

# Perceived Effectiveness of Booster Sessions Following a Stepfamily Education Course

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## Abstract

Agencies in northern Utah that provide services to low-income (including minorities) families were used to recruit a stepfamily sample. Booster sessions were educational meetings that occurred four to six weeks after the completion of the stepfamily education course and reinforced the protective factors taught in the stepfamily course material. Participants consistently reported that they did find the booster session worthwhile, that they learned something, and that they increased in knowledge concerning healthy stepfamily skills. Study findings suggest that booster sessions may serve as a means of increasing educational gains of participants after the conclusion of course material.



## Background

### Stepfamily Education

- There are limited educational resources and supports designed specifically for stepfamilies (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004).
- When providing Family Life Education (FLE) for stepfamilies it is important to give consideration to the unique aspects of these families (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Hughes, 1994). Satisfied stepfamilies are families that develop realistic expectations and strong couple relationships (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham; Visher, Visher, & Pasley, 2003).
- Intervention theory provides a helpful framework for the development and evaluation of FLE programs (Coie et al., 1993). This theory posits programs can address "high risk" populations and should account for cultural differences in the implementation process. A FLE program should increase protective factors that in turn decrease risk factors for families.
- Program evaluation is essential to understand the initial, intermediate, and long-term or lasting effects of all FLE programs in order to ensure that the needs of the participants are being met (Hughes, 1994).

### Booster Sessions

- *Booster sessions* are defined as meetings that occur less frequently once the content of the program is complete. These sessions are opportunities for participants to review course material, ask questions, discuss problems, and receive additional support (Clarke, Rohde, Lewinsohn, Hops, & Seely, 1999).
- Hughes (1994) stated that thorough FLE program evaluation should involve evaluating the implementation process, which would include booster sessions.
- Research has suggested that booster sessions can aid in the maintenance of gains, recovery of gains, and increase gains of participants in various FLE programs (Krauss, Godfrey, O'Day, & Friedim, 2006; Accordino & Guernsey, 2003; Braukhaus, Hahlweg, Kroeger, Groth, & Fhem-Wolfsdorf, 2003; Clarke et al., 1999; Baer, Williams, Osnes, & Stokes, 1984; Baggis & Spence, 1990; Guernsey, Voglesong, & Coufal, 1983). Further evaluation of booster sessions is needed to support these findings for stepfamily FLE.

**Research Question:** Did participants perceive booster sessions as being worthwhile, report learning something from the booster session, and indicate a change in knowledge about healthy stepfamily skills following the booster session?

## Method

### Implementation

The current study is part of Higginbotham's (2006) grant that was awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to educate lower-income, ethnically diverse stepfamilies in Utah about healthy marital skills. The *Smart Steps* (Adler-Baeder, 2001) stepfamily education program was used to teach these skills. After completion of the education course, participants were encouraged to attend a booster session, held 4 to 6 weeks later.

### Sample

A sample of 487 males and 560 females was recruited for this study through agencies in northern Utah that offer stepfamily education classes for lower-income families and individuals. Stepfamily courses in the years 2007-2008 included 20 courses in Spanish and 34 courses in English. Over 50% of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian and 36% identified themselves as being Hispanic/Latino. Of these recruited participants, approximately 23% of the male and 28% of the female participants attended the booster sessions and completed the evaluation form.

Participants were generally in their 30's with males averaging two years older than females. The married participants had been married an average of just over 4 years. Approximately 33% of participants reported being in an unmarried relationship. The participants reported more residential children than non-residential children in their stepfamilies.

### Instrumentation

The *Booster Session Evaluation Form* was a self-report evaluation form that was developed by a panel of experts in the field of stepfamily education to evaluate the booster sessions. Three Likert scale questions were aggregated to discover whether participants perceived the booster session as worthwhile (i.e. fun, educational, and worth their time; Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .925). A second question was used in the analysis that specifically asked if participants' learned something in the booster session.

A retrospective design was used evaluate participants' perceptions of knowledge base change in stepfamily relationship skills from before and after the booster session. Four questions were aggregated to form the "after booster session" variable (Cronbach's alpha coefficients: .852 for before-booster session and .818 for after-booster session).

## Results

- Descriptive statistics were used to find the mean responses of males and females for all three research questions.

### Descriptive Statistics for Research Questions

Question	n	Males		n	Females	
		Mean	SD		Mean	SD
Worthwhile	110	13.70	3.00	154	13.59	2.29
Learned Something	112	4.46	0.73	155	4.56	0.77
Before Knowledge	95	15.29	3.33	139	15.26	3.08
After Knowledge	106	18.44	1.95	147	18.58	2.33

- $t$  tests were also used to determine gender differences across all three research questions which yielded no significant differences across gender.

### Worthwhile and Learning Something from Booster Session

- Independent  $t$  tests were used to discover possible differences between responses of English and Spanish speaking participants by gender for the worthwhile and learning something from booster session variables.

- The results from the  $t$  test indicated no significant differences between languages of participants for males or females and perceptions of booster sessions being worthwhile.
- Male Spanish participants ( $M = 4.66, SD = .48$ ) reported higher rates of learning something from booster sessions than male English-speaking participants,  $t(110) = -2.16, p < .05$ .

### Change in Knowledge Base Language

- A Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (RM ANOVA) was used to determine the relationship of stepfamily knowledge base change over time with language. Both male and female participants had significant within-subjects main effects for time.

- Additionally, there were significant within-subjects main effects for language for both male and female participants. Spanish speaking participants reported higher knowledge gains.

### Marital Status

- A second RM ANOVA was used to evaluate changes in knowledge base with marital status of participants. There was a significant within-subjects main effect for time for both male and female participants.
- There were no statistically significant differences for marital status for male or female participants.

Analysis of Variance: Knowledge Change from Before and After the Booster Session									
Sources	df	Males				Females			
		MS	F	P	df	MS	F	P	
Analysis of Variance for Language									
Time (T)	1	544.67	130.36	.000**	1	910.83	187.70	.000**	
T X Language	1	46.14	11.04	.001**	1	127.24	26.22	.000**	
Within group error	93	(4.18)			135	(4.85)			
Analysis of Variance for Marital Status									
Time (T)	1	91.96	21.74	.000**	1	413.34	78.89	.000**	
Time X marital status	2	4.91	1.62	.318	2	0.71	.14	.874	
Within group error	84	(4.23)			128	(5.24)			

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . Time = before- and after-booster session responses

## Discussion

- Silliman and Shum (1999) explained in their evaluation that if participants do not view the program as effective and worthwhile the participants were no better off than they were before they started the program. Stepfamily participants consistently reported that booster sessions were worthwhile.
- Participants reported that they increased their knowledge of stepfamily skills in the booster session. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted with booster sessions (Clarke et al., 1999; Guernsey et al., 1983; Krauss et al., 2006).
- Both Latino and English participants reported that booster sessions were effective. Latino participants in several analyses reported higher levels of perceived effectiveness when compared to Caucasian participants.
- Intervention theory was shown to be an effective framework considering the implementation FLE programs. Booster sessions reiterated the protective factors specific for stepfamilies. Stepfamily participants consistently reported that attending the booster session was worthwhile, that they learned something, and that they increased in their knowledge about healthy stepfamily skills.

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