family change. Males who were born to single mothers or who were separated from both parents before the age of six were significantly more likely than other males to be poor adults. Females that experienced a parental divorce and a subsequent remarriage were more likely to be poor adults than other females.

Divorce, Alcohol and Tobacco Use. One of the major areas of public health that is often a significant concern to public health stewards is the consumption of alcohol and the use of tobacco. The literature reveals a direct correlation between divorce and the likelihood of alcohol and tobacco use.

One example of this is a study conducted by Bachman, Wadsworth, O'Malley, and Schulenberg (1997), which demonstrated a strong correlation between alcohol use and divorce. A two-year follow up study of both men and women using self-reporting measures of the number of drinks taken in the last two weeks following their divorce showed a marked increase in alcohol consumption. The authors go on to report that the increased use of alcohol or other drugs after divorce may be partially due to the fact that divorce often severs all social ties and support systems that were established in the marriage. In addition, divorce brings on less constraint for the individuals to re-enter the "singles' scene" which often times takes place at parties or bars.

In addition to alcohol use and divorce, the aforementioned authors studied the relationship between divorce and increased cigarette use. Over a two-year time period,

following divorce average cigarette consumption rose 7 to 8 percent for both men and women. Thus it appears that divorce has a profound effect on two of the most prominent public health issues of the day. Hundreds of thousands of individual lives are lost each year due to cigarette use and tens of thousands more lives are ended due to alcohol-related diseases and accidents (Wolfinger, 1998).

Another public health issue impacted by divorce is adolescent suicide. A study conducted by de Goede and Spruijt (1997) analyzed the correlation between parental divorce and youth unemployment. In addition, four health variables (mental health, thoughts of suicide, psychological stress, and physical health) were also correlated. The findings demonstrated that parental divorce and gender were physical health risks. Parental divorce and the experience of unemployment were found to be predictors for psychological health issues. While for males the optimum predictor of mental health and suicidal thoughts was the experience of unemployment, for female adolescents, parental divorce was the optimum predictor for all the health variables.

Developments of Premarital Counseling

Recent estimates predict that approximately 90 percent of all adults in the United States will marry (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). Of those who divorce, an estimated 75 to 80 percent will remarry. According to Stahmann & Hiebert, for every 100 marriages in the United States, fifty-four are first time marriages.

Stahmann & Hiebert (1997) report that there are three entities that provide premarital counseling: mental health counselors, physicians, and the clergy. Mental health counselors offer some premarital education primarily for those who have been divorced and are reconsidering remarrying. Physicians provide some premarital counseling as well,

usually in the form of a brief visit dealing with contraception and sexual information. The clergy conducts the majority of premarital counseling; a service that is optional or mandatory depending on the clergy or church. In addition, clergy perform the majority of first time marriages and remarriages as opposed to a justice of the peace or another entity sanctioned to perform marriages (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997).

Until 1924 there was no documentation of premarital interventions. It was at that time when a professor at Boston College taught the first course in “Preparation for Family Life” (Nichols, 1992). It was not until 1928 that an article appeared in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology that mentioned premarital counseling as a valuable service in building emotional and physical health. Until the 1950’s the primary literature of premarital counseling focused on the physician and the premarital physical examination (Stahmann & Hieber, 1997). In the mid 1950’s the clergy began to develop literature about premarital counseling.

The Counseling Professional

Within the counseling profession from 1900 to World War II there was very little focus on the family; the profession itself was beginning to take on its own identity as a separate discipline from medicine (Stahmann & Hieber, 1997). The major focus was on the individual, not couples or families. Taking the history of the counseling profession into account, it appears that very little premarital counseling took place prior to World War II. If there was a problem within the marriage it was usually viewed as being caused by an individual; neurotic or psychotic individuals caused problematic marriages (Stahmann & Hieber, 1997).

The Clergy

Originally marriage ceremonies were conducted without the benefit of clergy until 398 A.D. when the Synod of Carthage assumed the role of priestly benediction. With the involvement of church and state individuals began to need parental approval to marry on their own accord. Prior to this change, marriages were arranged solely by the parents (Stahmann & Hieber, 1997). By the Middle Ages the conception of a couple having to obtain permission from parents, clergy, and overlords to become married was clearly established. In addition to the issue of the church being involved in the institution of marriage was the concern about how marriage would relate to the Christian life in general. Initially the church looked negatively at marriage, supporting celibacy instead, but by 1164 the church had officially established marriage as a sacrament along with the clergy's official involvement with premarital couples. Today most weddings performed by the clergy require some form of premarital counseling or education, although these sessions do not necessarily follow the same guidelines as premarital counseling or education conducted by a counselor or mental health professional.

Methods of Premarital Counseling

As discussed previously, premarital counseling and education is generally conducted by three entities: a professional or mental health counselor, clergy or pastor, and the family physician or primary caregiver. These different providers also use various methods to counsel, and some therapists or pastoral counselors will use inventories or questionnaires depending on their style and requirements.

Premarital Programs as Prevention

The following study was conducted by Stanley & Markman (1997) in an effort to examine premarital programs and their effectiveness on marital satisfaction and divorce prevention. According to the authors prevention can be classified into two definitions: primary prevention or proactive efforts to reduce emotional and behavioral deficits or disorders or to maintain healthy functioning; and secondary or early identification, diagnosis, and treatment of deficits to avert more serious breakdown or to establish healthy functioning. These preventative efforts can be classified into factors or strategies raising protective factors and lowering risk factors. According to Stanley & Markman (1997) there are three forms of research that frame preventive strategies that are designed to assist couples in having stronger, happier and lasting marriages. The three methods of research that are described are prediction research, survey research, and outcome research.

Prediction Research

There have been a number of long term research studies conducted with regards to marriage predictability and survival rate (Gottman, 1994). Numerous factors affect couples' chances of succeeding in a long-term relationship, but unfortunately many of these factors or traits are not changeable, i.e. Personality traits, family of origin issues, divorce history (Karney & Bradbury, 1995, Kurdek, 1993). Some of the predictive factors that are changeable in a couple's relationship that might increase their risk of divorce include the wife's employment and income (the wife's employment status is directly correlated with the likelihood of divorce) (Greenstein, 1990); premarital cohabitation (studies have shown that couples who cohabit prior to marriage are more likely to

divorce than those couples who do not cohabit) (Gottman, 1994); issues in the area of sexual relations and leisure activities (Fowers, Montel, Olson, 1996); physiological arousal prior to conflict discussions (Levenson & Gottman, 1985); parental divorce (Gottman, 1994); previous divorce of the husband (Bumpuss, Martin, Sweet, 1991); communication (both positive and negative), (Gottman, 1994); dissatisfaction with partners' habits and personality traits (Fowers, et.al.,1996), difficulties in communicating and lack of problem solving skills (Fowers, et.al.,1996); issues surrounding religion (Maneker & Rankin,1993); length of courtship prior to marriage (Kurdec,1993); and age at marriage (Gottman,1994). Of course these are not all of the issues that can cause discord among couples,' this list simply represents areas that have been correlated with divorce and marriage distress. One major factor that predicts marital discord and is well documented and widely accepted among researchers is in the area of the couples' interaction with each other. Stanley & Markman (1997) state "To be quite simplistic, many studies show that couples who were either currently doing more poorly or likely to do more poorly in the future interacted more negatively and less positively than other couples"(p.4). Matthews, Wickrama & Conger (1996) report, "The weight of the evidence, then, suggests that the quality of marital interactions, whether warm and supportive or hostile and negative, relates to risk for marital distress and even dissolution of the relationship" (p.643).

Survey Research

In a sample survey that was conducted a few years ago by the Catholic community couples were asked specific questions with regards to their premarital experience. When questioned on what areas were most helpful the top three areas were communication,

(73.5% rated as helpful), commitment (70.4% rated as helpful), and conflict resolution (67.2% rated as helpful), (Center for Marriage and Family, 1995). Some of the areas that were rated lower were personality traits, financial issues, compatibility, and career choices. This study may show how important and useful some issues are in premarital counseling versus others. It is well noted that this survey was conducted in a non-secular setting; the outcome and findings may differ in a more secular survey.

In a survey study conducted by Schumm, Resnick, Silliman and Bell (1998), the authors compared premarital counseling with marital satisfaction. The subjects were civilian wives of military personnel. For the study, 18,422 military couples were surveyed in 1992. Couples who jointly participated in premarital counseling reported a higher satisfaction for the counseling experience and reported a higher satisfaction rating for marriage overall. The results for the couples who disagreed about having premarital counseling showed some support in the area of marital satisfaction but not as consistent as their co-horts. This study may show that couples who participate together and are present in the moment get more out of a premarital session than those who are not completely present or distracted.

Outcome Research

According to Stanley and Markman (1997), Outcome studies attempt to assess correlational effects of different approaches to reducing or preventing marital discord and or divorce. The following paragraphs illustrate findings on the three most widely used programs for couples martially and premaritally (Silliman,et al.,1997)

The first program that is described is called *Relationship Enhancement* (Guerney, 1977). This empathy building program, which consists of 16-24 hours of instruction, is

one of the most tested skill building program in existence today (Stanley & Markman, 1997). This program has been used for a wide range of issues but is primarily used for premarital and marital problems.

The second program described is *Couple Communication*. This program is similar to the Relationship Enhancement program in that it is one of the oldest and best researched programs for couples. Like the R.E. program this program can be used in a wide variety of settings. A majority of the outcome research on this program has been on the effects of the 12-hour skills training. Most of the couples in the samples were married couples from a middle class background (Wampler, 1990). Even though this program was originally developed to improve communication between couples, Miller and associates report that small group participants have gained value in self and other awareness exercises. Other studies show substantial gains in communication behavior post training (Russell, 1984).

Studies of the *Couple Communication* program were reviewed by Wampler (1990), who noted that the quality of the communications training was strong but its effects actually diminished over time. Individual gains in functioning and relationship quality seem longer lasting than the communication training although the assessments for this program are less than one year in duration. Some the providers who may use this program include clergy, business personnel, therapists, chaplains in the U.S. armed forces, and lay leaders. This program, which can be used with individuals, couples, or in groups, was redesigned and updated in 1991 (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

The third program to be described is the *Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program* (PREP). This program is different from the previously described programs in that PREP focuses on changes in attitudes and behaviors related to the risk and protective

factors in marital research (Stanley & Markman, 1997). These authors go on to report that the rationales for PREP are supported by 1. Research studies that predict marital failures and successes; 2. Outcome research on program effects; and 3. Survey research on what couples voice are the most important topics of prevention (Stanley, 1997).

PREP is offered in a 12-hour sequence of lectures, discussions, and interpersonal skills sessions (Stanley & Markman, 1997). Topics include communication, conflict management, fun, religious beliefs and practices, and friendship (Stanley & Markman, 1997). In addition, PREP is available in secular and non-secular versions (Stanley & Trathen, 1994).

With regards to long-term effects, PREP is one of the most extensively researched programs, with its primary research focused on premarital couples. A study conducted in Denver by Markman (1993), indicated that after three years of participation in the program, PREP couples maintained higher levels of relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and reduced problem intensity than the control group (Markman, 1988). In additional findings, PREP participants demonstrated more positive interaction, including increased communication skills, mutual support and validation, positive affect, and overall positive communication in relation to a matched control group. In addition to these findings a more significant finding was discovered among group differences on negative communication patterns (e.g., denial, dominance, negative affect, etc.) up to four years after participating in the PREP program (Stillman & Markman, 1997). PREP couples communicated less negatively than the other co-horts (matched control couples, and couples who declined the program). What makes this finding paramount is that these negative communication patterns are correlated with marital distress, violence and

breakup (Holtzworth-Monroe, 1995; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988; Gottman, 1994).

In addition to research being done in the United States, PREP is also widely used and researched in Europe. In one particular study in Germany, the data from a 5 year follow-up showed that PREP couples have a 4% divorce rate versus 24% divorce rate for control group couples (Stillman & Markman, 1997).

What Do Couples Report About Their Premarital Experience?

Stanley and Markman (1997) conducted a nationwide random phone survey, which found that 35% of couples who had married in the last five years had premarital counseling in a religious context. Of these couples, 75% report that this intervention was helpful. In addition, a study through Creighton University found that premarital education in the Catholic Church that consisted of couples married at least four years found that 80% reported that the training/education was valuable (Center for Marriage and Family, 1995). Sullivan and Bradbury (1997) report that 90% of couples that have taken premarital training would do so again, although there seemed to be no significant difference between couples who participated in programs and those who did not with regard to marital outcomes (i.e., divorce and separation). Stanley and Markman (1997) go on to report that couple satisfaction with preventive interventions is an important measure of outcomes, although studies on programs and their effectiveness are complicated and difficult to interpret to an exact science. The authors believe that couples who participate in preventive programs come away with some value attached to the experience.

Legislation for Premarital Counseling

The movement by a few local governments to curtail the divorce rate has recently been established. The following paragraphs illustrate some of those programs.

In 1998 the Florida legislature passed the “Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act”(Fl. Law chapter 98-403). The sole purpose behind this act was to increase the likelihood that couples will remain married, and in turn, reduce the divorce rate. Couples who participate in a four-hour premarital program receive a discount on their marriage license and have no waiting period. Early reports of couples taking advantage of the program in two counties (Broward and Miami-Dade) show an 8 to 9 percent participation rate.

A number of other programs exist in other states across the nation. In Arkansas the governor has considered a tax credit for couples who participate in a premarital program (State of Arkansas web site). Some other communities may have a different intervention policies such as Judges in Grand Rapids, Michigan who now have the right to refuse weddings to couples who have not participated in premarital counseling. Other states such as Arizona, Utah and others offer some sort of education or incentive programs for engaged couples.

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to gather demographic information on 5 couples that reside in Spokane County with regards to marriage, divorce, and premarital counseling. In addition to the demographic information couples were asked specific questions that pertain to their impressions and interpretations of what premarital counseling/education consists of, and whether or not it was helpful to their marriage.

Study design

Five random couples were chosen from a population of dozens who voluntarily agreed to participate in these qualitative interviews. Participants were residents of Spokane County, a population of 275,000. Couples were not compensated for participating in these interviews. It is beyond the scope of this paper to capture and investigate all variables associated with couples' opinions of premarital counseling. The limitations of this research project are well noted, including the limited pooling source of the subjects, the number of subjects and the limited geographic area. The main objective of this project is to obtain the detailed accounts of 5 couples and their opinions of divorce and premarital counseling and compare those to the findings presented in the lit review.

Survey Data

Couple Number One

Demographic Information:

Education Level: Wife: B.A. Husband: A.A.S.

Length of Marriage: 12 Years

First or Subsequent Marriage: Wife: first Husband: first

Age at this Marriage: Wife: 22 Husband: 24

Combined Annual Income: \$100,000 plus

Did you receive premarital counseling? If so by whom? Answer: Clergy, three sessions.

Was this beneficial to your marriage?

Wife's response: Yes, the clergy brought out some things that were very important, for example he gave us some issues to think about in the future. I believe our communication has been better for this. He gave, I believe, both of us the tool or tools to talk with each other in a more open manner. I find myself thinking about those sessions from time to time.

Husband's response: Absolutely, I believe if it was not for those sessions we may have had more trouble than what we have gone through in our relationship. I think it is important to be able to go into a marriage with all the tools one can gather. I am not sure if things would be the same without those sessions.

Do you believe premarital counseling/education should be mandated or offered as an incentive?

Wife's response: I think it should be offered as an incentive. I don't believe that any program that is mandated is beneficial in the long run. This gives the couple the freedom of choice to participate or not. I don't think this is the area that programs should be forced on people. In our church it [premarital counseling] was required to become married in that church or faith, but if we had chosen not to we could have gone to another church or had gotten married by someone else. Although I have stated that my initial response is to support premarital counseling as an incentive, I can see where it might not be a bad idea for mandating a law for premarital counseling. I just don't know if I could fully support that.

Husbands response: Incentive, for the same reasons my wife has given. I feel couples should take the opportunity to participate in these programs but I could not support any law that required couples to receive premarital counseling.

Who should provide this service (premarital counseling)?

Wife's response: I think that professional counselors should do this service. Although I did get something out of my premarital counseling experience through my church, I think a professional counselor is better equipped to handle relationship issues. After being in counseling after the premarital experience I feel there are certain things or issues that I would not bring up to my pastor that I would feel more comfortable telling a counselor or therapist, since I would not see this person in any other setting other than in his office as opposed to our pastor who I would see in other social arenas. I think there are things that I would not tell any other person other than my counselor or therapist.

Husband's response: I think that the clergy should provide this service. I feel more comfortable talking with my pastor about issues more so than a stranger (counselor). For

me my pastor is more personable, we had and have an ongoing relationship, he knows me. I just would not feel comfortable talking with someone I didn't know about my intimate thoughts. I can understand how other people would feel comfortable about going to a counselor but it's not for me.

Do you believe divorce is a problem in the United States? If so why?

Wife's response: Yes, I think divorce is such an emotional thing and that there are so many negatives attached to it especially if there are children involved. I think when a person goes through a divorce it does something to their self-esteem. I have seen some of my friends go through a divorce, and even though in the end it was probably the best thing that could have happened, as they were going through it they were not the same person. I think one of the biggest downfalls of divorce is the emotional distance it puts on all the families. Families that were once together are no longer there and relationships are strained if not severed all together.

Husbands response: Yes, the failing rate for marriage is too high; I have seen divorce ruin families and relationships. I don't think people realize until they see or experience a divorce what this really does to people. I also have seen friends go through a divorce; this is something I would not want to experience. Also I think people have increased emotional trauma that is long lasting after a divorce, for example depression and other personal issues.

In your opinion how can the divorce rate be lowered?

Wife's response: I believe that the divorce rate can be lowered through stronger relationships, and I believe through premarital counseling things can be brought out that can make the individuals more compatible to go through a marriage. I just don't think

that people who divorce are compatible and I think that this could have been discovered before they got married.

Husband's response: I believe it can be lowered by having people be more educated on how to make a marriage work. I think it should begin much sooner than the premarital counseling sessions. I think the schools should be involved to teach young people about what marriage is really about not just the fun stuff like the big wedding or the honeymoon but about the relationship and how to make it work together.

Couple Number 2**Demographic Data**

Education Level: Wife: M.A. plus additional education Husband: H.S.

Length of Marriage: 5 years

Combined Annual Income: \$ 50,000-75,000

Age at first marriage: Wife: 27 Husband: Current marriage 41, first marriage 24

Husband was married for 3 years for his first marriage, ending in divorce.

Did you receive premarital counseling for your first marriage?

Husband's response: No, I am not sure it would have helped that one.

Did you receive premarital counseling for this marriage? If so, by whom?

Husband's response: Yes, 2 sessions. Through a church, but it was done by a professional counselor who was contracted through the church.

Was this beneficial to your marriage?

Husband's response: No, she basically told us we should not get married; it was not a good experience. She gave us a test to see what our likes and dislikes would be. We actually left the church feeling like this isn't going to work.

Wife's response: Yes and No. I did get something out of it but it was disheartening the way it was presented to us. I left the church crying. It was very upsetting for me. She told us what the test or questionnaire showed and that with our differences it was going to be very difficult to make it (marriage) work. I don't think it would have been all that bad, because she did bring some things up that we needed to work on but she left it at that. We

did not receive any guidance or suggestions on how to do this, she basically told us all the negative things that could happen but not how to avoid or handle the issues when they came up. I would have thought she would have given us some “tools” to take from her to work on our relationship.

Do you believe premarital counseling/education should be mandated or offered as an incentive?

Husband's response: I think it should be offered as an incentive. I don't think people should be required to receive something that they should take advantage of on their own. I don't believe when people are required to do something that the outcome is what we would expect.

Wife's response: I believe it should be offered as an incentive. I have some difficulty with mandating such a thing as premarital counseling. I would hope that people would want to participate on their own without outside pressure. Although, I think there are couples who would not participate even if given every opportunity. I am speaking mainly of the young couples who are excited about their wedding and relationship and that is all that they can think about. They are not concerned with what may or may not happen; all they know is what is going on at that moment.

Who should provide this service (premarital counseling)?

Husband's response: I think professional counselors should provide this. I think they are more capable of dealing with the issues that come up for couples. When we received premarital counseling it was from a professional counselor but not a very good one. I think the churches are more capable of dealing with the religious aspect of a marriage but

not necessarily with a couple's issues. Counselors have a better background and more education in this area.

Wife's Response: I think professional counselors and churches should provide this service, maybe a combination of both. I have even heard of programs through churches that offer peer education, where a couple about to get married are assigned to another couple that has had a long healthy marriage; in turn they learn by example. For the majority of the issues that come up in a relationship I believe a professional counselor is more capable of helping a couple than a lay couple or even a pastor, but I can see where all of them could play an important role. I think that a couple should take advantage of all the resources available to them regardless of the source.

Do you believe divorce is a problem in the United States? If so, why?

Husband's response: Yes, I believe it is a major problem, especially for the children who are involved in a broken home. It seems to me that when couples get divorced children are not a major issue; the adults seem to fend for themselves and the children are caught in the middle. Unless there are children involved I don't think it is a big deal; its just two adults going their own separate ways with no attachment.

Wife's response: Yes, divorce is a major problem. I think it leads to creating instability in adults and children which leads to unhealthy behaviors such as drug addiction, alcoholism, and unwanted children. We have too many single parents in this society. Children and adults have enough problems and issues without having to deal with a divorce and the negative outcomes that follow. I work with small children and I see first hand what divorce does to a child and their parents. Although there are marriages where divorce should happen, I believe this should be rare.

In your opinion how can the divorce rate be lowered?

Husband's response: Through good premarital counseling. I also believe they should increase the waiting period to get married to at least 6 months. Couples have a waiting period for divorce; they should have a longer waiting period to get married.

Wife's response: I believe we as a community should be educating individuals on an ongoing basis, through the media, schools, and community centers on what a healthy relationship or marriage is. We do this for so many other programs why not for this? I think we have had the opportunities in front of us and we haven't taken advantage of this. We need to change our efforts towards education in schools to reflect what a healthy marriage or relationship looks like. I think grade school aged children should be exposed to this information.

Couple Number 3**Demographic Data**

Education Level: Wife: H.S. Husband: H.S.

Length of Marriage: 30 yrs

Age at Marriage: Wife 22 Husband: 21yrs. (First marriage for husband and wife)

Combined Annual income: 50,000-75000

Did you receive premarital counseling? Both husband and wife answered no.

Do you believe premarital counseling/education should be mandated or offered as an incentive?

Wife's response: I believe this should be offered as an incentive because the couple is more likely to get to some central issues with regards to their relationship. Also, they would be able to obtain the "tools" to help enhance their relationship and have the ability to handle problems or issues when they arise.

Husband's response: I think that premarital counseling should be mandated, to ensure that couples would complete the program (meaning I don't think most young couples are going to go through a program on their own). I believe couples who go through premarital counseling have a better chance of finding out if they are compatible and have a better chance of not divorcing, or lowering their chance for divorce.

Who should provide the service of premarital counseling?

Wife's response: I think the clergy or a professional counselor could provide this service. They each offer something different to the couple. I think even lay people who have had a

good marriage can teach the couple something. I think it is important for couples to recognize how difficult a marriage can be. I mean at times it can be very difficult to communicate and live with another person.

Husband's response: I think that a professional counselor should do this service. I believe they are more educated on the subject of premarital counseling and are more knowledgeable on trust issues and they tend not to "beat around" the bush on sensitive matters; they get right to the heart of the subject. I don't think that the church or a layperson would have the skills to do this.

Do you believe divorce is a problem in the United States? If so, why?

Wife's response: Yes, divorce is a problem. The rates are too high; the children seem to suffer a lot. I believe divorce increases the strain on our welfare system; our daycare systems and too often children are left without at least one parent when divorce takes place. There seems to be a lot of negativity associated with divorce, not for just the children but families in general; they seem to lose out also. I think divorce causes a lot of strain on a number of systems.

Husband's response: Yes, I believe divorce is a big problem. It causes financial havoc for people going through it and also reduces the parents' connection with their children. I know a number of couples who have had a lot of marital difficulty or even divorced over issues that I think could have been helped through premarital counseling. I think if couples had the skills in the beginning they could deal with the issues better.

In your opinion how can the divorce rate be lowered?

Wife's response: I think couples should seek out professional help early on in their relationship. I think so many times when people have difficulties they seek out the help

that they need but often times it's too late. I have heard so many times my friends tell me that they would go but their husbands will not. I believe it helps the marriage even if one person gets counseling. I think so many couples have problems that can not necessarily be fixed but at least they can get help with their relationship issues, or addiction issues or anger management or whatever the problem is.

Husband's response: I think the divorce rate can be lowered by couples and individuals seeking out professional help. Couples need to realize that marriage is not something to be taken lightly; they need to be committed to the relationship. Couples need to understand that if they get intervention or counseling early on this would help them in the future when problems come up. Counselors have the knowledge and background to test couples and individuals and give recommendations on what should take place in a couples relationship or marriage.

Couple Number 4**Demographic Data**

Education Level: Wife B.A. Husband B.A.

Length of Marriage: 2 yrs.

Combined Annual Income: \$ 100,000 plus

Both husband and wife were previously married.

Age at first marriage: Wife: 20 Husband: 24

Age at this marriage: Wife: 27 (previous marriage lasted 5 yrs ending in divorce)

Husband: 29 (previous marriage lasted 4 yrs ending in divorce)

Did you receive premarital counseling for your first marriage?

Wife's response: Yes.

Husband's response: Yes

Was this beneficial to your marriage?

Wife's response: No, not really. We received counseling through our church and he talked mainly about what marriage is in the eyes of the church and what the sacrament of marriage means but not really anything specific with regards to our relationship.

Husband's response: Not really, we received counseling through our church and it wasn't helpful for the same reasons she shared. He just spoke of the religious aspect of the marriage but nothing about what you might think is counseling at all. It was enjoyable and this minister was a nice person but it seemed like he was just going through the motions just as he had done so many times before with other couples. I have talked with

some of my friends who got married through the same church and their feelings were similar to mine.

Did you receive premarital counseling prior to this marriage?

Wife's response: No, I have had a lot of counseling with therapists for my own issues since going through my divorce. I feel I have a pretty good handle on what happened to my first marriage and I think I am a better person for it. I think I can handle and view things differently in this marriage than my previous one. It's just not the same relationship. I think we will be O.K., and I think we will be able to work out our problems. We have so far.

Husband's response: That's true; I think this relationship is so much more different than our previous ones. I feel that even though we have only been married for a couple of years we have the skills to handle our problems. We both came from bad relationships so we know what we want and we know how to get it.

Do you believe premarital counseling should be mandated or offered as an incentive?

Wife's response: I think it should be an incentive, but I don't think people should be required to do this. I think the incentive should be attractive enough so couples would be more likely to receive premarital counseling. So often when we talk about incentives, the incentives seem to be pretty minimal and not really worth the effort. So if there is an incentive it should be substantial.

Husband's response: I think there should be an incentive for premarital counseling. Some people don't realize what pitfalls or difficulties there are in a marriage. In the beginning, couples are usually caught up in the wedding plans and not really focused on what they are in for. I have seen many couples spend a lot of money for their wedding

and honeymoon and within a year they are divorced. It would seem to me that they might have been going through this with blinders on, either not really knowing each other or not really caring if it worked out or not.

Who should provide this service (premarital counseling)?

Wife's response: I think a professional counselor should do this. Like I said before I have been in a lot of counseling sessions and got a great deal out of them. I think they are the experts when it comes to relationships and personal issues. Maybe if my experience had been different with my first premarital counseling through my church I would feel differently. No, I don't think so. I still believe that a counselor should deal with these issues and let the church do its part with the couple as far as the religious aspect.

Husband's response: I think a professional counselor should do this. For the same reasons, I feel they are the experts. They have had the training and they know how to intervene and what to tell the couple to do for their personal problems and issues. I am not sure the church or clergy is the place for this.

Do you believe divorce is a problem in the United States? If so, why?

Wife's response: Yes, I think it is a big problem for a number of reasons, I believe people should take all the advantages that are offered to them to make their marriage work, specifically counseling. I have had several friends that have marital problems and some of them actually go into counseling but they only go for 1 or 2 sessions or not at all they don't finish what they start. I think children suffer the worst part of divorce, depending on their age of course, but overall it seems that they are the ones who suffer the most. On the other hand I think in some cases the children are better off if the marriage is an abusive one and they are caught in the middle of it. I think if people

actually would take the time to explore on what is available to them and take advantage of those resources at least if the marriage did end up in a divorce at the very least they can say they tried and that it just was not a quick decision.

Husband's response: Yes it is a problem, for the same reasons as she mentioned. I also think that children are truly the ones who suffer the most. Individuals who go through a divorce experience pain and discord but they bounce back and move on. For the children especially if they are young, could leave a lasting impression for a long time. Not to mention the distance it can create for the absent parent. I have two young children from my previous marriage who live a couple of thousand miles away, so not only is there a physical distance but an emotional distance. They seem to be adjusting O.K. but it is still tough at times for them and me.

In your opinion how can the divorce rate be lowered?

Wife's response: I think it can be lowered by couples seeking help early on in their relationship; by not waiting until "divorce" is coming up in conversation. It seems like when couples start talking about divorce it is almost already decided and when they seek counseling at this point it's too late. They go to counseling just to satisfy themselves or their spouse. Counseling should be brought up much sooner than this. I also believe couples should know each other before they get married. I have seen many couples get married shortly after they meet. I am not sure if these worked out by my guess would be that they would find things out that they had not known.

Husband's response: I would say that counseling would be the key to save marriages, but I would hope couples would do all they could in the very beginning of their relationship to get to know each other and communicate more openly with each other. I

have seen and experienced myself what good communication or bad communication can do for a relationship or marriage. Quite often I have had friends tell me that they don't understand something about their wives but when asked if they have talked about it with them they say "No." Its almost like they don't want to "rock the boat."

Couple Number 5**Demographic Data**

Education Level: Wife: M.A. Husband: B.A.

Length of Marriage: 3yrs

Combined Annual income: \$75,000-100,000

Age at this Marriage: Wife: 27yrs Husband: 39yrs.

First or subsequent marriage: Wife was married for 5 years ending in divorce, Husband was married 20 years ending in divorce.

Age at first marriage: Wife: 21 Husband: 18

Did you receive premarital counseling for your first marriage?

Wife's response: Yes, 1 session. It was done with our pastor through our church.

Husband's response: Yes, It also was through our church, 2 sessions.

Was this beneficial to your marriage?

Wife's response: No, He encouraged us to go to more sessions, but we didn't.

Husband's response: I don't really remember other than it seemed to focus on the marriage and what that meant in the religion and the church.

Did you receive premarital counseling for this marriage?

Wife's response: Yes. Again it was through our pastor. It covered what marriage meant in the eyes of God and dealt with the religious aspect. There were no skill building exercises involved.

Husband's response: Yes, through our church, again he mainly focused on the religion and the sacrament of marriage. That was pretty much the main focus.

Was this beneficial to your marriage?

Wife's response: I did get something out of it; he said some things that I would never have thought of so yes I think it was beneficial. But it wasn't something that actually gave us the "how to" for our marriage.

Husband's response: No not really. I think there are some things that you can get out of these sessions with the pastor, but as far as being beneficial for the marriage, I am not sure.

Do you believe premarital counseling/education should be mandated or offered as an incentive?

Wife's response: I think it should be offered as an incentive, and it should primarily be skilled based. So often couples get married and they do not have the skills that is needed to have a happy and healthy relationship. The incentive should make it affordable for every couple to participate in a premarital program. In addition to making it affordable the program or programs should have easy access. So often people want the help but either they can't afford it or there are too many barriers. It is somewhat disheartening for those under served couples who would probably benefit the most but who don't have the opportunity to participate.

Husband's response: It should be offered as an incentive. The incentive should be large enough for couples to take advantage of the program. I think when programs are mandated it immediately sends a negative message. Some people look at a program that is mandated and get the impression that an outside agency or the government knows what's best for a couple or an individual. I agree that the program should primarily be skill based. Most of the young couples I know who get married have very little

experience or knowledge on what skills they need to possess to have a healthy relationship. I think a premarital program would be a good place to start teaching these particular skills.

Who should provide this service (premarital counseling)?

Wife's response: I think the clergy, counselors, and professional educators can provide premarital counseling or classes. I think all of them can bring something different into the sessions or classes that they might teach. However I do believe that the clergy or professional educator or especially the lay couples should know when it is warranted to refer to a counselor or mental health professional. I think that this is the biggest mistake some professionals make, not referring out when it is deemed necessary. I also believe that a professional educator may be able to serve more couples than a minister or counselor by teaching premarital education in a classroom setting; not just one on one.

Husband's response: I think primarily these type of skills should be taught by a professional counselor for a couple of reasons; they have the training and education to not only provide the skills but also to look for underlying or hidden issues that the couples may not be aware of. I don't believe this would be the role of the church or clergy, although I do support a combination of both entities providing services for whatever the couples need. For example the couple would go through their church to receive the religious premarital counseling and in addition the couple should go to a professional counselor to receive the skill building premarital counseling.

Do you believe divorce is a problem in the United States? If so, why?

Wife's response: I think divorce is a major problem, and I think it exacerbates so many negative aspects of society; relationships, health, crime, and social programs. It impacts

our children probably the greatest. I think divorce creates a great financial burden not just for the family but on resources that are already strained. It increases instability in adults but especially the children. I think we have way too many single parents raising children.

Husband's response: I believe it is probably one of society's greatest problems. I also agree that it's probably more difficult on the children than the parents depending on the age of the child. But on the other hand I have parents tell me when they were divorcing they were so afraid to tell their children that mommy and daddy are not going to be living with each other any more, but to the parents surprise the children were relieved. In addition to the emotional trauma, there is the loss of wages and loss of income because there are now two households to support instead of one.

In your opinion how can the divorce rate be lowered?

Wife's response: I think to actually make a difference in lowering the divorce rate we need to start educating couples long before their premarital sessions. We should begin healthy relationship education in grade schools, and high schools. So often children and young adults have no idea what a healthy relationship is or they even know less about how to form one. I think we can do more than what we are doing to promote good healthy relationships.

Husband's response: I tend to agree with the fact that we should start teaching couples what a healthy relationship is much earlier than what is being done now. So often couples enter into marriage not having the slightest idea of what they are in for. I have seen so many people who are very bright and well educated but who don't know how to talk with their spouse or who avoid the issues hoping they will just go away. I think a good place to start is to have premarital counseling offered as an incentive and make the incentive

big enough that it would be accessed on a larger scale. I think counseling should be subsidized by the local governments for couples who want to take advantage of the service but cannot afford to do so. In addition to this; begin to educate students in the early school years on what a healthy marriage or relationship is. This would be a good start in reducing the divorce rate.

Findings

The findings for this survey are somewhat limited due to the number of subjects (five couples). Even though the data is somewhat limited there are distinct commonalities among these five couples.

Demographic Data

Educational level range: high school diploma-Graduate Degreed

Length of Marriage range: 2yrs-30yrs

Combined Annual income range: \$50,000-\$100,000 plus

Did you receive premarital counseling for this marriage? If so by whom? (Clergy, Professional Counselor, other)

Four of the five couples reported as having some form of premarital counseling. Three of the four couples had received premarital counseling through their church by the clergy; one couple received premarital counseling by a professional counselor.

Was this beneficial to your marriage?

Two of the ten individuals that received premarital counseling reported that the experience was not beneficial to their marriage. Eight individuals reported at least some benefit.

Do you believe premarital counseling/education should be mandated or offered as an incentive?

Nine of the individuals felt that premarital counseling should be offered as an incentive, and one individual supported mandated a law for this service.

Who should provide this service?

Seven individuals felt that a professional counselor should provide this service. Two individuals felt that both the clergy and a professional counselor could provide the service. One person felt that the clergy was the person who should perform this service.

Do you believe divorce is a problem in the United States? If so why?

All five couples felt that divorce was a problem. The opinions ranged from “divorce is only a problem if children are involved” to “it is one of society’s greatest problems.”

In your opinion how can the divorce rate be lowered?

Opinions were somewhat centralized with this question. Overwhelmingly the couples agree that in some form premarital counseling should be a part of a couple’s plan. In addition to this, seeking out counseling in assisting the couples to overcome their hardships was suggested emphatically. In addition there were a number of individuals who would advocate to begin premarital education in the schools at the elementary level.

Summary

This survey revealed some central tendencies with regards to premarital counseling and divorce in general. The majority of the couples felt that premarital counseling is important and should be provided by a professional counselor. Furthermore the couples felt divorce was a problem in the United States and that some preventive measures could be implemented to curb the rate. The couples also felt that people should seek outside help (counseling) early on not just to prevent divorce but also to make their marriage more viable and healthy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore opinions on divorce and marital preparation. The various data and statistics show that divorce is a major problem in the United States. There are a number of methodologies that are available to couples before and after marriage to begin or sustain a healthy relationship. It should be made clear that premarital counseling should not be looked at solely for divorce prevention but also as a tool to enhance the happiness in a marriage; if a couple is happy and contented in their relationship, this alone is a natural and logical deterrent for divorce.

As presented, divorce affects all of us; not just the couple or the family that is experiencing the breakup but all of us who are family members, neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Divorce affects us emotionally, as well as financially. Billions of dollars each year are spent and lost (directly and indirectly) due to divorce. Jobs, careers and lives are lost every day due to the traumatic effects of divorce. Just as long as there are cars on our freeways there will be accidents. Similarly, as long as there are marriages there will be divorces. As a society, though, we have the ability to raise the awareness of the high rate of divorce and take action in an effort to lower it. We owe it to ourselves, but most of all we owe it to our children of the future.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

	Male	Female
Education Level?		
Length of Marriage?		
Age at Marriage?		
First or subsequent marriage?		
Age at first marriage?		
Did you receive premarital counseling for your first marriage?		
Annual Income? 25,000-50000, 50,000-75,000, 75,000-100,00, 100,000 plus		
Did you receive premarital counseling? If yes, by Whom? (Clergy?, Professional Counselor?, Other)		
Was this beneficial to your marriage?		
Do you believe premarital counseling/education should be mandated? Offered as an incentive?		
If so, Who should provide this service?		
Do you believe divorce is a problem in the U.S? If so why?		
In your opinion how can the divorce rate be lowered?		