

African American Marriages: Status, Quality, and Clarification

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Federal Healthy Marriage Initiative

Mission Statement:

- To help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage (Administration for Children and Families website)
- In 2006, \$100 million for Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants and \$50 million for Strengthening Fatherhood Grants.

African American Healthy Marriage Initiative

- The AAHMI was created to promote a culturally competent strategy for fostering healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, improving child well-being, and strengthening families within the African American Community.

Marriage Education

- Movement started by Diane Solle, 1989
- Broad Definition include:
 - Skills-based group programs for the prevention and remediation of marital distress
 - Marital support groups normally labeled as marriage enrichment (Larson, 2004)
- Developed to aid couples
 - Enhance relationship quality
 - Improve satisfaction
 - Prevent divorce

Marriage Education Cont...

- Marriage Crises Intervention
- Coalition for Marriage and Family
- Couples Education
- Grants
 - Healthy Marriage Initiative – 2001
 - PAIRS Evaluation Project - 2006

Marriage Education Cont...

- Also called couples or relationship education
- Designed for persons in intimate relationship; married or not
- Curricula vary but most include:
 - Communication
 - Problem-Solving and relationship decision-making
 - Parenting skills
 - Benefits of healthy marriages and relationships on children

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/mission.html#goals>

<http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/>

Marriage



- How do you define marriage?
- What defines a marriage?
 - A salient aspect of emotional and financial well-being
 - “Marriage matters for African American Health” (Mellgren, 2007)

Benefits of Marriage

- Family
- Economics
- Physical Health and Longevity
- Mental Health
- Emotional Well-being
 - Wilcox & colleagues (2005)

Benefits for Children and Youth

- More likely to succeed academically
- Physically and emotionally healthier
- Less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol
- Less likely to commit delinquent behavior
- Have better relationships with mothers and fathers
- Less likely to become sexually active as a teenager

Benefits for Couples

- More satisfying relationship
- Physically and emotionally healthier
- Wealthier
- Longer Lifespan
- Decrease abuse of drugs and alcohol
- Decreased rate of violent crimes
- Stronger relationships with children

Benefits for Community

- Higher rates of physically and emotionally healthy citizens
- Higher rates of educated citizens
- Lower crime
- Lower rates of teenage pregnancy
- Higher rates of home ownership
- Decreased need for social services

Unwed Child-Bearing and Family Fragmentation

- Two to three times more likely to:
 - Drop out of high school
 - Be involved in juvenile justice system
 - Engage in sexual behaviors at an early age
 - Consume alcohol and drugs at an early age
 - Be absent from school
 - Not enroll in college
 - Earn less money as adults
- \$112 Billion annual (\$1.1 Trillion/decade) is taxpayer cost of divorce and unwed childbearing

Statistics Regarding AA Couples

- More likely to be separated or divorced (Belgrave & Allison, 2006)
- In the 1990s divorce rate for AA couples increased by 17%
 - (Martin & Bumpass, 1989)
- By 1998, the divorce rate among AA couples was the highest of any American ethnic minority group
 - (McKenry & Price, 2006; United States Census Bureau, 2000)

Statistics Cont...

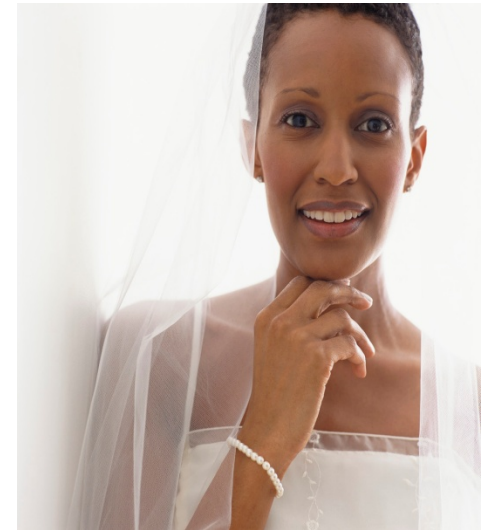
- AA couples have the lowest marriage rates compared to other ethnic groups
 - (National Center for Health Statistics, 2003; United States Census Report, 2000)
- Two to three times the divorce rate
 - (Pinderhughes, 2002; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995)
- 75% of African-American children are born to unwed parents

Research on AA Couples

- Scholars typically view Black families from a “deficit perspective”
- Emphasizes problems and pathology
 - Connor and White (2006)
- What are some of the following:
 - Cultural stereotypes
 - Gender stereotypes

AA Women

- Desire marriage
- Women are becoming
 - more educated
 - more independent
 - relying less on men for support



AA Men



- AA men often abandon their family responsibility
- Want “to be the kind of father they [have] not experienced”
 - Coles (2006, p. 83)
- “Why get married when you got six to seven [women] to one guy, really . . . why get married when you can play the field?”
 - Wilson (2003, p. 15)

AA Marriages



- “Black couples who have a stronger role sharing [or egalitarian] orientation . . . are more stable than those who have a weaker role sharing orientation”
 - (Veroff, Douvan, & Hatchett, 1995, p. 158)
- Black couples who share household labor is a resource that seems to strengthen their marriages

AA Marriages Cont.

- Importance of AA faith communities
 - (Marks, Nesteruk, Swanson, Garrison, & Davis, 2005)
- Importance of prayer in AA marriages
 - (Beach & Hurt, 2009)



AA Marriage

- Barriers include
 - Lack of education
 - Employment opportunities
 - Imbalanced gender ratio
 - Limited mate availability
 - Children from previous relationships



Study by Mark et. al (2008)

- “Together we are Strong”
 - All couples married an average of 26
 - All couples gave marital self-reports of “strong” and “happy”
 - Qualitative study
 - 30 couples
 - Purposive sampling
 - Strong marriages



Themes Found

- Challenges in AA marriages
- Overcoming external challenges to marriage
- Resolving intramarital conflict
- Unity and the importance of being “equally yoked”

Findings

- Individual-level resources and barriers
 - Two happy individuals may often make a happy marriage
 - All had at least a GED
 - Wives had as much or more education than husbands
 - Physical, emotional and mental strength
 - Developed over the marital years

Findings Cont...

- Interpersonal Resources and Barriers
 - Trust is an important, perhaps essential, interpersonal resource in a strong, happy, enduring marriage
 - Mistrust is problematic in these marriages
 - Greatest = each other

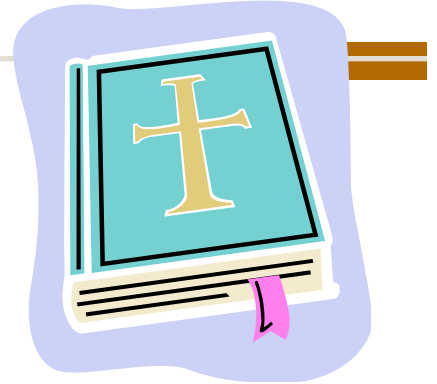


Findings Cont...

- Social and Economic Resources and Barriers
 - Family impact and specifically parental influences
 - Single parent homes
 - Assisting to meet needs of extended family
 - Finances
 - Extended parenting
 - Aging/ailing parents

Findings Cont...

- Religion
 - Congregational attendance
 - Personal faith commitment
 - United participation in religious experience
 - Equal yoking
 - Together to church or at home



ProSAAM

- Program for stronger African American marriages
 - University of Georgia
 - Researchers Steven Beach and Tera Hurt
 - Three year grant supported project
 - John Templeton Foundation
 - Administration for Children and Families

Program Status

- Results in 2009 pending
- Use of Marriage Education
- Seeks to strengthen AA marriages
 - Standard marriage skills training and prayer
- Three groups
 - An established self-help program on their own
 - Small groups with a trained leader
 - Trained leader and a series of prayers that tie into skills being learned

Additional Research

- Dion's Dissertation Research
- Nivischi's Dissertation Research

Implications for Counselor Educators

- Healthy Marriage Initiative grants, Building Strong Families (BSF), and Supporting Healthy Marriages (SHM) projects all ended around 2011
 - Evidenced-based support for MRE with AA and other populations
 - Growth of parenting and family educators
 - Counselors not adequately represented at the 'table' regarding marriage education research or intervention

Counselor Ed Implications Cont...

- School and mental health counselors need to be prepared to work with growing number of young persons without adequate relationship role models
- Integration or addition of marriage and relationship education for students

Implications for Counselors

- Keeping abreast with the latest information regarding the changing demographic trends
- Continuing education to increase multicultural competencies
- Increased knowledge concerning the counseling needs of different cultures
- Availability of resources for families at all levels (community, state, and federal)

Thank you!!!

Questions,

Comments,

Concern?

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