

Preliminary Examination: Healthy Marriage Grant with Diverse Populations

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Knowledge to Go Places

Abstract

Family Success in Adams County (FSAC) provides various education programs to families needing enrichment due to stress related to parenting, relationships, and finances. This study examines parenting classes with culturally and economically diverse individuals. Data collection is in early stages, but we are seeing positive outcomes including increased parenting self-efficacy.

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a widening gap in socioeconomic status (SES) and marital instability with lower SES couples experiencing higher rates of marital and relationship discord (e.g., Martin, 2006).

In response, the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) was formed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to promote programs that provide couples with the wide range of skills needed to form and sustain healthy relationships. Family Success in Adams County (FSAC) was formed in response to this call for proposals.

FSAC is curriculum-guided programming that offers a variety of free services addressing communication, conflict management, finances, and parenting skills. Including multiple services such as parenting education is essential as we know that new parents report substantially lower relationship satisfaction compared to other couples (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003).

FSAC recognizes that as a result of their parents' divorce, children are at least two to three times greater risk for emotional and behavioral problems, academic problems, delinquency, early sexual activity, problems with intimate relationships in early adulthood, poverty, and other challenges (e.g., Amato and Cheadle, 2005).

The intent of relationship education and enrichment is to assist more partners in fostering and sustaining a healthy, committed relationship that they wish to continue. Taking a holistic approach to this problem by including parenting education is an essential piece of the puzzle.

The majority of our participants are Latino and low SES families. We know that problems surrounding strong relationship formation and stability are often severe in poor communities, as there are higher rates of divorce, single parenting, and non-marital births (Dion et al., 2003). As there is a need to have comprehensive relationship and parent education programs focus on low SES and ethnically diverse individuals our program has a unique opportunity to aid in filling this research gap.

Essential is that proper evaluation is done on evidence based interventions in order to assess measurable outcomes and promote sustainability of programming for future generations. In the current study, preliminary immediate post and 6 month follow-up data of the parenting piece of our relationship education program is explored.



Method

Participants:
 $N = 251$; **Gender** = 80% Female; **Age** = $M = 30.88$ (10.05)
Ethnicity = Hispanic/Latino = 48%, White/Caucasian = 38%, African American/Black = 7%
Income = Household less than 14K/year = 56.4%; **Married/Engaged** = 56%
Number of children = 1 = 25%, 2 = 30%, 3 = 18%, 4 = 19%

Purpose:
 To examine the effects of a parenting education program on participants. Specifically, examination of parenting alliance (PAM; Abidin & Brunner, 1995), parenting self-efficacy (PSAM; Dumka et al., 1996), and psychological well-being scores (SOS; Blais, 1999; Owen et al., in press) at immediate post program and 6 month follow-ups.

Procedure:
 Participants are enrolled through various methods (e.g., health departments, social services). Participation is fully voluntary with informed consent. Participants commit to attending the educational sessions regularly, participating in assessments, and developing a Household Success Plan, duration is 24 months of follow-up. Participants meet with Family Service Coordinator for pre assessments and a one on one focus, then complete at least 8 hours of the parenting education class (i.e., Make Parenting a Pleasure (MPAP); Birth to Three, (Kumpfer, 1983). After program completion, participants complete an immediate post test and remain in contact with their coordinator for six-month follow-up assessments.

Results

The following analyses were conducted on a smaller post and follow-up sample due to the floating nature of our enrollment and varying times of class completions. Specifically, means were compared using an independent samples t-test with our baseline sample of 251 to either our post sample of 173 or our follow-up sample of 124.

Parenting Alliance Measure: No significant difference was found between pre and post PAM scores; $p > .05$. However, a significant difference was found when comparing means of immediate pre scores to 6 month follow-ups, $t(225) = 2.36, p < .05$ (see Figure 1). Here, findings showed significant improvement in PAM means (Pre, $M = 50.94; SD = 25.18$) (Post, $M = 43.55; SD = 21.03$), with lower scores indicating better parenting alliance or the belief that parents have a sound working relationship.

Parenting Self-Efficacy: A significant difference was found between pre and post reported PSAM (Dumka, 1996), $t(345) = -2.03, p < .05$ (see Figure 2). Specifically, we are seeing improvement from pre ($M = 19.59, SD = 3.75$) to post ($M = 20.37, SD = 3.32$) program. We also see this significant improvement in mean PSAM scores from pre to 6-month follow-up scores ($p = .05$).

Figure 1. Improvement in PAM from pre to 6 months

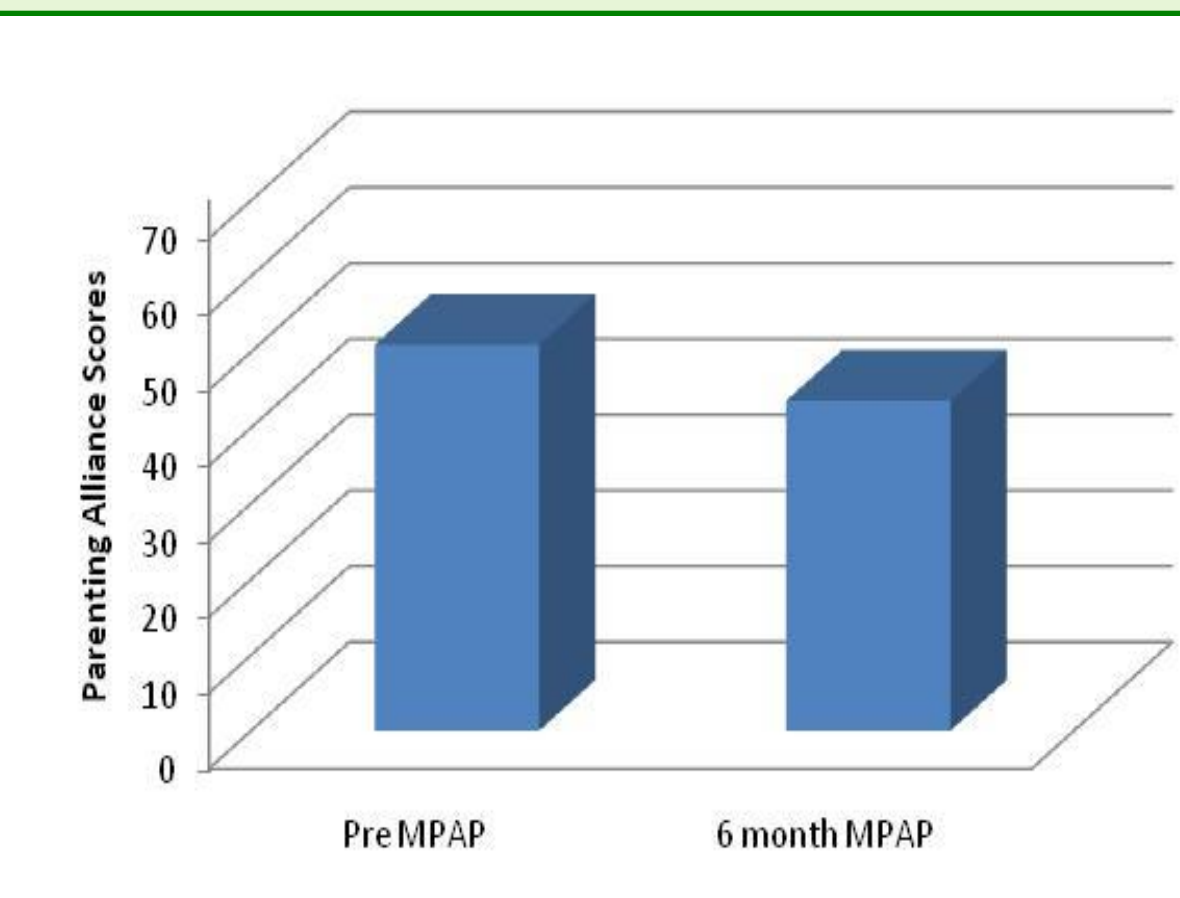
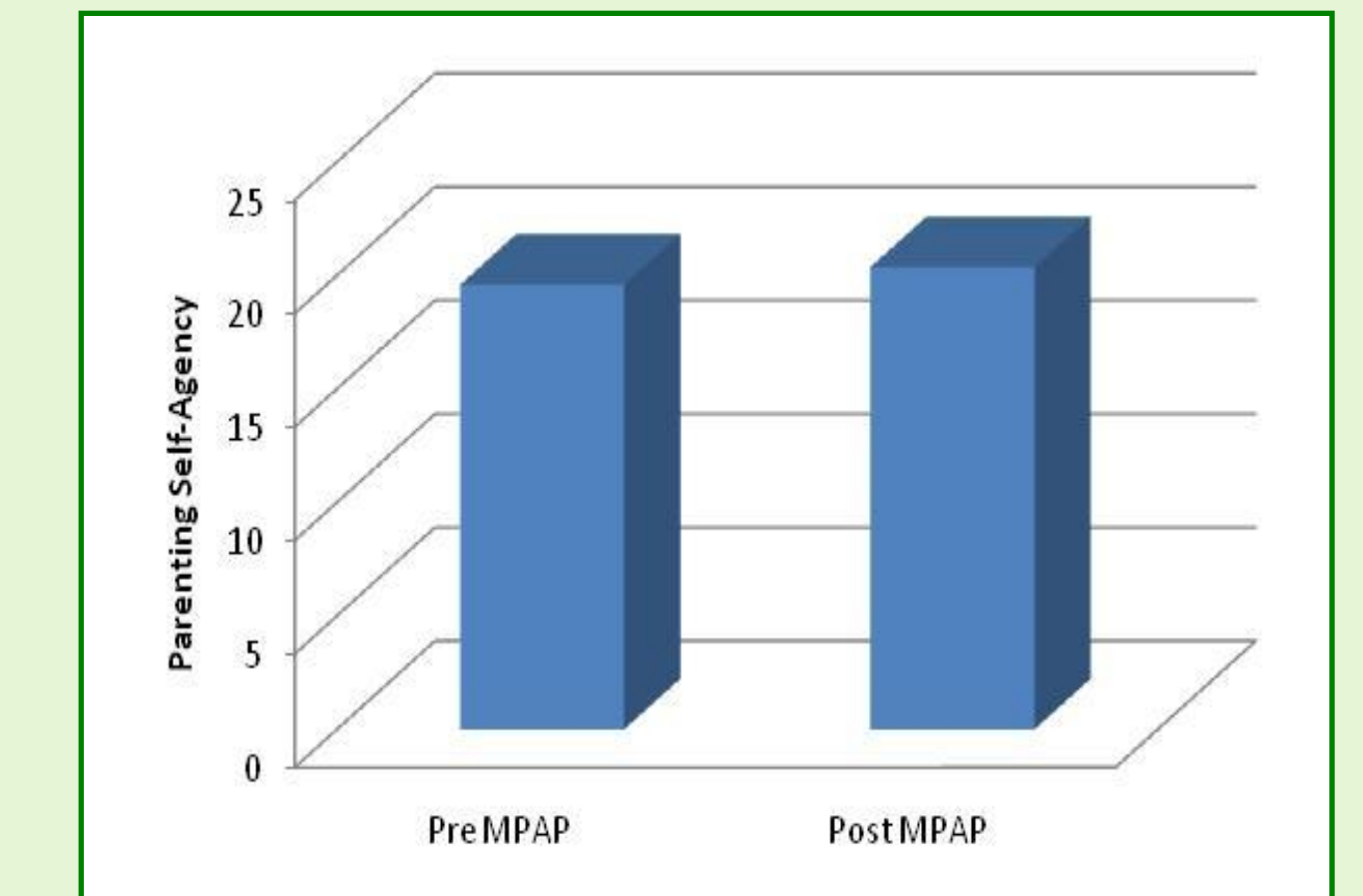
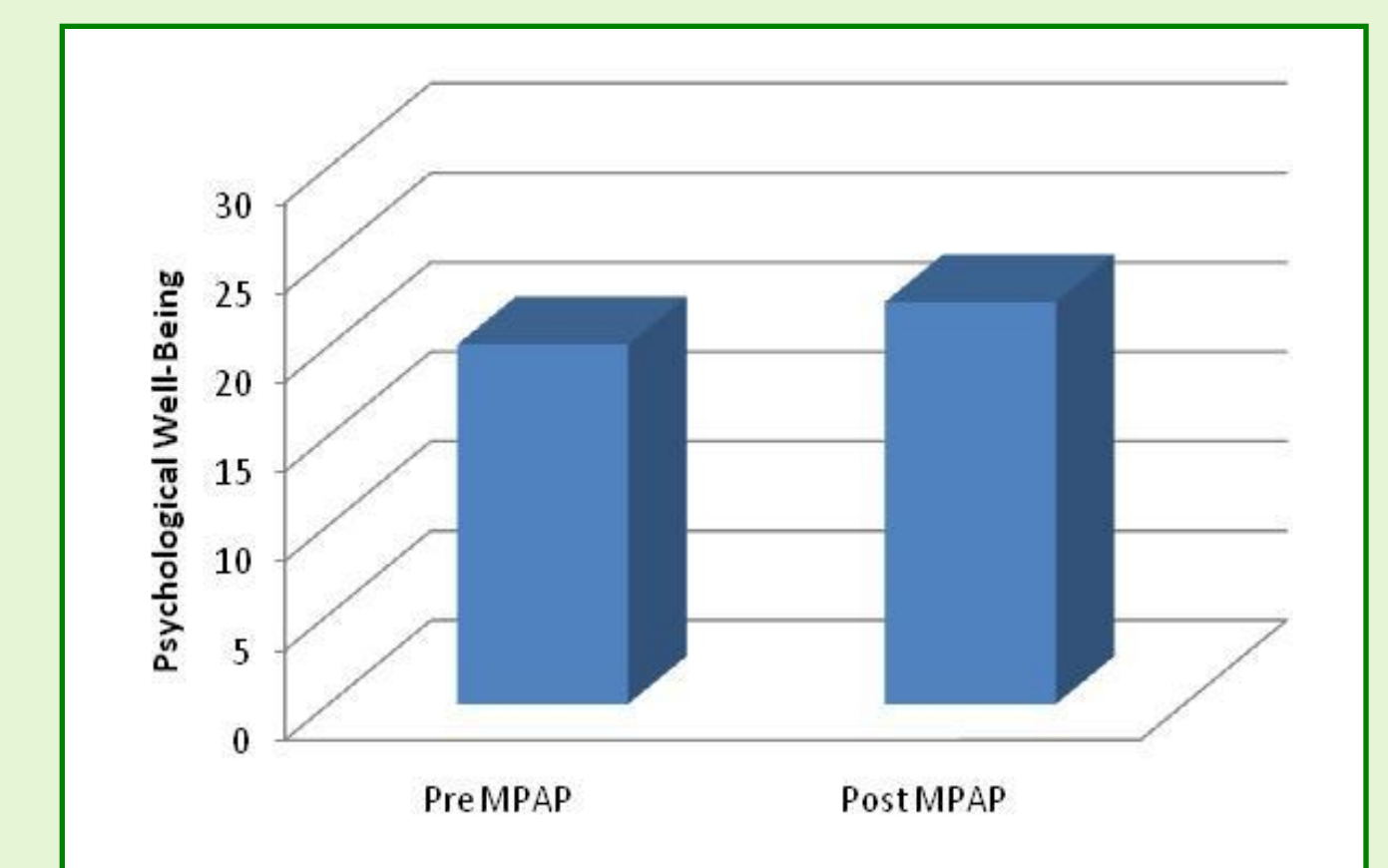


Figure 2. Improvement in PSAM from pre to immediate post



Psychological Well-Being: A significant difference was found between pre and post reported SOS (Blais, 1999), $t(392) = -4.26, p < .05$ (see Figure 3). Specifically, we are seeing improvement from pre ($M = 20.08, SD = 5.61$) to post ($M = 22.46, SD = 5.29$) program. We also see this significant improvement in mean SOS scores from pre to 6-month follow-up scores ($p < .05$).

Figure 3. Improvement in SOS from pre to immediate post



Conclusion

In the current preliminary examination we found improvements in parenting alliance, parental self-efficacy, and psychological well-being.

Improvement in parenting alliance is encouraging as this has been correlated to marital satisfaction and child adjustment (Abidin & Brunner, 1995). Interesting is that we saw an improvement at 6 months but not immediate post, indicating that perhaps this type of relationship change takes time and practice of skills learned.

Significant improvements in parenting self-efficacy was found suggesting that parents may have altered their framework around parenting practices and child adjustment (Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Wells-Parker, Miller, & Topping, 1990). Improvements may be attributed to participants overall increase in confidence in their ability to successfully parent their children.

Lastly, improvement in a broad outcome measure such as psychological well-being which encompasses life satisfaction and positive self-appraisal suggest a more long term impact on our population.

Key is that over half of our participants are minority and fall below poverty. Although current analyses don't allow for test of these covariates it is promising that we are seeing positive results with this unique sample.

Our population is of particular importance as lower income couples tend to be less well educated, have lower literacy, and are often members of minority groups. Specifically, approximately 37% of couples below the federal poverty line with young children are Latino (Fein & Associates, 2004). One of the many strengths of our study is its ability to successfully reach out to and serve this at risk population.

Data collection is ongoing, therefore caution should be taken in interpretation. Future analysis will consist of within subjects and allow for test of covariates (e.g., income, ethnicity).



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