

# Using Research in Marriage/Relationship Education Programming

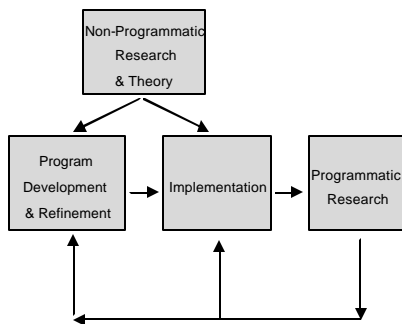
Brian J. Higginbotham, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist  
Utah State University

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## Objectives

- “...approaching prevention as a scientific enterprise as well as a service mission”
  - Dumka et al., 1995, p. 78
- The role of Research
  - Research informed programming
  - Programmatic research (program evaluation)

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## Research Informed Practice

- What program to offer?
  - You can choose a marketed program
    - See [www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com)
  - You can choose an empirically evaluated program
    - See Jakubowski, et al., 2004

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## Cautions about Choosing Programs

- Well-evaluated and well-known programs can be expensive
- Unevaluated programs are not necessarily “worse” or “less effective”
- Some evaluated programs have not been updated
- The guiding assumptions and content of established programs may not necessarily fit with your context or target audience

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## Another approach to program selection

- Compare program content with findings from an appropriate empirical research base
- “...a well-grounded family life education program needs ...a demonstrated research basis in regards to the topic, the content, and the application techniques”
  - Hughes, 1994, p. 75
- Program content should be clearly supported by the current research literature

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### Step 1: Determine and Gather Literature Based on Goals

- The goal of your program should implicate the research topic area to be investigated
- Use electronic search engines
  - EBSCO
  - PsychINFO

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### Step 2: Narrow Potential Studies

- Inclusion Criteria
- Exclusion Criteria
- Focus on “Modifiable” interactional variables

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### Step 3: Identifying Research Themes

- Identified broad themes or categories
  - Positive emotions and behaviors (Positivity)
  - Negative emotions and behaviors (Negativity)
  - Cognitions

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### Step 4: Determining & Reviewing Research Rigor

- You can have greatest confidence in studies which include:
  - A longitudinal design
  - A representative sample
  - Observational methods
  - Multi-method or multi-informant procedures

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### Research-Supported Topics and Subcategories for Marriage Education Prevention Programs

<u>Positivity</u> <i>Protective Factors</i>	<u>Negativity</u> <i>Risk Factors</i>	<u>Cognitions</u> <i>Protective Factors</i>
-Positive emotions	-Negative emotions	-Realistic beliefs and perception of expectations met
-Affectionate behaviors	-Overt negative behaviors	-Knowledge and understanding
-Supportive behaviors	-Withdrawal, nonresponsive, or dismissive behaviors	-Consensus
-Time Together	-Withdrawal, nonresponsive or dismissive behaviors	-Perceived equity and fairness
-Relational identity	-Withdraw pattern	-Positive attributions and biases
-Expressivity and self-disclosure		

### Research Informed Implementation

- Implementation issues should also be informed by the extant literature
- How a program is implemented may be just as important as what the program content covers

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## **Program and Audience Characteristics**

- **Culturally appropriate material**
- **Benefits of homogeneous groups**

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## **Facilitator Characteristics**

- **Facilitator should be**
  - Interesting
  - Familiar with issues
  - Credible
  - Trustworthy
- **Demonstrate support, empathy, and concern for participants**
- **Be flexible and adapt to comfort-level of participants**

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Do you have to have a great marriage to be a great marriage educator?

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## **Programmatic research**

- **More research is needed regarding implementation, facilitator, and audience characteristics**
- **Every organization can do some type of an evaluation**
- **The more the merrier**

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## **Assumptions regarding the role and value of program evaluation**

- 1- Evaluation is a systematic collection of data
- 2- Evaluation is a necessary component
- 3- There are numerous legitimate purposes
- 4- There are many legitimate audiences
- 5- Evaluation should not detract from service delivery

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## **Five-Tiered Approach to Evaluation**

- **Each level requires**
  - Greater efforts
  - Increased precision in program definition
  - Larger commitment to the evaluation process
- **All aspects of evaluation have inherent value**

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## **Level One: The Pre-implementation Tier**

- **Possible Evaluation Activities**
  - Perform needs assessments
  - Determine the fit for the community via interviews with community leaders
  - Detail program objectives
  - Establish basis on which the curriculum was developed
  - Hold focus groups

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## **The Pre-implementation Tier cont.**

- Ask potential participants what they want and in what format
- Evaluations provide the foundation and baseline for future evaluation activities

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## **Level Two: The Accountability Tier**

- **Systematic collection of client-specific and service-utilization data**
- **Possible Evaluation Activities**
  - Gather cost information per unit of service
  - Document program participants
    - Number registered, number attending, marital status, race, age, etc.
  - Document program services
    - Number of sessions offered, amount of time per session, format of sessions, etc.

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## **Level Three: The Program Clarification Tier**

- **Possible Evaluation Activities**
  - Gather observations from staff
  - Review participant data
  - Question basic program assumptions
  - Clarify and restate program's objectives, strategies, and target audience

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## **Level Four: Progress-Toward-Objective Tier**

- **Possible Evaluation Activities**
  - Administer questionnaires
  - Examine short-term objectives
  - Measure client and staff satisfaction
  - Assess for differential effect
- **Consider using a professional evaluator**
- **This level of evaluation is expected when applying for large grants**

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## **Level Five: The Program-Impact Tier**

- **This type of evaluation includes a rigorous experimental design**
  - Assess the program's effectiveness over time
  - Discern whether the positive results were spurious
- **Possible Evaluation Activities**
  - Gather quantifiable client-specific data
  - Gather data from a control or comparison group

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## Five Tier Summary

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Tier 5
Provide a "data groundwork"	Document usage and cost	Clarify and improve	Assess for short-term and differential effects	Assess the program's effectiveness and discern whether the results are spurious

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## Evaluation Resources

Child Trends' compilation of evaluation instruments:

- [http://www.childtrends.org/docdisp\\_page.cfm?LID=2CACD57D-1090-419B-8D4BB6C3F7ED10DC](http://www.childtrends.org/docdisp_page.cfm?LID=2CACD57D-1090-419B-8D4BB6C3F7ED10DC)

Harvard's Evaluation Exchange:

- <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue28/>

NCSU On-line course on Program and Evaluation Development:

- <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/courses/fcs510.php>

University of Wisconsin-Extension - Program Development and Evaluation Information:

- <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/>

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## Conclusion

- **Research should inform the content and practice of your program**
- **Refine your program and contribute to the field through evaluation**

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