Making the Case for Premarital Education
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Scott M. Stanley
University of Denver

For more Information of an overview nature, see:


Conceptual Arguments for Premarital Education

Increasing need for Premarital Education

• At least 40% of new marriages will end in divorce (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992)
• Marital distress negatively impacts:
  - Physical health (Burman & Margolin, 1992)
  - Mental health (Halford & Bourma, 1997)
  - Work productivity (Forthofer, et al., 1996)

Benefits of Premarital Education

• It can slow couples down to allow time for fostering deliberations.
• It allows time to process the fact that marriage is a very important matter.
• It helps couples gain access to marital resources and providers of other helps.

Benefit: Slowing Couples Down

• It can lower the risk for subsequent marital distress and/or termination of relationships for some couples.
• Reduces impulse in decision making and increases time for reflection.
• Gives couples time to clarify expectations with each other.
Levin’s Thoughts On Wedding Day (from Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina)

“How did they guess that it is help, just help that one needs?” he thought, recalling all his fears and doubts of late. “What do I know? What can I do in this fearful business,” he thought, “without help? Yes, it is help I need now.” . . .

Benefit: Marriage is Important

- Allows for reflection on the (committed) nature of marriage and its importance
- Sends several messages:
  - The decision to marry is important, has long term consequences, and should be carefully thought out.
  - Marriage is an investment that is effected by short and long term views.

Benefit: Accessing Marital Resources

- Seeking good advice prior to marriage makes couples more likely to seek help when needed during a marriage.
- The quality of premarital education received also sets the tone for perceptions of whether seeking help in the future will be worthwhile.
- Seeking help earlier upon encountering marital distress can lessen marital deterioration.
  - Much deterioration within marriages takes place within the first 5 years (Glenn, 1998)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Empirically Demonstrated Benefits of Premarital Education &amp; and Limitations of Social Science</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of Social Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Some questions cannot be answered</td>
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<td>- Measurement issues</td>
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<td>Limitations of Social Science</td>
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<td>- Complexity and reductionism</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Causal confusion</td>
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<td>No Findings and Null Findings</td>
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<td>- When it comes to understanding effects in social science, . . . .</td>
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<td>. . . . the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.</td>
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<td>State of Outcome Research</td>
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Clear Basis for Encouragement that Marriage Education Can Work


Research is Lacking on Marriage/Relationship Education With These Conditions

- Very low income and high economic stress
- Lower education levels
- Ambiguous commitment between partners, including about a future and exclusivity
- High percentage of serious personal problems: substance abuse, domestic violence, poor job history/opportunities, criminal history, and ambiguity about sexual exclusivity, etc.

Where We Have Somewhat More Reason for Confidence

- Younger couples with clear commitment
- Working class (lower income but not poverty) couples
- Couples with different racial/ethnic backgrounds

Effects of Premarital Education

- Various studies of various programs show positive effects.
- I will focus on research on PREP in the next two panels, but note that other studies exist on other programs.

Outcome Research On PREP

- 8 of 10 outcome studies on PREP show promising results over control groups.
- We need more long-term studies with couples from different backgrounds and circumstances, as well as with adaptations of the curriculum.
- See abstracts, papers, and “PREPfacts” document on our website for more detail and references.

In Summary:

- Many studies show benefits in terms of:
  - Maintenance of satisfaction over time
  - Gains in positive connection (e.g., friendship)
  - Gains in confidence
  - Greater stability (lower breakup or divorce rates in two key studies but this is not as consistent as clear an effect as we’d like to see)
- All studies (but one) show strong gains in communication quality:
  - Less negative and more positive interaction.
  These type of changes hold up over years for many couples.
Optimism or Pessimism: Interventions with Couples Who Are Not Typically Served or Studied

See also . . .

- Available at: http://www.prepinc.com/main/Articles.aspx as “Stanley et al. APPAM paper”

Universal Desires, Universal Needs

- The desire for life-long, secure love and companionship is universal.
- The fundamental themes of safety are universal and cross-cultural.

Are people from diverse backgrounds interested in relationship and marriage education?

The following data are from the Oklahoma Baseline Survey report:


Would you consider using relationship education, such as workshops or classes to strengthen your relationship? (Oklahoma Baseline Survey, 2002)

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<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Native American/Alaskan Native</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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</tbody>
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Would you consider using relationship education, such as workshops or classes, to strengthen your relationship?
Access

• It is not possible to accurately judge interest in types of services where there is no access.

• Do couples from various backgrounds get similar benefits from marriage education?

Our Core Dissemination Model

• Training leaders who:
  – Can reach the couples
  – Know their audience well

• A key for successful use of programs like PREP with various audiences is for providers to use language, stories, and metaphors that are most powerful for those with whom they work.

• The messenger matters (a lot!)

OMI Premarital Education Analyses: Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman (2006)

• Sample of 2,323 adults
  – Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Texas.

• Married respondents were asked:
  – If had premarital education experience
  – If so, how many hours? Conducted by whom?
  – Also, divorced respondents were asked about premarital education before marriage that ended in divorce.

• Premarital education or not with previously divorced sample

Measures

• Currently married respondents:
  – Marital satisfaction
  – Marital commitment (dedication construct)
  – Conflict/negative interaction

• Participation in premarital education is associated with higher levels of satisfaction and commitment in marriage and lower levels of conflict.

• Participation is associated with reduced odds of divorce.

• Estimated effects were robust across race, income (including among the poor), and education levels.

Practical Steps in Improving Preventive Work

ONE: Build Capacity and Recognize Opportunities for Ongoing Refinement
- Building infrastructure for lasting change
- Thoughts about Tracks and Trains

TWO: Focus on What is Changeable

Prediction and Risk Research: Factors Associated with Divorce and Distress?
- **Static Factors:**
  - Some Personality Factors
  - Parental Divorce
  - Cohabitation History
  - Previous Divorce
  - Religious Dissimilarity
  - Young Age at Marriage
  - Economic Status
- **Dynamic Factors:**
  - Interaction Danger Signs
  - Communication Ability
  - Conflict Management
  - Physical Aggression
  - Dysfunctional Attitudes
  - Commitment and Motivation

Risk Factors
- **Static** (Many key moderators are relatively static.)
- **Dynamic** (The most interesting outcomes are dynamic; The part that can change.)

Other (really really good) Opportunities To Make a Difference
THREE: Develop a Broad Understanding of What “Marriage Education” can be

- Helping high school students better understand the benefits of marriage
- Helping people develop realistic expectations
- Helping someone understand some of the key risk factors for marital and relationship distress
- Working with couples who are planning marriage, or who are already married
- Working with a single who could use help distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Teaching information that leads someone to break up with a partner who is dangerous
- Teaching people how to manage conflict more constructively, even if their primary focus at this time is not marriage
- Helping young people understand risks of decisions such as cohabitation

FOUR: Mate Selection
(Could be where the largest effects can occur.)

Making A Good Choice:
From *The Power of Commitment* (2005)

- Get to know the person very well before deciding to marry. One thing you can do is take the time to work together through a detailed list of core expectations to see just how compatible you are.
- Do not make this crucial decision in a period of emotional infatuation.
- Date the person for a long time.
Making A Good Choice:  
From The Power of Commitment (2005)

• Observe how the person treats not only you but his or her friends.

• Learn as much as you can about the person’s priorities and values.

• Give more weight than your heart may want to how closely the person shares your most essential values in life.

Making A Good Choice:  
From The Power of Commitment (2005)

• Wait until you are 22 or older to make such an important decision. What you think you are looking for can change a lot.

• Get the opinion of friends and family who are not likely to tell you only what you want to hear.

For more information: www.PREPinc.com