

# Proposing Mental Health Awareness Inputs for Marital Relations

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## Abstract:

One of the seven sacraments which arises from the ministry of Christ and continued by the Catholic Church is the Sacrament of Matrimony. Given that Matrimony is a sacrament, the Church recognizes the importance of the marital bond in couples (unitive) and their participation in the divine creative power (procreative). The Church is aware of the factors surrounding and affecting the integrity of the marriage of Catholic couples. It is aware of all the challenges faced by every couple that often leads to their separation, annulment, or divorce. (Elsig, 2023) says that ongoing unresolved conflict is harmful. When there are continued arguments in a relationship, research shows it restricts the processes that lead to good mental health. This suggests that marital brokenness is attributed to several factors that include the mental disposition of either spouse. It is in this regard that this research explores the possible integration of inputs for mental health awareness in Catholic marriages for couples who are in their early years in marriage. A meta-review of related literature citing the causes, effect, threats, and remedies relative to mental health issues affecting married couples shall be undertaken. These materials shall be discussed in terms of their practical catechetical value through the Catechism of the Catholic Church on Marriage. Through these various related literatures, the researchers hope to contribute towards the improvement of understanding the relationship between mental health issues and marital relations.

## Introduction:

The Catholic Church stands firm on its teachings about the “indissolubility” of marriage. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 2019), it is stated that the Church believes that the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved (para. 1640). However, the strength of marriage itself is challenged by the various overwhelming factors and themes that couples are experiencing.

In the study conducted by Hawkins, Willoughby, and Doherty (2012) on 886 divorcing individuals, they found that there are top six divorce related reasons. The following reasons are: growing apart (55%), not being able to have words with each other (53%), their spouse’s manner of handling money (40%), disloyalty (37%), not getting enough attention (34%) and their spouse’s personal problems (37%). Most of these identified reasons reflect marital dissatisfaction. Thus, divorce can be concluded as a product of marital dissatisfaction.

With the existence of these various reasons for divorce, mindfulness on marital satisfaction plays a major role. It is in this regard that religious themes might be significant. In the study of Ellison et al., (2010), couples who engage in regular devotional practices, such as family prayer or scripture study within the home, may enjoy richer unions than others. It is in this practice that they encounter the common religious themes like sacrifice, compromise and forgiveness and practice them in their own marital relationship.

Still, despite the guidance of religion though, there is a percentage of couples with religious upbringing who end up terminating their marriage through divorce. In the report produced by the Institute for Family Studies, between 1995-2017, there is a 4% annual probability that catholic couples may end up filing divorce.

In this regard, mindfulness on marital satisfaction guided by religious themes might be reinforced by necessitating mental health awareness in the marital context. To protect the indissolubility of marriage in the catholic context, it is important, not only to realize certain religious themes, but also psychological and psychosocial factors affecting married couples. Thus, there is a need to necessitate mental health awareness in the marital context. This is what this study is trying to establish. Using existing literature, this study wishes to establish the importance of mental health awareness in strengthening marital bonds.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed content analysis. Content analysis, same as how it is appropriate for this study, is defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). The study will be consulting various literatures to gather data that can be used in describing the phenomenon of marriage as how it is viewed in this research and analyzing how mental health awareness is important in the catholic marital context. From these analyses, the researchers will make a meta-synthesis of how necessitating mental health awareness will help in the preservation of the credibility of catholic marriage.

#### **1. Common Mental Health Issues that Married People Experience and their Possible Causes**

Although most women appear to have happy lives, their relationships and conflicts with their husbands are common concerns. Most of them complained about their family’s lack of appreciation and respect, their husbands lack of respect, and their husbands’ neglect towards their needs and demands (Asadi et al., 2016).

Associated also with the mental health of couples is the role of family characteristics, of which some are gender specific. Wives express more mental distress while husbands, generally, have poorer mental health. (Read & Grundy, 2010)

Another study shows that sex, severity of hurts, frequency of transgressions, marital satisfaction and marital forgiveness accounted for discrepancy in mental health symptoms. (Miller & Worthington, 2010) There is inferential evidence that by tradition, sex role orientations explain partly the relationship between spouse's employment and psychological distress among men. (Kessler & McRae, 1982)

Also, one research that looked at the effects of the economic crisis on the prevalence of common mental disorders, depression and anxiety disorder, in particular, revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the subgroup of married persons, being one of the two groups which are most afflicted. (Economou, M., et.al 2013)

Moreover, a study which focused on the crisis brought about by COVID-19, resulting in school and daycare closures and social-distancing obligations, subjected the fathers and mothers’ ways of coping in terms of childcare provision, employment, working arrangements, and psychological distress levels. Accordingly, women are more burdened than men in childcare while still working. The same research established a new gap by higher levels of psychological distress reported by mothers of elementary school-age and younger children (Zamarro & Prados, 2021)

Although there were reports about the positive effects on the anxiety levels, pregnancy rates, or marital function of infertile couples in six studies which adopted varied psychosocial approaches, including mind

body intervention (Eastern body-mind-spirit, Integrative body-mind-spirit, and Mind/body intervention), cognitive behavioral therapy, group psychotherapy, and harp therapy. ... None of these, however, were found to be successful in relieving the depression or stress of ... couples undergoing IVF treatment. Not one of the included studies mentioned or discussed the mental health status of couples in their most stressful time of waiting for the pregnancy results of their treatment. Ying, L., Wu, L. H., & Loke, A. Y. (2016)

The study of Smart, J. (2008) presented the cyclical influence between poor marital quality and mental health issues and the destructive effect of these on the lives of individuals and to the marriage itself. The past studies mentioned in the same paper by the same researcher revealed that there is a strong relationship between mental health issues and marital quality.

### **Necessitating Mental Health Awareness in Marriage**

A meta-analytic review on maternal depression and parenting behavior conducted stated that there is a significant relationship between depression and positive maternal behavior. The paper concluded with a suggestion that further research is needed which may identify factors that influence women's parenting deficit and are experiencing depression and other psychological difficulties. Lovejoy et al., 2000

Another study corroborated the view that relationships are a key factor of human functioning with the potential to affect a broad array of mental health outcomes. Though the association between relationships and mental health is bidirectional, observation showed that the causal arrow flows strongly from relationship to mental than the other way. The more established, committed relationships, such as marriage, are associated with greater benefits than unions like cohabitation. Improving relationships improve mental health, but improving mental health does not necessarily follow an improved relationship. Braithwaite, S., & Holt-Lunstad, J. (2017).

Based on the cross-sectional study which was conducted on more than 200 pregnant women in Alborz province, there is a need to give due attention to the mental health of women. (Salehi et al., 2020)

One study revealed that the psychological well-being of the military couples was a critical factor in the stability of their unions. It further acknowledged that interventions and resources critically support their strong marriages. (Johnson, C. 2023).

## **2. The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Marriage**

As stated in the book Genesis, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." This further stresses the unbreakable union between the couple, a principle discussed in the introduction part. As a result, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh." (EWTN, n.d.)

The Pope forcefully stresses the fact that conjugal love by its very nature defines the partners in a richly encompassing and lasting union, precisely within that "mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures" which indeed make up a marriage. (*Summary of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia (the Joy of Love) on Love in the Family*, n.d.)

Further, Pope Francis' Synod gave space to examine the situation of families in order to have a broader understanding of marriage and the family. The existence of the complexity of issues that beset these calls for the need to keep an open discussion on a number of doctrinal, moral, spiritual, and pastoral questions. (*Amoris Laetitia, the Family Is the Space Where We Walk Together - Vatican News*, 2021)

### **Study Limitations**

The limitation of this study can be observed in its nature, a meta-synthesis about related literatures that confirm, directly or indirectly, the association between mental health issues that affect the married life of

couples. This, then, invites future research to further establish the relationship between the two variables, and perhaps, identify in great detail other possible causes and from there, come up with more possible solutions to safeguard Catholic marriage.

## Conclusion

Indeed, gone are the days when the discussions of mental health issues are looked upon as one that bears a stigma. It cannot be denied that with a gamut of unique circumstances encountered by married couples, the key players of a family, long defined as the basic unit of a society, are greatly affected in their mental health. With the number of scientific studies backing up the dynamic association between the mental health and the married life of Catholic couples, it is thus established that there is a need to consider the couples' mental health awareness which may lead them to enjoy their lasting relationship as husband and wife.

## Recommendations

Thus, the following may be recommended:

- With respect to the religious themes which may guide married couples, as stated in the introductory part, the local leaderships in the Catholic church may address the concerned and related mental health issues of the same who signify intention to seal their union in marriage by coming up with activities or a program directed towards supporting and nourishing a strong spirituality and needed resiliency in their future married life.
- The inclusion of a question in the area of mental health condition of each party on the canonical questions during the pre-cana seminars may be facilitated by the parish.
- Local government units may plan and/ or pursue projects that will support the married couples' psychological, psychosocial, emotional and economic situations. Concretely, the following may be considered:
  - The justified use of a portion of local funds may be allotted to help families who struggle economically to send their children to school.
  - Talks may also be given as regards the couples' financial literacy.
- Non-government organizations may be tapped to empower married men and women towards their self-becoming. The same may also be creative in extending support for relatively new couples who have no one to care for their very young children when they attend their daily works/jobs.
- Catholic universities, colleges, and schools may integrate in their programs seminars, workshops, and religious activities that may address issues and strengthen family life. As examples, the following may be looked into:
  - The essential matrimonial rights and obligations may be discussed/ integrated. Respect for marital space may also be considered as the pandemic forcibly removed the married couples' personal and mental space.  
<https://www.mindful.org/why-personal-space-is-a-good-thing-in-marriage/>
  - A series of awareness talks may be given to students, leading them to understand their parents' mental health issues.

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