

The Case for Marriage Education

By Susan Barth

Founder, Israeli Amuta B'Yachad B'Osher/Together in Happiness

Executive Summary

There are increasing signs of discord in Israeli marriages, with increasing divorce rates that bring negative impact across numerous dimensions for couples, their children, and for Israeli society.

The monograph discusses known by-products of marital failure and family instability that include decreases in physical, mental, and emotional health among divorced couples and their children; decreased levels of education among children of divorce; decreased workplace productivity; higher numbers of fatherless children; increased costs of social services needed by fractured families.

These factors were presented in a November 2017 Knesset Seminar on Pre-Marriage Education, where several MKs spoke about the importance of addressing these current trends.

Concerns being Addressed: Decline in marriage rates and marital instability in Israel mirror similar trends in other western countries. Cost estimates are given for these factors, which represent significant social burdens with significant impact upon public coffers.

Statistics on the causes of divorce are presented, with the top three factors being: Lack of commitment; Infidelity; Too much conflict. As divorce represents a misalignment with the Jewish value of a strong family and has deleterious impact on family and community well-being, the case is made for the importance of addressing these negative trends before we lose the Jewish family.

Means of Addressing This Concern: Marriage Education presents an important preventive means for doing so, especially Pre-Marriage Education programs that reach couples before relationship problems have become entrenched. Pre-Marriage Education programs are taught through an established curriculum to small groups of couples, and benefit them in multiple ways including:

- Increasing couples' likelihood of having a happy and stable relationship by teaching skills and principles that research shows are associated with a healthy marriage;
- Allowing couples to slow down, think, and talk more about marriage before entering into it;
- Learning about additional resources in the community that address parenting and other family problems that might later occur.

The monograph explores investments in Marriage Education made in other countries, including Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Return on Investment estimates from

these programs range from 4:1 to greater than 1200:1. Such returns have immediate benefits as well as multi-generational ones.

Proposed Model for Israel: The monograph presents a model for expanding national impact of Marriage Education in Israel. Developed by Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher, the model includes:

- A national clearinghouse for promotion, advocacy, and programming of Marriage Education initiatives;
- Raising awareness about the importance of Marriage Education as an important intervention for couples and means for strengthening families and the well-being of communities;
- Advocating for governmental funding for Marriage Education;
- Organizing educational forums;
- Increasing participation in Marriage Education workshops;
- Conducting workshops of the PREP and IPREP curricula which are underway in Israel and for which there is ample research evidence of their effectiveness in improving crucial skills and techniques in communication and problem-solving for couples.

On November 8, 2017, the Knesset convened a seminar co-hosted by MK Yehudah Glick and the nonprofit Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher discussing Pre-Marriage Education as a potentially legal component of Israeli marriage when enthusiastic support was expressed by Knesset Members. MK Yehudah Glick convinced Minister Gila Gamliel to dedicate 2 million NIS of her Ministry's budget for a project to offer incentives to young couples to educate themselves and acquire the tools needed for them to succeed as a couple.

A budget for Pre-Marriage Education in Israel is presented, along with additional resources on Marriage Education as a potent and cost-effective resource for family harmony and stabilization.