



The Philadelphia Healthy Marriage Project

A joint project of Council For Relationships and
the Mayors Office of Community Services

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Project Goals

- to establish a model for delivery of marriage education among low income populations within a complex urban community action agency
- to increase the marriage rate and strengthen existing marriages
- to increase opportunities for families to obtain the social and economic benefits of healthy marriage



The Plan

- To interview staff and clients of MOCS on their ideas about a healthy marriage curriculum appropriate to their low income and minority population
- To develop a marriage curriculum based on best current practices and the findings of our research
- To provide comprehensive training so that MOCS staff will be able to teach the Philadelphia Healthy Marriage Model in their programs



Using Qualitative Grounded Research Methodology – Why?

- For exploring topics about which little is known or where the prevailing theories appear inadequate or incomplete.
- Small scaled and focused
- Semi-structured interview guides – allows for open ended answers
- richness and depth of data from the perspectives of those who have lived through the experience
- limitations



Demographics of MOCS Staff Interviewees

- 19 interviewees – 15 African American
3 Latino, 1 White/Latino

Age – 11 above age of 50

Class – 13 middle class

Gender – 10 males, 9 females

Education – 15 attended college; 6 of the 15 graduated

Marriage Status – 9 in their first marriage, 4 in second or third marriages, 1 divorced, 1 widowed, 4 single

Demographics of Staff

Interviewees (cont.)

- Number of Children – 16 have children, 3 do not
- 5 staff members had children out of wedlock but only 2 of the 5 not married – 1 single, 1 divorced
- Only three interviewees with grandchildren born out of wedlock where the parents were not married at the time of the interview.



Four Types of Client Problems

- 1. Psychological Issues/Attitudes
 - Many clients are angry, often at the women –
 - “They’re very bitter and furious at the custodial parent, mainly because they think that it was their direct actions that brought them there...the majority of the time it’s actually applying for TANF benefits is what brings them into court and brings them into the Fatherhood Program rather than the woman pressing charges on them....”



Client Problems (cont.)

- 2. Environmental Issues
 - Lack education; role models; language barriers; financial resources
 - “Most of them come from families [of] single mother[s]...that are struggling, don’t have the right support systems, don’t understand their position in life...they’ve got that burden of...the environmental barrier...the educational barrier... they don’t understand the responsibility of being a father.”



Client Problems (cont.)

- 3. Interpersonal Relationship Issues
 - sexual issues, fatherhood issues, abusive relationships, youth, multiple partners
 - “One of the key questions is asking them [the fathers] what relationship do you even envision or...want...[they may say] I don’t want anything to do with that woman...There are some very complex webs of relationships.”
 - “Trying to have sexual conquests. Trying to see how many kids that [they] father in different households.”



Client Problems (cont.)

- 4. Abuse Issues
 - Physical, emotional, substance
 - “A lot of them are drug addicts. A lot of them may be locked up and they’re still in love. And the woman...is meeting up with the man at the jail...They’ve never had...structure in their own family, and they just don’t know how to...try...to make a relationship.”



Insights From The MOCS Staff

- Their attitudes: sensitivity to the needs of the clients; serious mandate to help; sense of idealism; commitment to work.
 - “They succeed because of how well we treat them...with respect...make them feel comfortable and feel good.”
 - “You have to be role models...that’s the way these guys have learned all their life...from watching people.”



Shared Similarities with Clients

- Identification with life experiences with their fathers or father figures; on the importance of the father as a role model; on general life experiences.
 - “I came from a single parent home. My grandmother raised me. My mother died when I was five years old. And my father was a military man...I’ve been through all of those issues they are wrestling with...”



Shared Similarities (cont.)

- “I went through life what my customers are going through now...I came here...a single mother with a child in my arms...with my daughter’s father...it was a very abusive relationship....”
- “My personal experience would be a kind of common ground that I would share with a lot of the clients. I also grew up low income...in a fractured family. My father was in and out of jail.”

Staff Attitudes And Values

About Marriage

- Key components: understanding, give and take, communication, commitment, role of religious beliefs.
 - “...if you come from a very good home, you usually pass that on. If you come from an abusive home, you usually pass that on...you have to look at...who you are and if you need to change...”
 - “bringing families together, making them stronger, enable them to communicate with one another.”



Staff Ideas About Marriage Education

- Teaches communication and conflict resolution skills plus understanding females
- Tools and resources to make better choices and develop positive relationships

Ideas About Marriage Education

(cont.)



- “For those who are married, how to maintain a health marriage, a healthy relationship. For those who are single...how to get into a healthy relationship, how to understand marriage...Because sometimes people confuse living together and legal marriage.”
- “There are some very important functions of marriage in healthy relationships...economic stability...personal stability...someone is there and supporting you and you’re not alone in the world...”

Ideas About Marriage Education

(cont.)

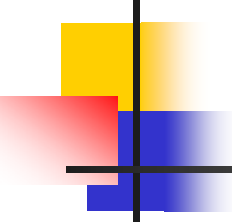


- “The backbone of that is strengthening families and families are what make up the neighborhoods and that’s what the city is made of...it’s stabilizing the entire city if you could...heal these fractures. And the ultimate goal is the kids...setting an example of them and giving them a sense of stability.”



Staff Concerns About Marriage Education

- “We’re going to have to train them. Re-train them. They’ve got a lot of bad learned behavior.”
- “My concern would be that we get them to understand a healthy relationship...some of them have multiple mothers for their children, which child’s mother would you marry?...That presents a dilemma. They have not been in a healthy relationship with any of them.”



Demographics Of Client Interviews

- Ethnicity – 11 African Americans, 1 white, 1 Latino
- Age – 7 in their 30s, 6 in their 20s
- Class – 4 middle class, 8 lower or working class
- Education – 4 had some high school; 7 were high school grads; 3 of the 7 attended 2 years of college
- Occupation – 6 were in the trades; 3 were in retail; 4 did not specify an occupation. Only one, a forklift operator, was employed.
- Marital status – 7 were not married; 6 were



Demographics (cont.)

- Number of Children – The number of children each father had ranged from one to eight. Only three fathers had children from one woman. Of the three, two were still in long term relationships with those women. The other men had had children with from two to four women.
- Age of Children – The children ranged from a few months old to 22 years. Most were young children to young teens. None were married or had children of their own.



Values Learned In The Family Of Origin

- Important Values Learned From the Significant Adults in Their Lives – work, education, importance of family, staying out of trouble.
 - “My father always told me being a man means taking care of your family-kids, wife, house or home.”
- Important Values To The Fathers – learning, education, work, positive attitude, respect
- Values Passed on to Their Children – education, faith, importance of love, being a role model



Definition Of A Good Parent

- Placing your children first, bonding with them, communication, trust, guiding them, teaching them right from wrong.
 - “At the end of their life, they’re not going to remember every dollar you gave them. They’re going to remember when you love them and supported them.”



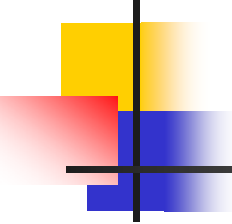
Definition Of Good Marriages

- Components of a Good Marriage – communication, trust, honesty, loyalty, love, commitment, faith, dedication, friendship, children, sharing values, relationship of equals
 - “In my mind what makes a good marriage is that we communicate better. Communicate, trust, honesty. Basically being loyal to each other. If there’s no trust in a relationship there is no future. And if you don’t trust each other, then what are you doing being with each other?”



Positives Of Fatherhood Initiatives Program

- The current staff
 - “They make us feel very comfortable...and they try to educate us with the most that they have to offer.”
 - “Some of them went through what we’re going through today...They were taught how to be better fathers and now their job is teaching us, the fathers, how to be better fathers to [our] children.”



Positives Of Fatherhood Initiatives Program (cont.)

- Benefit from hearing from others with the same problems
- The program contains information and discussions
- They learn how to be better fathers
- Help with anger management and substance abuse
 - “It taught me how to change diapers...Taking my kids out on a trip by myself, away from their mother. Having them to myself.”



Suggested Improvements

- Job readiness/job placement/job training skills
- More counseling
 - “a lot of advice on how to overcome certain obstacles in a marriage.”
- To include their partners in the program with them
 - “I think basically having your spouse or your girlfriend or even your ex or whatever, if she’s willing to come and do this with you, that shows a lot of character on both sides. They’re willing to help each other learn to communicate better and be truthful.”



Commonalities Between Staff And Client Insights

- Client Attitudes: Both agreed anger is a problem
- Environmental Barriers: Both agreed lack of education, lack of role models, lack of job skills and opportunities are barriers
- Staff cited their sensitivity towards the clients and their dedication to their jobs. The clients agreed.
- Positive aspects of the program both agree are content, referrals to other resources, safe environment, information
- Faith or spirituality is an integral part of their lives

Disconnects Between Staff And Clients



- Staff described clients problems as having multiple partners and negative attitudes about women. Although most of the men had multiple mothers for their children, none identified it as a problem and none expressed negative attitudes about women in the interviews.
- Staff and Clients share similar views on the components of a good marriage but unlike the staff most of the clients experienced relationship disruption and children with multiple partners.



Specific Recommendations For A Healthy Marriage Curriculum

- Link clients to other supportive services - employment, education, etc.
- Build on the common views of marriage between staff and clients
- Focus on communication, conflict resolutions skills, insights into understanding females, role playing,
- Focus on healthy relationships not just healthy marriages
- Include women as participants in the curriculum



The Research Findings That Impacted the Creation of the Curriculum

- Psychological issues/attitudes of bitterness
- Environmental Issues – being raised by single mothers and having multiple mothers of their children
- Educational deficits
- Interpersonal problems around co-parenting complicated by domestic violence, sexual promiscuity and substance abuse
- The ‘ripple effect’ of the influence of the family of origin on the fathers’ beliefs, attitudes and behaviors