UCF

Marriage and Family Research Institute

The Effect of Individual Distress on Retention for Low-Income Couples Participating in Marriage Education Workshops

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Introduction

Low-income couples are particularly susceptible to frequent relationship stressors, contributing to recruitment challenges for treatment and research. We provided marriage education to 152 low-income married participants and assessed each partner for individual distress pre-intervention. This study will examine the relationship between individual distress and retention in marriage education workshops.

Why is this study important?

• Low-income couples inherently face challenges that make participating in studies, or receiving relationship interventions, difficult (Charles et al., 2006: Dakin & Wampler, 2008; Kerkmann et al., 2000).

• This study aimed to target specific areas that may be able to prevent the attrition of these couples in research studies.

• Results aim to identify whether OQ total scores pre-assessment are an effective approach to prediction of individuals retention in these studies.

Research Questions

The current analysis will focus on the following two research questions:

• **Research Question 1**: Is there a relationship between individual distress (OQ total scores pre-intervention) and number of lessons attended?
  • $H_0 1$: No relationship exists between individual distress and number of lessons attended for men.
  • $H_0 2$: No relationship exists between individual distress and number of lessons attended for women.
  • $H_0 3$: Individual distress does not predict number of lessons attended for men.
  • $H_0 4$: Individual distress does not predict number of lessons attended for women.

• **Research Question 2**: Is there a difference in individual distress (OQ total scores) between those who selected the two-day weekend workshop format, and those who selected the four-day week night workshop format?
  • $H_0 1$: No relationship exists between individual distress and workshop format chosen for men.
  • $H_0 2$: No relationship exists between individual distress and workshop format chosen for women.

Methods

Methodology

The research team received UCF IRB approval for this study. Couples for the program were recruited at multiple recruitment sites in Central Florida and participated on a volunteer basis. Couples interested in this program attended an intake appointment where eligibility was established followed by random assignment (RA) to either the treatment or control group. Those couples that were RA to the treatment group received a 12-hour, 13 lesson, Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) offered as two six-hour weekend sessions or four three-hour weekday sessions. Data for this project was collected for 152 RA individuals out of 300+.

Analyses

• **Research Question 1** - A partial correlation was conducted to present the relationship between OQ total scores pre-assessment and number of lessons attended while controlling for workshop format.(i.e., weeknight or weekend)

• **Research Question 2** - A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to show the difference between OQ total scores pre-assessment and workshop format chosen.

Abstract

Although research exists in numerous areas related to couples and individuals in committed relationships, the amount of research directed towards the retention of low-income couples is scant. These couples are particularly susceptible to more frequent stressors and financial difficulties, leading to an increased likelihood of divorce. In 2002, the federal government provided funding aimed at treatment interventions for low-income married couples with children. The Together Project, a university-based site, provided marriage education workshops to 152 participants. We administered a demographic form and the Outcomes Questionnaire (OQ) 45.2 at pre-assessment. The OQ 45.2, a 45-item measure, assessed individual psychological distress. After assessment, the couple was randomly assigned to either the treatment or wait-list control group. The treatment group participated in a 12-hour, 13 lesson, Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) offered as two six-hour weekend sessions or four three-hour weekday sessions. We examined the role of individual distress on factors influencing retention. We found no relationship between individual psychological distress and attendance. Additionally, no differences exist between workshop format selected and individual distress. However, we found a positive, strong relationship between attendance at earlier lessons for men and women and completion of attendance for all lessons. We will discuss implications of these findings.

Results

Ethnicity - Men

Other 4%
White/Non-hispanic 32%
Black/Non-hispanic 14%
Hispanic/Latino 50%

Ethnicity - Women

Other 8%
White/Non-hispanic 29%
Black/Non-hispanic 9%
Hispanic/Latino 54%

	N	Mean	SD
Age: Men	76	34.71	7.16
Age: Women	76	32.95	6.92
Yrs of Ed.: Men	75	13.99	2.41
Yrs of Ed.: Women	76	14.26	2.06
# times married: Men	76	.25	.47
# times married: Women	76	.28	.58
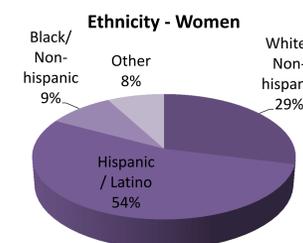
Examined Difference Between Individual Distress and Workshop Format Chosen for Men

Class Format: Men	N	Mean	SD	F - Score
Weeknight	34	52.71	21.37	$F_{(1,56)} = .13, p = .72$
Weekend	24	50.75	19.41	
Total	58	51.90	20.43	

Examined Difference Between Individual Distress and Workshop Format Chosen for Women

Class Format: Women	N	Mean	SD	F - Score
Weeknight	34	51.15	24.58	$F_{(1,57)} = .24, p = .63$
Weekend	25	48.12	22.48	
Total	59	49.86	23.56	

Examined Relationship Between Individual Distress and Number of Lessons Attended

	Pre – OQ Total: M / Pre – OQ Total: W	L 1: M / L 1: W	L2: M / L2: W	L3: M / L3: W	L4: M / L4: W	L5: M / L5: W	L6: M / L6: W	L7: M / L7: W	L8: M / L8: W	L9: M / L9: W	L10: M / L10: W	L11: M / L11: W	L13: M / L13: W	L14: M / L14: W
Pre – OQ Total: Men	1.000													
Pre – OQ Total: Women	1.000													
L1: Men	.121	1.000												
L1: Women	.105	1.000												
L2: Men	.121	1.000	1.000											
L2: Women	.105	1.000	1.000											
L3: Men	.116	.931	.931	1.000										
L3: Women	.103	.929	.929	1.000										
L4: Men	-.058	.711	.711	.715	1.000									
L4: Women	-.018	.686	.686	.694	1.000									
L5: Men	-.065	.665	.665	.734	.969	1.000								
L5: Women	-.087	.639	.639	.710	.970	1.000								
L6: Men	-.056	.563	.563	.639	.831	.865	1.000							
L6: Women	-.018	.541	.541	.621	.833	.867	1.000							
L7: Men	-.160	.456	.456	.522	.623	.652	.689	1.000						
L7: Women	-.123	.444	.444	.511	.589	.616	.660	1.000						
L8: Men	-.177	.526	.526	.582	.727	.752	.692	.888	1.000					
L8: Women	-.116	.515	.515	.572	.700	.722	.669	.885	1.000					
L9: Men	-.128	.456	.456	.522	.623	.652	.807	.879	.888	1.000				
L9: Women	-.051	.444	.444	.511	.589	.616	.779	.876	.885	1.000				
L10: Men	-.057	.494	.494	.502	.583	.615	.639	.886	.784	.767	1.000			
L10: Women	-.128	.484	.484	.491	.546	.575	.607	.883	.778	.762	1.000			
L11: Men	-.031	.442	.442	.511	.602	.632	.779	.792	.802	.911	.855	1.000		
L11: Women	.001	.431	.431	.500	.567	.595	.750	.787	.797	.909	.852	1.000		
L13: Men	-.128	.456	.456	.522	.623	.652	.807	.879	.888	1.000	.767	.911	1.000	
L13: Women	-.051	.444	.444	.511	.589	.616	.779	.876	.885	1.000	.762	.909	1.000	
L14: Men	-.063	.442	.442	.511	.602	.632	.663	.911	.802	.792	.972	.882	.792	1.000
L14: Women	-.070	.431	.431	.500	.567	.595	.633	.909	.797	.787	.971	.879	.787	1.000

Key

M = Men
W = Women
L = Lesson
Red = $p < .05$

Discussion

Research Question 1 – Lesson Attendance

A partial correlation was used to explore the relationship between perceived individual distress (as measured by the OQ 45.2) and number of lessons attended, while controlling for workshop format. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of assumptions, missing data, or outliers. There was no statistically significant relationship between perceived individual distress and number of lessons attended for men or women while controlling for workshop format. We initially set out to see what relationship exists between pre-assessment OQ and attendance. We were not able to predict attendance based on individual distress since no relationship was found between the variables. However, we found that there is relationship between early attendance and workshop completion.

These findings suggest that individual distress for men and women does not influence the dosage of treatment intervention received. However, early attendance appears critical to overall workshop completion. Therefore, researchers and practitioners may choose to consider incentivizing early workshop attendance.

Research Question 2 – Workshop Format

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to see if there was a difference in individual distress scores between those who selected the weeknight and those who selected the weekend workshop format. There was no statistically significant difference between individual distress and workshop format chosen.

These findings suggest factors other than individual distress influence which format low-income couples choose. Factors may include work schedules, transportation, issues with children (e.g. health). Therefore, researchers and practitioners may want to consider flexible make-up options.

Conclusion

• Workshop format chosen does not seem to be affected by individual distress for men or women.

• Retention seems to be heavily weighted on getting individuals to attend their initial scheduled lessons.
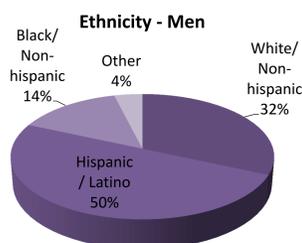
Future Research

• Future researchers can use this data to expand on whether initial lesson attendance is significant to further attendance.

• Incentives could be used in order to get participants to attend their first lesson.

• Future research should focus on analyzing factors other than individual distress such as work schedules, transportation, issues with children, etc. and their influence on retention for low-income study participants.

Limitations

• Individuals' interest in the topics of each lesson.
• Participant and program factors that prevented couple participation.
• Results cannot be generalized due to the low-income requirement of the study.
• Variations in teaching methods from different instructors.

Acknowledgments