

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**The perception of divorced Orthodox women of
the significance of various educational programs
on marriage**

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Abstract

In the ultra-Orthodox community there is a relatively new phenomenon of a rising divorce rate. More and more one hears about young couples who divorce shortly after getting married. Hence, the great interest regarding research that deals with factors related to divorce prevention in newly married couples.

Despite the general awareness, both globally and within Israeli society, regarding the effect of education on interpersonal relationships, myths still exist that knowledge about relationships and about building a stable home is acquired naturally by being married, thus eliminating the necessity to prepare for marriage. Although it is customary in ultra-Orthodox society to guide the couple before marriage, this training focuses mostly on matters of Halacha [religious law] and the beginning of the relationship, but not on furthering a mature relationship.

In this work, I examined the significance of various educational programs on marriage in the perception of divorced women from the ultra-Orthodox society.

The study is qualitative, and is based mainly on 15 ethnographic interviews with divorced women from the ultra-Orthodox sector. The research method is ethnographic, a method which seeks to document the cultural reality of ultra-Orthodox society in its natural setting.

This study's background and methodology is based mainly on current research by established researchers in the field and on recent research articles that touch on and shed light on the topic in question, examining the situation 'hands on'. It is based on scientific literature and makes use of statistics related to the topic. An additional factor addressed are halachic values as found in traditional and contemporary rabbinic literature. In addition, being both a member and involved with this society, I also based my work on my personal acquaintance with the fundamental values regarding relationships as found in the ultra-Orthodox population.

The results of this study provide significant new insight regarding the relationship between the characteristics of marriage education and the phenomenon of an increasing divorce rate within the Jewish, and in particular the ultra-Orthodox, population in Israel. These insights include a correlation between inappropriate marital education and the sharp rising divorce rate. Further insights address how marriage education can potentially avoid toxic relationships, contribute to the understanding of the relationships as they are in real time, and help prevent the waste of time and resources in seeking appropriate marital education during a marital crisis. Either way, marriage education serves as a preventive intervention designed to reduce divorce.

It documented the women's need for appropriate pre-marital guidance, primarily during school and late adolescents and prior to the search for a partner on their behalf, so they can form coherent perceptions regarding the significance of marriage. In addition, the need arises to accompany married couples throughout the initial years of marriage, as well as education of coping strategies and marriage educational enrichment for adequate relationships. Those needs were raised by the interviewees who felt these items were absent or lacking in their experience.

The results and outcomes of this study show that the interviewees attribute great importance to marriage education that women provide their children while growing up at home, out of personal duty and responsibility for this sort of education. This is in addition to the formal education that was found by these women to be lacking/insufficient.

Additionally, it was found that the education provided by the ultra-orthodox school system regarding relationships was in some regard misunderstood by these women, who mistakenly assumed that the Torah directive regarding marriage is: 'Whom is a kosher wife? She who fulfills EVERY wish of her husband', even if it was abusive or destructive to the relationship. In addition, the educational system does not address non-'generic' circumstances. It focuses more on pre-direction of proper construction and less on coping when it's not.

Furthermore, the results point to the significant lack of guidance given to brides and grooms in context of coping methods, continued accompaniment of the couple, and the absence of an appropriate address to turn to in a time of marital distress. The guidance focuses mainly on halachic and technical contents, hence devoting less and insufficient time to address the emotional aspect as well.

There was a general lack of knowledge and poor training regarding awareness of and the ability to identify red flags indicating violence, even when disguised in various ways.

Furthermore, according to the interviewees, there is clear indication that the prevailing causes of divorce are usually based on the spouse's violence, lack of commitment, or a personality or mental disorder, diagnosed or undiagnosed.

The insights emerging from this work demonstrate that pre-marital education, marital education, as well as various educational marriage enrichment programs, are vitally important and have the potential to reduce the incidence of divorce within the ultra-Orthodox community, and possibly among the general population in Israel.