

LONG-TERM SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES IN ISRAEL

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ABSTRACT: Long-Term Marriages (LTM) in Israel is part of a larger on-going international research. Our study focuses on two related questions: Are all long term marriages successful and satisfying? Similar studies have been undertaken in the United States, Sweden, Germany, and Chile. This paper focuses on the Israeli results with a few cross-cultural comparisons. Israel adds several unique features to the research: the people to whom LTM applies have emigrated to Israel from 112 different countries, with different cultures and nationalities; how Holocaust survivors are distributed in comparison to the rest of the population; Israel has the lowest divorce rate in the west; family life being a highly valued norm among Jewish people, it will be interesting to determine what keeps couples together and whether the motives and ingredients for satisfying marriages are similar or different from other countries.

KEY WORDS: long-term marriage; successful marriage; Israel; family therapy.

In several studies it has been shown that marital satisfaction is a key variable in predicting long term marriages (Spanier, 1976; Greeley, 1981; Schlesinger, 1982; Schlesinger & Schlesinger, 1987; Kaslow, 1981, 1982; Fields, 1983; Fennell, 1987; Fincham, 1991). In more recent studies utilizing Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) as a measure of marital satisfaction in relation to long term marriages, Fennell (1987) found that the most frequent characteristics of marital satisfaction are: (1) Lifetime commitment to

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marriage; (2) Loyalty to spouse and the expectation of reciprocity; and (3) Strong shared moral values. Lauer, Lauer, and Kerr (1990) found that the variables identified by couples as important to their marriages were: commitment to the spouse and to marriage, a sense of humor, and consensus on various matters such as aims and goals in life, and decision making.

Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) elaborated on marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction, suggesting that the concept of satisfaction is a very subjective one and, if defined broadly enough, may permit multi-cultural comparisons. They provide the following definition: "Satisfaction implies a sense of well-being, contentment and overall good feeling, including camaraderie, affection and safety" (p. 21). Their study was conducted utilizing Spanier's DAS and somewhat similar methodology used by Fennell. When asking their respondents what advice or "words of wisdom" they would give to others to help them achieve a satisfying relationship, the most frequent categories cited were: (1) Give and take and making compromises (38%); (2) Establish and maintain good communication (35%); and (3) Respect your spouse and treat him/her as an equal (28%). Kaslow and Hammerschmidt gave their respondents freedom to create their own list of "essential ingredients" for long term satisfying marriages, which were most frequently cited as: (1) Good problem solving and coping skills; (2) Trust in each other, including fidelity, integrity and feeling "safe"; and (3) Permanent commitment to the marriage.

Good problem solving and coping skills were also found to be important by Gottman, ". . . a lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship . . ." (Gottman, 1994: p. 38). In an earlier study, Markman and Hahlweg (1993) cite Storausti and Markman (1990): ". . . it is the couple's ability to handle differences (not the differences themselves) that will be the critical factor in determining future marital success" (p. 31).

Our study is an additional attempt to learn which factors appear to be significant in a Long Term Marriages (LTM) Israeli sample.

PURPOSE

The goals of this study were to present the Israeli version of the characteristics of long-term marriages and to identify which variables are most likely to contribute to a satisfying "good" marriage. The study also attempted to establish the factors differentiating satisfying

marriages from dissatisfying ones, specifically among those married longer than 25 years. Another aim was to ascertain whether there are any differences between male and female experiences of marital satisfaction, motives, and ingredients. Finally, the study replicated earlier studies using the same methodology, thereby contributing to the cross-cultural comparison between the participating countries.

METHODOLOGY

A battery of questionnaires and rating scales were sent out to 120 couples. A networking approach was the methodology used for creating a purposeful sample. The snowball technique was encouraged between participants and their friends; respondents were asked to meet the single criteria of duration of marriages—25 years and more.

Each couple received a set of two forms, one for the wife and one for the husband. They were instructed to respond separately and to discuss their reactions and responses with one another, if they chose to do so, only upon completion and without making any changes after having completed the questionnaires. The couples were instructed to insert the questionnaires in a pre-stamped envelope and mail them with no identification to the research center.

Each questionnaire included the following six parts: (1) Demographic characteristics of the subject; (2) Relationship with parents before marriage; (3) History of parents' relationship; (4) History of own marital relationship. These parts were specifically constructed for this study by the original research group (Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992); (5) The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) as a global summary measure. The DAS scale is a measure of the dyadic satisfaction in the relationship and consists of 32 items with four subscales: 13 items regarding dyadic consensus, 10 items on dyadic satisfaction, 5 items about dyadic cohesion, and 4 items concerning affectional expression. The score varies from 0-151. The total scale and the sub-scales can be considered as measures of different aspects of marital satisfaction. Several authors have criticized the usefulness of the subscales of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. These criticisms are based on an inability to replicate two of the subscales—the Dyadic Satisfaction and the Affectional Expression subscales that were utilized in the Kaslow and Hammerschmidt study (1992). Kazak, Jarmas, and Snitzer (1988) conclude from their study, "We would urge researchers and clinicians to view the DAS as an instrument for

assessing one general dimension of marital satisfaction and not to utilize the subscales as valid and reliable measures of components of marital satisfaction" (p. 89). This article is followed by a comment by Spanier (1988) who indicates that, "the Dyadic Adjustment Scale works best as a global summary measure . . . as a general measure of relationship quality . . ." (p. 93). Similar comments are made by Thompson (1988), Crane, Busby, and Larson (1991), and Sabourin, Laporte, and Wright (1990), and in earlier studies by Sharpley and Cross (1982) and Spanier and Thompson (1982). Taken together, these articles suggest that the structure of the DAS is probably better described as a structure other than the four subscales originally proposed. In the present paper, however, we did not make use of the DAS subscales as did Kaslow and associates (1994), and made use only of the global score. (6) Couple Problem Solving (Olson & Stewart, 1990); Couple Communication (Olson, 1988); Couple Relationship—two subscales "Closeness & Flexibility" (Olson & Stewart, 1990). Also included were 45 items to explore motives, i.e., why did and do spouses stay together? Each of the spouses was asked to mark the three most important reasons for staying together at the present time and the same for the most difficult stage of their marriage.

In the last section of the questionnaire, couples were asked to mark and rate 10 items out of a list of 43 ingredients for marital satisfaction. They were asked to indicate which ingredients existed at the present stage of their marriage and which ones they would desire. (The latter two instruments: "motives" and "ingredients" have been developed by Kaslow and Hammerschmidt).

The original English version of the questionnaire was translated into Hebrew and back into English and then again into Hebrew. Testing for reliability using Cronbach's alpha was quite high (.91).

THE SAMPLE

Of the 120 couples who were given questionnaires, we received 50 usable returns. All were Jewish and Caucasian. Women ranged in age from 43 to 70 years with a mean of 58.7 (SD 7.9); the men ranged in age from 45 to 74, with a mean of 62 (SD 8.2). Fifty percent of the men and 60% of the women were Israeli born. The second largest group were born in Eastern Europe (36.7% for the men and 26.7% for

the women); the remainder were from Western Europe, the former Soviet Union and North Africa. We found that 60% of the women's and 56.7% of the men's fathers were born in Eastern Europe. Twenty percent of the women's fathers came from the former Soviet Union and 20% of the men's fathers were Israeli born. The third group—both men and women—came from Western Europe. One-half of the sample was born in Israel, while nearly 30% immigrated shortly after Israel became an independent state (1948-1950). Fifteen percent of our sample were Holocaust survivors, all from Eastern Europe. No significant differences were found between these groups, hence they can be presented as one sample. The majority were of upper-middle socio-economic status. Joint incomes between \$41,000-50,000 were reported by a third of the sample. \$51,000 per year were reported by 60% of the couples, with 20% of them falling in the \$75,000-100,000 per year income bracket. Thus, almost all in our sample seem to have achieved a relatively high standard of living.

All study participants had been married between 25 and 40 years, with a mean of 34 years. Ten percent of the females and 6.7% of the males had married under pressure. For 13.3% of the males it was a second marriage. For all the women it was a first marriage. Only one couple did not have children, while 80% had two or three (mean 2.5). Most of the children (83.3%) were aged 25 and over. Table 1 reveals that 74% of the males and 70% of the females worked full-time or part-time. Seventy-eight percent of the males and 82% of the females indicated that they were not religious; this is higher than the representation in the general Israeli society. The men had slightly more years of schooling than did the women. Women were in slightly better health (68%) than the men (60%); 10% of the men reported that their health was not good. Seventy percent of the men and 74% of the women indicated they had a happy childhood.

Some limitations regarding the generalizability of the data should be mentioned here. Our sample was relatively small and not representative of the stratification of the country at large. The findings are more applicable to those in the middle and upper class who are still working. Our low rate of return (40%) can be attributed, at least partially, to the following reasons: (1) the nature of the questions asked was personal and sensitive, and (2) the questionnaire was too long and sometimes the instructions provided were not clear enough to the respondents. In future studies we would suggest that the non-responders be followed up to produce a better response rate.

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	<i>Male (n = 50)</i>	<i>Female (n = 50)</i>
Age (Mean, s.d.)	62.5 (SD) 8.2	58.7 (SD) 7.9
Retired but:		
working full-time	54.0%	44.0%
working part-time	20.0%	26.0%
not working	26.0%	28.0%
Missing values		2.0%
Religion:		
non-religious	78.0%	82.0%
traditional	20.0%	16.0%
orthodox	2.0%	2.0%
Schooling:		
number of years	15.4 (SD) 3.7	14.6 (SD) 3.4
Personal income per month, mean in NIS (New Israel Shekel)	5500	2500
Joint income per month, mean in NIS	8000	7000
Physical health:		
very good	10.0%	24.0%
good	50.0%	44.0%
moderate	30.0%	30.0%
bad	10.0%	2.0%
very bad	—	—
Childhood:		
very happy	18.0%	18.0%
fairly happy	52.0%	56.0%
rather unhappy	28.0%	24.0%
very unhappy	2.0%	2.0%

RESULTS

Some Relationship Characteristics of Sample

Various aspects of relationships within the family should be explored, i.e. (a) Relationship with parents before marriage; (b) History of parents' relationship, and (c) History of own marital relationship. Relationships of the couples with their own parents before marriage are presented in Table 2(a).

Table 2(a) reveals that there were few differences between men and women regarding closeness between themselves and their parents. The men reported being closer or moderately closer to their mothers than to their fathers, while women were much closer to both their fathers (84%) and mothers (92%). When looking at conflicts between the couples and their parents, we see a reverse picture. More women than men have had conflicts with their parents. Two-thirds of the men have had little or no conflicts with their parents, while only

TABLE 2(a)
Relationship with Parents Before Marriage (in %)

	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>
Closeness between you and your parents:				
quite a bit	32.0	20.0	62.0	42.0
moderate	44.0	40.0	30.0	42.0
little	24.0	34.0	6.0	10.0
none	—	4.0	2.0	4.0
missing values		2.0		2.0
Conflicts between you and your parents:				
a lot	8.0	8.0	6.0	10.0
moderate	20.0	20.0	30.0	28.0
little	56.0	50.0	44.0	42.0
none	16.0	20.0	20.0	16.0
missing values		2.0		4.0

TABLE 2(b)
History of Parents' Relationship

	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
Length of parents' marriage (years)	34.3	12.6	37.7	14.0
Parents' current marital status:				
married,	4.0%		18.0%	
ended in divorce	—		—	
ended in death	96.0%		82.0%	
An appraisal of parents' marriages:				
very happy	8.0%		12.0%	
fairly happy	64.0%		56.0%	
rather unhappy	20.0%		28.0%	
very unhappy	6.0%		4.0%	
mis	2.0%		—	

one-half of the women reported doing so. Both results are in the positive direction and show good relationships with the family of origin.

The history of the parents' relationship is presented in Table 2(b). The men reported the length of their parents' marriage to be 34.3 years and the women 37.7 years. Almost all the men's parents were reported to be deceased (96%) and the women's much lower (82%). The majority of men (64%) and women (56%) estimated their parents had fairly happy marriages.

The history of the respondents' own marital relationship is presented in Table 2(c). No differences were found between men and women in terms of how long they knew each other. Both spouses had known each other for 30 months prior to marriage. Some similarity was found when they were asked about the length of time they "kept company" (were together) prior to marriage, 22 months. Men married at 26 years of age and women at age 22 on the average. Both men and women reported not getting married under pressure (92% and 90% respectively).

TABLE 2(c)
History of Own Marital Relationship

	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
How long had you known your mate (months)	29.3		30.2	
How long did you "keep company" with your mate (months)	22.0		21.5	
Marital age	26.1	4.0	22.1	1.8
Marriage under pressure:				
no	92.0		90.0	
yes	8.0		10.0	
Marital status:				
first marriage	84.0		94.0	
second marriage	16.0		6.0	
Length of your current marriage (years)	34.0		34.4	
Length of your former marriage (years)	1.00-15.00		15.0	
Number of children:	2.4		2.4	
none	2.0		the same	
one	6.0			
two	50.0			
three	30.0			
four	12.0			
Ages of children 0-12	4.0		the same	
13-18 years	18.0			
19-24	34.0			
25 and over	80			

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)

We found that women and men did not differ significantly on the total Dyadic Adjustment Scale (see Tables 3 and 3(a)). Women scored 106.9 (SD 13.8) and men 107.1 (14.2). These results are slightly lower than in the German study (Women 114.4; Men 116.56 and in Spanner's original study 114.8(17.8). In one of the 32 items we found significant differences between the women's and men's ratings. (Item #29: Being too tired for sex; $p < .01$)

TABLE 3
Differences Between the Ratings of Women and Men of the
Global DAS and Olsons Scales

	Women	Men	W & M	
	(n = 50)	(n = 50)	t	p
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
Dyadic adjustment (total)	106.9 (13.8)	107.1 (14.2)	0.06	0.9
Couple problem solving	36.7 (5.9)	36.3 (6.0)	0.3	0.7
Couple communication	36.4 (5.0)	35.6 (7.2)	0.6	0.5
Closeness	38.4 (7.2)	38.7 (7.5)	0.2	0.7
Flexibility	30.6 (6.7)	30.8 (6.9)	0.1	0.8

Motives for Staying Together

In our attempt to study the motives that lead to satisfied marriages, we asked our couples why they stayed together and what were the crucial motives during the most difficult stage in their marriage (see Table 4).

Table 4 reveals that "today" love seems to be the most important motive for staying in a marriage. During times of crisis, the motive "marriage is a partnership for life" is most important for females, while males during crisis feel "responsible for our children." Complete similarity between male and female is found in both "today" and "crisis" for second place reasons. The overall motives of "today" and in "crisis" for males and females are totally different. In some items the mean number of males and females differed between "today" and "crisis," such as in regard to item 10 "I enjoy our lifestyle and do not wish to change it," where males were found twice as often in "today" as in "crisis" and females three times more in "today" than in "crisis." In Table 4(a) we included only items which showed the highest differences.

Ingredients for Marital Satisfaction

The couples were asked to mark and rate the most important ingredients for marital satisfaction (see Table 5). These are shown in descending order in Table 5. Very few differences were found between

TABLE 3(a)
Differences Between the Ratings of Women and Men of the
Additional Sub-Scales

	<i>Women</i> (<i>n</i> = 30) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Men</i> (<i>n</i> = 30) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>W & M</i> <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Satisfied vs.</i>		<i>Dissatisfied</i>	
				<i>W</i>		<i>M</i>	
				<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Full consensus (Dyadic consensus & 8 related items)	82.0 (9.6)	83.9 (10.7)	83.0 (10.1)	.001		.000	
Couple problem solving	39.0 (5.3)	38.8 (6.1)	38.9 (5.6)	.01		.02	
Couple communication	37.7 (7.7)	38.3 (5.2)	38.0 (6.5)	.04		.03	
Closeness	41.3 (5.7)	40.4 (8.0)	40.9 (6.9)	.01		.009	
Flexibility	34.4 (4.5)	32.8 (7.4)	33.6 (6.1)	.004		.02	

men and women. In the "Exist" column we see that for both women and men, top items included mutual trust, loyalty and fidelity, mutual support and love, as well as making major decisions together, and reliability. In the "Desired" column we see significant differences for both possible comparisons, namely with "Exist" items and between women and men. In the "Desired" group, women indicated "happy atmosphere" as one of the most important ingredients, while men stated "mutual sexual fulfillment" as well as "consensus about sexual behavior."

For the whole group there were again no significant differences between women and men. Top ingredients mentioned were mutual trust, love, mutual respect, and similar philosophy of life. Also at the same level of importance for women and men were mutual support, openness, honesty, and candor, loyalty, and fidelity.

DISCUSSION

Generalizability from our findings is somewhat limited for several reasons: (a) Our sample was small and not representative of all the segments of Israeli society and did not allow some statistical ma-

TABLE 4
Most Significant Motives for Staying Together

	<i>Today</i>	<i>Crisis</i>
Female	16, 10, 1, 19, 26, 27	1, 16, 3, 14, 4, 19
Male	16, 10, 1, 19	3, 16, 1, 4, 19

- 1 - Marriage is a partnership for life
- 2 - I feel responsible to my partner
- 3 - I feel responsible to our children
- 4 - We have children
- 5 - My religious convictions
- 6 - Pressure of the church
- 7 - Expectations of our family of origin
- 8 - Pressure of our family of origin
- 9 - Fear of negative impact on job or career
- 10- I enjoy our lifestyle and do not wish to change it
- 11- Splitting our assets would destroy the economic basis of our existence
- 12- Financial dependence
- 13- I do not want to accept economic disadvantages
- 14- The conviction that crises are inevitable
- 15- The conviction that crises promote personal growth
- 16- Love
- 17- Good, satisfying sexual relationship
- 18- I believe I could not find a better partner in spite of a number of difficulties
- 19- We complement each other in spite of occasional tensions
- 20- I haven't yet found just cause for separation in spite of some difficulties
- 21- My partner has always behaved fairly evenly in crises
- 22- We can shape our marital life ourselves
- 23- I can contribute something to shaping our marital life
- 24- We are prepared to accept the changes and challenges which make life exciting
- 25- One cannot give up easily in such crucial matters
- 26- Our shared experiences have drawn us so closely together
- 27- We appreciate our closeness and comfort with each other
- 28- I can adjust myself to my partner
- 29- We can adjust to one another
- 30- My partner is patient and understanding with me
- 31- We are patient and understanding with one another
- 32- I am convinced that we can resolve our problems
- 33- We have struck a good balance between independence and connectedness
- 34- I have learned to live with a less than satisfactory marriage
- 35- Fate has brought us together
- 36- I still find my partner attractive
- 37- I am admired for having this partner
- 38- I am afraid that my partner would not be able to cope by him/herself
- 39- I am afraid that I would not be able to cope by myself
- 40- Separation and divorce are considered a social stigma
- 41- I am afraid of change
- 42- My partner doesn't want to release me no matter what happens
- 43- Our division of roles and responsibilities is practical
- 44- We have the ability to forgive

TABLE 4(a)
Differences Between Selected Motives as Indicated
Today and During Crises

	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>Today</i>	<i>Crisis</i>	<i>Today</i>	<i>Crisis</i>
4. We have children	24	51	34	51
10. I enjoy our life style and do not wish to change it	73	36	92	28
16. Love	148	71	132	72

Mean \times 100

nipulation. (b) Our study was in great part a "postal enquiry," and even though our instructions asked participants to complete the questionnaire separately and not to compare answers before completion, we did not have enough control. After comparing each couple for male and female differences, we believe that our instructions were followed, as there is no evidence of "combined work." (c) The questionnaires were much too long and we plan to shorten them in future studies. Some of our questions were very intimate and could have hindered the number of respondents.

Our future plans are to continue the study of long-term marriages with a larger population and with two additional groups. One sample is to consist of disadvantaged families (families of lower economic status), including multi-problem families or families in distress. The second sample will consist of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who emigrated to Israel in recent years. A comparison will be made between the three groups as well as with other countries who have participated in the international research group.

The results of our study show that most of our respondents had good relationships with their own parents before marriage. When looking at the amount of conflict with parents prior to their marriage, we found that two-thirds of the men and only half of the women reported having had conflicts with their parents. We may conclude that the results reflect good relationships with the family of origin, and a fairly happy childhood. These findings are congruent with earlier studies. None of the marriage systems are happy throughout their entire existence. Raising children, illness and accidents, loss of family

TABLE 5
Most Significant Ingredients for Marital Satisfaction

	<i>Exist</i>	<i>Desired</i>
Female	41, 15, 37, 25, 26, 40, 14, 24, 1, 5, 12, 2, 7, 17	16, 42, 6, 21, 4, 20, 2, 32, 29
Male	1, 14, 15, 2, 4, 25, 26, 37, 41, 7, 12, 24, 31, 35, 36, 39	21, 20, 19, 16, 6, 8, 18, 22, 29, 42

- 1 - Mutual trust
- 2 - Mutual respect
- 3 - Mutual give and take
- 4 - Mutual support
- 5 - Shared interests
- 6 - Being patient and understanding
- 7 - Respect for each other's independence
- 8 - Openness, honesty and candor
- 9 - Frequent exchange of ideas
- 10- Good problem solving ability
- 11- Similar philosophy of life
- 12- Corresponding religious beliefs
- 13- Cohesion
- 14- Love
- 15- Loyalty and fidelity
- 16- Sensitivity and consideration for needs of spouse
- 17- Sharing leisure time activities
- 18- Mutual appreciation
- 19- Expression of affection
- 20- Consensus about sexual behavior
- 21- Mutual sexual fulfillment
- 22- Happy atmosphere
- 23- Doing interesting things together
- 24- Permitting each other individual development
- 25- Making major decisions together
- 26- Reliability
- 27- Financial and general economic security
- 28- Clear role structure and responsibilities
- 29- Willingness to adjust and compromise
- 30- Complementarity
- 31- Shared interest in children
- 32- Avoiding repetition and boredom
- 33- Egalitarian relationship
- 34- Attractiveness of spouse
- 35- Fun and humour together
- 36- Mutual encouragement
- 37- Shared values
- 38- Balance between individuality and couplehood
- 39- Similar spiritual orientation
- 40- Feeling safe
- 41- Comradeship
- 42- Good listening
- 43- Other ingredients . . .

members, and other normative changes in the family's life cycle always require durable adjustments by each member of the family as well as by the couple as a team (Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992).

Most studies in this area have examined couples and their coping processes during the early stages of family life or through the normative process (Lewis, Beavers, Gosset, & Phillips, 1976; Kaslow, 1981, 1982; Cheal, 1991). Our study looks particularly at the variables that contribute to long-term marriages in the mid-life cycle. The findings show that our couples in long-term marriages have a high level of marital satisfaction, with a normal distribution. Our results are a bit higher than those reported by Spanier (1976), especially regarding dyadic consensus and dyadic cohesion. Our scores of dyadic adjustment are not as high as those reported in the Swedish study (Kaslow et al., 1994); however, our sample also represents a more liberal usage of divorce when there is less consensus between the spouses.

The men in our sample consistently rated higher satisfaction levels than did the women, which may be a result of men having less sensitivity to relationship disturbances than women. Nevertheless, no significant differences were found between the overall satisfaction of women and men. We did find significant differences when comparing the very satisfied group with the dissatisfied group, which again confirms the American, Swedish, and German findings. In a recent study, King (1993) showed that emotional expressiveness is positively correlated with marital satisfaction. Spouses' ratings of each other's expressiveness correlated with marital satisfaction, independent of spouses's self-reported expressiveness. Husbands' ambivalence over expression was negatively correlated with wives' satisfaction. We may conclude that our findings are in accordance with those of Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992), and that our couples are present and future oriented rather than living in the past. As they state: "Emotional stability, emanating from a consistently loving environment, is the best prediction for and precursor of the ability to make a commitment to a long term, intimate relationship" (p. 31).

CONCLUSION AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

What characteristics actually keep married people together? All couples indicated love as the primary motive for staying together, as well as enjoying their life style and not wishing to change. The most important ingredients chosen by our couples were:

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1. Mutual trust
2. Loyalty and fidelity
3. Love
4. Mutual support
5. Mutual appreciation
6. Mutual respect
7. Making major decisions together
8. Reliability

There were no significant differences between husbands and wives regarding the most important ingredients. Findings of our sample show a great deal of overlap with earlier studies, although there are some variations. Thus, the results reconfirm the basic characteristics believed to account for satisfying and lasting marriages: similarity and congruence of background, including religion, education, lifestyle, and philosophy of life, living in the present and future, and intrinsic motivation as the basis for marriage.

To sum up, the article seeks to answer some questions about the characteristics of Long-Term Marriages in Israel. Knowledge about successful marriages can help us in clinical work in family therapy. More specifically, family therapists may wish to work on the relationship between the spouses by encouraging them to use their own abilities to function, solve problems, and reinforce their partnership for life. Understanding the driving motives for staying together, as well as the most significant ones for marital satisfaction, is like knowing the right materials to use for constructing a solid building. One other area that clinicians could work on is the belief system of the couple. Shared values seems to have been most valuable in enabling families to cope with their hardships. A healthy family is a family which has coping and problem solving capabilities. Hardships and crises are part of life, and in order to strengthen the belief that "marriage is a partnership for life" there should be the recognition that crises are strengthening opportunities. We believe that every family is different and that we have to search for the particular characteristics of a given family. Nevertheless, it seems that certain ingredients are shared by many successful marriages, which gives us some direction to work on. It would be interesting to have a comparison study with couples in long-term unsuccessful marriages who come for therapy. In future studies it might also be interesting to conduct face to face interviews, thus adding qualitative knowledge to the study.

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