



A Meta-Analytic Outcome Evaluation Study of OFA Grantee Healthy Marriage Programs

Alan J. Hawkins & Kaylene J. Fellows
Brigham Young University; Provo, Utah



This study was supported with a grant from the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center.

For more information, contact Alan Hawkins: hawkinsa@byu.edu

BACKGROUND

In 2006, the Office of Family Assistance (Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health & Human Services) awarded more than 125 five-year demonstration grants to organizations to provide marriage and relationship education services to individuals and couples, especially lower-income individuals and couples. In addition to the Healthy Marriage programs, some Responsible Fatherhood grants included healthy marriage and relationship services along with responsible fatherhood services.

While the emphasis for these grants was to demonstrate possibilities in this new area of social policy work rather than rigorously evaluate outcomes, many of these programs collected basic program evaluation data to help refine their services. While few grantees conducted randomized controlled trials—the gold standard in program evaluation—the pre-post data on couple and family outcomes they did collect can still provide an initial view of program outcomes.

To date there has not been an attempt to aggregate and disseminate the results of these evaluation efforts to a wider audience. With the assistance of the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, we contacted grantees to invite them to participate in a study to summarize what we have learned from these evaluation efforts. This meta-analytic study brings together basic evaluation data from 34 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs conducted by 18 grantees to help practitioners, policy makers, and researchers gain an initial view of the potential of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages and relationships.

METHODS

Recruitment

- We contacted all OFA HM grantees (and RF grantees with MRE services) via an initial survey to assess what kind of evaluation data they had and their interest in participating in a study.
- 49 grantees indicated they had usable data and would be interested in participating in a study.
 - 29 returned evaluation surveys with basic outcome data.
 - 18 grantees had usable data for the meta-analysis; some grantees had more than one program
 - 34 programs were evaluated from the 18 grantees

What is Meta-Analysis?

- Meta-analysis is a systematic and rigorous set of methods for combining and standardizing the results of many different studies on the same topic to compute an overall effect.
- We computed standardized mean change score (pre-post) effect size = d (Follow-up data were requested but not much data was given or usable.)
- Two programs provided control-group data from randomized controlled studies. With only two programs, we did not calculate separate effects for these programs. We included these programs pre-post data in the meta-analysis (without the control-group data).

Table 1. Number of Programs Evaluated and Total Number of Program Participants by Allowable Activity.

Allowable Activity	Number of Programs Evaluated (<i>k</i>)	Total Participants (Total N= 27,386)
Youth/HS	5	9,989
Unwed Expectant Parents	7	2,113
Premarital	4	3,856
Married (& Premarital)	9	3,812
Married Couples	6	6,241
Divorce Reduction	0	--
Marriage Mentoring	0	--

Table 2. Overall Program Success Effects (all programs, all outcomes)

Effect	Timing	Effect Size (<i>d</i>)	Number of Programs (<i>k</i>)
All programs, all outcomes	Post	.359***	34
All programs, all outcomes	Follow-up	.559***	7

*** = $p < .001$

Interpretation:

About 65% of participants at the post-test scored above the mean of the pre-test (by definition, 50% of participants scored above the mean at pre-test). About 71% of participants at the follow-up scored above the mean of the pre-test (by definition, 50% of participants scored above the mean at pre-test).

Table 3. Program Effects (Pre-Post) by Allowable Activity

Allowable Activity	Pre-post Effect (<i>d</i>)	Number of Programs (<i>k</i>)
Youth/HS	.369*	5
Unwed Expectant Couples	.393**	6
Premarital Couples	.271*	5
Married (& Premarital) Couples	.372***	11
Married Couples	.380*	6
Divorce Reduction	--	0
Marriage Mentoring	--	0

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

Table 4. Program Effects by Timing and Outcome

Allowable Activity	Timing	Effect (<i>d</i>)	Number of Programs (<i>k</i>)
Relationship Quality	Post	.432***	25
Relationship Quality	Follow-up	.476***	7
Communication Skills	Post	.325***	32
Communication Skills	Follow-up	.713***	7
Relationship Confidence	Post	.202***	21
Relationship Aggression	Post	.255***	18
Unhealthy Relationship Knowledge	Post	.394***	13
Co-parenting/Father Involvement	Post	.154***	10

*** = $p < .001$

Note: pre-follow-up effects for outcomes with $k < 5$ are not reported.

Table 5. Program Effects (Pre-Post) by Moderator

Moderator	Effect (<i>d</i>)	Number of Programs (<i>k</i>)	Difference Between Categories? (<i>Q</i>)
Dosage (Mean = 14.3 hrs.)			
Low (less than 9 hours)	.112***	5	34.3, $p < .001$
Medium (9-20 hours)	.456***	22	
High (21+ hours)	.231, <i>ns</i>	5	
Program Volume (Number of Participants)			
1-1000	.296***	15	3.3, $p = .20$
1000-3000	.460***	11	
3000+	.272***	6	
Participant Relationship Distress (X=21%)			
Low (1-30%)	.399**	13	.01, $p = .915$
Medium (30+%)	.384*	5	
Participant Education (Mean =23% < HS)			
High (80+% high school grads)	.217***	7	3.28, $p = .07$
Low (less than 80% high school grads)	.356***	13	

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$ *ns* = not statistically significant

Note: We tested for gender differences in each outcome. Only Relationship Confidence showed a significant difference with women reporting somewhat stronger effects in Relationship Confidence than men.

Note: Four programs did not supply the correlations between pre-test and post-test outcome measures which are necessary to calculate precisely the effect size statistics. When these correlations were not supplied, we used the average correlation for all outcomes in the study ($r = .46$) for the unsupplied correlations. We tested whether effect sizes for programs estimated with this inserted correlation ($d = .328$, $p < .001$, $k = 4$) were significantly different from effect sizes using exact correlations ($d = .364$, $p < .001$, $k = 30$); the difference was minimal and non-significant ($Q = 0.25$, $p = .62$).

SUMMARY

- Overall, looking at 34 programs with more than 70,000 participants, there were modest positive program outcome effects.
- Positive program outcome effects were obtained for programs in each allowable activity; most of these were moderate effects.
- Positive program outcome effects were obtained for each measured outcome; most of these were moderate effects.
- There were few gender differences in outcomes.
- Programs with moderate dosage (9-20 hours) had stronger positive outcome effects than lower-dosage or higher-dosage programs.
- Programs with larger proportions of participants who did not have a high school education tended to have stronger positive outcome effects.

Limitations:

- Pre-post outcome evaluation data without control-group comparisons can be inflated estimates of true program effects; the estimates here may be upper limits.
- Evaluation data were collected in many different ways, formats, and procedures. Some methods may have been more effective than others.
- Not all grantees with outcome evaluation data were able to participate in this study.