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Effectiveness Of Couple Enrichment Module On Marital Satisfaction And Subjective Well-Being During Covid-19

Sahayaraj S. S¹, Dr. Lawrence Soosainathan²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Anugraha Institute of Social Sciences, Dindigul, Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai. ²Head-Department of Psychology, Anugraha Institute of Social Sciences, Dindigul, Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

ABSTRACT: Marital satisfaction (MS) is an individual mental state that reflects the benefits and cost of marriage; higher the perceived benefits, higher the satisfaction (Stone & Shackelford, 2007). Subjective well-being (SWB) is a broad concept that includes positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002). Previous studies have shown the importance of MS and SWB for the well-being of families. COVID-19 has seriously affected the family well-being, with rise in the family violence (Humphreys, Mying, & Zeanah, 2020), stress and depression (Ceri & Cicek, 2021), financial crisis (Mamun, Bhuiyan, Manzar, 2020), and divorce (Prasso, 2019).

The researchers explore the effectiveness of "Couple Enrichment Module' (CEM) to enhance MS and SWB among the spouses, during this pandemic situation. A pilot study with 25 participants was carried out to explore the feasibility of this interventional model. Given the significant difference, a few modifications were added to the CEM and the intervention was carried out with 90 persons (30 men, 60 women) with a pre and post-test. The instruments used were: Index of Marital Satisfaction (Hudson, 1992) and Subjective well-being (Sell & Nagapal, 1992). The results show that the intervention is effective in mitigating the severity of marital problems and thusincreasing the level of MS and SWB. When checked for gender, there was a significant difference regarding MS and not in SWB. Limitations and future scope is discussed.

Keywords: Covid-19, Couple Enrichment Module, Marital satisfaction, Subjective wellbeing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a socially recognized union between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them intended to be a constant and long-term relationship (Haviland, Prins, McBride & Walrath, 2013; Nambi, 2005). Traditionally the Indian society, was dominated by joint family system. Due to urbanization and globalization, nuculear familes have emerged as norm of the day with newer dynamics such as: both the partners working to earn their livelihood, grandparents living far away, and children being alone at homes. Studies also show that modern families go through varied difficulties: separation, divorces, single parent and dysfunctional families (Patel, 2005). The Pandemic COVID-19 has added to the list of woes with the rise in the family violence (Humphreys, Mying, & Zeanah, 2020), stress and depression (Ceri &Cicek, 2021), financial crisis (Mamun, Bhuiyan, Manzar, 2020), and divorce (Prasso, 2019).

ISSN: 2008-8019 Vol 12, Issue 02, 2021



This study aims to measure the effectiveness of "Couple Enrichment Module" (CEM) in increasing the marital satisfaction (MS) and subjective well-being (SWB) of couple and thus mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on families.

2. MARITAL SATISFACTION

Marital Satisfaction is defined as an individual mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and cost of the marriage. The higher the perceived benefits, the higher the satisfaction obtained from the marriage and the partner (Stone & Shackelford, 2007). Kirschner (2009) points out that great couples, like great sculptors, shape each other so that both move toward their own individual dreams and goals. The factors that determine MS are: intimacy, passion and commitment (Sternberg, 2013), similarity between partners (Gaunt, 2006), self-disclosure (Hendrick, 1981), ability to identify and communicate emotions (Cardova, Gee & Warren, 2005) and collaborative conflict management style (Greeff & Tanya De Bruyne, 2011).

3. SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING (SWB)

Subjective well-being is a broad concept that includes the presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect and life satisfaction (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002; Suh & Oishi, 2002; Watson, Pichler & Wallace, 2010). Schueller & Seligman (2012) explored the relationship between the three unique predictors of well-being - pursuit of pleasure, engagement and meaning. All three pathways correlated with higher levels of SWB.

4. Role of MS and SWB in Family Well-being

Diener, Gohm, Suh & Oishi (2000) concluded that the relations between marital state and SWB are very similar across the world. Robels et al., (2014) demonstrate that high marital quality is characterized by the satisfaction of the relationship, general positive attitudes towards one's spouse, and low levels of hostile and negative behaviour; enhances physical and emotional well-being of partners (Carr & Springer, 2010). Hawkins & Booth, (2005) show that long-term, low-quality marriages have significant negative effects on overall well-being, self-esteem, life satisfaction and overall health along with elevated levels of psychological distress (Robels, et al., 2014).

The impact of marital satisfaction/marital conflict on physical and psychological health has been studied by researchers. Greater marital quality was related to better health, lower risk of mortality and lower cardiovascular reactivity during marital conflict (Robles, Slatcher, Trombello & McGinn, 2014; Choi, Yorgason, & Johnson, 2015). Marital dissatisfaction commonly co-occurs with mood and anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and some types of alcoholism, as well as some physical and psychological abuses of partners (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2009; Beach, 2001). Similarly, marital discord is also associated with poorer health, cancer, chronic pain (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2003), and cardiac vascular disease (Smith, Uchino, Berg & Florsheim, 2012).

5. Impact of COVID-19 on Family Life

The COVID-19 has shaken the entire globe and particularly the families have been severely affected. Families experience anxiety and depression (Ceri & Cicek, 2021), stress caused by lockdown, financial uncertainty, unemployment (Carroll, et al., 2020), physical and mental issues (Killgore, Cloonan, Taylor, & Dailey, 2020), infidelity (Coop Gordon & Mitchell,

ISSN: 2008-8019 Vol 12, Issue 02, 2021



2020), risk of violence and conflict in families (Humphreys, et al., 2020; Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020), increased divorce rates (Prasso, 2019) and various other factors have affected family life. In addition to it, Haiyang & Jingjing (2020) found that COVID-19 has reduced emotional well-being by 74%.

6. Development of Couple Enrichment Module (CEM)

To respond proactively to the above situation an intervention module was envisioned by the researchers. As a first step, an extensive literature review was carried out and the researchers gathered information from existing and validated Couple Enrichment modules (Guerney, 1977; Miller, Nunnaly&Wackman, 1979; Worthington et al., 1997; Markman, Stanley & Blumberg, 2001). As a second step, a new model was envisioned with cultural sensitivity (Chadda & Deb, 2013; Prabhu, 2004) incorporating some of the elements of the available modules. A few psychologists were consulted, as a third step, to gather expert opinion and feedbacks on the module. Having adapted the feedbacks, as a fourth step, a focused literature review was made to theoretically finalize the module with 6 hours intervention daily for 3 days either as couples or as individuals. The intervention consists of psycho-education, individual/couple work and group sharing along with some therapeutic In Psycho-Education (PE), family as a system (Bowen, 1993), patterns of attachment (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 2015), Imago therapy (Hendrix, 2007) were offered, coupled with group sharing/discussion after every psychoeducation process. In Individual Work (IW), Genogram (Reeves, Winter, Bleiberg & Kane, 2007), love languages (Chapman, 2004), positive communication (Greene & Burleson, 2003), and Conflict management strategies (Gottman, 2015) were offered as practical sessions. While, Psychotherapeutic Processes (PP) were offered by anger therapy, art therapy, and body movement therapy (Malchiodi, 2013).

A pilot study was carried out to ascertain item clarification and feasibility of the intervention with 25 married individuals from Dindigul District, Tamilnadu (9 men; 16 women; age 28 to 52). A pre and post-test was carried out using the tools adapted for the study.

6.1.Tools for Study

No	Name of the Scale	Autho	ors		Reliability	Interpretation		
1.	Index of marital Satisfaction	Hudson, 1992			.96	Higher the score, greater		
						the marital Problem and		
						lesser the marital		
						satisfaction*		
2.	Subjective Well-being	Sell	&	Nagpal,	.82	Higher the score, greater		
		1992				the SWB		

^{*}First cut off 30 – clinically significant problem in marriage; second cut off 70 – severe marital problem

7. COUPLE ENRICHMENT MODULE (CEM)

Table 1:

Paired t test results for Pilot Study

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		t value	p value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
MS	33.96	10.72	29.84	7.54	3.46	.001

ISSN: 2008-8019 Vol 12, Issue 02, 2021



SWB	74.88	8.75	81.04	8.26	10.14	.001
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The results of the pilot study showed a significant increase in the MS and SWB. The pilot study results indicated that the Couple Enrichment Module is effective in enhancing the MS and SWB.

A separate feed-back process was also held with the participants of the pilot study apart from the self-evaluation of the researchers themselves. Having consulted some experts again, a few more modifications in the time allotted, content and methodology were adapted. The whole process took place between June 2020 and March 2021. The CEM was arrived at as presented in the following table:-

Table 2: Couple Enrichment Module Intervention

Day	09.00 – 10.30 am	11.00-12.30 pm	03.00-04.30 pm	06.00 to 7.30 pm
One	Family as a system;	Family life cycle	Family roles & Rules	Genogram (IW)
	Patterns of Attachment	stages, birth order	(PE)	
	(PE)	(PE)		
Two	Imago therapy &	Conflict management	Positive	Anger therapy
	Couple Dialogue (PE)	(IW)	Communication (IW)	(PP)
Three	Art therapy (PP)	Body Movement	Forgiveness and	Love
		Therapy(PP)	Reconciliation	Languages(IW)

PE – Psycho-education; **IW** – Individual Work; **PP** – Psychotherapeutic Process

8.THE MAIN STUDY

Having finished the CEM, the main study was initiated with the following:

8.1. Objectives

- 1) To identify the effect of "Couple enrichment intervention" on MS and SWB.
- 2) To identify the difference between men and women regarding MS and SWB in pretest and post-test conditions.

8.2. Hypotheses

Ho1) The Couple Enrichment Module would not be effective in increasing the MS and SWB among the spouses.

Ho2) There would not be a significant difference between men and women regarding MS and SWB

8.3.Participants and Procedure

The *pre-test and post-test experimental group design* (Creswell, 2009) was followed to collect data from a *simple random sampling* (Creswell, 2009) using inclusion and exclusion criteria of married people (aged 26 to 60; 5 to 20 years of married life) with heterosexual orientation. There were 122 participants in total (84 women and 38 men), from all over Tamilnadu, India, participating in the intervention. However, data of 90 participants (60 women and 30 men) were only considered for analysis leaving out the out-layers due to incompletion of the questionnaire. CEM was offered with a pre and post-test approach.

8.4. Results

8.4.1. Results from Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality

Table 3:

Shapiro-Wilk test for Normality

ISSN: 2008-8019 Vol 12, Issue 02, 2021



Variable	Gender	Statistic	Df	р
Marital Satisfaction	Male	.972	30	.582
	Female	.975	60	.248
Subjective Well-being	Male	.977	30	.745
	Female	.970	60	.140

Shapiro-Wilk test for normality regarding MS and SWB indicate that the samples were normally distributed.

8.4.2. MS and SWB in pre-test and post-test conditions

Table 4:

Paired t tests between pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents on the level of MS and SWB

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		t value
	Mean SD		Mean	SD	
MS	34.95	13.33	27.04	8.74	11.29**
SWB	76.05	8.27	90.74	8.54	23.92**

p < .01

The results indicate that MS and SWB has increased due to CEM. Thus the first hypothesis has been nullified and rejected.

8.4.3. MS and SWB for men and women regarding pre-test and post-test conditions

Table 5:

Independent t test to find out the difference between men and women regarding MS & SWB in pre & post-test conditions

		pre cepesi			
Variables	Men	Men			t value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
MS – pre-test	30.57	10.69	37.15	14.05	2.26*
Post-test	23.53	7.92	28.80	8.66	2.79**
SWB – pre-test	77.26	7.65	75.45	8.56	.98
Post-test	91.33	8.69	90.45	8.52	.67

^{**} p = <.01; * p = <.05

The results indicate that there was a significant difference between men and women regarding MS due to CEM and not in SWB. Thus the hypothesis is partially rejected.

9. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to find out the effectiveness of CEM on MS and SWB. The first hypothesis stated that the intervention programme would be effective in increasing the level of MS and SWB of the participants. The result has indicated the same. A few interventional studies have proved to be effective in establishing MS among the spouses (Yousefi, Abedin,

ISSN: 2008-8019 Vol 12, Issue 02, 2021



Tirgari & Fathabadi, 2010; Cordova, Warren & Gee, 2001; Rostami, Taheri, Abdi & Kermani, 2014; Khajeddin, Riahi, SALEHI & IZADI, 2010). In this regard, the CEM can be considered as a useful tool to enhance the MS. It is important to underscore here that the index of marital satisfaction measures the severity of problems experienced by a spouse, we would conclude that CEM is effective in reducing the problems experienced by couples during this pandemic. This claim is supported by the significant negative correlation (r = -.53) between MS and SWB. Given the centrality of MS for the physical and psychological wellbeing of individuals and families.

Secondly, CEM is found to enhance SWB. Previous studies have confirmed it in increasing the SWB among the spouses (Hasakhani & Vantakhah 2016; Burchard et al., 2003). Various studies have underscored the importance of SWB not just for individual and family well-being but also SWB is found to be a broad predictor of human well-being and it has farreaching effects in varied domains of human life. Thus, the effectiveness of CEM in enhancing both MS and SWB makes it a promising interventional tool.

These findings makes us to claim that counsellors and psychotherapist have a hand-on tool in CEM to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on families and enhance MS and SWB among couples. Given its role in enhancing both MS and SWB, CEM becomes worth an investment with its short duration of just 3 days with 6 hours per day. At this lockdown situation, counsellors and psychotherapists can offer this CEM on online mode as well, even though it may have its own limitations. While results shows that CEM is effective to couples who are undergoing conflicts in their marital life, couples who are separated from their spouses, we propose that CEM can be effective to individuals before marriage to understand themselves, family dynamics and to better prepare for married life. Further studies are needed to ascertain our claims. We believe that CEM not only increases the MS but also offers skills and tools to couples like communicational/relational skills, conflict management strategies and awareness.

The role of gender differences have been an important and repeated area of study in varied psychological theories and research. It is said that Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus to highlight the differences between men and women. We can even claim that a theory or intervention is incomplete without being sensitive to gender differences. Hence, we paid special attention to explore the gender differences in CEM. Results indicated that there was a significant difference between genders in MS. This finding is in conformity with earlier researches that women were less satisfied in marriage than men (Jackson, Miller, Oka & Henry 2014; Schumm, Webb &Bollman1998). It is important to note that the index of marital satisfaction measures the severity of problems experienced by a spouse. Hence, we may conclude from the result that women tend to give more attention to family problems while men may ignore it or not give importance as women would. This could be due to the fact, as studies show, that women are more emotional and pay attention to emotional components while men are more pragmatic and pay less attention to emotions (Lively, 2008). While there was a gender difference in MS, the present study did not find a significant gender difference in SWB. This is in conformity with previous studies where men and women do not differ significantly in SWB. (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Joshi, 2010). Women experience both positive and negative emotions in high intensity. Fujita, Diener & Sandvik (1991) indicated that gender accounts for less than 1% of difference in well-being, whereas the emotional experiences are reported to be more than 13% of difference. Yet another possible reason for lack of gender difference in SWB could be that it has three different components that are fused together as SWB, like positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Batz & Tay,

ISSN: 2008-8019 Vol 12, Issue 02, 2021



2018). All these three components are experienced differently by men and women; now when they are joined together, there is a possibility of lack of significance regarding SWB.

10. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

There were a few **limitations** to this study: 1) Control group was not there to establish the effectiveness of the present study. 2) The couple did not have a follow-up programme; it might facilitate to increase the effectiveness of the present study. 3) The data collected was through self-assessment form; this can affect the results due to the social desirability of the participants. 4) This programme was limited to Tamilnadu and therefore this limits the global perspective of the study results.

The **future scopes** of the present study are: 1) Family enrichment programmes can be conducted even online for the benefit of the spouses during COVID-19; 2) Individuals were taken for study and it is better that Couples are taken together for the benefit of the spouses; 3) This programme can focus on the well-being of children and adolescents as well. 4) Future study can focus on measuring the duration of effectiveness of CEM on individuals.

11. CONCLUSION

Indian *shastras* consider marriage as a sacrament. However, it is alarming to note that in the past two decades marital dissolution through divorce or separation has been raising high in India (Dommaraju, 2016) much more during this pandemic, marital life is in a crisis. Therefore, this "Family Enrichment Module" has been conducted to facilitate the married partners to increase the level of their MS and SWB, particularly during this pandemic situation. The results reveal that the intervention has been effective in increasing the level of MS and enhance the SWB. There was a significant difference between men and women regarding MS and not significant regarding SWB. Thus, we conclude CEM is an effective tool to enhance family well-being, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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