

Effects of Pre-Enrollment Efforts on Retaining Low-Income Married Couples with Children in a Marriage and Relationship Education Program

Ashley Bennett and Dr. Andrew P. Daire

Introduction

- Between 2001 and 2003, the federal government launched an initiative to help overcome some of the barriers to improving or maintaining relationship satisfaction in low-income couples. As part of this initiative, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) funded grants and training programs geared at strengthening marriages and relationships (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Some of the programs were designed to conduct research on the effectiveness of marriage and relationship education (MRE) with low-income couples.
- The UCF Marriage & Family Research Institute (UCF MFRI) has participated in one of the programs funded by ACF, the Supporting Healthy Marriages study. This is a national, experimental design study targeting low-income married couples with children. The UCF MFRI randomly assigned eight hundred couples, with 400 in the treatment group. Those couples randomly assigned to the treatment group received services for 12 months, including 30 hours of marriage and relationship education, office visits, booster topic sessions covering various topics pertinent to the population's needs, as well as other support services.
- Low-income couples face a host of challenges that threaten the satisfaction of their relationships. As a result, low-income couples are not as likely to participate in MRE or relationship interventions as middle and upper income couples. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify how interactions with couples prior to study participation might impact retention. The interactions that occurred after a couple was recruited, and before a couple was a study participant were labeled pre-enrollment efforts. Data was collected from 392 treatment group participants who were randomly assigned to the treatment group from January 29, 2008 to December 6, 2008. Those couples were selected because they had been in the treatment group for 12 months. We hope the findings of this study will contribute to best practices for recruiting low income married couples.

Research Questions

1. What pre-enrollment factors impact program participation?

H₀1: No relationship exists between the number of pre-enrollment contacts and program participation measured by number of hours spent in a MRE session.

H₀2: No difference exists in pre-enrollment contacts between those who completed as measured by 75% completion, and those who did not.

2. Does who you contact from the couple impact program participation?

H₀1: No difference exists in program participation for couples where staff contacted wife only, husband only, or both husband and wife after the initial referral.

Method

This study was conducted by collecting data from the 392 participants who were involved in the UCF Supporting Healthy Marriages study. The data collected included the number of pre-enrollment phone contacts with participants, the number of hours spent in marriage and relationship education classes, and which participant was contacted via phone pre-enrollment (e.g. wife only, husband only, or both). Participants for the study met the following eligibility criteria:

1. Married
2. Children ages 0-17 that live in the home at least part-time
3. Low-income as measured by 200% of the Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines.

Demographics

The mean age was 33.48 and the participants had a mean number of 2.45 children. Finally, the couples were married a mean number of 66.28 months. Of the 392 participants, 64% were employed at the time of their intake appointment. The ethnicity was collected and listed in the Table 1.

	Frequency	Percent
Caucasian	108	27.5
Hispanic	195	49.7
African American	70	17.9
Asian	10	2.6
Native American- Alaskan Native	3	0.8
Other	6	1.5
Total	392	100.0

Abstract

Since May 2007, the UCF Marriage & Family Research Institute (UCF MFRI) has participated in the Supporting Healthy Marriages study, a national, experimental design study targeting low-income married couples with children. As such, the UCF MFRI randomly assigned 800 couples. The couples in the treatment group received 30 hours of marriage and relationship education, as well as other support services. Recruitment and enrollment of low-income couples was deemed one of the largest challenges to this study. There is little empirical data on the best practices for recruiting this population, and its impact on program retention. Data was collected from 392 treatment group participants. The number of contacts prior to the couple's random assignment to the treatment group, which member of the couple was contacted, total number of hours the couples spent in relationship education workshops, and demographics were collected. The researchers expect there will be a relationship between the number of contacts a participant received pre-enrollment and retention. Additionally, the researchers expect there will be a difference in retention based on which member of the couple was contacted pre-enrollment. Findings from this study will provide information on best practices for researchers targeting low-income couples for research studies.

Results

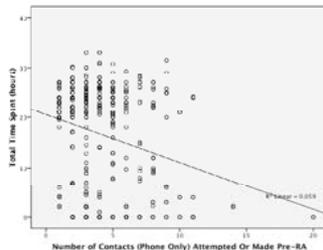
Research Question 1(RQ1): What pre-enrollment factors impact program participation?

H₀1: No relationship exists between the number of pre-enrollment contacts and program participation as measured by time spent in hours of marriage education.

Researchers conducted a univariate regression because we were looking to see if program participation can be predicted from number of pre-enrollment contacts. The analysis revealed a statistically significant, relationship between number of contacts pre-enrollment and retention ($F_{1,390} = 24.645, p < .01$). Approximately 6% ($r^2 = 0.059$) of the variance in retention can be attributed to pre-enrollment contacts. For mean time spent in hours and number of phone contacts attempted or made pre-random assignment see Table 2.

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Time Spent (Hours)	16.50	10.566
Number of Contacts (Phone Only) Attempted or Made Pre-Random Assignment	4.28	2.717

From the data collected, researchers were able to create a regression equation where \hat{Y} = time spent and X = Number of contacts made pre-enrollment. $\hat{Y} = -0.948X + 20.549$



H₀2: No difference exists in pre-enrollment contacts between those who completed, measured at 75% completion, and those who did not.

To test this question, we conducted a One-Way ANOVA. The results indicated a statistically significant difference ($F_{1,390} = 18.42; p < .01$) between completers ($M = 3.91, s = 2.16$) and non-completers ($M = 5.18, s = 3.60$) in retention, as measured by hours spent in MRE workshops. We calculated the effect size using η^2 to be 0.045. An effect size of 0.045 is a moderate effect. For the percent of program completed by participants and mean number of contacts please see Table 3.

	Number of Participants	Mean Number Contacts	Standard Deviation
Completed 75% or more	278	3.91	2.159
Completed 75% or less	114	5.18	3.600
Total	392	4.28	2.717

Research Question 2(RQ2): Does who you contact impact program participation?

H₀1: There is no difference in program participation measured as time spent in hours for couples where wife only was contacted, husband only, or both members of the couple pre-enrollment.

We conducted a One-Way ANOVA to test this hypothesis. The results indicate no statistically significant difference ($F_{2,387} = 1.72, p > .05$) for time spent in MRE workshops between pre-enrollment contacts with wife only ($M = 17.16, s = 10.44$), husband only ($M = 15.75, s = 11.37$), and both husband and wife ($M = 14.95, s = 6.23$). For number of contacts and mean time spent in hours for wife, husband and both members of the couple please see Table 4.

	Number of contacts	Mean Time Spent in hours	Standard Deviation
Wife	256	17.16	10.439
Husband	28	15.75	11.386
Both Husband and Wife	106	14.95	10.629

Discussion

RQ1-H₀1:

- The data was statistically significant.
- A relationship exists between the number of pre-enrollment contacts a participant receives and their program participation.
- The partial eta squared is 6% and medium, or moderate, this indicates that the more often a participant is contacted, the fewer hours they participated in MRE classes.
- There is a negative correlation between the time participants spend in program services and the number of pre-enrollment contacts indicating that the more often a participant is contacted pre-enrollment the fewer hours they spend in programmatic services.
- We rejected the null hypothesis.

RQ1-H₀2:

- The data was statistically significant.
- A difference exists in pre-enrollment contacts between those who completed MRE, measured at 75% completion, and those who did not.
- The effect size is 0.045. This is a moderate effect size which means that we can attribute some of the variance in groups to number of pre-enrollment contacts. In other words, pre-enrollment contacts can be attributed to whether or not a couple completes 75% of the program.
- The results of this analysis suggest that we reject the null hypothesis for H₀2.

RQ2-H₀1:

- No statistical significance based on who is contacted pre-enrollment and retention.
- For couples who were randomly assigned to the treatment group, who was contacted pre-enrollment does not have a significant impact on the couple's retention in programmatic services.
- We fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Limitations

- All couples were randomly assigned to the treatment group; therefore, couples who show up to the first appointment could inherently be more motivated than others. Future research should look at all couples recruited, not just couples that were randomly assigned to the treatment group.
- Researchers could not control for all the variables that affect program participations, such as participants' schedules, mode of transportation, etc.
- Research Question 2: H₀1 had a small number of contacts for husband only.

Conclusion

- The number of pre-enrollment contacts affects the overall completion rate and the number of hours participants spend in the program (i.e. retention).
- Who is contacted in the relationship makes little difference in the participation rates of couples in the program.
- Implications:**
- Researchers in future studies targeting low-income dyads can tailor their recruitment initiative to focus on making approximately 3-4 pre-enrollment contacts per participant prior to enrollment in a study. It is indicated in this study, that anything more than 4 phone calls has a negative correlation with retention.
- Pre-enrollment contacts with participants as some of these can be attributed to whether or not the participants complete the program.
- Not exceeding 4 pre-enrollment phone contacts with participants. It is important that recruiters seek out other potential participants and discontinue reconnecting those who have been non-responsive.
- The data presented can be helpful to future researchers working with low-income couples. The results of the study indicate how pre-enrollment efforts impact retention, and that the more a couple needs to be contacted, the less likely they are to participate in the treatment.

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