

New Mexico State University



Effectiveness of Relationship Education with Single, Cohabiting, and Married Parents in New Mexico

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INTRODUCTION

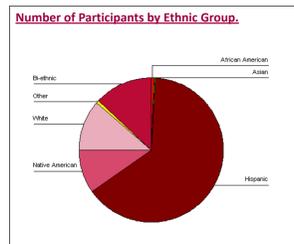
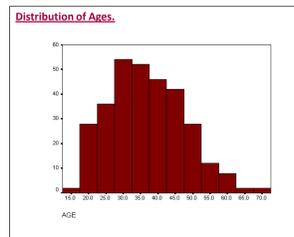
Purpose of Study

To evaluate the effectiveness of a relationship education program with married, cohabiting, and single parents in New Mexico.

- New Mexico has a higher rate of births to single mothers (51%) than the national average (35%).

- Many single parents are involved, or will be involved, in cohabiting relationships.

- Relationship education may help many types of families improve their functioning and enhance child well-being.



INSTRUMENTS

Instruments and Scales used

ENRICH

- Couple communication.
- Conflict resolution.
- Relationship satisfaction.

Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2)

- Belief in corporal punishment.
- Reversal of parent-child roles.

Family Environment Scale (FES)

- Conflict.
- Organization.

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES)

- Adaptability.
- Cohesion.

Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES)

- Reframing.
- Mobilizing resources.

METHODOLOGY

Design

Curriculum

The Family Wellness (www.familywellness.org) curricula were used:

- Low level of literacy required.
- Experiential rather than didactic approach.
- Available in English and Spanish.

Content

The classes focused on 3 areas:

- Couple relationship.
- Parenting attitudes.
- Family functioning.

Classes

- Met 2.5 hours per week for 12 weeks.
- Offered at schools, community centers, churches, and public health offices.
- Taught in the early evening hours with food and childcare provided.
- Classes were free, and participation was voluntary.
- Offered in English or Spanish.

Subjects

- 326 adults with children: 46% were married, 29% were single, and 25% were cohabiting.
- Age: Ranged from 16-69 years, with a mean age of 37.
- Gender: 70% were female; 30% were male.
- Ethnicity: 65% were Hispanic or Latino, 11% were European American, 10% were Native American, 2% were African American, Asian American, or Other, and 12% were bicultural.
- Employment: 58% were employed.
- Education: 52% had a high school degree or less education.
- Income: 41% made \$14,999 or less; 28% made \$15,000-\$34,999; 16% made \$35,000 or more; 15% did not report their income.

Data Analyses

- A mixed models procedure was run in SAS comparing pre- and post-test means by gender and relationship status.
- If there were no significant main effects or interactions, a simple *t*-test was used.
- Significance was set at $p \leq .05$.



RESULTS

Couple Relationship

- Single individuals were dropped from this analysis.
- There were no main effects or interactions by gender or relationship status.
- Relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution showed significant improvement.

Table 1: Couple Relationship

Scale	N	Alpha	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	t	p
Relationship satisfaction	190	.85	32.84 (8.06)	34.57 (7.20)	-3.11	.002
Communication	177	.88	31.61 (9.33)	32.15 (8.52)	-0.76	NS
Conflict resolution	171	.82	29.74 (7.73)	31.81 (7.37)	-3.49	.0006

Parenting Attitudes

- For belief in corporal punishment, there was a main effect by relationship status. Cohabiting individuals reported less favorable attitudes than married individuals.
- For reversal of parent-child roles, there was a main effect by gender. Women were less likely to reverse roles than men.

Table 2: Belief in Corporal Punishment

Status	N	Mean (SE)	t	p
Married	145	40.06 (0.59)	-2.62	.009
Cohabiting	76	42.40 (0.73)		

Table 3: Reversal of Parent-child Roles

Status	N	Mean (SE)	t	p
Male	93	22.76 (0.48)	6.88	.009
Female	223	24.09 (0.35)		

Family Functioning

- There were no main effects or interactions by gender or relationship status.
- Adults reported reduced conflict, greater organization, increased flexibility, and greater use of positive coping strategies.

Table 4: Family Functioning

Scale	N	Alpha	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	t	p
FES						
Conflict	308	.75	3.36 (2.43)	2.53 (2.21)	5.85	.0001
Organization	302	.73	5.31 (2.33)	6.17 (2.21)	-6.54	.0001
FACES						
Cohesion	321	.89	27.49 (5.42)	27.91 (5.11)	-1.32	NS
Adaptability	324	.88	24.45 (5.78)	25.96 (5.33)	-4.19	.0001
FCOPES						
Reframing	321	.87	30.19 (5.12)	32.02 (4.60)	-5.68	.0001
Mobilizing	320	.76	14.55 (3.20)	15.50 (2.99)	-4.47	.0001

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

Couple Relationship

- This class taught me to be more patient. We are closer, more open, and have more sex!
- It helped me with communication, commitment, and goal setting. I liked the positive focus.
- I liked learning about how a couple is supposed to work together on keeping the relationship alive.

Parenting Attitudes

- We now make plans and rules. Something I discovered is that I don't have to yell.
- What did the most for my family was learning about discipline and communication.
- It opened our eyes and helped us realize we as the parents are a team and we need to work together with our children and with each other as well.

Family Functioning

- It really helped me to adjust our home life, and to be more open in discussions.
- We have learned to become one and all work together.
- Helped us to understand the complexity of family dynamics especially with a new stepfamily.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

•Parents in New Mexico who participated in a 12-week relationship education program showed significant positive changes in their couple relationships, parenting attitudes, and family functioning.

•All participants seemed to benefit from the relationship education classes, regardless of whether they were single, cohabiting, or married.

•There were some interesting differences between males and females, and between cohabiting and married individuals, in the area of parenting attitudes. More research is needed to explore these findings.

•Hispanic families often place a higher emphasis on the parenting role as compared to the romantic partner role. Classes that focus on parenting and family issues, as well as the couple relationship, may be more appealing to Hispanic families.

•Family strengthening programs are cost-effective. Services were delivered at less than \$60 per hour. Continued funding for relationship education is needed.