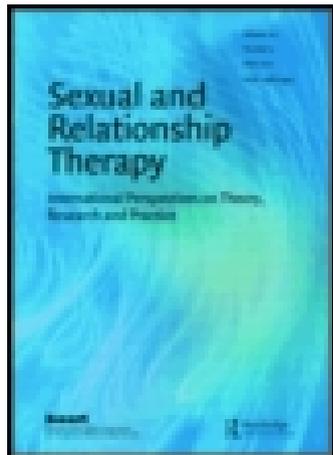


This article was downloaded by: [University of Cambridge]

On: 09 October 2014, At: 08:40

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Sexual and Marital Therapy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csmt19>

Marital Problems in General Practice

John Rust ^a, Susan Golombok ^b & Christine Pickard ^c

^a University of London Institute of Education ,

^b City University , London

^c General Practitioner in London ,

Published online: 14 Dec 2007.

To cite this article: John Rust , Susan Golombok & Christine Pickard (1987) Marital Problems in General Practice, *Sexual and Marital Therapy*, 2:2, 127-130, DOI: [10.1080/02674658708407855](https://doi.org/10.1080/02674658708407855)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02674658708407855>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Marital Problems in General Practice

JOHN RUST¹, SUSAN GOLOMBOK² & CHRISTINE PICKARD³

¹*University of London Institute of Education*, ²*City University, London* and

³*General Practitioner in London*

ABSTRACT *The prevalence of marital problems among general practice attenders was investigated by interviewing a random selection of 78 men and women who were waiting to see their doctor, and asking them to complete the Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State, which includes 28 questions about the state of the relationship. It was found that about 10% of marriages are on the verge of collapse, while a further 20% show characteristics which indicate that the participants would benefit from some form of advice or therapy.*

Marital Problems in General Practice

Most Western European countries showed a gradual increase in divorce following the Second World War, a decline during the 1950s and a constant upward trend after 1960. At the present rate, one in four marriages heads for dissolution in England and Wales. The accuracy of the statistics remains uncertain because divorce records code petitions filed and exclude marital breakdown and distress not located by the Home Office records. In 1976, the divorce rate was 10.1 per 1000 married and it was calculated that at least 22% of all females would divorce at least once by the age of 45 years (Thorne & Collard, 1979). In 1975, a working party set up by the Home Office in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Security, assembled information relating to marital problems. The Working Party on Marriage Guidance produced its report *Marriage Matters* in 1979 addressing itself to the delivery of more efficient services for distressed couples and the development and improvement of training.

The original marriage counsellors were general practitioners, clergy, educators, social workers and later gynaecologists. However, with the increase in marital breakdown, a substantial number of conciliation and treatment agencies have been established. The first marriage guidance centres were established in the 1930s and in the United Kingdom a number of services were established to aid distressed couples, e.g. The National Marriage Guidance Council and the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council in 1946 and the Family Discussion Bureau (now the Institute of Marital Studies) in 1948. Currently, other agencies such as The Family Welfare Association, Family Services Unit and The Jewish Marriage Education Council offer marital counselling, with help also available within the National Health Service. The General Practitioner still remains one of the major ports of first call for couples in

distress. Yet even the General Practitioner may be in ignorance of the true state of a patient's relationship. How common are marital problems in those who are still together?

To answer this question a random selection of 30 men and 48 women who were waiting to see their doctor was asked to complete the Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (Rust *et al.*, 1986; in press). This questionnaire provides standardised information about the state of a marriage. All participants had to be over 18 years of age, and either married or cohabiting. It is important to stress that those who took part were not attending the surgery for sexual or marital problems. The investigation was carried out over a six-month period. As it is estimated that over 40% of those registered with a GP visit the surgery in that period of time (Shepherd *et al.*, 1966) the sample should have been fairly representative of the practice, which was situated in inner London. The occupations of those who took part were wide-ranging, from unskilled manual to professional/managerial. The average age of the men and women respectively was 35.0 (SD 13.10) (range 18–67) and 31.8 (SD 9.67) (range 18–59).

The interviews and questionnaire administration were carried out by three psychological researchers, and each lasted about 15 minutes. About 18% of those asked in the waiting room refused to take part, though they did not generally know at this time that the questions were to be about their marriage. Only a few subjects subsequently refused to take part on the basis of this knowledge, representing about 7% of the sample.

The 28 questions of the GRIMS are all four choice, ranging from strongly agree, agree, to disagree and strongly disagree. There is no 'don't know' or 'uncertain' category. The scores of the men and the women on each item were compared on a chi-square test and found not to differ significantly, so that they have been combined for the purposes of this paper. The correlation between male and female partners' total GRIMS scores when both fill in the questionnaire has been found to be 0.77 (Rust *et al.*, 1986), so that we can use the response from one partner alone as an estimate for the relationship as a whole. Further information about this, as well as details on the reliability and validity of the GRIMS are available in the *GRIMS Test and Handbook* (Rust *et al.*, in press).

Nine per cent of the sample (7 out of 78) reported that they were on the verge of separation, and this percentage of seriously disturbed relationships was consistently supported by other items in the questionnaire. Thus 7 of the 78 couples (9%) no longer found any joy or excitement in their relationship, 7 felt they could no longer trust their partner, 7 felt there was no longer any 'give and take' in their relationship, 9 (12%) were bored at the prospect of spending the rest of their life with their partner, and 7 (9%) found difficulty making up after an argument. The same individuals responded in the same way to this set of items, showing about 10% overall of the population have marriages which are seriously on the rocks.

Many of the items in the questionnaire look at specific areas of the relationship, though these specifics tend to be heavily influenced by the state of the marriage overall. Thus 11 of the sample (14%) felt that their partner was not usually sensitive to and aware of their needs, 6 (8%) did not appreciate their partner's sense

of humour, 7 (9%) felt that their partner no longer listened to them, 5 (6%) did not enjoy sitting and talking with their partner, 11 (14%) felt that their relationship was stuck and no longer evolving and 6 (8%) found their relationship strained because their partner was always correcting them. This list of complaints was again highly interrelated and represented behaviours all in all of about 15% of the total sample, including those who were about to separate. It thus seems that where problems occur they tend to feed off each other and generate a downward spiral in the state of the relationship.

In looking at further specific problems it was found that 13 (17%) found it difficult to show their partner that they were feeling affectionate, 21 (25%) wished that there was more warmth and affection in their relationship, and 12 people (15%) reported that they were dissatisfied with the relationship. All of these items may be connected with sexual problems, which, in a study using the Golombok Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS) (Rust & Golombok, 1985, 1986a and 1986b, in press), a companion questionnaire to the GRIMS, have been shown to have an incidence of about 20% in general practitioner populations of this type (Golombok *et al.*, 1984).

Further minor problems were reported. Eighteen people (23%) complained that their partner was lazy and kept putting things off. Twenty six people (33%) stated that they often felt lonely even though they were with their partner, 14 people (18%) found that they were unable to 'agree to disagree' with their partner, 34 (44%) admitted that they had occasionally had second thoughts about their relationship, and 36 (47%) became competitive when they had to make decisions. On the basis of these results we can probably surmise that 33% of marriages in the general population have problems of a type that could benefit from some form of marriage guidance (Bennun, 1985).

Some other results showed interesting prevalence data. Twenty-four people (30%) reported that their partners had occasionally been disloyal, 59 people (76%) felt that life would still be worth living if their partner left them, 47 (60%) agreed that it was useless to carry on with a marriage beyond a certain point, 15 (19%) found that they generally liked different things from their partner, 17 (22%) found that one of them talked much more than the other, and 18 (23%) believed that marriage was more about security and money than about love. The converse of these items are also of interest, that is, the 24% who feel that life would not be worth living if their partner left them, and the 40% who believe that married people should stay together whatever the circumstances.

Most data on divorce and marital breakdown is based on samples of those who are separated or those who have asked for help. The data reported here, on the other hand, gives a straightforward picture of the state of existing marriages in the population at a particular time. It seems that about 10% of marriages are on the verge of splitting up, while a further 5% are seriously disturbed, showing constellations of serious problems which, if unattended, might be expected to lead almost inevitably to separation. A further 15% have difficulties which may deteriorate, but which, at the time of report, are probably amenable to marriage guidance or other intervention as they show characteristics for which counselling is known to be

effective. Thus about 30% of marriages show some form of problem. As we know that about 20% of marriages do eventually break down, this figure would seem to be realistic. In regards to the remaining 70% we have, of course, no knowledge of how they will change over time. In some ways marriages without problems are more vulnerable to life events (e.g. death of a relative, unemployment, etc.) than those who have already had to cope with some form of difficulty, while some of the marriages which report problems may well be doing so as a result of having to cope with major life events. The environmental factors, and in particular, life events, associated with deterioration in marriage need further research.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Aura Moncada, Anne Cunningham and Roger Goldbrom for assistance in interviewing subjects and collecting data.

References

- BENNUN, I. (1985) Prediction and responsiveness in behavioural marital therapy, *Behavioural Psychotherapy*, 13, pp. 186–201.
- GOLOMBOK, S., RUST, J. & PICKARD, C. (1984) Sexual problems encountered in general practice, *British Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 11, pp. 171–175.
- RUST, J. & GOLOMBOK, S. (1985) The Golombok Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction, *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 24, pp. 63–64.
- RUST, J. & GOLOMBOK, S. (1986a) The GRISS: a psychometric instrument for the assessment of sexual dysfunction, *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 15, pp. 153–161.
- RUST, J. & GOLOMBOK, S. (1986b) *The Golombok Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction* Windsor, NFER-Nelson.
- RUST, J., GOLOMBOK, S., & COLLIER, J. (in press) Marital problems and sexual dysfunction: how are they related? *British Journal of Psychiatry*.
- RUST, J., BENNUN, I., CROWE, M.J. & GOLOMBOK, S. (1986) The construction and validation of the Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State, *Sexual and Marital Therapy*, 1, pp. 34–40.
- RUST, J., BENNUN, I., CROWE, M. & GOLOMBOK, S. (in press) *The Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS) Test and Handbook*, (Windsor, NFER-Nelson).
- SHEPHERD, M., COOPER, B., BROWN, A.C. & KALTON, G. (1966) *Psychiatric Illness in General Practice* (London, Oxford University Press).
- THORNE, B. & COLLARD, J. (1979) *Who Divorces?* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul).
- WORKING PARTY ON MARRIAGE GUIDANCE (1979) *Marriage Matters: a consultative document* (London, HMSO).

Contributors

JOHN RUST, PhD., *Department of Child Development and Educational Psychology, Institute of Education, University of London, 25 Woburn Square, London WC1H 0AA, U.K.*

SUSAN GOLOMBOK, PhD., *The City University, London.*

CHRISTINE PICKARD, MB. ChB., *General Practitioner, London.*