



# Resources

## Annotated Bibliography of Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Articles

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This annotated bibliography describes current research, from peer-reviewed academic journals, on the efficacy of healthy marriage and relationship education programs and services to inform safety-net stakeholders' efforts to integrate healthy marriage and relationship education into their existing services. This annotated bibliography is also intended to serve as a guide to promote awareness about research-based practices and resources that have been evaluated.

The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families reviewed 62 peer-reviewed academic journals for articles published between October 2010 and May 2012. A total of 40 articles were identified as research (1) evaluating a healthy marriage and relationship education program or service or (2) directly informing the integration of healthy marriage and relationship education into stakeholder services. Each annotation provides a brief summary of the research conducted, implications for integrating healthy marriage and relationship education, and a URL to facilitate access. In some cases, the articles are available online for free from the publishers. In other cases, they are available via subscription or for a fee. However, it may be possible to read, print, or request articles via interlibrary loan (ILL) from a local public or university library.

### General

#### Evaluation

**Bradbury, T. N., & Lavner, J. A. (2012). How can we improve preventive and educational interventions for intimate relationships? *Behavior Therapy*, 43(1), 113-122.**

URL: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0005789411000852>

In this article, the authors describe current directions in the field of relationship education and identify issues that may hinder progress with relationship education efforts (e.g., disregarding individual characteristics that may contribute to relationship quality). They suggest that issues across multiple areas must be considered in order to strengthen relationships (e.g., helping couples improve communication patterns and learn how to cope with stressors such as unemployment). The authors note that an important next step in this area is to teach individuals and couples the underlying principles that contribute to healthy relationships (e.g., find ways to connect with your partner emotionally) rather than simply telling them how to act toward one another (e.g., have a weekly "date night"). They also point to the importance of promoting relationship stability rather than focusing on encouraging relationship satisfaction as a sole outcome of educational efforts. One pathway to attaining this goal is by focusing on the full range of issues that at-risk individuals and couples may face (e.g., housing, employment, child care, substance abuse).

**Childs, G. R., & Duncan, S. F. (2011). Marriage preparation education programs: An assessment of their components. *Marriage and Family Review*, 48(1), 51-89.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01494929.2011.626893>

The authors compared eight marriage preparation education programs against recognized standards of program development that focus on content, instructional process, implementation process, and evaluation process. The authors found that all the programs utilized content grounded in theory.

However, they varied in techniques used and what skills they chose to be the primary focus. The authors also found that emphasis was placed on the importance of having clearly defined goals and objectives in the design of the programs. Even if the programs experienced problems in other areas, they still scored well in this area. The programs seemed to place less emphasis on the implementation component, with many receiving low scores for marketing, recruiting, budgeting, and working with other agencies. All of the programs received low scores for their evaluation processes. In working with the community, it is important to tailor programming to the needs of the participants. It is also important to make sure that the program design follows best-practices guidelines in order to generate the desired outcomes.

**Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., & Knox, V. (2010). Marriage and fatherhood programs. *Future of Children, 20*(2), 205-230.**

URL: [http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/20\\_02\\_10.pdf](http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/20_02_10.pdf)

The authors reviewed 12 couple intervention programs and eight father intervention programs designed to strengthen the relationship between parents and to encourage fathers to become involved in rearing their children. The goal was to see if these programs would be helpful for at least some types of families with unmarried parents. Programs aimed at middle class families focused mainly on the couple relationship and were found to have a positive effect on marital quality and subsequently on children's behaviors and academic achievement. Programs for low-income families showed that working with a therapist during the transition to parenthood reduced intimate partner violence, enhanced couple relationship quality, and increased fathers' competence in working with the mother on co-parenting issues. Interventions for fathers in low-income fragile families showed that fathers who were separated from their children, but saw them at least once a week, provided for them financially, especially if the mothers were included in the intervention. This study reinforces the idea that interventions for fathers should attend to and incorporate services that strengthen the couple/co-parent relationship since the quality of this relationship affects the family as a whole.

**Dixon, L. J., Gordon, K. C., Frousakis, N. N., & Schumm, J. A. (2012). A study of expectations and the marital quality of participants of a marital enrichment seminar. *Family Relations, 61*(1), 75-89.**

URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00681.x/abstract>

This study was based on a group of married men (n=95) and women (n=147) who attended a marital enrichment seminar. The authors studied how the individuals' expectations of the amount of effort that they and their spouse would put toward applying the skills taught at the seminar related to their marital quality and their satisfaction with the level of effort put forth. The results showed that the greater the difference between expected effort and perceived effort, for oneself and one's partner, the more disappointed one would be in the amount of effort put forth. Furthermore, those dissatisfied with their spouse's effort were more likely to see a decrease in their marital quality satisfaction. However, those dissatisfied with their own effort were not more likely to see a decrease in satisfaction with their marital quality. One implication for relationship education and therapy professionals is that it may be advantageous to have clients and participants aim their expectations inward rather than toward their partner to encourage personal responsibility. Also, marital educators and clinicians may see better results if they make their clients aware of the potential for disappointment and promote communication and understanding between partners.

**Duncan, S. F., Childs, G. R., & Larson, J. H. (2010). Perceived helpfulness of four different types of marriage preparation interventions. *Family Relations*, 59(5), 623-636.**

URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2010.00628.x/abstract>

Using surveys administered to participating individuals (n=2,769), the authors assessed the perceived helpfulness and positive change of four different styles of marital preparation interventions: class, community/church sponsored workshop, counseling, and self-directed. Results showed that all intervention types were thought to be either helpful or very helpful. The class and self-directed interventions were thought to be the most helpful while counseling, class, and self-directed interventions were thought to result in the most positive change regardless of gender. Interventions were more likely to be perceived as helpful if they were initiated by self-interest and if they were longer in duration. The present study shows that those providing and considering providing marriage preparation interventions have a variety of effective options to select from and reinforces the concept that no single intervention is the best match for every person. The perceived effectiveness of the self-directed approach indicates that this may be a preferable, as well as more affordable, program to invest in in order to serve a greater portion of the population.

**Futris, T. G., Barton, A. W., Aholou, T. M., & Seponski, D. M. (2011). The impact of PREPARE on engaged couples: Variations by delivery format. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 10(1), 69-86.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.539175#preview>

The authors studied how methods of delivery can affect the impact of the *PREmarital Personal and Relationship Enhancement* (PREPARE) program. Couples were either involved in six weekly single couple sessions (n=25) or a one-day group workshop (n=28). Participants from both formats reported seeing similar improvements in the areas covered by the PREPARE program, which included couple strength and growth areas, assertiveness, active listening, conflict management, family-of-origin influences, financial management, and setting and achieving goals. Couples also reported feeling more confident and satisfied in their relationships, more ready for marriage, and more able to manage their futures. Since both groups saw similar improvements, the research suggests that there are multiple effective formats for service delivery of premarital education. This article shows the potential for providers and educators to deliver premarital education in more cost-effective and less time consuming formats. This may be especially important to those with heavy caseloads who are looking for alternate ways to provide their services in order to meet the high demand. Additionally, for couples with busy schedules, having multiple methods to select from that meet their personal needs may increase participation.

**Hawkins, A. J., Stanley, S. M., Blanchard, V. L., & Albright, M. (2012). Exploring programmatic moderators of the effectiveness of marriage and relationship education programs: A meta-analytic study. *Behavior Therapy*, 43(1), 77-87.**

URL: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0005789411000670>

This study examined the impact of marriage and relationship education in relation to dosage (e.g., number of sessions or hours of content), content emphases (e.g., building skills versus knowledge), program format, and setting. The authors reviewed 148 evaluation reports and found that moderate dosage programs (i.e., 9-20 hours) had the strongest effects, although this may only be the case for white, middle class, non-distressed couples. The authors also found that programs that had 10 or more sessions were more effective than programs that took place over short durations. The authors

speculated that the longer duration may give couples the opportunity to engage in program content and practice skills. They also found that communication skills-based curricula had the greatest effect on communication skills. Programs that had formal manuals or instructor training did not seem to produce greater effects than less structured or less formal programs. Program setting also did not seem to contribute to greater or lesser program effects. These findings suggest that certain marriage and relationship education characteristics, such as a moderate number of sessions carried out over a few months, may make programs more effective.

**Kalinka, C. J., Fincham, F. D., & Hirsch, A. H. (2012). A randomized clinical trial of online–biblio relationship education for expectant couples. *Journal of Family Psychology, 26*(1), 159-164.**

URL: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam/26/1/159/>

The authors studied the effectiveness of an online marriage education program for new parents and expectant couples. The program was designed to limit the decline of marital satisfaction following the birth of a new baby. Those in the intervention improved their conflict resolution skills and had less of a decline in relationship satisfaction compared to those not receiving the program. The results support the potential usefulness of online marriage education, which may be a more cost-effective method of mass delivery. Online programs could be especially useful in improving couple relationships for families that have little time in their schedule for formal classes and would require less time and money to run continuously. Online programs could also supplement formal marriage and relationship education classes. However, ready access to an online program could be a potential barrier for some low-income families.

**Markman, H. J., & Rhoades, G. K. (2012). Relationship education research: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy, 38*(1), 169-200.**

URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00247.x/abstract>

The authors reviewed the published literature on relationship education programs from the last 10 years. In addition to providing a brief overview of what relationship education is and how it differs from couples' therapy, the authors describe where the field of healthy relationship education has been in recent years and where it is headed in the future. This article would be an ideal introduction for those interested in learning about relationship education, why it is important, and potential delivery modes (e.g., coaching over the telephone, providing resources via the Internet, offering education within community settings).

**Morris, M. L., McMillan, H. S., Duncan, S. F., & Larson, J. H. (2011). Who will attend? Characteristics of couples and individuals in marriage education. *Marriage and Family Review, 47*(1), 1-22.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01494929.2011.558463>

The authors recruited 121 married couples (n=242 individuals) to determine what types of individual and relationship qualities made a couple more likely to choose to participate in marriage and relationship education. While 121 married couples chose to participate, the authors also identified a control group (n=46 couples) who knew about the marriage education opportunity, but chose not to participate. Authors found that certain individual and couple characteristics predicted whether or not couples chose to participate in the program. Those who did participate scored lower in self-esteem, marital communication, relational commitment, marital conflict, marital strength, marital consensus, intimacy, marital expectations, and marital satisfaction. Findings suggest that certain inter- and intrapersonal characteristics influence whether or not an individual or a couple chooses to participate in

marriage and relationship education. It would be helpful for those who are recruiting couples or individuals for marriage and relationship education to use recruitment strategies that will engage those who may feel that they are in a low distress marriage, even if they are truly at-risk.

## Facilitation

**Bradford, A. B., Adler-Baeder, F., Ketring, S. A., & Smith, T. A. (2012). The role of participant-facilitator demographic match in couple and relationship education. *Family Relations*, 61(1), 51-64.**

URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00679.x/abstract>

Program facilitators (n=119) and participants of these programs (n=3,080) were surveyed to examine the relationship between participant-facilitator demographic match (i.e., ethnicity, sex, education, and relationship status) on reported facilitator quality and program outcomes. The authors also examined the relationship between facilitator quality and program outcomes. The authors found that participants who had a facilitator of the same sex reported greater facilitator quality. They also found that similar education levels and similar marital status were important to the level of change in individual and couple functioning. Ethnicity was not found to be related to either perceived facilitator quality or the level of change in individual and couple functioning. Higher ratings of facilitator quality predicted more positive outcomes for participants. The authors felt that more research needs to be done in the area of participant-facilitator match; however, for those implementing marriage/couple relationship education programs, these results indicate that matching the facilitator(s) to the intended audience should at least be taken into consideration. This study also indicates that the curriculum for the program is not the only important factor in marriage and relationship education programs. The quality of the facilitator and how they deliver the material is important for participants as well.

**Owen, J. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2011). The role of leaders' working alliance in premarital education. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(1), 49-57.**

URL: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam/25/1/49/>

The authors of this study looked at the effect of the *Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program* (PREP) premarital education program, specifically the effect that the leaders (n=31) had on the couples (n=118 couples) across a variety of relationship outcomes. The findings showed that leaders had a small influence on the relationship outcomes. Most of this influence was accounted for by whether or not the leader was trained in PREP and the working relationship with their client. These findings reinforce the importance of using trained facilitators who can build strong working relationships with clients in order to increase the impact of such programs.

**Piercy, F. P., Dolbin-MacNab, M. L., & Richardson, T. A. (2011). Affair proofing relationships: Discussion questions for couples. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 10(4), 345-362.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.613311>

The authors present discussion questions for facilitators to use with couples to prevent and/or address infidelity. The discussion questions aim to help couples conceptualize infidelity (e.g., How do you define infidelity?), recover from infidelity, see their view of the impact of an affair on family members, and prevent infidelity. They also include scenarios for couples to discuss to further explore the questions they answered and information on how to develop an affair prevention plan to protect their relationship. This article gives facilitators a blueprint to discuss infidelity with the couples they serve and help them develop ways to prevent or survive an affair.

**Wilmoth, J. D., & Smyser, S. L. (2010). Use of premarital assessment questionnaires by clergy in marriage preparation. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 9*(3), 252-267.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2010.491783>

Based on a nationwide survey of clergy who perform premarital education, the authors studied whether the use of premarital assessments (specifically, PREPARE, PREP-M, and FOCCUS) made a difference in the perceived effectiveness of premarital education. They found that the use of premarital assessments did not change the effectiveness of premarital education, but did affect how the clergy perceived the effectiveness of preparing couples for marriage. This may be due to the idea that clergy know more about the couple that they are educating, have received more training in premarital education, or spend more time with the couple that they are educating. They also found that clergy who preside over larger congregations and those from the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church of America, and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod are more likely to use premarital assessments. The authors believe that recruiting clergy of every denomination and congregation size to use quality evidence-based premarital assessments and training them to use these assessments could increase the effectiveness of premarital education.

## Education

### Education (K-12): For families

**Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., & Barry, J. (2011). Couples' groups for parents of preschoolers: Ten-year outcomes of a randomized trial. *Journal of Family Psychology, 25*(2), 240-250.**

URL: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam/25/2/240/>

This study reported the results of a 10-year follow up of 81 couples to see if programs that were effective in improving the first child's transition to elementary school would have long-term effects on the family and the child during the transition to high school. The original sample included couples whose oldest child was transitioning to kindergarten and who were randomly assigned to either a control group; a 16-week couple's group meeting that focused more on couple relationship issues among other family issues; or a 16-week couple's group that focused more on parenting issues among other family issues, with an identical curriculum to the previous group. The authors found positive, long-lasting effects of a preschool intervention on the family and on the child making the transition to high school. It was also found that mothers that participated in groups that focused on relationship issues showed effects on marital satisfaction and positive couple communication at the 10-year follow up. The results of this study indicate that preventative intervention programs can have long term effects on the family. It also suggests that including some couple relationship education can make parenting interventions more effective.

### Education (K-12): For students

**Halpern-Meehin, S. (2011). High school relationship and marriage education: A comparison of mandated and self-selected treatment. *Journal of Family Issues, 32*(3), 394-419.**

URL: <http://jfi.sagepub.com/content/32/3/394.short>

The authors examined the effects of a relationship and marriage education program on 222 high school students. The authors also studied whether the program being mandated or voluntary influenced these effects. The results indicated that relationship education provided to high school students can positively affect the students' relationship skills. Those mandated to participate in the program were more likely to

show improvement than those who opted into the program. Students with two-parent families were more likely to benefit than those with non-traditional family structures. Students at economically disadvantaged schools were less likely to show improvement. The study shows the importance of adding relationship and marriage education into schools' curriculum and the added benefits of mandating these classes to produce the greatest impact.

**Sparks, A., Lee, M., & Spjeldnes, S. (2011). Evaluation of the high school relationship curriculum Connections: Dating and Emotions. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 29(1), 21-40.**

URL: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/g3v5w17335303516/>

Based on pre- and post-tests of students (n=119, grades eight through 12), the authors evaluated the impact of a healthy relationship education class, *Connections: Dating and Emotions*, on the student's knowledge and attitudes about relationships. Overall, the students' knowledge and attitudes about relationships did not improve. However, some students with certain characteristics (e.g., female students, students with higher academic performance, students who did not have a history of parental divorce) did see improvements in knowledge and attitudes about relationships. Therefore, it could be concluded that students who already have a more positive attitude about relationships benefit further from healthy marriage and relationship education. Those developing healthy marriage and relationship education curricula and those facilitating relationship education for adolescents could work to reach male students, students with lower academic performance, and students with a history of parental divorce. Due to the idea that these students are more at-risk than their counterparts for future negative relationship outcomes, they are less likely to benefit from healthy marriage and relationship education, according to this study.

## Education: Postsecondary

**Braithwaite, S. R., Lambert, N. M., Fincham, F. D., & Pasley, K. (2010). Does college-based relationship education decrease extradyadic involvement in relationships? *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(6), 740-745.**

URL: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam/24/6/740/>

The authors used information collected from university students (n=380) in committed romantic relationships to examine the effectiveness of relationship education, integrated into their existing college courses, on rates of infidelity. Participants completed surveys before participating in the program and twice more in six-week intervals. Authors found that the overall frequency of infidelity among the participants was reduced over the course of a semester. It was also found that females were less likely to engage in infidelity over the course of the program. The results for this study show that relationship education can be effectively integrated into a college course and the benefits of reaching college-age students as they engage in relationships.

**Olmstead, S. B., Pasley, K., Meyer, A. S., Stanford, P. S., Fincham, F. D., & Delevi, R. (2011). Implementing relationship education for emerging adult college students: Insights from the field. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 10(3), 215-228.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.588093>

The authors examined a relationship education intervention aimed at emerging adult college students (n=1,587) by reviewing student feedback. Students reported satisfaction with the program and with those facilitating the sessions. The facilitators' background (marriage and family therapist vs. non-marriage and family therapist), did not affect participants' assessment of the sessions. Participant

assessments were affected by the gender of the facilitator (with higher ratings going to female facilitators) and the facilitators' experience with the curriculum. Curriculum delivery (e.g., the use of movie clips, hands-on activities, group discussion) was also the most frequent response when participants were asked what was most helpful about the sessions. For educators wanting to implement relationship education for college students, this study shows that it is important to use a variety of techniques to get the message across. It is also important for educators to be experienced with the curriculum before beginning to instruct the students.

## Cultural and Special Circumstances

### Latinos

**Allen, K., Gudino, A., & Crawford, C. (2011). Getting them in the door: Strategies for recruiting Latinos to family life education programs. *Journal of Extension, 49(3)*, Article 3T0T7.**

URL: <http://www.ioe.org/joe/2011june/tt7.php>

The authors described three strategies used to encourage Latino parents to participate in *The Connecting for Children* relationship education program offered in mid-Missouri. The strategies involved: (1) increasing the cultural competence of the staff, (2) building relationships with established programs and organizations that served the Latino community, and (3) establishing relationships with the Latino community itself. Using these strategies resulted in the recruitment of 58 Latino couples over a six-month period that completed the program. These couples accounted for 40% of all couples who were recruited. The authors suggest that the strategies outlined may be beneficial to engaging ethnic minority groups in relationship education programming.

### Military services

**Allen, E. S., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., Loew, B., & Markman, H. J. (2012). The effects of marriage education for Army couples with a history of infidelity. *Journal of Family Psychology, 26(1)*, 26-35.**

URL: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam/26/1/26/>

To investigate whether marriage education can benefit Army couples with a history of infidelity, four groups of couples were compared: faithful and unfaithful couples who completed relationship education (PREP), and faithful and unfaithful couples who received no treatment. Outcomes in marital satisfaction and communication skills were measured three times: (1) at baseline, (2) soon after program completion, and (3) one year later. Unfaithful couples had lower relationship quality than faithful couples at baseline. Couples with a history of infidelity who received treatment had the greatest change in marital satisfaction and communication skills between baseline and program completion, but still had lower scores than couples who were faithful regardless of their treatment status. Results also showed that declines occurred in relationship quality for all groups at the one year follow up. The authors highlighted that although program participants with infidelity had significant gains, their relationships still remained distressed. These results suggest that intervention is helpful, but on a short-term basis, for military couples who have experienced infidelity in their marriage. Couples therapy may be more beneficial for long-term improvement.

**Allen, E. S., Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Markman, H. J., & Loew, B. A. (2011). Marriage education in the Army: Results of a randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy, 10(4)*, 309-326.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.613309#preview>

The authors examined short-term effects of relationship education for Army couples, at two different sites, who were randomly assigned to either an intervention group or to a control group. Results from site one showed that couples in the intervention group experienced positive effects for communication skills, confidence that the marriage can survive over the long haul, positive bonding between the couple, and satisfaction with sacrificing for the marriage and partner. One year after the intervention, couples also had lower divorce rates compared to couples in the control group. The second site only showed positive effects for communication skills when compared to the control group. Differences between sites may be attributable to the unique demographic characteristics of the couples. For example, participants at site two were older, more established, and were deployed less frequently, which means less stress and risk for these couples. The authors suggest that couples who are not at high risk may be less likely to benefit significantly from intervention, and recommend directing resources toward higher-risk couples who could benefit the most.

## Stepfamilies

**Adler-Baeder, F., Robertson, A., & Schramm, D. G. (2010). Community education programs serving couples in stepfamilies: A qualitative study of form. *Journal of Extension, 48(5)*, Article 5R1B1.**

URL: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2010october/rb1.php>

Over 200 curriculum developers, experts on relationship and marriage education for stepfamilies, and representatives for organizations geared toward stepfamilies were interviewed to identify strategies for implementing educational programs for couples in stepfamilies. A total of 16 programs serving stepfamilies were chosen and summaries of program content, design, format, and outreach efforts were provided by program delivery staff. Challenges in recruiting participants were overcome by reaching stepfamilies through word-of-mouth, effective leaders and facilitators, and online promotional efforts. Programs were held in a variety of settings. Costs varied widely based on the type of program and facilitators varied in experience and training. Programs used various resource materials (e.g., videos, workbooks) to aid discussion about the unique characteristics and experience of stepfamilies in order to reinforce effective stepparent-stepchild relationships, enhance cooperative coparenting relationships, and strengthen couple relationship skills. Marriage and relationship education program coordinators can use this information to include stepfamily education as part of their programs, target ethnic minorities and low-income families, and encourage staff and facilitators to continue education and training in stepfamily education programs.

**Gelatt, V. A., Adler-Baeder, F., & Seeley, J. R. (2010). An interactive web-based program for stepfamilies: Development and evaluation of efficacy. *Family Relations, 59(5)*, 572-586.**

URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2010.00624.x/abstract>

Based on a sample of parents and stepparents (n=300), authors assessed the development and effectiveness of a self-administered, interactive, web-based program for stepfamilies that promotes healthy couple, parenting, and step-parenting behaviors. The data showed benefits in the areas of adjustment, harmony, life satisfaction, overreacting, parenting and couple intentions, parent-child and couple conflict, parental and couple efficacy, and lax parenting. However, benefits were not seen in the areas of attitudes and beliefs, positive marital quality, or negative marital quality. These findings suggest that alternative service delivery systems show promise in reaching and helping hard-to-reach and high-risk families such as stepfamilies.

**Higginbotham, B., Davis, P., Smith, L., Dansie, L., Skogrand, L., & Reck, K. (2012). Stepfathers and stepfamily education. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 53(1), 76-90.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10502556.2012.635972>

Authors examined the impact that stepfamily education can have on stepfather relationships by assessing qualitative interviews with men (n=14) who attended a 12-hour course. The majority of stepfathers reported that they felt that they had improved their abilities to communicate, be empathetic, be good parents, and interact with their stepchildren. Overall, the stepfathers felt that the program served to increase family involvement and cohesiveness. The present study reinforces the importance of targeting stepfathers for participation in relationship education and how each relationship within the stepfamily unit can benefit.

## **Economic Self-Sufficiency**

### **Asset building**

**Futris, T. G., Nielsen, R. B., & Barton, A. W. (2011). Financial management and relationship skills education: Gauging consumer interest and delivery preferences. *Journal of Extension*, 49(4), Article 4FEA10.**

URL: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2011august/a10.php>

Authors assessed the consumer interest and delivery preferences of married Georgia residents (n=512) for financial management and relationship skills education led by Cooperative Extension Services. Results indicate that a large majority of the respondents were interested in receiving financial management and relationship skills education. Websites were found to be the most preferred service delivery method for both types of education. Additionally, participants reported an interest for other delivery methods including workshops, brochures, newsletters, and newspaper articles. The research suggests that Extension programs should broaden offered program areas to include financial management and relationship skills education because of the expressed interest in the topics. Furthermore, Extension programs should be ready to use a variety of service delivery strategies to meet the needs of the persons served.

### **Child support services**

**Brotherson, S. E., White, J., & Masich, C. (2010). Parents Forever: An assessment of the perceived value of a brief divorce education program. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 51(8), 465-490.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10502556.2010.504095#preview>

This study examined the perceived value of a four-hour divorce education program for adults entitled *Parents Forever: Education for Families in Divorce Transition*. Individuals (n=342) attended the class and responded to follow-up questionnaires regarding their satisfaction, knowledge, and value of the program. Legal and community professionals (n=32) participated in stakeholder educational sessions about the program and responded to questions about their perceptions of the program's value. Participants and community stakeholders reported having strong perceptions of the program's value, with the majority responding that the program was worthwhile for them; that the class would be beneficial to all divorcing parents; and that they would recommend the course to another person. Participants also reported increased knowledge, with the largest gains seen in understanding how to make a parenting plan, how to help themselves and their children adjust to a new life path, and

effective communication strategies to use with their former partner during divorce process and co-parenting. Stakeholders did not report an increase in their overall knowledge, but saw gains in their understanding of the family dynamics influenced by the divorce process and the benefits of divorce education. Following the session about the program, stakeholders reported an increased support for the program, noting they were more likely to refer clients to participate in the program and that they also felt an increased ability to assist clients in finding resources or support during the divorce process. This article showed that brief education programs for divorcing parents are seen as valuable by participants as well as stakeholders, and that these programs can lead to significant gains in knowledge for participants.

**Schramm, D. G., & Calix, S. (2011). Focus on Kids: Evaluation of a research-based divorce education program. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 52(7), 529-549.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10502556.2011.615662>

The authors evaluated the impact of the divorce education program, *Focus on Kids*, based on a sample of divorced or separated individuals (n=2,274) and follow-up data from 149 participants. *Focus on Kids* educates divorcing parents on the impact of divorce on children and healthy coparenting strategies. The authors reported that participants found the program to be helpful; but women, younger participants, and those with lower education levels and lower income levels found the program to be most helpful. They also found that the program did change the behavior of the divorcing parents to be healthier for their children overall. Since previous research has shown that the level of conflict and the degree to which children feel caught in the middle of the conflict between parents is a strong predictor of the child's well-being after parental divorce, educating parents on healthy coparenting may make a difference in the well-being of their children.

## Family Safety

### Child welfare

**Antle, B. F., Sullivan, D. J., Dryden, A., Karam, E. A., & Barbee, A. P. (2011). Healthy relationship education for dating violence prevention among high-risk youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(1), 173-179.**

URL: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740910002926>

Following a two-day healthy relationship program, 233 high-risk youth participated in a follow-up study evaluating changes in relationship knowledge (i.e., knowing the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship), attitudes toward violence, and communication and conflict resolution skills. Survey responses showed that participants' relationship knowledge improved following the program. African American youth exhibited the greatest improvement in their relationship knowledge overall. Participants also showed improvement in their communication and conflict resolution skills and decreases in negative communication patterns. Lastly, participants reported a much lower acceptance of violence in dating relationships. These results indicate that brief relationship education that combines the teaching of both knowledge and skills can be effective, especially in dealing with high-risk youth who may be difficult to retain in programs of longer duration. Also, the authors reinforce that offering programs at community centers in which youth were already involved and using staff with whom they were already familiar may play a part in the effectiveness of these programs.

**Kaufman, J. S., Ortega, S., Schewe, P. A., & Kracke, K. (2011). Characteristics of young children exposed to violence: The Safe Start demonstration project. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26*(10), 2042-2072.**

URL: <http://jiv.sagepub.com/content/26/10/2042.abstract>

The authors studied the characteristics of young children (n=2,798) and their parents from 10 cities who participated in the Safe Start demonstration project. These participants had been exposed to violence within the family and/or community. The children who had been exposed to violence were most likely to live at home with one or two biological parents and be very young (roughly 50% of participants were zero to three years old). Biological parents were the most likely to be perpetrators (fathers more than three times more likely than mothers) and children were more likely to be witnesses than victims. On average, the participants had been exposed to two and a half violent events. Twenty-five percent of participants exhibited clinical-level posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Twelve percent exhibited subclinical levels, and 47% of mothers reported clinical levels of stress. This study shows that it is important for service providers to develop an understanding of the consequences created by various extents and types of exposure to family and community violence. This will allow service providers to develop their intervention strategies, referral processes, and ability to identify affected children.

**Mooradian, J. K., Hock, R. M., Jackson, R., & Timm, T. M. (2011). What couples who adopt children from child welfare want professionals to know about supporting their marriages. *Families in Society, 92*(4), 390-396.**

URL: <http://www.familiesinsociety.org/ShowAbstract.asp?docid=4155>

Based on focus groups (n=22 individuals), the authors examined the professional help that adoptive couples received and desired from child welfare services to support their marriages. Most couples reported that they did not receive much, if any, information about how the adoption might affect their relationships. The couples suggested that it would be helpful for child welfare professionals to go over some of the challenges that they may face in their relationships as they adopt a child. Couples also indicated that couple training would be a good idea and suggested that it could be offered when parents apply for their foster care license. The parents also indicated that they benefited from having interactions with mentors from other families and couples that have adopted from child welfare services. Some couples indicated that, by helping with the family, the professionals did contribute positively to the couple relationship. These findings demonstrate the interest and need for relationship education and support to address the negative stress that adoption may have on couple relationships.

**Toews, M. L., Yazedjian, A., & Jorgensen, D. (2011). "I haven't done nothin' crazy lately:" Conflict resolution strategies in adolescent mothers' dating relationships. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(1), 180-186.**

URL: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740910002938>

The authors evaluated the effectiveness of the *Love U2* healthy marriage and relationship education curriculum based on the pre- and post-tests of high-risk youth participants (n= 233). Authors found that the short (two-day) curriculum increased relationship knowledge, especially among African American students (74% of the participants). There was also an increase in communication skills and negative attitudes toward couple violence. These findings suggest that short-term programs can have positive outcomes for high-risk participants. With many organizations facing barriers to implementing healthy marriage and relationship education, this evaluation shows that short, cost-effective programs facilitated by familiar staff in a non-academic setting can make a difference for high risk youth.

Combining knowledge and skill development can also be a cost-effective way to teach about healthy marriage and relationships.

## **Domestic violence**

**Bradford, K., Skogrand, L., & Higginbotham, B. J. (2011). Intimate partner violence in a statewide couple and relationship education initiative. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy, 10(2)*, 169-184.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.562468#preview>

Participants of a relationship education program in Utah (n=1,124) were surveyed to determine their level of risk for intimate partner violence (IPV). Cooperative Extension agents (n=14), who coordinated the trainings, were interviewed to talk about IPV, discuss any risk factors they have seen of IPV, and the extent to which they felt equipped to handle IPV. Interviews revealed that Cooperative Extension agents were familiar with resources for IPV in the communities they served; however, not all agents were equally comfortable with including IPV content in couple relationship education or addressing IPV issues. The agents also responded that they thought that IPV was most likely occurring in their counties, but not with the participants of their programs. Survey results of participants indicated that 10% had moderate to severe risk of IPV and 29% had minor risk. This study showed that it cannot be safely assumed that: (1) marriage and relationship education participants are free from experiencing IPV and (2) all marriage and relationship educators are comfortable addressing IPV or are able to identify IPV. Creators of these programs should not only incorporate IPV into the curriculum and have trainings for educators on this topic, but also have required partnerships with local experts in case they are needed.

**Bradley, R. P. C., Friend, D. J., & Gottman, J. M. (2011). Supporting healthy relationships in low-income, violent couples: Reducing conflict and strengthening relationship skills and satisfaction. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 10(2)*, 97-116.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.562808#preview>

The authors evaluated the *Creating Healthy Relationships Program*, an intervention designed to strengthen relationships and reduce conflict in low-income, situationally violent couples. Couples (n=115) were randomly assigned to either a treatment group or a no-treatment control group. Participants completed surveys prior to the beginning of the program about their relationship and again zero to six months after the program ended. The results showed that women who participated in the program were more satisfied with their relationship after program completion. Men had similar results. It was also found that participants employed greater use of healthy relationship skills, such as skills for building a stronger friendship, enhancing emotional intimacy, and creating shared meaning between couples. Males and females who participated in the program reported less conflict in the follow-up surveys. The results from this study show that centering marriage and relationship education on topics that are of specific concern to low-income, high-conflict couples is beneficial for their relationships.

**Florsheim, P., McArthur, L., Hudak, C., Heavin, S., & Burrow-Sanchez, J. (2011). The Young Parenthood Program: Preventing intimate partner violence between adolescent mothers and young fathers. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 10(2)*, 117-137.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.562823#preview>

Couples participating (n=53) in the *Young Parenthood Program* (YPP), an intervention designed to promote healthy coparenting and prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) among pregnant adolescents

and their partners, were compared with couples that did not participate (n=52), in a pilot study assessing the new program. The data suggests that the YPP was effective in decreasing the occurrence of IPV in couples who participated in comparison to those who did not participate. However, it was found that the effect diminished over time. The pilot study suggests that programs like the YPP can be effective in decreasing the occurrence of IPV in adolescent couples. Implications for domestic violence professionals, especially those working with adolescents, include the need for targeting at-risk populations early by making them aware of the benefits of such programs and providing them opportunities to become involved in order to prevent IPV.

**Halford, W. K., Petch, J., Creedy, D. K., & Gamble, J. (2011). Intimate partner violence in couples seeking relationship education for transition to parenthood. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 10(2)*, 152-168.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.562835#preview>

Couples participating in a relationship education course during their transition to parenthood were assessed for the occurrence of intimate partner violence (IPV). Couples (n=81) reported that there had been at least one instance of IPV in the previous year. Most of the cases were committed by both partners and involved lower levels of violence. Some participating couples (n=18) reported at least one spouse had been injured by IPV. Offenders were more likely to self-report instances of IPV than victims. Men and women were found to commit violence towards a partner at similar rates; however, women were found to commit violence more frequently. Since IPV was shown to be common in couples expecting their first child, services that include relationship education should screen for IPV and address topics (e.g., communication to improve conflict resolution) that can reduce the risk of IPV.

**Rhoades, G. K., & Stanley, S. M. (2011). Using individual-oriented relationship education to prevent family violence. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 10(2)*, 185-200.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.562844>

This study examines the use and effectiveness of relationship education programs designed for and delivered to individuals (rather than couples) for preventing relationship aggression. They specifically looked at the *Within My Reach* relationship education program, which focuses on general relationship education with detailed information about relationship aggression. Individual-oriented relationship education generally provides content about relationship aggression, communication and conflict management skills, how to make good decisions in relationships, and children and parenting. Evaluation of the *Within My Reach* program included 202 individuals (76.7% women) and found that satisfaction with the program was high, participants showed large increases in knowledge about relationship skills, higher communication quality and conflict management, and a reduction in relationship aggression. This study shows that marriage and relationship education created for and delivered to individuals is effective for building healthy relationship skills and for reducing relationship aggression.

**Wilde, J. L., & Doherty, W. J. (2011). Intimate partner violence between unmarried parents before and during participation in a couple and relationship education program. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 10(2)*, 135-151.**

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332691.2011.562848>

The authors studied the risk of an increase in violence for those who participate in healthy marriage and relationship education, based on data from urban, low-income, unmarried parent couples (n=90) from the Family Formation Project. 44% of the participants reported intimate partner violence (IPV) prior to

enrollment in the healthy marriage and relationship education program. The authors found that healthy marriage and relationship education was safe for couples experiencing IPV, with 77.5% of couples who had experienced previous IPV not experiencing IPV during their participation in the program. However, they cautioned that due to a small number of participants, it is important that further research in this area be done to determine if couples who already experience IPV are safe to work on their relationship using healthy marriage and relationship education. It is important to note that participants reported that the IPV they had experienced was situational couple violence, and none of the participants reported intimate terrorism. Findings suggest that couples who experience IPV in their relationship may want to stay and work on their relationship. It is important that stakeholders proceed with caution and refer IPV couples to other resources to deal with the IPV before working on other aspects of their relationship.

## Health and Mental Health Services

### Mental health

**Feinberg, M. E., Jones, D. E., & Kan, M. L. (2010). Effects of Family Foundations on parents and children: 3.5 years after baseline. *Journal of Family Psychology, 24*(5), 532-542.**

URL: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam/24/5/532/>

Authors studied the effects of the Family Foundations prevention program, a program for expecting couples on parental adjustment, co-parent and couple relationships, parenting, and child outcomes. They compared participants enrolled in the program (n=89) to couples who were not (n=80). The authors found that three years following participation, program participants showed less parental stress and depression, less harsh or overly permissive parenting, and higher co-parent relationship quality. Furthermore, children of program participants showed fewer behavioral problems than their counterparts. Program participants who were parents of boys showed a positive impact on their couple relationship. Thus, providing expecting families opportunities to enroll in prevention programs aimed at reducing the stress that adding a baby can have on couples can help increase relationship quality and equip families with the tools to raise their child in a happy, healthy environment.

**Morrill, M. I., Eubanks-Fleming, C. J., Harp, A. G., Sollenberger, J. W., Darling, E. V., & Córdova, J. V. (2011). The Marriage Checkup: Increasing access to marital health care. *Family Process, 50*(4), 471-485.**

URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2011.01372.x/abstract>

The authors developed the *Marriage Checkup*, an intervention which consists of an annual evaluation of the relationship including questionnaires and interviews. This study evaluates the ability of the *Marriage Checkup* program to recruit married couples (n=334 couples, 668 individuals) who would normally not seek help for their relationship. They recruited participants through broadcast media, the Internet, flyers, and word-of-mouth. They found that the *Marriage Checkup* attracted couples who did not see their relationship as distressed, couples who would not normally seek out therapy or counseling, couples who vary in relationship distress level (from low distress to high distress), and couples who saw the *Marriage Checkup* as having less barriers (e.g., cost, time, etc.) than traditional therapy. By getting couples who do not normally seek mental health services for their marriage to participate in an intervention, the *Marriage Checkup* reaches an untapped audience that has a need for services. The idea that a checkup does not necessarily mean that help is needed was important to this intervention's success. This information suggests that it is important for stakeholders to create an atmosphere that attracts families who have high distress and those who have lower levels of distress but could be at risk for high distress in the future.

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