

# Marital/Relationship Issues: An EAP's Perspective

Insights from the WarrenShepell Research Group



WarrenShepell  


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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Marital cases are among the most common presented to WarrenShepell's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), currently comprising close to 30 per cent of all cases. As such, it is reasonable to assume that marital/relationship issues are at the root of much productivity loss for Canadian employers, including increased absenteeism for personal and family issues.

A review of 40,026 EAP marital cases from 2000, 2001 and 2002 reveals that, of the three types of marital cases (marital/relationship discord; separation/divorce and domestic violence) seen in WarrenShepell's EAP, the "marital/relationship discord" sub-category is:

- i) the most frequently assessed (73.9%);
- ii) becoming more prevalent over the past three years;
- iii) causing greater levels of stress among EAP clients.

While the divorce rate is still running at 50% among married Canadians, higher rates of marital / relationship discord as a presenting issue may in fact represent good news for couples -- and for employers. Factoring out marital/relationship cases with separation/divorce as a secondary issue (11.8%), which indicates that counselling was focused on managing the separation process, this still leaves 62.1% of all marital/relationship cases representing individuals seeking counselling to **improve the quality of their relationships**, rather than seeking counselling for issues related to separation/divorce. This bodes well for the health of relationships within the EAP user population, and therefore for the health of workers, as well.

A large body of research supports the vital link between social support/relationships and both physical and mental

health. Certain relationship characteristics have been found to protect us against disease and illness, depression, anxiety, stress and substance abuse, and reduce the likelihood of risk-taking behaviour. These characteristics include feelings of closeness and connection; the ability to resolve conflicts and make decisions as a couple; and open communication. Conversely, relationships that are angry and hostile, where there is criticism and blame, or ones that are rigid, inflexible or demand perfection of either partner or the couple as a whole, have been demonstrated to increase the risk for illness and disease.

The value and importance of relationship counselling become clear in view of these facts. Programs that support individuals' and couples' capacity to maintain healthy, happy relationships include marriage preparation, marriage enrichment, parenting and grand-parenting programs and, pertinent to this research report, employee assistance programs. These are all designed to educate and improve people's abilities to care for themselves and their most significant loved ones in a way that enhances their personal health and wellness, and by extension the health and wellness of families, workplaces and communities.

To order a complete copy of this report or others in the series, please contact:

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## The WarrenShepell Research Group

The WarrenShepell Research Group has been formed to gather, analyze and provide commentary on organizational health trends that affect our clients, their employees and families. Collecting and disseminating data about mental health issues, linking with some of the industry's highest profile research institutes and individual scholars, and drawing from our 24 years of expertise in the industry, the WarrenShepell Research Group's mandate is to help our clients and the broader business community understand the intricacies and the impact of poor mental health, work/life imbalances and related issues in our workplaces and in our communities.

The findings reported are based on WarrenShepell proprietary data. This research study was supported by data analysis by MASI Research Consultants, Inc., with additional research support provided by Jennifer Watson, Research Associate, and Gerry Smith, VP Organizational Health. The WS Research Group is directed by Karen Seward, VP Research and Development. Questions or comments may be directed to Karen Seward at 1-800-461-9722.