

6-1-2005

Development of the Remarriage Belief Inventory for Researchers and Educators

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Recommended Citation

Higginbotham, B. J., & Adler-Baeder, F. (2005). Development of the Remarriage Belief Inventory for Researchers and Educators. *The Journal of Extension*, 43(3), Article 20. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol43/iss3/20>

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Abstract

The Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI) was designed to further elicit knowledge about the increased divorce risk for remarriages and to aid educators in program work with couples preparing for or living in stepfamilies. Utilizing a sample of 546 young adults, this article addresses the discriminant validity of the RMBI's five factors. The RMBI is an empirically validated questionnaire that can be used to assess an individuals' level of endorsement of five beliefs about remarriages and stepfamilies. For educators, the questionnaire is offered for application in prevention and intervention programs to raise awareness of beliefs among members of stepfamilies.

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Introduction

Recent figures show that approximately half of marriages annually are remarriages for one or both partners, and the majority (approximately 65%) of those adults have children from a previous relationship, thus forming stepfamilies (e.g., Chadwick & Heaton, 1999). Overall, estimates are that half of Americans today are or will be in a step relationship in their lifetime (Larson, 1992). Thus, there is a great need for educators to offer programs and resources for stepfamilies, and this need will only increase.

There is also a need to expand the empirical knowledge base on processes in stepfamilies, because these families are comparatively understudied in family science (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). The Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI) was designed for use (a) in research of couple functioning in stepfamilies in order to further elicit knowledge about the increased divorce risk for remarriages and (b) in program work with couples preparing for or living in stepfamilies.

Background

It is estimated that between 55 and 60% of all remarriages will dissolve (Glick, 1989) compared to approximately 50% for first marriages (e.g., Waite & Gallagher, 2000). In the research on first marriages there is evidence to suggest that cognitions (e.g., expectations, beliefs, and attitudes) may contribute to marital dissolution. For example, the endorsement of particular expectations, which if/when they are not met, lead to frustration, difficulties in adjusting, and have a negative impact on marital satisfaction and stability (e.g., Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Moller & Van Zyl, 1991).

There are a number of specific issues, beliefs, and expectations that are unique to and particularly salient in remarriages (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). These expectations appear to be influenced by the societal "norm" of first family functioning, which may be unrealistic in stepfamilies. Papernow (1987) offers a few examples, including:

The hope that the members of the new family will love each other in the way that members of biological families do; the conviction that this new spouse will be a better mother or father to these children than the ex-spouse; the wish that the new family will heal the hurts of the previous divorce or death; the fantasy that the couple's caring for each other will be experienced between stepparents and their stepchildren (p. 632).

Just as instruments that identify dysfunctional beliefs in first marriages have aided the researchers and practitioners who work with couples, a reliable and valid instrument that assesses remarriage beliefs can aid practitioners who provide remarriage and family life education. Specifically, educators can utilize the Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI) in programs to assist family members in identifying and discussing their individual expectations/beliefs about remarriage and stepfamilies. The study described here is an initial test of the RMBI's discriminant validity.

Method

Item Selection and Refinement

To generate the items on the RMBI, a review of the empirical and clinical literature on stepfamily "myths" and "beliefs" was conducted, and a list was compiled. Five themes were identified, and several questions were developed that were expected to tap into each theme (n = 43): (a) History is unimportant, (b) Children are the priority, (c) Stepfamilies are second-class, (d) New partner is better than previous partner, and (e) Adjustment comes quickly.

Sample

Data for this study came from a sample of undergraduates attending a public university in the South. It was determined that young adults were an acceptable sample for discriminant validity testing because it is assumed that all adults have some belief or notion about how stepfamilies function based on their experiences within our society. Five hundred forty-six questionnaires were returned. The sample was predominately white (91%) and female (85%). The mean age was 20.5.

Results

Five factors were confirmed using a principle component factor analysis with promax rotation. Eliminating items that cross-loaded or loaded less than .45 resulted in 24 items (see Appendix for RMBI items). The alpha reliability coefficient was .78. Each factor (a) satisfied Kaiser's (1958) criterion of eigen values greater than 1.00, (b) accounted for an appreciable percentage of total score variance, and (c) had items that principally loaded on one factor. Factor loadings are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.
Factor Loadings from Factor Analyses of Remarriage Belief Inventory

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
RMBI2	.705				
RMBI1	.687				
RMBI15	.613				
RMBI27	.603				
RMBI30	.594				
RMBI5	-.487				
RMBI16		.688			
RMBI31		.630			

RMBI19		.615			
RMBI7		.597			
RMBI9		.558			
RMBI8		.541			
RMBI22			.737		
RMBI11			.725		
RMBI34			.582		
RMBI18			.565		
RMBI43				.715	
RMBI21				-.627	
RMBI3				.539	
RMBI36				-.533	
RMBI28					-.613
RMBI32					.568
RMBI14					-.566
RMBI25					.560
<p><i>Note.</i> Principal Component Analysis. Promax rotation with Kaiser Normalization.</p> <p>Factor 1: Quick adjustment--assumed stepparent authority and attachment Factor 2: Partner is better than previous partner Factor 3: Stepfamilies are second-class Factor 4: Children are the priority over the couple relationship Factor 5: History is unimportant</p>					

Conclusion

Despite the prevalence of remarriages and stepfamilies, relatively few empirically validated resources are available to Extension educators who provide remarriage and family life education. In research on marriages and families, the role of beliefs/expectations in promoting relationship quality and healthy family functioning is established (e.g., Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000; Moller & Van Zyl, 1991). However, no measure exists to assess beliefs and expectations about remarriages and stepfamilies.

The study of the Remarriage Belief Inventory described here has resulted in an empirically validated questionnaire that can be used to assess an individuals' level of endorsement of five

beliefs about remarriages and stepfamilies. Further work is planned to empirically assess the factorial structure of the RMBI with a remarried sample as well as the predictive nature of each set of beliefs on remarriage quality.

For educators, the questionnaire is offered for application in prevention and intervention programs to raise awareness of beliefs among members of stepfamilies. Educational applications include using the RMBI as a starter activity in family-life education classes on remarriages, as a self-assessment, or as a couple activity to promote communication and consensus on expectations regarding stepfamily functioning. In both program and research contexts, the RMBI can be utilized in efforts to strengthening remarriages and stepfamilies and to meet the needs of this ever-increasing population.

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Appendix*

Items on the 24-item version of the RMBI

RMBI Please indicate the extent to which you believe that each of the following statements is true or false.

1
Very
false

2
More false
than true

3
Neither

4
More true
than false

5
Very
true

Adjustment comes quickly	
2	A new spouse should be able to step right into the role as parent to his/her stepchildren.
1	<i>A stepfamily should operate like a biological family</i>
15	A stepparent should share in child-discipline duties right away.

30	A stepparent should expect the other family members to open their hearts to him/her as readily as they do to each other.
27	Stepparents should presume intimacy and authority with the children.
5	Stepfamily members should not be expected to immediately love one another
Partner is better than previous partner	
16	A second (or third, or fourth) spouse should be a better spouse than their predecessor.
31	The new spouse should be more understanding than a previous spouse.
19	A new spouse should be more "in-tune" to the quality of the relationship.
9	A new spouse should fill the emotional holes that the previous mate left empty
7	A remarriage will be more fulfilling and satisfying than previous relationships
8	A remarrying individual is more choosy about whom s/he marries.
Stepfamilies are second-class	
22	Overall, a stepfamily is a poor substitute for a biological family
11	A stepfamily can't offer children the kinds of things that a biological family can.
18	Individuals in a remarriage are less committed to making their relationship last
34	Problems that occur in a stepfamily probably would not occur in a family in which children live with both biological parents.
Children are the priority over the couple relationship	
43	Wishes of the children take priority over the wishes of the new spouse.
21	Needs of the new spouse should come before needs of the children.
36	The relationship with the spouse is the most important relationship in a family.
3	In a stepfamily, children should feel they come first.
History is unimportant	

28	The functionality of past relationships has little to do with remarriage success.
14	An individual's past relationship history has little impact on a remarriage.
32	A remarrying individual is likely to repeat the same patterns/behaviors as those in previous marriages.
25	Individuals who have divorced are more likely to divorce again.

*For copy of the complete RMBI, contact the first author by email.

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