

# Counselling and the dual career couple

Kelly Arbeau

CPA Student Co-Representative, U.N.B.S.J.

**Source:** Arbeau, K. (2001). Counselling and the dual career couple. *Psynopsis: Canada's Psychology Newspaper*, 23(1), 22.

Couple counselling helps to resolve issues in relationships. Counselling dual-earner couples necessitates a special understanding of the needs and situations unique to such individuals. Atkinson et al.(1990) state that problems which are normal in relationships, such as talking about feelings and needs, “become intensified” when the interpersonal conflicts involve a married couple. Research has shown that these problems can be further exacerbated when both husband and wife work outside of the home (Hertz, 1999).

There are several options available to the relationship counsellor. For instance, if differing ideas about each spouse's role has led to misunderstanding among the pair, the counselor can work with the couple to help them reach an agreement about the contribution each person will make to the marriage (Atkinson et al., 1990). The behavioral approach to skills training may be used to teach proper methods of communication or problemsolving skills (Spiegler & Guevremont, 1998). Further, cognitive restructuring may clarify an individual's differing perceptions of the other person's behaviour and motivations (1998).

The distinction between dual-earner and dual-career couples is made in research on dual-income couples. A relationship in which the partners hold nonprofessional jobs is called a dual-earner family. In contrast, a dual-career couple is one in which both partners choose to maintain professional

careers (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969, as cited in Jordan et al., 1989). Dual-career couples tend to have a higher socioeconomic status due to comparatively high education levels and incomes, combined with having fewer children (Spain & Nock, 1984, as cited in Jordan et al., 1989). Dual-income couples face several challenges unique to their situation. For example, the couple may find it difficult to pursue their careers concurrently. If one spouse is offered a new job in another geographic locale, the family must decide whether or not to move – and hence, which partner's opportunity for career advancement to pursue. Conversely, the couple might maintain a commuter relationship, where the spouses live and work in different cities or even countries. As well, problems can develop from competition between spouses to be more successful in their respective career than the other. The combined responsibilities of household duties, career responsibilities, and personal issues can lead to role overload (Brown, Taylor, & Williams, 1997). Further, while working opposite shifts avoids the need for outside childcare, it significantly reduces the amount of time that husband and wife can spend together. A dual-income couple may have to work within a limited framework of alternatives, primarily due to financial constraints. While Becker and Moen (1999) report that families are increasingly choosing to reduce their workload in order to spend more together, this is simply not an option for all couples. Couples tend to seek counselling only if they have some hope of the process being

effective (Overton, 1994). Counsellors will work with clients to bring this sense of hope to the forefront.