



Major Depressive Disorder and Marital Relationships

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Introduction

Marital conflict has been linked to depressive symptoms as characterized in Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). According to Beach, Katz, and Brody (2003), problems within the marriage are positively correlated with depressive symptoms such as sadness, irritable mood, lower libido, and sleep or appetite disturbances. Unresolved, these problems can result in the need for marriage therapy or if the problems are continued to be ignored, possibly separation and divorce.

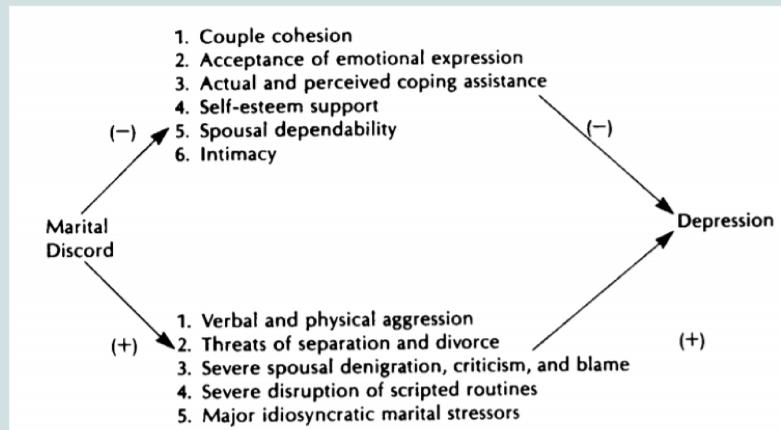


Marital Events

Influential and disruptive events in a marriage can be more likely to cause marital dissatisfaction. These can include death of a child, extreme financial difficulty, and infidelity. A study has found that the positive correlation between marital dissatisfaction and mental health problems can be attributed to the economic, social, and psychological influences of marriage and by the stability of the relationship (Uecker, 2012). A study by Beach, Katz, and Brody (2003) discovered that marital difficulties and extreme stress related to the marriage can be powerful enough to trigger a major depressive episode that might not have occurred without it.

Marital Discord Model of Depression

The Marital Discord Model of Depression illustrates the negative correlation between marital satisfaction and depression, suggesting that marital conflict is a predictor for future depressive symptoms and diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder. Depressive symptoms often co-occur with marital instability. The Marital Discord Model of Depression helps therapists design treatments for individual clients and couples (Beach & Cassidy, 1991).



Source: Beach, S. R., & Cassidy, J. F. (1991). Marital Discord Model of Depression. *Comprehensive Mental Health Care*, 1(2), 120.

Differences: Husband and Wife

Multiple studies found that the direction of marital dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms were reversed in men and women. According to a study by Fincham, Beach, Harold, and Osborne (1997) which examined 150 newlywed couples, the husband's depression is negatively correlated with lower marital satisfaction, but for the wife, lower marital satisfaction is negatively correlated with depression. Each sex attributes their marital quality and depressive symptoms reversely and this could be due to differences in their gender roles, perspective of the relationship as well as the etiology of the development of MDD.

Negative Outcomes

In the case of untreated or unaddressed marital discord, separation and divorce can be a possible outcome. According to Devine and Forehand (1996), increased marital dissatisfaction could predict a higher risk of divorce potential as well as increased the chances of a formal divorce. Marital conflict and separation and/or divorce can also have negative consequences on children and can contribute to problematic behavior in children when subjected to both the depressive symptoms in their parents and marital dissatisfaction (Franck & Buehler, 2007).



Treatment

Whisman et al. (2013) suggests that couple therapy is an option for individuals diagnosed with MDD, who are also in a relationship with marital discord. Aside from couple therapy, Couple Relationship and Education classes are also available and have been found to decrease depressive symptoms and increase overall marital satisfaction (Bradford et al., 2014). Another similar study has found that while couple therapy is helpful in improving marital satisfaction, a component addressing the specific depressive symptoms and MDD diagnosis is also needed (Denton, W.H., Golden, R.N., & Walsh, S.R., 2003). The treatments should be multidimensional and address all the problems from the marital distress to the Major Depressive Disorder in order for it to be truly effective and have the highest rates of efficacy.