

Couples who receive government assistance report less marital satisfaction, commitment, study finds

September 7 2011

For better or worse, marital quality influences the well-being of couples and those around them. In addition, economic and social hardships can reduce overall happiness within marriages. According to a new study from the University of Missouri, low-income couples who receive government assistance, such as Medicaid or Food Stamps, are significantly less satisfied and committed in their marriages.

"We found that there's a unique relationship among [income](#) level, government assistance and marital satisfaction and commitment," said David Schramm, assistant professor in Human Development and Family Studies in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. "The study confirms that low income does have a [negative impact](#) on [marital quality](#), but there are additional factors as well. The relationship between income and marital satisfaction is influenced by other issues, including whether or not the couple receives some form of government assistance."

In the study, couples with low incomes (less than \$20,000 per year) scored significantly lower on five of the six dimensions of marital quality: overall satisfaction, commitment, divorce proneness, feelings of being trapped in a marriage, and negative interaction. Married individuals who received government assistance reported similar scores. Couples that experienced the combination of earning low-incomes while receiving government assistance had drastically lower levels of overall [marital satisfaction](#) and commitment.

"[Economic hardship](#), the feeling of strain and tension associated with money issues, tends to be a driver for other [stressors](#)," Schramm said. "For example, if couples can't pay the bills, then they are likely to be more irritable and stressed about other areas of life. This leads to negative interactions between spouses or individual feelings of being trapped because they can't survive on their own. It's a constant drain on many aspects of marital quality and overall well-being."

Few studies have focused on government assistance and marital quality. This study provides evidence supporting the distinct relationship between these factors. Future research should address additional factors beyond income and marital quality, Schramm said.

"It's likely there are pre-existing or co-existing issues that occur in addition to the receipt of government assistance," Schramm said. "Possible explanations for the relationship among income, government assistance and marriage include mental health issues, psychiatric disorders, physical handicaps and substance abuse problems."

Based on the findings and related research, Schramm plans to implement education programs aimed at low-income couples who receive government assistance.

"Now we've identified a specific population to target with marriage and relationship education," Schramm said. "No longer will we reach out to just low-income couples. Specifically, programs will target couples who receive government assistance and provide resources, including healthy relationship and wellness education, employment training and financial planning."

More information: The study, "Marital Quality and Income: An Examination of the Influence of Government Assistance," was published in the September issue of the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Couples who receive government assistance report less marital satisfaction, commitment, study finds (2011, September 7) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-09-couples-marital-satisfaction-commitment.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.