Author's response to reviews

Title: The Buffering Effect of Relationship Satisfaction on Emotional Distress in Couples

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Jimmar Dizon

Please find enclosed the revised manuscript:
Gun-Mette B. Røsand, Kari Slinning, Malin Eberhard-Gran, Espen Røysamb and Kristian Tambs: The Buffering Effect of Relationship Satisfaction on Emotional Distress in Couples

Thank you for the reviews and for your comments on our manuscript. We are pleased that you and the reviewers found the paper of some value, and that you are willing to consider a revised draft.

We hope this revised manuscript addresses your concerns. We found the comments very constructive and useful and believe that their impact have improved the paper. A detailed description of how we have addressed the issues raised by you and the reviewers follows below.

Editorial comments:
We have addressed the comments from the reviewers in a revised manuscript and given a point-by-point response to the concerns.

All changes made in the revised manuscript have been highlighted with ‘tracked changes’.

Our revised manuscript conforms to the journal style, and the files are formatted in accordance with BMC Public Health’s Instructions for authors.

On behalf of the authors, sincerely yours

Gun-Mette B. Røsand, PhD
Comments from reviewer 1, Steven Beach

Minor Essential Revision

1. On page, change the first two words under the heading “buffering effects of relationship factors from “besides of” to “in addition to”.

Our response:
This is corrected (p. 7).

Comments from reviewer 2, Joseph M Trombello

Minor essential revisions

- On page 4, the following sentence: “Poor mental health in men and women, in particular depression, is a major health problem that not only affect individuals, but also may have severe negative effects on their families” should be revised to “Poor mental health – in particular depression – among men and women is a major health problem that not only affects individuals, but also may have severe negative effects on their families” in order to improve grammar.

Our response:
Thank you for this comment. We have revised this sentence as suggested (p. 4).

- On page 7, the following sentence demonstrates poor grammar: “Besides of the strong main effects of relationship satisfaction on mental health that has previously been demonstrated [17-21], a good relationship may also have an additional protective effect under otherwise stressful conditions” (i.e. the “of” is not necessary).

Our response:
The sentence is corrected in accordance with reviewer 1 who suggests that “besides of” is changed to “in addition to” (p. 7).

- On page 9, the authors write that “The women, but not the men, are also followed up at later times.” “Are” should be changed to “were”, and the authors may also want to briefly mention the frequency and duration of the follow-up intervals.

Our response:
The sentence is corrected (p. 9). We have also added some information about the follow-ups here (p. 9).

- There is a typo in the following sentence on page 21, as “if” should be changed to “of”: “The literature shows a decline in marital satisfaction after pregnancy [63, 64], which is what to expect if the time when expecting a child is among the happiest periods in many couples lives.”
Our response:
We thank the reviewer for making us aware of this typo. The sentence is corrected (p. 20).

- The above sentence seems to also miss the point that pregnancy can be a significant stressor that affects marital satisfaction (i.e. it’s more than just a regression to the mean phenomenon.)

Our response:
We have added one sentence on page 20 about possible stress that may be associated with child birth and the transition to parenthood.

Discretionary revisions

- On page 5, the authors write: “To date, most research on relationship dissatisfaction and psychological distress has been based on small samples that are not necessarily representative of the population of married or cohabiting individuals.” This might be a good place for them to discuss the strengths/aims or the need for their current study.

Our response:
We thank the reviewer for this comment. We have added a sentence in the end of the paragraph (p. 5).

- On page 6, the following sentence: “However, most of the research, particularly when it comes to pregnant couples, is based on small samples with limited power to obtain precise estimates and to investigate interaction effects” could be expanded, as it provides another opportunity for the authors to discuss how their work might add to the literature.

Our response:
Thank you for reminding us of this point again. We have added one sentence on page 5 as suggested. We nevertheless think it will be a repetition to remind the reader again about the need of large studies on page 6.

- Again, on page 7, the authors state that “To our knowledge, no previous large-scale study has investigated the direct effect of one spouse’s relationship satisfaction on the other’s emotional distress.” Here, the authors might mention that this is a key aim of the current work.

Our response:
We have added a sentence in the end of the paragraph (p. 7) underlining this point.

- It is a bit cumbersome to read at the bottom of all of the tables what results are significant versus non-significant. The authors may consider replacing this text with p-values or asterisks as is more common to denote significant effects. On the other
hand, I understand if the authors specifically used the text at the bottom of tables to avoid this confusion (i.e. I see pros and cons either way).

Our response:

Table 1: We think it is more visually informative to add “NS” to the two non-significant coefficients than to add asterisks for all figures except for the two. We have added “NS” for the two non-significant values in Table 1.

In the rest of the tables, only significant results are included. We would prefer to keep the rest of the tables unchanged. The alternative would be including all results, the significant as well as the non-significant in the tables, which would have made the tables much bigger.