



Holistic Relationship Programming with a Diverse Population

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Abstract

The goal of the current study is to demonstrate the ability of Family Success in Adams County (FSAC) to provide a comprehensive approach to relationship enrichment to a variety of individuals including low income participants with different ethnic backgrounds. Current data supports our hopes by showing significant improvements over an extended period of time on measures of parenting alliance and perceived stress across income and ethnicity. It appears that FSAC is successful at helping diverse populations improve their relationships in a variety of domains.

Introduction

Marriage and healthy/stable relationships in general has lost ground in the United States. Researchers across disciplines have outlined how the decline in marriage and the lack of healthy/stable relationships in America’s lower income and minority populations has been linked to a variety of negative and far reaching consequences. Specifically, this decline has been linked to negative consequences such as higher rates of divorce, single parenting, and non-marital births (Dion et al., 2003).

In response to these concerns, the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) was formed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF; 2005). Family Success in Adams County (FSAC) is part of this initiative and takes a holistic approach to relationship enrichment by offering a variety of programming (relationship, parenting, & financial). As there is a need to have comprehensive relationship programs focus on low income and ethnically diverse individuals, FSAC has a unique opportunity to aid in filling this research gap with our long term one-on-one follow-up model and our diverse population.

The purpose of this poster is to examine how our eclectic programming offerings effect broad outcomes that can influence all levels of relationships. Additionally, assessing if these programs are effective across income and ethnicity.

Method

➤ **Strong Empirical Approach:**

- Longitudinal follow-up (up to 24-months).
- Use of valid & reliable scales (e.g., parenting alliance (PAM; Abindin & Brunner, 1995), perceived stress scale (PSS; Cohen, 1988)).
- One-On-One contact with participants to build relationships.

➤ **Procedure:**

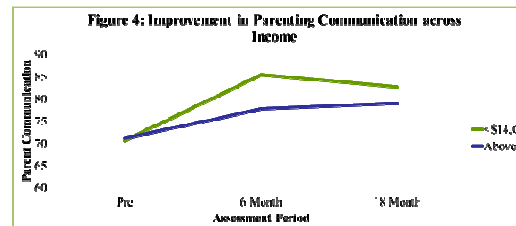
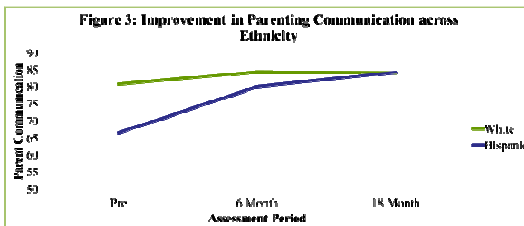
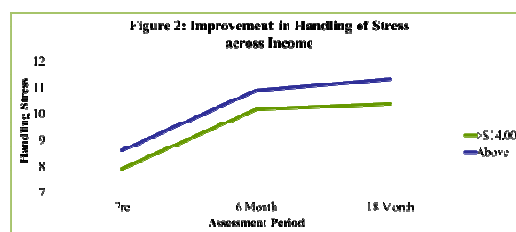
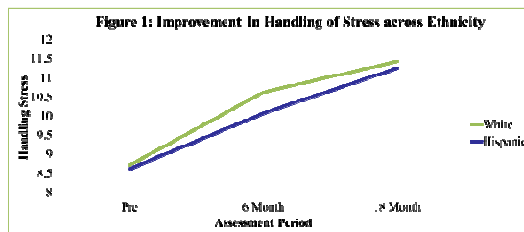
- Participants meet with Family Service Coordinator one-on-one, then complete at least 8 hours of the parenting (i.e., Make Parenting a Pleasure (MPAP; Birth to Three, Kumpfer, 1983), relationship (i.e., Within My Reach (WMR; PREP, 2008), and/or financial (Spend Some, Save Some, Share Some (SSS; CSU Extension) classes.
- Complete an immediate post-test and remain in contact with coordinator for six-month follow-up assessments up to 24-months.

Demographics (N=1850)	
Gender	79% Female
Age	M=34.01(SD=11.22)
Ethnicity	50% Hispanic/Latino 32% White/Caucasian 8%, African American/Black
Income	58% less than 14K/year
Relationship Status	52% Married or Engaged
Number of Children	M=3.0

Summary of Results

Repeated measures ANOVAs were run on parenting and relationship participants while examining the outcomes of PSS and PAM across time with income and ethnicity as between subjects factors*

- **Perceived Stress Scale:** Participants significantly improved in handling of stress from pre to 18-months; $F(1,18) = 11.38, p < .05$. No significant interaction was found ($p > .05$); Improvement was found for both ethnicities (Figure 1). Participants significantly improved in handling of stress from pre to 18-months; $F(1,19) = 13.04, p < .05$. No significant interaction was found ($p > .05$); Improvement was found for both income levels (Figure 2).
- **Parenting Alliance Measure:** Participants significantly improved in parenting communication from pre to 18-months; $F(1,14) = 3.35, p < .10$. No significant interaction was found ($p > .05$); Improvement was found for both ethnicities (Figure 3). Participants approached significant improvement on parenting communication from pre to 18-months; $F(1,12) = 2.71, p = .12$. No significant interaction was found ($p > .05$); Improvement was found for both income levels (Figure 4).



Conclusions

In the current preliminary examination, improvements in handling of stress and parenting alliance were found at 18-months post program across ethnicity and income. Improvement in parenting alliance is encouraging as this has been correlated to marital satisfaction and child adjustment (Abidin & Brunner, 1995). Improvements in perceived stress are also promising as this detects how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives; these changes are indicative of long-term meaningful relationship improvements.

Further outcomes not shown here include improvement in Psychological Well-Being, Parenting Self-Efficacy, Family Functioning, and Relationship Confidence. Participants also rate quality of the programming and instructors as high, and 90% would recommend the class to a friend.

Noteworthy is that over half of our participants are minority and fall below poverty. Analysis included an examination of income and ethnicity on outcomes with no significance found ($p > .05$); indicating that programming is equally effective across income and ethnicity. One of the many strengths of our study is its ability to successfully reach out to and serve this at risk population.

As research has shown a need for helping diverse individuals improve their relationship skills and functioning (e.g., Knox & Fein, 2008), we are heartened to show long lasting program effects with these at risk groups. We believe networking with local agencies and the one-on-one approach taken by FSAC is key to success with a diverse population.

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