

The Effects of Divorce on Health and Wellbeing

Marriage Education as a
Solution

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INTRODUCTION

Israeli society has long been characterized by stable communities anchored by families in which parents live in harmony, and their children reap the benefits of growing up in a stable family. But there are increasing signs of discord, with potentially devastating impact throughout many components of society. Increasing divorce rates are correlated with decreased health and wellbeing in families, especially children, who experience divorce and have a significant impact on personal and public resources, both local and national. This white paper, one of a series of four, excerpted from a 45-page document entitled *The Case for Marriage Education*, will explore the impact of divorce on health and wellbeing, and the potential of Marriage Education as a means for strengthening families and improving health.

HEALTH RISKS

According to Jane Bianchi,¹ a health editor expert, divorce can have the following negative health risks:

- Anxiety
 - Drastic weight change
 - Metabolic Syndrome
 - Depression
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Substance abuse
 - Insomnia
 - Chronic health problems and mobility issues
- A study published in *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* found that divorced or widowed people have 20% more chronic health conditions (such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer) than people who are married.²
 - One 2012 review of scientific literature published in *The Journal of Men's Health* found that divorced men have higher rates of substance abuse, as well as higher rates of mortality, depression, and lack of social support, compared with married men.³
 - Additional long-term studies⁴ have shown a rise in high blood pressure, high cholesterol and susceptibility to heart disease, especially among women after divorce.
 - Research⁵ shows that in comparison with married adults, separated or divorced adults have substantially increased risk for death from multiple disease processes. The study assessed over 6.5 million people, 160,000 deaths, and 755,000 divorces from 11 different countries and concluded that, on average, separated/divorced adults were 23% more likely to have died at the successive follow-up period relative to their married counterparts. Divorced men were significantly more likely to die early than were divorced women. These findings were subsequently replicated in a sample of 600 million adults.
 - Single-parent families tend to rely more on prepared food and eating out, which is both more expensive and less healthy than cooking at home.
 - Single parents are less likely to invite friends over for meals, due to lack of time and money, which can lead to social exclusion.
 - Divorced people often experience deterioration of their social support network, and this is particularly true for men.
 - A study⁶ conducted by Lewin and Stier in Israel found that “divorced women had a score of 0.661 on giving up basic necessities followed by divorced men (0.267), while married men had the lowest (-0.157).

¹ <https://www.prevention.com/sex/relationships/a20448176/divorce-and-health-effects/>

² <https://www.prevention.com/sex/relationships/a20448176/divorce-and-health-effects/>

³ <https://www.prevention.com/sex/relationships/a20448176/divorce-and-health-effects/>

⁴ <https://www.webmd.com/balance/news/20090728/divorce-has-lasting-toll-on-health#1>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4397145/>

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1040260818300030?via%3Dihub>

- Divorced Israeli women were also the most likely to forgo medical attention, despite healthcare being covered.

Effects on Health of Children of Divorce

There is no doubt that children are being affected by the sudden change in their familial environment as well as by additional influences that accompany the divorce process⁷. It is well recognized that the divorce process affects the mental state of the children, including development of behavioral problems, negative self-concept, social problems and difficulties in relationships with the parents. Among these children there is a higher frequency of depression, violence, learning and social deterioration, and high risk for suicidal attempts. Research in recent years had shown that the divorce process also increases rates of physical illness in children.⁸

A study on longevity conducted by Friedman and Martin⁹ revealed that the long-term effects of divorce on children are so great that they influence lifespan:

- Children from divorced families died almost five years earlier than those from intact families
- The single strongest social predictor of early death was facing parent divorce during childhood
- Parental divorce is strongly linked to death from all causes, including accidents, cancers, and cardiovascular disease
- Boys whose parents divorce are at greater risk of dying from accidents and violence, since they grow up to be more reckless
- Children from divorced homes are more likely to smoke and drink as adults
- An otherwise positive family environment does not cancel out the detrimental effects of divorce¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/the-impact-of-parental-separation-and-divorce-on-the-health-status-of-children-and-the-ways-to-improve-it-2332-0672-1000137.php?aid=67622>

⁸ <https://www.omicsonline.org/journal-of-psychiatry.php>

⁹ <http://www.howardsfriedman.com/longevityproject/>

¹⁰ Howard S. Friedman & Leslie R. Martin (2011). *The Longevity Project: Surprising Discoveries for Health and Long Life from the Landmark Eight-Decade Study*. NY: Hudson Street Press.

THE POTENTIAL OF MARRIAGE EDUCATION

The good news about the disintegration of marriage in contemporary society is that it is not a decree from heaven. Rather, it is both preventable and relatively easy to change. The Marriage Education movement, virtually unknown in Israel, works to counteract these alarming, painful and expensive statistics by helping to stabilize marriages and families and prevent divorce.¹¹

Because prevention is always less expensive and simpler than a cure, we believe it makes tremendous sense for the State of Israel to invest lesser sums in preventing divorce and the devastation that results from it, rather than investing in pulling single-parent households out of poverty.

Marriage Education programs are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement, especially because the infrastructure for Marriage Education already exists in Israel. Many agencies have goals that align with this work and there is a general consensus in society about the importance of happy families.

Additionally, Marriage Education taps into the deepest intentions which couples have for their lives and their families. They are ready and willing to learn how to achieve that. Premarital education is particularly effective when couples are first starting out. Young people are quick learners and at this stage in their relationship, they don't have years of embedded habits and resentments which need to be counteracted.

The logic of learning effective relationship skills is irrefutable. We send children to school to learn numerous skills and find employment, yet for life's greatest achievement, living successfully with another person and building a home, there is no training. This lack of preparation can lead many to stumble, resulting in troubled marriages that have a significant negative effect on society.

According to Howard J. Markman, premarital education is very effective at counteracting the dynamics of negative communication and mismanaged conflict, because we can help couples improve their communication and improve their conflict management, thereby improving their satisfaction over time and preventing divorce.¹²

Prof. Howard J. Markman stated that premarital education deals directly with issues of conflict and commitment, as well as helping to protect the positives in relationships that bring people together in the first place.¹³ In point of fact, pre-marriage Education

¹¹ <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/marriage-education-matters/>

¹² Howard J. Markman is Professor and co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver (Colorado, USA). He is President of PREP, Inc. (Prevention and Relationship Education Program). He served as keynote speakers for both conferences sponsored by Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher (The First International Conference on Marriage Education in Israel, May 17, 2011 and the Knesset Seminar for Pre-Marriage Education on November 8, 2017 co-hosted in the Knesset with MK Yehudah Glick).

¹³ Ibid, Howard J. Markman

counteracts what was cited by couples as the last straw - which included infidelity, domestic violence and loss of that loving feeling.

There is significant positive evidence on the effectiveness of Marriage Education, so the logic of bringing Marriage Education to the forefront of Israeli culture, both as individual units and as citizens is compelling. In addition to reducing divorces and the wear and tear on couples and their children, Marriage Education brings a range of compelling byproducts of increased productivity, happiness and success of our children, as well as for their parents.

What is Marriage Education?

Marriage Education consists of a variety of classroom-based curricula that teach couples the characteristics of a healthy relationship and the communication and conflict management skills that will equip them to achieve this. The goal of Marriage Education is to increase the chances of couples having a happy, healthy, stable and successful relationship and long-term marriage. Numerous studies show this to be a potent means of increasing relationship satisfaction and preventing divorce.¹⁴

Marriage Education addresses the relationship distress factors that lead to divorce and helps couples protect the positives in their relationship that bring them together in the first place.

Marriage Education helps both spouses have a voice in the relationship, have the skills to find solutions to their problems and increase their capacity for intimacy.¹⁵

Marriage Education teaches couples alternatives to the negative behaviors which lead to divorce. Instead of being silent, obnoxious or downtrodden, the couple learns to express their needs in ways which are likely to promote cooperative behavior change. They learn that instead of taking on each other's problems, they can understand their partner's thoughts and feelings and help them find a solution. Instead of resenting each other, they problem-solve in ways that meet the needs of both spouses.

Mechanisms:

- Teaching couples communication skills and principles associated with a healthy relationship
- Identifying characteristics of healthy marriages
- Identifying characteristics of unhealthy marriages
- Providing the opportunity to slow down, explore, and talk more about marriage and the couples' personal goals for their marriage
- Individualized assessments of potential relationship flashpoints
- Identification of predictable relationship challenges and skills for dealing with them
- Identification of impact of child rearing on the marital relationship and skills for coping with these challenges
- Providing options for support such as parenting and relationship resources, including couples therapy

¹⁴ Nock, S., Sanchez, L., & Wright, J. (2008). *Covenant marriage: The movement to reclaim tradition in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; Stanley, S., Amato, P., Johnson, C., & Markman, H. (2006).

¹⁵ Women: Why Marriage?! Luncheon Plenary, Smart Marriages, Orlando, FL—July 8, 2010, Patty Howell, California Healthy Marriages Coalition.

ESTIMATED RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Social Capital Valuations, LLC has provided a unique perspective on how Marriage Education programs are not only highly cost-effective, but they deliver a Return on Investment that is many times greater than the costs associated with running them. The organization's specific focus is on monetizing the ROI from Marriage Education and related social programs and this perspective is uniquely valuable.

Social Capital Valuations studied the results for over 5,000 couples in Ohio, Indiana and Texas who participated in marriage strengthening programs. The actual rate of divorce over the five-year period following the Marriage Education intervention was 13.7% lower than the projected rate of divorce. This resulted in a return of \$14.42 in taxpayers' benefit for every dollar invested in the Marriage Education programming.

Benefits of these programs accrued to taxpayers in the form of higher employment rates and higher household income resulting in an incremental \$4,187 in state and federal taxes collected per household per year. About 2/3 of the 685 saved marriages would have resulted in 452 additional single mothers with children requiring public assistance at an average of \$28,750 per year.¹⁶

Divorces also affect the next generation where twenty-seven percent of children with divorced parents had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 50 percent of those with married parents. 78% of children from two-parent households graduated from high school, while the graduation rate for children of divorce is 60%.¹⁷ Differences in educational attainment affect the life trajectory of the next generation, lowering lifetime income by \$10,000 per year for high school dropouts,¹⁸ or close to \$500,000 over a lifetime.

From these Social Capital Valuations, we can see that Marriage Education programs in Israel bring the promise of saving State budgets considerable costs and increasing individual and workplace productivity, in addition to all the personal and family benefits that accrue for the individuals involved.

¹⁶ Parental Divorce, Social Capital, and Post Baccalaurate Educational Attainment Among Young Adults by Camron Devor, Susan Stewart and Cassandra Dorius, published March 12, 2018 in the Journal of Family Issues. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0192513X18760349>

¹⁷ In 2009, a research project identified correlations between major changes in family structure and high school completion rates. Researchers encapsulated their findings in "Family Structure Histories and High School Completion: Evidence from a Population-based Registry," published in the Canadian Journal of Sociology.

¹⁸<https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2016/data-on-display/education-matters.htm>

HIGHLIGHTS OF ADVOCACY AND PROGRAMMATIC INITIATIVES IN ISRAEL

Impact on Marriage Perception

Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher¹⁹ is altering the way we perceive marriage. Marriage is a life change on an enormous scale which requires preparedness beyond an intimate conversation with a mother, father, rabbi or kallah teacher. Marriage and its foundations have the ability to strengthen or rock the very core of our society from our collective happiness to our employment productivity. Through efforts at community levels to corporate and governmental echelons, we have an obligation to ourselves and our children to provide tools and techniques to strengthen their chances of a successful marriage.

Since 2011, the Israeli nonprofit Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher has been spearheading Marriage Education in Israel. The nonprofit, founded by American immigrant Susan Barth to memorialize her parents' 52-year long marriage, has been a pioneer in raising the awareness of the Israeli public of the contributions Marriage Education can make for Israeli society.

Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher serves as a national clearinghouse for promoting advocacy and programming of Marriage Education initiatives.

The vision of Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher is to:

- Establish a national movement for Marriage Education in Israel
- Strengthen the foundation of Israeli society through strengthening couple's relationships
- Offer couples the opportunity to participate in marriage communication workshops that given them the tools to improve communication and prevent the escalation of future marital conflict
- Promote healthy, lasting relationships among married couples
- Serve as the umbrella organization for private organizations which will teach Marriage Education programs.

¹⁹ Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher website www.together-in-happiness.com

Organization and Sponsorship of International Conferences

Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher /B'Yachad B'Osher has sponsored and organized two major international conferences on Marriage Education in 2011 in Jerusalem and 2017 in the Knesset.

The First International Marriage Education Conference in Israel

Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher sponsored the first International Conference for Marriage Education in Israel in May 2011, which brought together 360 professionals and lay people interested in promoting Marriage Education in Israel.

The conference featured as keynote speaker world-renowned Marriage Education expert Professor Howard J. Markman (University of Denver, Colorado).

Professor Markman offered proof of the effectiveness of Marriage Education by citing the results of his own scientifically researched and worldwide acclaimed curriculum known as PREP (Prevention Relationship Education Program).

2nd International “Historic” Knesset Seminar on Pre-Marriage Education²⁰

On November 8, 2017, the Knesset convened a seminar²¹ co-hosted by MK Yehudah Glick and the nonprofit Together in Happiness/B'Yachad B'Osher,²² wherein for the first time in the nation's history, the concept of integrating Pre-Marriage Education as a formal and potentially legal component of Israeli marriage was discussed at the highest levels.²³

The conference featured MKs from across the Israeli political spectrum. Israeli and international experts and Knesset members discussed the impact of family breakdown on our economy, our society and our future. Professor Howard J. Markman once again delivered the keynote address: “Why Pre-marriage Education holds the Key for the Future and is Cost Effective.”

The Torah perspective of marriage was presented by Rebbitzin Goldie Plotkin, emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and co-director Chabad of Markham, Ontario.

The Knesset Seminar highlighted compelling reasons for government support for Marriage Education:

- The social and economic benefits which Marriage Education (particularly Pre-marriage Education) can offer as a potential remedy or addressing the negative effects of divorce

²⁰ <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/a-historic-first-in-the-knesset/>

²¹ <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/NGO-asks-Knesset-to-require-couples-to-take-classes-before-getting-married-513749>

²² <https://together-in-happiness.com/>

²³ <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/a-historic-first-in-the-knesset/>

- The negative consequences of divorce and its societal and governmental budgetary implications

MK Yifat Shasha-Biton (Kulanu), chairperson of the Special Committee for the Rights of the Child, described the impact on children who often get lost in the “war between parents” and the long-term effects this has on their future and on Israeli society as a whole. She advocated for marriage and relationship education even in high school, when young people are beginning to explore the world of relationships.

“I am very excited, as chairperson of the of the Special Committee for the Rights of the Child, to suddenly find partners in advocating for good marriages. Not just from a financial standpoint and from the perspective of the couple, but also from the perspective of the child who is growing up in a family where the parents know how to manage family life in a better way, and to deal better with the challenges of modern life.”

“Unfortunately, we see that the divorce rate is rising. I mostly deal with children from broken homes where the crisis is great. Generally, when a crisis happens, the focus is on the mother and father and the fights between them, and there are children in the middle who get lost.”

SUMMARY

The health risks which result from divorce are tremendous at every level—for the individuals and their family, and for the government which bears a tremendous burden because of the impact of divorce on healthcare costs. Decreased health across the nation is not inevitable, however.

Research increasingly shows the value of Marriage Education in equipping couples with the skills they need to form and sustain healthy marriages. Because marriages are the backbone of society, investing in helping couples learn skills that correlate with stable marriages offers considerable value as a preventive approach. An across-the-board program to teach young couples the necessary skills for happy marriages will increase the health of parents and children and have a positive impact on health and well-being in Israeli society.

APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

If you are excited about this vision of strengthening families and strengthening Israeli society, we welcome your support.

To achieve this vision, it will take the contributions of many, including:

- The voice of government officials to articulate and elevate this work as a national priority;
- Government funding,
- Support from foundations, philanthropies, and individual donors.
- Local leaders opening the doors of their temples, schools, and social agencies to sponsor Marriage Education classes.
- Media support to educate and excite the public about how every person who learns and utilizes these research-based relationship skills in their daily lives is making a contribution to bettering our society.
- Creative thinking;
- Dedicated involvement;

And most of all, it will take all of us working together to create this vision.

B'Yachad B'Osher/Together in Happiness welcomes you to join us in this vision in whatever ways you can contribute. You too can be a part of the birth and evolution of marriage education in Israel.

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For more information, see: The Case for Marriage Education