

A Systematic Review to Understand the Need for Inclusion of Sexual Communication and Satisfaction under Pre-marital Counseling

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is considered to be one of the most important commitments an individual takes up and couples across the socioeconomic spectrum; wish their marriages to be satisfying and long-lasting. The majority of couples base their dissatisfaction on various factors, such as education, personality, financial condition, fertility issues, family type, and differences in individual goals. Another important, yet lesser-discussed factor is sexual life. Many couples are not aware of the importance of communicating sexual likes, and dislikes, or how they can improve their level of sexual satisfaction. This review evaluates the importance of sexual satisfaction and sexual communication which can result in a strong long-lasting bond between two individuals in a relationship. In conclusion, the review paper suggests the importance of psychoeducating couples about sexual satisfaction and communication followed by the inclusion of appropriate skills that need to be developed for the same during pre-marital counseling; to build a much stronger foundation for marriage.

Keywords: *Sexual satisfaction, sexual communication, psychoeducation, pre-marital counseling*

Marriage is considered the most important institution which molds the individuals personal as well as social life to a great extent. It is a lifelong commitment that requires constant efforts, which is only possible if there's marital satisfaction as a reward for the efforts put in. Marital satisfaction can be defined as a genuine feeling of pleasure, satisfaction, and joyfulness experienced by the couple in all aspects of their marriage. It is affected by several factors and one such factor influencing it is the satisfaction of sexual relations or sexual satisfaction (Golmakani, N., Dormohammadi, M., et al, 2013). It can be defined as the individual's sexual needs and whether their expectations and needs or desires are being fulfilled in the relationship (Offman & Mattheson, 2005). For this sexual satisfaction to be attained, communication of needs and desires is important i.e sexual communication between the couples which becomes a prerequisite for sexual satisfaction and in turn enhances marital satisfaction. Because sexual satisfaction plays such an important role in marital satisfaction, this paper aims to explain/propose the inclusion of

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sexual satisfaction and sexual communication as a major area in pre-marital counseling (PMC) which will help build a strong foundation for newlywed couples in this aspect of marriage. This systematic review has focused on explaining the problem faced due to the absence of sexual communication in marriage and in what possible ways it can be addressed.

METHODOLOGY

In this narrative review, the researchers searched the NCBI database, Google Scholar, and Science Direct databases like Scientific Information Database with search terms of sexual satisfaction, sexual communication, and marital satisfaction, restricted to English. Then those articles written by renowned experts were selected. In this regard, 20 papers have been reviewed, and 13 articles related to this research have been extracted.

Current status of PMC Sessions

Premarital counseling is a form of couples therapy that intends to provide space for discussion regarding several important topics relevant to marriage. It commonly refers to a method that is intended to improve and enhance premarital relationships leading to more pleasing and established marriages with the envisioned consequence intended to avoid divorce (Amanda Kepler, 2015). The ultimate goal of premarital counseling is to support relationships prior to marriage in order to prevent the risk of future divorce and give them a better base for a stable and satisfactory marriage (Stahmann, 2000).

Current premarital counseling manuals cover a variety of topics encircling marriage across multiple sessions, where they begin with discussing general information and the motive behind marriage and whether that is healthy or unhealthy for both individuals followed by finances. Another topic covered is expectations, uniqueness, and acceptance followed by roles, responsibilities, and decision-making. PMC also covers communication which includes Talking, listening and understanding, and conflict resolution. Various PMC manuals have been developed by keeping in mind different cultural contexts but the crux of concepts remains the same.

There exist various pre-marital assessment questionnaires (PAQ) which further help carry out PMC efficiently. Reviewing these commonly used PAQs benefits this study by looking closely at programs already used in order to understand how some PMC sessions are taught and the marital aspects they address. A **premarital assessment survey** is designed primarily for assessing the current state of the premarital relationship and for gathering data relevant to future counseling topics and issues (Larson et al., 1995). Another one is **The Facilitating Open Couple Communication (FOCCUS)** questionnaire which includes four main content areas: matching personality and lifestyles, communication and problem-solving skills, bonders and integrators, and summary categories such as family-of-origin and key problem indicators. but the type of communication skills focused on has not been elaborated on at all. **The Cleveland Diocese Evaluation for Marriage (CDEM)** and the **Preparation for Marriage (PREP-M)** also prove to be helpful in assessing individuals on various factors regarding marriage.

But the current PMC manual as well as the questionnaires mentioned focus on sexual communication in terms of its biology such as pregnancy, menopause, periods, and basic knowledge of intercourse which reflects a research gap of in-depth communication as an umbrella topic of which sexual communication and sexual satisfaction are even more

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discreet of discussion in terms of individuals sexual needs and desires which needs to be fulfilled for sexual satisfaction and further marital satisfaction.

The Need for inclusion of Sexual communication

Sexual communication and self-disclosure of needs, desires, and boundaries leads to an in-depth discussion of pleasure among couples which is an instrumental component of sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2011; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010) and the absence of this creates a barrier among the couple leading to dissatisfaction. Yet research suggests that even in long-term romantic relationships, partners report only knowing 62% of what their partners find sexually pleasing and 26% of what their partners find sexually displeasing (Byers, 2011). The taboo around the topic of sexual communication exists as studies suggest that discussing sex is still one of the most difficult conversations among newlywed couples (Rehman et al., 2011).

A prerequisite to sexual satisfaction is sexual communication which will prove to be fruitful only if the communication is complementary where both individuals are receptive to whatever is being shared as adults (Transactional analysis, Eric Berne,1950). If the communication isn't complementary then the desires are retained in the minds of the individuals leading to repression. Repressed needs and desires have long been studied in psychology as the roots of major problems that arise moving forward. These repressed needs and desires, if not attended push themselves into the personal unconscious (Carl Jung,1912) and make the individuals dysfunctional and unsatisfied in that relationship which then gets expressed in different forms of actions, be it recurring fights or avoidance which ultimately either leads to divorce or extramarital affairs (Stanik, C. E., & Bryant, C. M. (2012).

The problems discussed regarding the effect of the absence of sexual satisfaction and communication on marital quality and the current status of PMC sessions and the topics covered in both the manuals as well as questionnaires reflect the need to add sexual communication as a major topic under the umbrella of communication in pre-marital counseling to explain the engaged couples the importance of it as well as make them equipped enough to discuss and communicate effectively in-depth with each other which can strengthen the foundation on which they build their marriage resulting in fewer divorces and increased marital satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Sexual satisfaction has become a crucial element of marital satisfaction but has not yet been addressed as aggressively as required. The papers reviewed so far in this particular study point out lack of sexual communication as a significant problem during marital relationships, as it can create a psychosocial impact on both partners.

This review asserts the incorporation of Sexual communication into premarital counseling sessions such that the couples can be in order to improve their marital satisfaction and overall well-being.

Further research into this study should be to work out various methods and models to psychoeducate and enhance the required skills in the clients of premarital counseling.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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