



Findings for **Adult** Participants in Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) in Year 2

Overview

The Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative (ACHMI) is a five-year project, funded by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through its efforts to strengthen families by addressing the quality of the couple relationship in the family. ACHMI is a partnership between Auburn University's Department of Human Development and Family Studies, The Alabama Children's Trust Fund (CTF), the Montgomery chapter of the 100 Black Men of America, members of the Alabama Family Resource Center Network*, and a network of other community-based organizations. Together, these agencies provide relationship/marriage education to Alabamians in order to promote the use of knowledge and key skills that have been identified in research as vital components of a stable, quality marital relationship. Among adult participants in this demonstration project, we expected to find positive changes in several areas of individual functioning, parenting, and couple functioning after participation in the programs. Because the study will be completed in 2011, these are considered preliminary analyses.

Methods

Participants. The sample for these analyses is drawn from the 1,320 participants who enrolled in the relationship and marriage education classes between April 2007 and September 2008 and completed a usable pre-program questionnaire. 678 completed the classes and a usable post-program questionnaire by October 2008. The reduced number is due to class attrition (19%), unusable data, and the voluntary nature of human subjects research. In addition, a number of participants were still in sessions or data had not been submitted to the research team by the time analyses were conducted for this report. Participants are primarily ethnic minority and low-resource.

- 30% are male; 70% are female.
- 17% were ages 18-24; 19% were ages 25-30; 27% were 31-40; 23% were 41-50; 14% were over 51. The modal age was 22.
- 53% were married; 47% were not married.
- 60% are African-Americans; 36% are European Americans; 1% were Hispanic/Latino; the remaining 3% were Asian-Americans, Native Americans, or responded "other" when asked their ethnic background.
- 49% reported working full-time; 13% reported part-time employment. Another 38% percent indicated they did not work for pay.
- 18% of the adults had not completed high school; 27% graduated high school or completed a GED; 24% had completed some college work; 13% had earned a 2-year college/technical school degree; 11% had completed a 4-year college degree; and 7% reported completing an advanced degree.
- Half of the participants (50%) indicated a gross household income of less than \$25,000 per year; another 38% reported income levels between \$40,000 and \$74,999; 9% reported between \$75,000 and \$100,000; and 3% reported a gross household income of more than \$100,000.

Measures. The adult pre- and post-program questionnaires contains 131 items, including demographic questions and established valid and reliable social science measures, designed to assess individual and couple functioning (i.e., awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills, behaviors, relational quality, and individual well-being). For a reference listing, please contact ACHMI at www.alabamamarriage.org.

*Alfred Saliba Family Services Center in Dothan, Hope Place Family Resource Center in Brewton, Sylacauga Alliance For Family Enhancement (SAFE), Parents and Children Together (PACT) in Decatur, Tuscaloosa's One Place, Circle of Care Center for Families in Valley, Family Guidance Center in Montgomery, The Family Success Center of Etowah County,

Results

To test for significant differences in changes from pre-test to post-test, we utilized paired-sample t-tests and repeated measures mixed between-within subjects analyses of variance (RMANOVAs), controlling for dependence in the dataset, to determine whether there were main effects for Time and whether there were interaction effects for Time by Gender and Time by Race.

Analyses revealed that for multiple dimensions, the mean level scores reported by participants before taking the MRE class were statistically significantly different than their reported scores after participation in the MRE class; changes were in the desired direction (See Table 1 and 2). Effect sizes ranged from $-.77$ to $.35$, and were mostly in the moderate effect size range (i.e., $.20$ is considered small, $.50$ – moderate, and $.80$ – large; Cohen, 1977). Statistically significant change across time was not found for: *Attitude Towards Aggression/Violence, Emotional Support, Parent Involvement, and Importance of Father Involvement*. For these measures, pre-program average scores were near maximum (in the desired direction), allowing for little movement over time.

Table 1. Paired Sample T-test for Mean Change Over Time for Women

	Pre-Test		Post-Test		df	t	Cohen's d Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD			
<u>Relational Skills</u>							
Negative Interactions ^α	1.85	.46	1.79	.46	326	2.48**	.17
Positive Interactions	2.75	.66	2.86	.64	327	-3.58***	-.28
Disclosure	3.72	.88	3.82	.84	357	-2.69**	-.18
Conflict Management	3.52	.81	3.68	.80	357	-3.86***	-.31
Assertiveness	3.93	1.14	4.06	.99	355	-2.57**	-.19
<u>Couple/Marital Quality</u>							
Relationship Quality	4.88	1.59	5.33	1.46	329	-7.03***	-.55
Relationship Adjustment	3.37	.81	3.61	.79	303	-5.59***	-.46
Confidence	3.75	1.28	3.96	1.19	297	-3.76***	-.32
Dedication	3.93	1.28	4.07	1.19	324	-2.73**	-.21
Trust	3.52	1.20	3.72	1.07	299	-4.02***	-.77
Stability	1.94	.66	2.08	.63	322	-5.06***	-.39
<u>Individual Strengths</u>							
Individual Functioning	3.77	.84	3.95	.78	355	-4.43***	-.34
Depression ^α	1.17	1.01	.97	.94	358	4.61***	.35
<u>Parenting</u>							
Co-Parenting Quality	3.55	.85	3.72	.85	272	-3.54***	-.30
Positive Parenting Behaviors	3.27	.43	3.34	.43	264	-3.25**	-.26
Parenting Efficacy	4.24	.74	4.37	.63	288	-3.95***	-.31
Family Harmony	3.71	.93	3.88	.86	223	-3.30**	-.31
<u>Attitudes/Beliefs</u>							
Gender attitudes	3.28	1.62	3.44	1.69	355	-2.66**	-.20

α. Mean level scores decreased, indicating fewer negative interactions and less depression. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ two-tailed tests

Table 2. Paired Sample T-test for Mean Change Over Time for Men

	Pre-Test		Post-Test		df	t	Cohen's d Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD			
<u>Relational Skills</u>							
Negative Interactions ^a	1.78	.40	1.71	.45	156	1.92*	.30
Positive Interactions	2.85	.69	2.94	.67	157	-2.81**	-.32
Disclosure	3.63	.86	3.7	.78	164	-2.22*	-.12
Conflict Management	3.51	.81	3.64	.82	164	-2.45*	-.26
<u>Couple/Marital Quality</u>							
Relationship Quality	5.40	1.35	5.71	1.31	153	-3.27***	-.35
Relationship Adjustment	3.55	.79	3.79	.70	152	-4.47***	-.53
Confidence	4.23	.89	4.39	.85	151	-3.14**	-.36
Dedication	4.21	1.00	4.37	.92	153	-2.82**	-.34
Trust	3.98	.93	4.21	.86	152	-3.75***	-.43
Stability	2.09	.69	2.17	.62	153	-2.00*	-.24
<u>Individual Strengths</u>							
Individual Functioning	3.54	.93	3.70	.86	160	-2.70**	-.31
Depression ^a	.89	.95	.79	.85	160	2.26*	.24
<u>Parenting</u>							
Co-Parenting Quality	3.58	.77	3.79	.75	119	-3.13**	-.39
Parenting Efficacy	4.20	.77	4.31	.70	133	-2.01	-.26

a. Mean level scores decreased, indicating fewer negative interactions and less depression. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ two-tailed tests

Qualitative Comments:

I need a stronger relationship with my child's other parent. I need to know what a strong family looks like. This is the information that I feel is most helpful in my life right now.

I have learned a lot about my past relationships. And I've had a lot of bad ones. I've learned how to look for signs of bad situations and to stay out of them, and what my priorities should be in looking for & starting relationships.

This is a great class. I wish we had taken it a few years ago. We may not have gotten to this negative point if we had taken it earlier. I would recommend this course to others.

Without this program we were headed for divorce. Now that we have taken this class we are headed toward recovery.

It helped me know myself and my husband better. I now know when to talk and when not to. I also know how to communicate better than I did before the classes.

I have become more aware of when I could use the skills and what happens when I do not. I am more aware when I am doing wrong. Get better... perhaps, but the 1st step is to be aware and I've got that down.

The sessions has helped me to show my wife that I understand what she is saying by showing feelings in my conversation.

This class changed my whole family's life!

By Race and Gender. Statistically significant between-groups effects for sex were found only for the Family Harmony measure (women reported a significant increase over time, while men reported a higher level at Time 1 and maintained this level over time (see Figure 1). Overall, **men and women appear to benefit from program participation in similar ways**

On most measures, the patterns of positive changes were similar for African American and European American participants; however, statistically significant between-group effects for Race were found:

- European American participants started out much lower and reported increases in Assertiveness skill, while African Americans retained higher levels [F (1,566) = 4.63, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .008]. See Figure 2.
- Both European American and African American participants showed significantly higher levels of Individual Functioning after participation; however, European Americans began the programs with a significantly lower average score and demonstrated a comparatively larger increase over time [F (1,566) = 4.23 $p < .05$; partial eta squared = .007]. See Figure 3.
- African American and European American participants both reported increases in Parent Efficacy; however, European Americans changed more significantly in relation to the change reported by African Americans. [F (1, 461), $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .01. See Figure 4.

Figure 1. Family Harmony by Gender

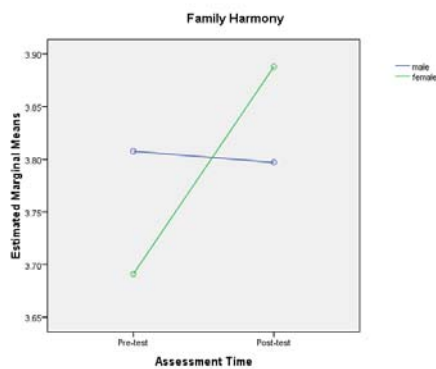


Figure 2. Assertiveness by Race.

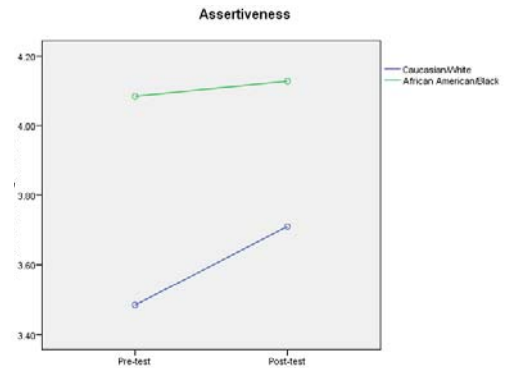


Figure 3. Individual Functioning by Race.

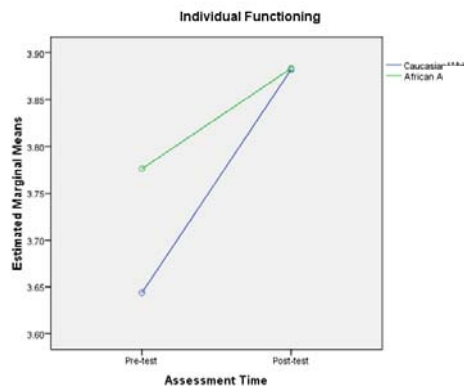
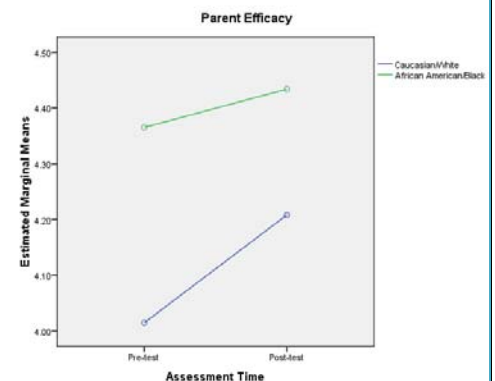


Figure 4. Parent Efficacy by Race.



Discussion

Results found for ACHMI's initial assessments of change among participants indicate that *nearly every targeted dimension for adult participants showed statistically significant change over time in a desirable direction*. In addition, both men and women appear to benefit similarly after participation in a MRE program on nearly every targeted area of individual functioning and relationship quality and behaviors. There are some differences between European Americans and African Americans in changes in individual and relational functioning after MRE participation (i.e., on measures of assertiveness, individual functioning, and parental efficacy). Overall, however, both European Americans and African Americans appear to benefit in similar ways after participation in a MRE program.

Since these data are from the initial implementation of a demonstration program, comparison groups were not utilized; therefore, caution should be used when interpreting the statistically significant changes as program effects. We can, however, note the calculated effect sizes (appropriate formulas for paired comparisons were used). Effect sizes were small to moderately large ranging from -.77 to .35; the average effect size was moderate. 72% of the women's and 79% of the men's statistically significant changes can be considered meaningful/practical differences for an educational program (i.e., $> .25$; Wolf, 1986). We can have some confidence that these documented changes over a short period of time are due to program participation.

These are some of the first indicators of *positive changes among a more ethnically and economically diverse group of adults* after participating in MRE programs. In addition, these are some of the first findings of changes in *multiple dimensions of individual and couple functioning*, and importantly, the first to identify *changes in parenting* after participation in MRE programs. The examination of changes by race and gender is also unique in the research on relationship/marriage education programs. These findings provide encouragement for continued work in this area of family life education as a means for enhancing couple and marital relationships and strengthening families.