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healthymarriageinitiative

Findings for Youth Participants in Relationship Education (RE) 2006-2008

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. 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 other community-based organizations. Together, these agencies provide Alabama youth with relationship/ marriage education to enhance knowledge and promote the skills identified in research as key components of healthy relationships and a stable marital relationship. The positive changes among youth participants in areas of individual and relationship knowledge and functioning as well as dating/marriage attitudes are outlined.

Methods

Participants. Data are from 2,094 youth participants who completed the relationship education classes between April 2007 and September 2008. Participants are primarily ethnic minority and low-resource.

- 47% are male; 53% are female
- 5% were in grades 5-6; 26% were in grades 7-8; 51% were in grade 9-10; 17% were in grades 11-12; and 1% received the class who were not in school
- Mean age of 15.16
- 54% are African-Americans; 39% are Caucasian; 2% are Hispanic/Latino; 3% selected bi-racial; and another 2% identified "other" for ethnic background
- Around a third of the participants (35%) reported living in a traditional nuclear family; 40% reported living in a single parent family; 17% reported living in a stepfamily; and 8% reported living in some other type of family structure
- 11% indicated that their mother had less than a high school diploma; 30% reported that their mother had completed HS; 32% reported that their mother had some college or a technical degree; and 26% reported that their mother had a 4 year degree or higher
- 16% indicated that their father had less than a high school diploma; 39% reported that their father had completed HS; 25% reported that their father had some college or a technical degree; and 20% reported that their father had a 4 year degree or higher

Measures. The youth pre- and post-program questionnaires contain 84 items, including demographic items and established valid and reliable social science measures, designed to assess individual and relational 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.

Results

To test for significant differences in changes from pre-test to post-test, paired-sample t-tests and repeated measures mixed between-within subjects analyses of variance (RMANOVAs) are used to determine whether there are main effects for Time and whether there are 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 is significantly different than their reported scores after participation in the MRE class; changes are in the desirable direction (See Table 1).

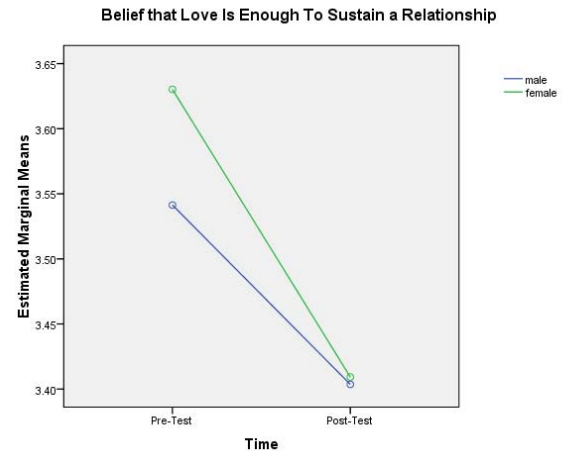
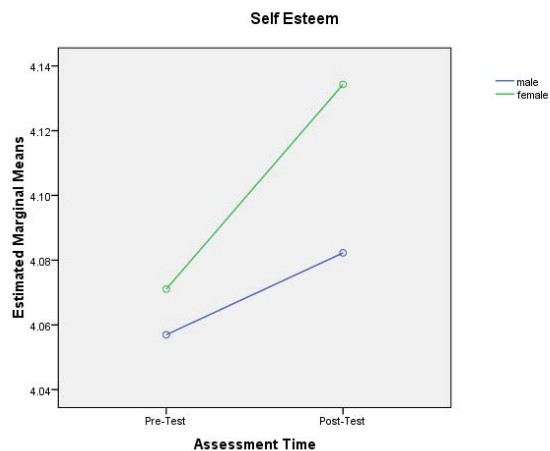
*Alfred Saliba Family Services Center in Dothan, Hope Place Family Resource Center in Brewton, Sylacauga Alliance For Family Enhancement (SAFE), Parents and Children Together (PACT) in Decatur, Tuscaloosa's One Place, Circle of Care Center for Families in Valley, Family Guidance Center in Montgomery,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

After program participation, youth report improved individual functioning, interpersonal competence, and increased knowledge about various aspects of healthy relationship functioning (See Table 1).

Table 1. Paired Sample T-test for mean change over time

	Pre-Test		Post-Test		df	t	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Self Esteem	4.059	.805	4.126	.883	1537	-2.726**	-0.09
Depression/Distress ^a	1.696	.719	1.427	.735	1539	2.864**	0.11
Individual Functioning	3.730	.896	3.808	.940	1508	-3.249***	-0.12
<u>Interpersonal Competence</u>							
Conflict management skills	3.260	.889	3.407	.902	1511	-6.351***	-0.23
Reflective Coping Style	3.329	.905	3.442	.885	1496	-4.862***	-0.17
Reactive Coping Style ^a	2.712	1.116	2.573	1.086	1499	4.478***	0.17
<u>Attitudes/Beliefs</u>							
Cohabitation ^a	3.261	1.151	2.896	1.207	1508	11.887***	0.37
Love is Enough ^a	3.588	.922	3.403	.949	1501	7.307***	0.26
Waiting to Have Sex	3.431	1.013	3.585	.978	1406	-7.024***	-0.25
Resisting Sexual Pressure	3.869	.916	3.940	.904	1446	-3.255***	-0.12
Attending Counseling	3.025	.920	3.211	.960	1487	-7.716***	-0.28

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



Qualitative Analyses/Comments.

“I gained more self respect for myself. I learned how to put my priorities in order and figure out what my values are.” – Female, Age 17

“I learned the difference between having a crush on someone and loving them.” – Male, Age 16

“I learned to wait before having sex, because it is unsafe. I also learned not to stay in an unhealthy relationship.” – Female, Age 13

“I gained the knowledge of why you should wait until marriage for sexual relations.” – Male, Age 14

“My goals are to be in a healthy relationship and do what’s best for me and to wait until I’m married and in love with my husband until I have sex.” – Female, Age 13

“I think this program has taught me how to respect my partner more and not take them for granted.” – Male, Age 16

The program was very informative on standing your ground and being true to yourself when in a relationship.” – Female, Age 17

Analyses by Ethnicity. Statistically significant between-groups effects for ethnicity are only found for the beliefs about Cohabitation measure. While both groups report cohabitation would not ensure better marital quality (desirable direction; indicated by lower scores on the Cohabitation measure), European American youth report significantly lower scores on the Cohabitation measure after program participation (**See Figure 1**). **Overall, on all other measures, students of various ethnic backgrounds appear to benefit from program participation in similar ways.**

Analyses by Gender. **On most measures, the patterns of positive changes are similar for male and female participants;** however, statistically significant between-group effects for Gender exist:

- Female youth report a significant decrease in Depression after program participation, while males maintain lower levels of Depressive symptoms [$F(1, 1986) = 31.851, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$]. **See Figure 2.**
- Female youth report a significant decrease in their views that Opposites Complement (desirable direction); males report a significant increase in their views that Opposites Complement [$F(1, 1964) = 18.215, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$]. **See Figure 3.**

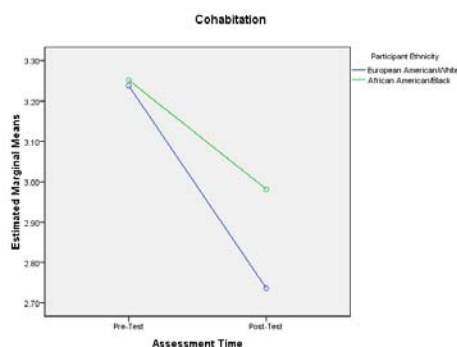


Figure 1. Cohabitation by Ethnicity

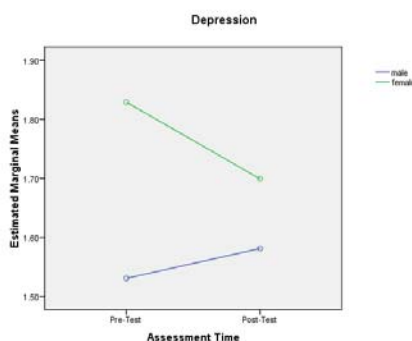


Figure 2. Depression by Gender

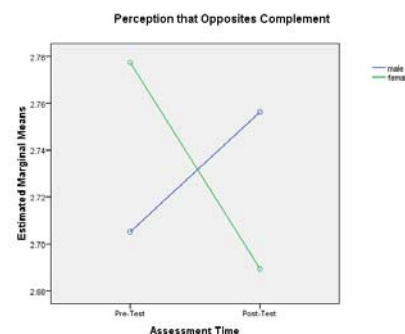


Figure 3. Opposites Complement by Gender

Discussion

ACHMI's first two project years indicate that *the majority of the targeted dimensions for youth participants show statistically significant change over time in a desirable direction.* In addition, both African American and European American youth appear to benefit similarly after participation in relationship education on nearly every targeted area of individual functioning and relationship quality and behavior. There are some differences between males and females in changes in individual and relational functioning after MRE participation (i.e., on measures of depression and belief that opposites complement), but, on average, both males and females 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 are not utilized; therefore, we suggest using caution 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 over .25 for approximately 46% of targeted outcomes, indicating meaningful/practical changes for an educational program (i.e., > .25; Wolf, 1986). Therefore, we 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 youth* participating in relationship education programs. In addition, these are some of the first findings of impact on *multiple dimensions of individual and relational functioning.* 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 youth development and family life education as a means for enhancing relational knowledge, decreasing risks for adolescents, and strengthening future families.