

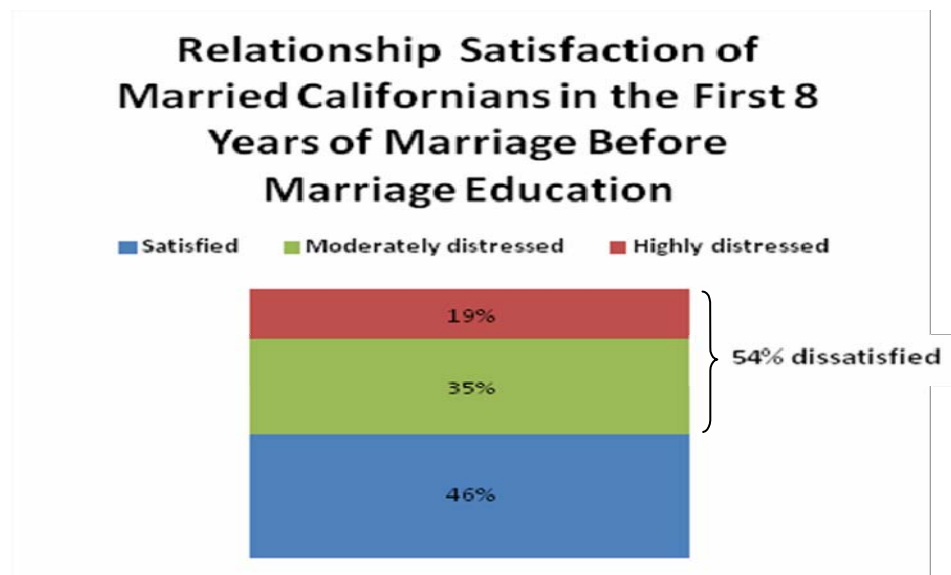


## RESEARCH BRIEF #6

### Marriage Education Helps Couples Even in the High-Divorce-Risk Years

Data from the nation's largest and most diverse study on the impact of Relationship and Marriage Education (RME) classes show that marital satisfaction improves substantially after participating in RME, a finding with significant ramifications during the high-risk early years of marriage.

With half of all divorces occurring in the first eight years of marriage,<sup>1</sup> there are two distinct periods of steep decline in marital satisfaction within this period: during the first four years of a marriage, and then again during the second four years.<sup>2</sup> Thus, researchers at Healthy Relationships California were not surprised to find high levels of marital dissatisfaction among those married less than eight years who participated in their study of 17,245 Californians taking an RME course. More than half of those married eight years or less were dissatisfied with their marriage when they began an RME course.<sup>3</sup>



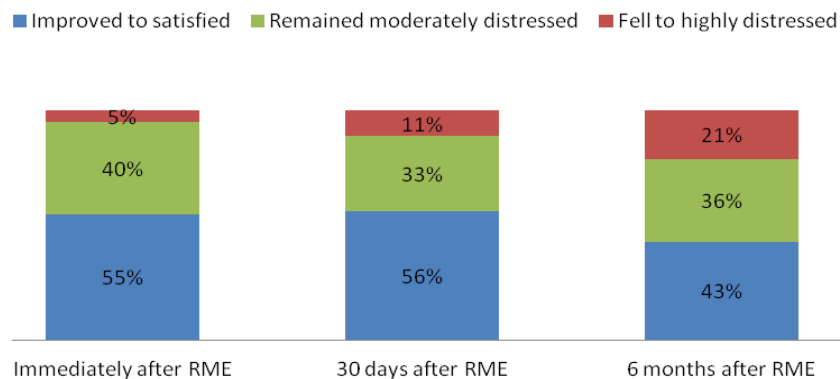
<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2007). "Most People Make One Trip Down the Aisle, But First Marriages Shorter, Census Bureau Reports." [www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/marital\\_status\\_living\\_arrangements/cb07-131.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/marital_status_living_arrangements/cb07-131.html). Retrieved 2012-03-27.

<sup>2</sup> Kurdek. (1999). "The nature and predictors of the trajectory of change in marital quality for husbands and wives over the first 10 years of marriage." *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 1283-1296.

<sup>3</sup> Results from this study come from participants in Relationship and Marriage Education classes sponsored by Healthy Relationships California and taught by facilitators in a wide variety of venues throughout California. The RME curricula are skills-based courses, generally 8 to 16 hours in length, and generally with a focus on Communication and Conflict Resolution skills. The participants in this report represent a subsample of participants who were married up to eight years and reported on their marital satisfaction before the course and after the course (n = 483).

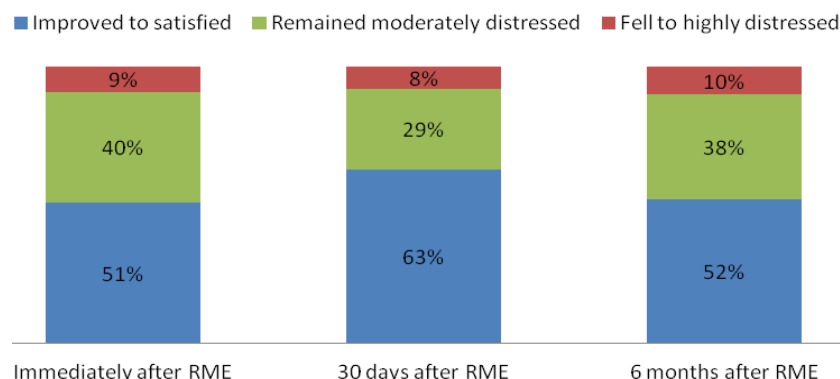
After participating in RME for 8 to 16 hours, researchers found a 42% increase in the number of participants who were satisfied with their marriage. Importantly, 55% of participants married four years or less who had been moderately distressed before the course reported being satisfied with their marriage immediately after the course. Thirty days after the course, 56% of those moderately distressed before the course were satisfied with their relationship, and nearly half of the formerly moderately distressed remained satisfied six months after participating in Marriage Education.

### Impact of RME on Satisfaction of Moderately Distressed Married Participants in First 4 Years of Marriage



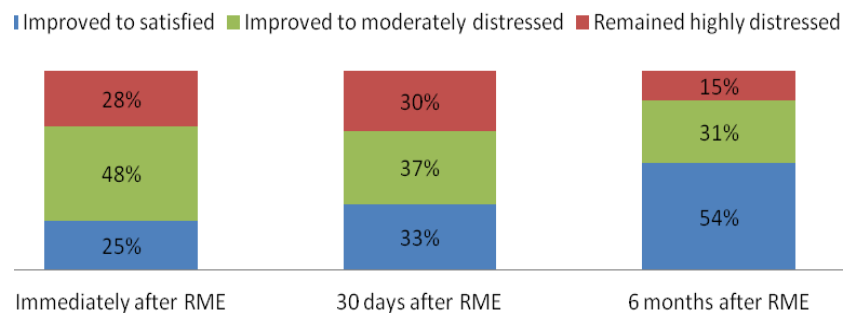
After participating in a Relationship and Marriage Education course, the majority of moderately distressed participants married four to eight years reported being satisfied with their marriage, an increase of 35%. More than 63% of those married four to eight years and who had been moderately distressed before the course were satisfied in their relationship 30 days after the course, and most notably, the satisfaction remained high for 52% of previously moderately distressed individuals six months after participating in RME.

### Impact of RME on Satisfaction of Moderately Distressed Participants Married 4 to 8 Years



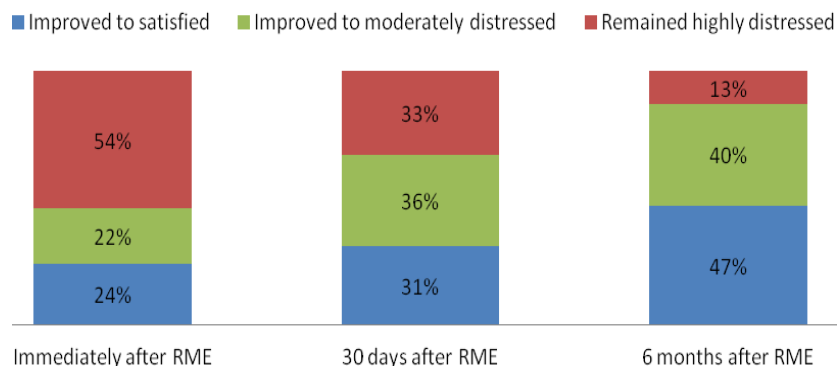
Even those participants who were the most distressed about their marriage before the RME course made substantial gains in satisfaction by the end of the course. Of those who were married less than four years and who were highly distressed before the course, one-quarter reported being satisfied with their marriage at the end of the course. These participants maintained this increased level of satisfaction 30 days after the course (rising to 33% who were satisfied), and also at six months after participating in RME, when more than half (54%) of the previously highly distressed participants were now satisfied with their marriage.

### Impact of RME on Satisfaction in Highly Distressed Married Participants in First 4 Years of Marriage



Among participants who were in the high-divorce-risk stage of four to eight years of marriage and who entered the RME course with high levels of marital distress, nearly one-quarter had become satisfied with their relationship immediately after participating in RME, and this group grew to 31% after 30 days. Most importantly, six months after participating in RME, nearly one-half (47%) of these formerly highly distressed individuals were satisfied with their marriages.

### Impact of RME on Satisfaction in Highly Distressed Participants Married 4 to 8 Years



## **Effects of RME for Distressed Couples in the Early Years of Marriage**

This research is particularly noteworthy as it demonstrates the potential of RME to increase marital satisfaction at a time when marriages have been found to be most vulnerable. Although divorce is most likely to happen in the first eight years of marriage, about half of participants from this high-divorce-risk cohort who were distressed in their relationship before taking a Relationship and Marriage Education course had become satisfied with their marriage after participating in a relatively brief RME course. This result held both for participants who were moderately distressed and for those who had been highly distressed before the RME course, and the positive trend lines after RME were either maintained or increased over time. As a result, this study adds evidence to the value of Relationship and Marriage Education not only for couples wishing to enhance a solid marriage but also for those whose marriage is foundering.

### **These results are considered both significant and important for several reasons:**

1. Because research shows that divorce is most common in the first eight years of marriage, these results demonstrate how RME can reduce marital distress during this critical period of time. These results, therefore, lend credibility to the potential of Marriage Education as a potent means for reducing the incidence of divorce for couples during their critical first eight years of marriage.
2. The majority of individuals who improved their relationships after participating in RME were able to maintain the positive changes in their relationships for at least six months.
3. As the RME classes evaluated in this study are relatively short, ranging from 8 to 24 hours in length, they present many couples with a means for improving their relationship that can occur over just one or two weekends.
4. As the cost of RME classes is significantly lower than marital therapy, RME presents couples with a relatively inexpensive investment for increasing marital satisfaction, and also represents a promising and cost-effective means for investing in family health and well-being, producing results that benefit a wide range of other social factors that are linked to marital outcomes.