

Relationships in distress find support in web-based program, OurRelationship.com

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Relationships in distress are linked to mental and physical health problems in partners and their children. Within the U.S., one-third of married couples are distressed, and almost half of first marriages (and more than half of unmarried, cohabiting relationships) end in a divorce or separation.

"We know that high-quality marriage counseling can help couples solve problems and prevent [divorce](#). The problem is that in-person counseling is expensive and time-consuming," said Dr. Brian Doss, a [psychology professor](#) at the University of Miami College of Arts & Sciences, and co-developer of the online program OurRelationship.com.

Although couple therapy is effective in reducing relationship [distress](#), it is utilized by less than one-third of divorcing couples, and racial and ethnic minority and lower-income couples receive services at even lower rates.

In a recent study entitled, "A Randomized Controlled Trial of the Web-Based OurRelationship Program: Effects on Relationship and Individual Functioning," Doss and his UM colleagues tested the efficiency of the 8-hour web-based program. Couples completed online activities, such as selecting a problem to work on and watching videos on how to solve that problem, and had four 15-minute calls with project staff.

With funding from the National Institute of Health, the researchers conducted a nationwide study where 300 couples were randomly

assigned to either begin the program or selected for a two-month waitlist control group. "We assessed couples' relationships before, during, and after the program," said Doss.

According to the findings, the program improved relationship satisfaction, reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, and 97 percent of the couples said they would recommend the program to a friend.

"We're excited about the results because they show that couples can get almost all of the benefit they would get from in-person marriage counseling by completing this brief program," said Doss. "The results also showed that, by improving their relationship, it made people significantly less depressed and anxious."

In July, an updated version of the program, sponsored through a federal grant from the Administration for Children and Families, will be available. This version can be completed on a smartphone and will include coaches to help couples through the program. It will be available to [married couples](#), couples living together, and same-sex couples. As part of a research study, couples will be paid up to \$200 for completing research assessments.

"I think the most rewarding thing to me about this program is that we're able to help couples who otherwise wouldn't get any assistance for their relationship problems," said Doss. "This program seems especially important for couples who don't have the time or the money to go to face-to-face counseling. At the end of the day, it's rewarding to be able to help so many [couples](#) and make a real difference in their lives and the lives of their children."

The study will be published in an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

Provided by University of Miami

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