

Relationship Counselling

Research shows that adults in poor-quality and distressed relationships are much more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other mental health problems, and from poor physical health. There is also clear evidence that poor-quality parental relationships and inter-parental conflict in particular have a negative impact on children's mental health and long-term life chances across many areas.

Evidence suggests that families on low incomes/experiencing financial pressure may be at particular risk of experiencing relationship difficulties. Financial hardship is a key factor leading to relationship problems¹, predicting lower relationship satisfaction and quality², higher psychological distress³, and increased risk of relationship breakdown⁴.

18% of people (2.87 million people) in adult couple relationships are in distressed relationships.⁵

Key Facts

- BACP is calling Studies have found relationship counselling improves relationship satisfaction⁶, and couple therapy results in significant change in relationship satisfaction.⁷
- The government-backed evaluation of UK relationship support found counselling and relationship education resulted in statistically significant positive changes in individuals' relationship quality, wellbeing and communication, according to validated scientific measures of these.⁸ The evaluation modelled the cost-effectiveness, finding that for every £1 invested the state could see £11.40 of savings.
- The cost of relationship counselling - which is not widely commissioned - can be a significant barrier to access for those on lower incomes. At present, the relationship support sector's ability to provide free or subsidised support rests largely on the resource it is able to draw in from clients' fees. The fact that the majority of clients pay a fee for counselling means that the actual and/or perceived cost of services can be a significant barrier to access for

¹ Markman, H. J., Stanley, S.M., & Blumberg, S. L. (2004) Risk factors for marital problems.

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/linn/sites/www.extension.iastate.edu/files/linn/riskfactorsformaritalproblems017.pdf>

² Grable, J, E., Britt, S., & Cantrell, J. (2007) An Explanatory Study of the Role Financial Satisfaction Has on the Thought of Subsequent Divorce, Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 36, (2), 130-150

³ Dakin, J. & Wampler, R. (2008) Money doesn't buy happiness, but it helps: Marital satisfaction, psychological distress, and demographic differences between low- and middle-income clinic couples, American Journal of Family Therapy, 36, 300-311

⁴ Archuleta, K. L., Sonya, L. B., Tonn, B. T. J., Grable, J. E. (2011) Financial Satisfaction and Financial Stressors in

Marital Satisfaction, Psychological Reports, 108, 2, 563-576

⁵ Sserwanja, I. & Marjoribanks, D. (2016) Relationship Distress Monitor: Estimating levels of adult couple relationship distress across the UK. London: Relate

⁶ Lundblad, A. and Hansson, K. (2006) Couples Therapy: effectiveness of treatment and long-term follow up. Journal of Family Therapy, 28, 136-152

⁷ Doss, B. (2012) Couple therapy for military veterans: overall effectiveness and predictors of response. Behaviour Therapy, 43, 216-227

⁸ Spielhofer, T., Corlyon, J., Durbin, B., Smith, M., Stock, L. & Gieve, M. (2014) Relationship Support Interventions Evaluation. Department for Education

those on low incomes, and especially those in debt.⁹

- 66% of Relate counsellors identified the limited availability of free relationship support as a barrier that inhibits more referrals/signposting between relationship support and debt advice.

Recommendations

- Excellent support is out there, but too few families on lower incomes are currently able to access it. BACP would like to see Government investment to provide free relationship counselling to lower-income families.
- The Government's forthcoming £39m Reducing Parental Conflict Programme will make some free support (selected parenting interventions, although not relationship counselling) to address parental conflict available to workless families. However, the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme contracts will only involve 30 local authorities, through four regional contracts. Furthermore, 86% of children who experience parental conflict have at least one parent in work¹⁰ and will predominantly therefore be left out of the programme. BACP believes that a broader, national, and more ambitious effort to address relationship distress is necessary.
- BACP believed that Family Hubs should be funded to offer relationship counselling, and that this should be subsidised or free for low-income families or families in severe distress.

⁹ Doubell, L., Stock, L., Acquah, D., & McBride, T., (2017) Inter-parental relationship support services available in the UK: Rapid Review of Evidence, London: Early Intervention Foundation

¹⁰ HC Deb, 22 March 2018, cW <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2018-03-14.132543.h&s=speaker%3A25386#g132543.q0>