

Impact of PAIRS Essentials Marriage Education with Low-Income Couples

May 5, 2010



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Executive Summary

- The current economic climate has directly affected marital satisfaction and stability, further contributing to the number of children being raised in single-parent homes.
- Marital breakdown directly contributes to the \$250 billion dollars spent each year on single-parent welfare benefits.
- Research shows a strong link between healthier marriages and economic success, further supporting the need to make research-validated marriage education programs widely available to low-income communities.
- Helping low-income couples learn usable skills to improve communication, bonding, and conflict resolution increases relationship satisfaction and ultimately can help sustain marriages and families -- leading to greater financial success, stability, reduced dependency of taxpayer assistance, and improved outcomes for children.
- In 2006, PAIRS Foundation, a Florida nonprofit, was awarded a multi-year, multi-million dollar grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, to conduct a marriage education demonstration project and research in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. To date, more than 5,000 people have participated, including couples and singles in all stages of relationship from diverse socio-economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.
- Six-month follow-up studies have consistently demonstrated significant benefits for couples, marriages and families after completion of nine hours of skills training.
- The impact on low-income participants has been particularly significant, including:
 - ☑ 77% showed greater relationship cohesion and stability;
 - ☑ 95% improved communication in their relationship;
 - ☑ 94% increased shared appreciations with their partner;
 - ☑ 93% improved conflict resolution;
 - ☑ 88% improved physical intimacy;
 - ☑ 89% improved emotional intimacy;
 - ☑ 93% improved overall relationship satisfaction;
 - ☑ 99% indicated they would recommend the classes to others.
- Findings offer encouragement for continued work in the area of relationship education as a way of strengthening low-income couples and families, which will assist in reducing divorce rates, the number of children raised in single-parent homes, and poverty.

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Introduction

Almost ninety percent of Americans will choose to marry at some point in their lives. Close to fifty percent of marriages in the United States end in divorce. Around half of all children will witness the dissolution of a parent's marriage. Of these children, close to half will go on to witness a parent's second divorce. Children who are raised in single-parent homes are less likely to get married, and those who do marry are more likely to divorce. Teenage girls from single-parent homes are two times more likely than their peers from two-parent homes to drop out of high school and/or give birth to an out of wedlock child. Over 60 percent of children living in poverty are being raised in a single-parent home. These numbers reflect the undeniable link between the breakdown of marriage and poverty in American society.

Marital breakdown has substantially contributed to social conditions that threaten the foundation of American society, culture and potential for economic prosperity. Since the 2008-2009 economic downturn, many Americans are faced with the constant worry and anxiety of providing for their families. The current economic climate has directly affected marital satisfaction and stability, further contributing to the number of children being raised in single-parent homes. Marital breakdown directly contributes to the \$250 billion dollars spent each year on single-parent welfare benefits. Research shows a strong link between healthier marriages and economic success, further supporting the need to make research-validated marriage education programs widely available to low-income communities.

Providing couples with tools to improve communication, bonding, and conflict resolution increases relationship satisfaction and ultimately can help sustain marriages and families -- leading to greater financial success and stability. Participating in brief, research-validated relationship skills training programs, such as those offered by the PAIRS Foundation, gives couples tools to strengthen love relationships, and endure times of stress and hardship. Research continues to demonstrate that PAIRS relationship skills training, a behavioral/cognitive educational approach developed, evaluated, and refined over a quarter century, has the potential to reverse this trend of relationship breakdown and significantly contribute to strengthening families and improving outcomes for society, and more importantly, for children.

For this study, PAIRS Foundation's instructors delivered the nine-hour PAIRS Essentials curriculum, including exercises to enhance communication, emotional understanding and expression, and constructive conflict resolution in both English and Spanish. In 2006 PAIRS Foundation was awarded a multi-year, multi-million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families to conduct a healthy marriage demonstration project in South Florida. As a result of the federal grant, couples in the classes studied for this research were able to participate at no cost.

The PAIRS Approach

PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) classes provide a comprehensive system to enhance self-knowledge and develop the ability to sustain pleasurable intimate relationships. PAIRS delivers a unique technology built on a skills-based approach to enhancing empathy, bonding and emotional literacy. PAIRS curricula integrate a wide range of theories and proprietary methods from psychology, education and psychotherapy and presents them in an educational format in classes that vary in length from nine to 120 hours. PAIRS acts to bridge therapy, marital enrichment, and family development through a cost effective group educational approach to reducing family breakdown. This study evaluates the impact of the PAIRS Essentials curriculum on relationship satisfaction.

Methods

Participants. The sample for these analyses is drawn from 168 participants who reported their combined couple income to be at or below \$48,000. The sample includes 45.2% male participants and 54.8% female participants. 12.5% of the participants were between the ages of 21-30, 47% of the participants were between the ages of 31-45, 32.7% of the participants were between the ages of 46-60, 4.8% of participants reported being 61 or older. 11.9% of participants are African American, 7.1% are White (non Hispanic), 81% are Hispanic/Latino. 94% of the participants reported their relationship status as married, 4.2% of the participants indicated they were engaged or considering marriage, and 1.8% indicated they were separated or considering separation.

Measures A demographic form was designed by the research team to gather applicable information. Participants in the study were asked to indicate their race, age, sex, relationship status, employment status, number of years in current relationship, and income level. Participants were also asked to complete the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) prior to beginning the PAIRS class, and again six months after class completion. The DAS is a pencil and paper evaluation which contains 32 questions. Participants also completed a retrospective survey developed by the PAIRS Research Team six-months following class completion

Results

Analysis indicates that 76.8% of low-income couples who participated in PAIRS Essentials nine-hour curriculum showed improved scores six months following their initial Pre-test on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (See Table 1). 66.7 percent of these participants showed improved scores on the DAS7 six months following their initial Pre-test (See Table 2). 95% of participants reported improved communication in their relationship, 94% reported increased shared appreciations with their partner, 93% reported improved conflict resolution, 88% reported improvement in physical intimacy, 89% reported improvements in emotional intimacy, and 93% reported improved overall relationship satisfaction. 99% of participants indicated they would recommend PAIRS to others.

Table 1 Percentage of participants with improved scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale Pre/6M

Dyadic Adjustment Scale Pre/6M Total Improved		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes, Score Improved	129	76.80%
No, Score Not Improved	39	23.20%
Total	168	100%

Table 2. Percentage of participants with improved scores on DAS 7 Pre/6M

DAS 7 Pre/6M Total Improved		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes, Score Improved	112	66.70%
No, Score Not Improved	56	33.30%
Total	168	100%

Qualitative Comments

“Before class my husband and I considered divorce. We had gone to a few counseling appointments, but we made no progress in our relationship. When I was invited to the PAIRS class my husband did not want to go, but I persisted and finally he accepted. Today after finishing the course we want to thank you and say this class saved our marriage. We realized that the biggest problem we had was that we didn’t know how to communicate and thanks to PAIRS things have changed, our relationship is different Thank you again to you and PAIRS!”

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate if low-income couples report significant improvements six-months after completing a PAIRS Essentials nine-hour course, which would indicate that PAIRS classes can increase relationship satisfaction, leading to decreased relationship breakdown, economic benefits for couples and their children. The results indicate positive changes among an ethnically diverse population. The results also show that PAIRS classes can produce lasting significant improvements, specifically among low-income couples. The results are a promising indication of how relationship education classes can enable low-income couples to attain greater economic prosperity and family stability. These findings offer encouragement for continued work in the area of relationship education as a way of strengthening low-income couples and families, which will assist in reducing divorce rates, the number of children raised in single-parent homes, and poverty.

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