

Policy Briefing

72 Waterloo St, Glasgow G2 7DA Tel: 0141 222 2166 info@scottishmarriagecare.org www.scottishmarriagecare.org

Counselling is a cost-effective solution that can save the government millions compared to the cost of family breakdown and its drain on local authorities, health and the economy.



COUNSELLING WORKS FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND STAGES

Research shows counselling helps unhappy relationships quickly, with 7-8 sessions being the optimum number (McKeown et al, 2002). SMC's own statistics support these findings, with clients usually attending between 4 and 6 sessions over a 6 week period. It costs SMC £40 to deliver a counselling session. At an average cost of £160 per couple this is a value for money service when compared to the £1.5 billion per year cost of family breakdown to the Scottish economy.

SMC clients come for counselling at all ages and stages in their relationships. There is no most common age group or length of relationship to seek counselling. SMC clients come from all social backgrounds. Less than one-fifth of SMC clients report that their relationship has ended on termination of the counselling process and clients report a high level of satisfaction with our service:

- 86% of SMC clients rate the effectiveness of the counselling they received as between 8 and 10 with 10 being excellent.
- Almost 100% of SMC clients would recommend our services to a friend.

Research shows counselling works equally well for both men and women and all social classes. It works by reducing stress, changing partners' negative behaviours of criticising, insulting and not listening, and by helping clients to become more satisfied with the partners' share in housework and childcare (McKeown et al, 2002). People who go to relationship counselling feel better about themselves afterwards and tend to develop more sharing and affectionate relationships (McCarthy et al, 1998).

WHY THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD INVEST IN RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING AND EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

Research shows that relationship counselling and early intervention services improve relationship satisfaction, strengthen relationships and prevent divorce and family breakdown. Investing in early intervention is therefore cost efficient for Local Authorities and the Scottish Executive rather than providing for high divorce rates and legal costs.

The Economy

Stable relationships are correlated with deprivation to the effect that becoming single increases deprivation and forming a partner reduces poverty (Berthoud et al, 2004). Costs of family breakdown to the economy include welfare support and payments for children and parents.



Employers typically lose out when employees suffer relationship difficulties and/or breakdown. Work productivity decreases and time is lost due to absence and ill health associated with relationship problems (Forthoother et al, 1996; McAllister et al, 1995). In one organisational study, 50% of clients said relationship difficulties were affecting their work.

Health

Relationship difficulties spill over into the workplace with men and women in unhappy relationships suffering from increased stress levels and high blood pressure, which increases risk of heart attack or stroke (Barnett, 2005).

Adults and children experiencing family breakdown are more vulnerable to physical and mental illness (McAllister et al, 1995; Sweeting et al, 1998). Stable relationships enhance physical and emotional well-being thereby reducing costs to health services and the economy (Mansfield, 1999; Kamp-Dush & Amato, 2005).

Social Work

Relationship counselling has a positive influence on children as well as the adults involved. Research consistently shows that good parenting is less likely to occur when the parents' relationship is troubled (Erel & Burman, 1995). Children seem to be much more aware of the link between the adult relationship and the parenting process than adults do. In one survey, seven out of ten teenagers questioned considered that 'parents getting on well together' is one of the most important factors in raising happy children. Yet only one third of parents questioned in the same survey thought that the relationship between parents was relevant to bringing up children (Mansfield, 2004).

There is much research to show children who have suffered divorce and family breakdown are more vulnerable to physical and mental illness; are likely to underachieve at school and are more likely to engage in youth offending and misuse of alcohol and drugs (West & Sweeting, 2002; Sweeting et al, 1998; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998; Pagani et al, 1998).

It is less well known however, that when married parents have a troubled relationship and fail to resolve conflicts successfully, their children tend to have problems at home and at school (Cowan & Cowan, 1997). The work done by clients in the counselling room has a positive effect on the adult couple relationship, which in turn is beneficial to children. Crucially, it is not only what the parents do with the child that matters, but also how parents relate to each other. Healthy relationships between parents are paramount for children's development and this is true even although parents may be separated.



ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE OF SCOTTISH MARRIAGE CARE (SMC)

- SMC is a national family support charity whose services are for everyone without exception.
- SMC has over forty years experience delivering specialist relationship services across Scotland. Thousands and thousands of adults and children have directly benefited from this service.
- SMC is an independent voluntary organisation which delivers services *directly* in 21 locations across Scotland.
- Relationship services available from SMC include: relationship counselling for couples and individuals; early intervention work with couples entering marriage or a committed relationship; relationship education work with young parents and young people in schools and youth groups, peer education projects, youth counselling and young parents counselling.
- SMC has over 100 volunteers delivering a range of tasks. The majority are relationship counsellors, professionally trained to a university accredited standard. Due to this voluntary effort and low running costs, SMC has independently been evaluated as a highly cost-efficient and effective organisation.
- SMC's turnover in 2004/5 was nearly half a million pounds. 78% was raised from non-statutory sources. 22% came from Scottish Executive grants.
- SMC is an Investor in People.