

Fostering positive values.

Dr. Damian Spiteri and Ms. Anna
Micallef (Caritas Malta).

Research about the way in which
values are lived, experienced, and
perceived in families where spouses
are not married.

Overview of Presentation.

Different types of families interviewed:

- Separated or divorced people.
- Person married before and married again.
- Unmarried mothers/fathers.
- Cohabiting partners.

Issues and gaps highlighted by literature review

- Objective/subjective approaches to the manner in which values are seen and understood;
- Contribution of all family members, including children and young people, as well as the influence of media and other agents of socialization on the values that people internalize;
- Cultural influences on family models.
- The influence of the mental picture of the 'original family.'

Research aims, objectives and methods

- To analyze the way in which family values are lived, experienced and perceived in families where the spouses are unmarried or where the marriage has failed.
- To explore ways in which such families experience and recommend that agencies and professional personnel support them in the area of family-needs.

Methodology, methods, data and theoretical frameworks.

- Qualitative study;
- Based on 12 in-depth interviews with people who had experienced some form of termination in their spousal relationship or who for some reason did not marry, 6 from Malta and 6 from Isle of Man;
- Data analyzed using open-ended interview schedules that were personally administered.
- Findings presented as themes. The core theme depicts how people define healthy families.

Questions asked (1).

1. What were the factors that contributed to the “breakdown” (or perpetuation) of your relationship with your partner (or ex)?
2. What are your views about couples committing themselves to living together for a life-time?
3. What do you think a healthy family is?

Questions asked (2).

4. What do you think are the major challenges that you face in your daily life today? Do you think that they are the same challenges that you faced before your relationship had first started?
5. What messages about family life did you get, as a child, from the way you saw your parents living? Do you think these messages affected you in your own family life?

Questions asked (3).

6. Did you learn anything about family life in school or at other places? Do you think it affected you in any way?
7. When you felt you needed help in meeting your family's needs, where did you go to find help? What help did you need?
8. Do you still need this help today?

Questions asked (4).

9. If you had to speak about relationship commitment to your children, what would you say about it?
10. What do you see as the major strengths of your family now?

Findings (1).

It is believed that a life-long commitment between partners is possible.

How?

- Being true to oneself in partner/mate selection.
- Commitment must be mutual.
- 'Talking the talk' is as important as 'walking the walk'.

Findings(2).

The family-of-origin was deemed as the most influential agent of socialization upon marital relationships (rather than school, etc.),

How?

- Family-of-origin serves as a role model/ 'inverse' role model.
- Family-of-origin passes on messages that are internalized by family-members.

Findings (3).

The challenges faced:-

- Letting go of past hurts;
- The dilemma between 'give and take' and self-gratification at all costs;
- The desire to transmit pro-social and desirable attitudes and behaviors to children and offspring based on forging healthy boundaries in interpersonal encounters and appropriate self-talk.
- Material aspects.

Findings (4).

- The help available from other family members (eg. Parents, siblings);
- Sometimes unavailable;
- When support was available, what was mostly needed was a listening ear and a form of guidance;
- In most cases provided material rather than emotional support.

.

Findings (5).

In Isle of Man, the general perception of the respondents was that the system of social care did not help the couples by such means as:

Promoting critical curiosity;

Promoting systemic awareness;

Providing information that supported them as a couple and as a family.

Findings (6).

- In Malta, the system of social care was not referred to by the participants.
- Professional help was often sought on a voluntary basis (eg. Through support group of Caritas).
- Help is usually sought from parents and other members of families-of-origin.

Core theory proposed.

- A healthy family is seen as one that is able to tackle challenges on a day-to-day basis. It is based on attributes such as intimacy, commitment, and passion, values such as honesty and openness, and the presence of a spousal bond alongside a parental one. It is based on empathy, compassion, kindness, forgiveness and overall emotional presence.

Workshop.

Sound values in different family contexts.

How do we promote them (1) with our children and (2) within wider society?