June Webinar: From Research to Practice: Examining New Findings on Marriage and Relationship Education Programs
June 30, 2010 ❖ 1:00 pm-2:30pm (EST)

Presenters:
Alan Hawkins, Ph.D., Brigham Young University
Robert Wood, Ph.D., Mathematica Policy Research
Jennifer Miller Gaubert, Operations Associate, MDRC
How to ask a question:

1. Click on the word “Q&A”
2. Type your question in the top box
3. Click on the word “Ask” to submit your question

Type your question here.
DOES RELATIONSHIP & MARRIAGE EDUCATION WORK FOR LOWER-INCOME COUPLES?
A LOOK AT THE EMERGING EVIDENCE

Alan J. Hawkins, Ph.D.
Brigham Young University
Middle-income, white, engaged/married, small N.

Outcome research:
- About 150 evaluation studies
- Recent meta-analytic studies: moderate + effects

References
Differences from phase I:

- Lower-income samples
- Racially/ethnically diverse samples
- Relationship status diversity (youth, single, dating, romantically involved, cohabiting, married, remarried)
- Larger samples
- Higher dosages
- Relationship aggression awareness/prevention
- Parenting issues
- Service integration
CRE Phase II Process Evaluation Research

- Recruitment challenges; form partnerships (health, employment, DV, social services, etc.)
- Retention challenges (lots of support for attendance)
- But significant successes as well as struggles
- Able to engage fathers
- Appreciate both couple focus and parenting info
- High consumer satisfaction with programs
CRE Phase II Outcome Evaluation Research

- Early evidence: moderate positive effects on communication skills and relationship quality
- Recent meta-analytic study of RME studies with mostly lower-income samples (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010)*
- Meta-analysis: systematic synthesis that combines results of all related studies
  - Experimental studies: $d = .25$ ($p < .05$, $k = 3$) (Cowan et al., 2009; Cox & Shirer, 2009; Stanley et al., 2010)
  - Pre-post (one group): $d = .29$ ($p < .05$, $k = 12$) (Mostly ACF/OFA-funded demonstration projects)

FUTURE WORK

- Longer-term outcomes
- Wider range of outcomes
- Youth relationship literacy education
- Test program characteristics and components
- Cost effectiveness analyses
Strengthening Unmarried Parents’ Relationships: The Early Impacts of Building Strong Families

Robert G. Wood • Sheena McConnell • Quinn Moore • Andrew Clarkwest • JoAnn Hsueh (MDRC)
What Is BSF?

- Relationship skills education program for unwed parents

Serves couples who:
- Are romantically involved
- Are expecting or had a baby in last 3 months
- Were unmarried when baby was conceived
- Passed an intimate partner violence screen

Model implemented by eight local programs
The BSF Program Model

Group Sessions on Relationship Skills

- Communication, conflict management
- Affection, intimacy, trust
- Considering marriage
- The transition to parenthood
- Parent-infant relationship

Individual Support from Family Coordinators
- Encouragement for program participation
- Reinforcement of relationship skills
- Ongoing emotional support

Assessment and Referral to Support Services
- Education
- Employment
- Mental health
- Child care
- Housing
- Legal Services
Group Sessions: The Program Core

- Weekly sessions run by trained facilitators
- Guided by one of three curricula developed and adapted for the study
- Groups ranged in size from 4 to 15 couples
- Intervention intended to be intense: 30 to 42 hours of instruction offered
### The Eight Local BSF Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Sponsor Organization</th>
<th>Curriculum Used</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>Georgia State University, Latin American Association</td>
<td>Loving Couples, Loving Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Center for Urban Families</td>
<td>Loving Couples, Loving Children</td>
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<td>Baton Rouge, Louisiana</td>
<td>Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge</td>
<td>Loving Couples, Loving Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana (3 counties)</td>
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<td>Houston</td>
<td>Healthy Family Initiatives</td>
<td>Love’s Cradle</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Angelo, Texas</td>
<td>Healthy Families San Angelo</td>
<td>Love’s Cradle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oklahoma City</td>
<td>Public Strategies, Inc.</td>
<td>Becoming Parents for Low-Income, Low-Literacy Couples</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Overview of BSF Impact Evaluation

- 5,102 couples randomly assigned from July 2005 to March 2008
- Surveys of both mothers and fathers
  - at 15 months and 36 months
- This analysis based on 15-month survey
  - 87% of couples responded (4,237 couples)
- Examined effects averaged across programs, separately for each program, for subgroups
How Might BSF Affect Outcomes?

The BSF Program
- Group Sessions
- Family Coordinators
- Referrals to Support Services

Services
- Relationship Skills Education
- Support Services

Couple’s Relationship
- Relationship Status
- Relationship Quality

Family
- Co-Parenting
- Father Involvement
- Parenting Behaviors
- Parent and Family Well-Being

Child*
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language Development

* Examined at 36 months
IMPACTS AVERAGED ACROSS THE EIGHT PROGRAMS
Averaged Across All Programs, BSF Had No Effect on Relationship Status

![Bar chart showing percentage of couples in different relationship statuses: Still Romantically Involved, Living Together (Married or Unmarried), Married. BSF Couples and Control Group Couples are compared.](chart.png)
Averaged Across All Programs, BSF Had No Effect on Relationship Quality

- Examined five dimensions of relationship quality
  - Relationship happiness
  - Support and affection
  - Use of constructive conflict behaviors
  - Avoidance of destructive conflict behaviors
  - Fidelity

- Also examined intimate partner violence and co-parenting

- No effects on these measures
Averaged Across All Programs, BSF Had No Effect on Father Involvement

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father Lives with Child</td>
<td>BSF Couples 64, Control Group Couples 63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Spends Time with Child</td>
<td>BSF Couples 66, Control Group Couples 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial Financial Support</td>
<td>BSF Couples 76, Control Group Couples 76</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Averaged Across All Programs, BSF Had Positive Effects on Some Less Central Outcomes

- Reduced mothers’ parental stress and use of frequent spanking
  - Effects mainly in one program—Houston
  - No effects on other parenting outcomes

- Reduced depressive symptoms
  - Effects for both mothers and fathers
  - No effects on other measures of well-being
THE SEPARATE IMPACTS
OF THE EIGHT LOCAL PROGRAMS
Examined Separately, Most Local Programs Had Little or No Effect—with Two Notable Exceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance of IPV</td>
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<td>Co-Parenting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Involvement</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- o: No significant impact
- +++/++/+: Significant positive impact at .01/.05/.10 level
- ---/---/--: Significant negative impact at .01/.05/.10 level
- n/a: Not available
Oklahoma: Consistent Pattern of Positive Effects

- Increased likelihood that couples remained romantically involved
  - 81% for program group; 76% for control group

- Positive effects on all five dimensions of relationship quality examined

- Improved quality of co-parenting

- Increased father involvement
  - Fathers more likely to live with their children and provide financial support

- No effect on marriage
  - 25% of both research groups married at follow-up
Baltimore: A Number of Negative Effects

- Reduced likelihood that couples remained romantically involved
  - 59% for program group; 70% for control group

- Reduced ratings of support and affection

- Reduced quality of co-parenting

- Had negative effects on father involvement
  - Fathers less likely to spend time with children or provide them financial support

- Increased intimate partner violence
  - 15% of BSF mothers experienced a severe assault, compared with 9% in control group
  - Effect concentrated among couples in less steady relationships
What is Distinctive About Oklahoma?

- Only BSF program to use *Becoming Parents*
  - Shorter curriculum and delivered in longer sessions
  - Could complete in 6-10 weeks – compared to 5 months

- Greater use of financial incentives to encourage attendance

- Couples more likely than those in other programs to receive 80% or more of the curriculum
  - 45% - compared with 9% in other programs

- Program served low-income *married* couples in the same groups as BSF couples
What is Distinctive About Baltimore?

- Couples, on average, were in less committed relationships initially than those in other programs
  - Fewer considered marriage likely
  - Rated relationship quality lower than couples in other BSF programs did

- Couples from more disadvantaged backgrounds—particularly the men
  - Men less likely than those in other programs to have jobs or HS diplomas

- Cannot be certain which factors led to pattern of effects
SUBGROUP RESULTS
Examined Impacts for Numerous Subgroups

- Used data from all programs

- Examined subgroups based on:
  - Relationship quality, relationship status, multiple partner fertility, timing of program entry relative to birth
  - Earnings, education, age, evidence of psychological distress
  - Race/ethnicity, attitudes toward marriage, religious participation

- Most had few or no effects on key outcomes

- Strongest subgroup results for African American couples
BSF Improved Relationship Quality for African American Couples

- Positive effects on four of five quality measures
- Also improved co-parenting and reduced intimate partner violence experienced by men
- No effect on staying together or getting married
- In contrast, no positive effects for non-African American couples
  - And increased their likelihood of breakup
Closing Thoughts

- Hard to make this approach work
  - 7 of 8 programs did not achieve primary objective

- And it may not be right for some unmarried parents
  - Particularly those in less steady relationships initially

- BSF model can work in some circumstances
Lessons from the Supporting Healthy Marriage Program

Jennifer Miller Gaubert
MDRC

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center
Webinar
June 30, 2010
What is the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) Project?

- National random assignment study of voluntary, preventive marriage education programs in eight sites
  - Interventions aimed at improving outcomes for low-income children and adults by improving health and stability of parents’ marriage
  - Created and funded by Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
  - Conducted by MDRC, Abt Associates, Child Trends, Optimal Solutions Group, in partnership with Public Strategies, Inc., with additional experts and consultants
The SHM Program Model

- Three mutually reinforcing components:
  - Marriage education curriculum (24 to 30 hours over 3 to 5 months)
  - Supplemental marriage education activities
  - Family support services
- Services delivered over 12 months
- Domestic violence protocols developed in consultation with local domestic violence agencies
Early Implementation Lessons

- Couples do come, and they continue participating
  - Encouraging early success in enrollment and participation
- Early lessons on programs’ strategies for:
  - Recruitment
  - Engagement
  - Management
Early data show encouraging enrollment and participation rates

- **Enrollment**
  - 6,300 couples enrolled as of December 31, 2009

- **Workshops:**
  - More than 80% of couples attend at least 1 workshop together within 6 months of enrollment
  - Couples who attend at least 1 workshop complete an average of 20 workshop hours together within 6 months
Early data show encouraging enrollment and participation rates (cont.)

- **Family support**
  - More than 85% of couples attend at least one family support meeting together within 6 months.
  - Couples who attend one meeting complete an average of 5 meetings together within 6 months.

- **Supplemental activities**
  - 50% of couples attend at least one activity together within 6 months.
  - Couples who attend one go on to attend an average of 3 activities together.
Recruitment & Enrollment

- Pay attention to marketing and recruitment
- Hire “sales” personalities for recruitment jobs
- Develop specific recruitment goals tied to the workshop schedule
- Market program benefits, not program features
- Market your program services as solutions to problems
- Screen for interest and availability to participate
- Deliver what you promise and don’t promise what you can’t deliver
Engaging couples: Program structure and content

- Family support staff
  - Continuous personal contact
  - Referrals to assistance in the community that families need and appreciate

- Offer services that are appealing and relevant
  - Focus on quality and strengths-based services
  - Make it fun & interactive for diverse learning styles
  - Deliver services in culturally appropriate ways
  - Create a friendly atmosphere and welcoming space
Engaging couples: Four key operational strategies

- Expect schedule changes and plan for make up sessions to keep people on track (work and sick children come first)
- Hire male staff no matter how long it takes – you can find them
- “You took away all the reasons I might have said no” -- Provide a meal/snacks, child care, transportation, and modest incentives related to milestones as your grant allows
- Offer meetings / workshops at times that work well for participants (and be prepared for the challenges of managing contracted or part-time staff)
Managing for performance

- Train staff on working with couples (new to many)
- Set quantitative benchmarks by staff and track them; have a system to track progress – automated MIS or paper system
  - Hold staff accountable for personal benchmarks
  - Regular team meetings; case file reviews
- High quality services require feedback to staff
  - Train staff on what “quality” means; do frequent one-on-one supervision and regularly observe staff in their interactions with couples
For more information

www.supportinghealthymarriage.org

www.mdrc.org

jennifer.miller@mdrc.org
Appendix

- The SHM evaluation
- The SHM target population
- The SHM sites and host agencies
- Early sample characteristics
The SHM evaluation

- Eight study sites across the country, in a range of local organizations
- Total sample enrolled is 6,300 couples.
- Impact study will examine effects on marital quality, parenting/co-parenting, mental health of each partner, and outcomes for children
- Implementation study will describe program characteristics, quality and intensity of services, management practices, and couple perspectives.
SHM target population

- Married couples with children
- At least 18 years old
- Speak and understand English or Spanish
- No evidence of domestic violence
- Family income less than 200% of poverty
- Both spouses volunteer to enroll
SHM sites and host agencies

- The eight sites are housed in four types of organizational settings:
  - Community based non-profit (5 sites)
    - Includes faith based organizations
  - For-profit with marriage education as primary service (2 sites)
  - Hospital (1 site)
  - University (1 site)
### SHM sites and host agencies - continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency Type</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Agency Name and City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community based non-profit</td>
<td>KS</td>
<td>Catholic Charities, Wichita</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Community Prevention Partnership, Reading and Family Answers, Bethlehem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Family Services Agency, San Antonio and El Paso Center for Children, El Paso</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Center for Human Services, Shoreline</td>
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<td>For-profit</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>Public Strategies, Inc., Oklahoma City</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Becoming Parents Program, Seattle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>University Behavioral Associates, Bronx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>University of Central Florida, Orlando</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early sample characteristics

- Couples married 7 years, in their early 30’s
- Average of 2 children
- 34% currently pregnant
- 24% stepfamilies
- Race/ethnicity:
  - 50% Hispanic; 30% White, non-Hispanic; 16% Black, non-Hispanic; 7% Other
- 74% at or below 200% of poverty
Thank you for participating in our webinar!

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center is dedicated to helping your marriage education program succeed.

Please email us at info@healthymarriageinfo.org if there are other areas of research you would like the resource center to address in the future.

www.healthymarriageinfo.org
www.twoofus.org
Thank you and have a great afternoon!

Please visit the website at:

www.twoofus.org

www.healthymarriageinfo.org