

# Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Evaluation Research: A Detailed Synthesis

Ilana Huz, Deja Logan, Mindy E. Scott, and April Wilson  
Child Trends

## Background

- Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) programs work with adult couples, adult individuals, and youth to enhance the quality and stability of current and future romantic relationships.
- The Administration for Children and Families has funded implementation and evaluation of HMRE programs since 2006.
- This brief provides a detailed assessment of HMRE program evaluation findings regarding two research questions:
  - What do we know about the impact of HMRE programs on different HMRE outcomes?
  - What do we know about what makes HMRE programs more or less effective?

## Methods

- Literature review of HMRE program evaluation research published between 2008 and 2019.
  - Meta-analyses
  - Experimental and quasi-experimental program evaluation studies
  - Tests of HMRE program features associated with participant outcomes
- Coded literature for study type, evaluation design, follow-up timing, outcomes examined, evaluation results, subgroup testing, and testing of HMRE program features.
- Counts provided based on evaluation design, outcomes examined, and evaluation findings.

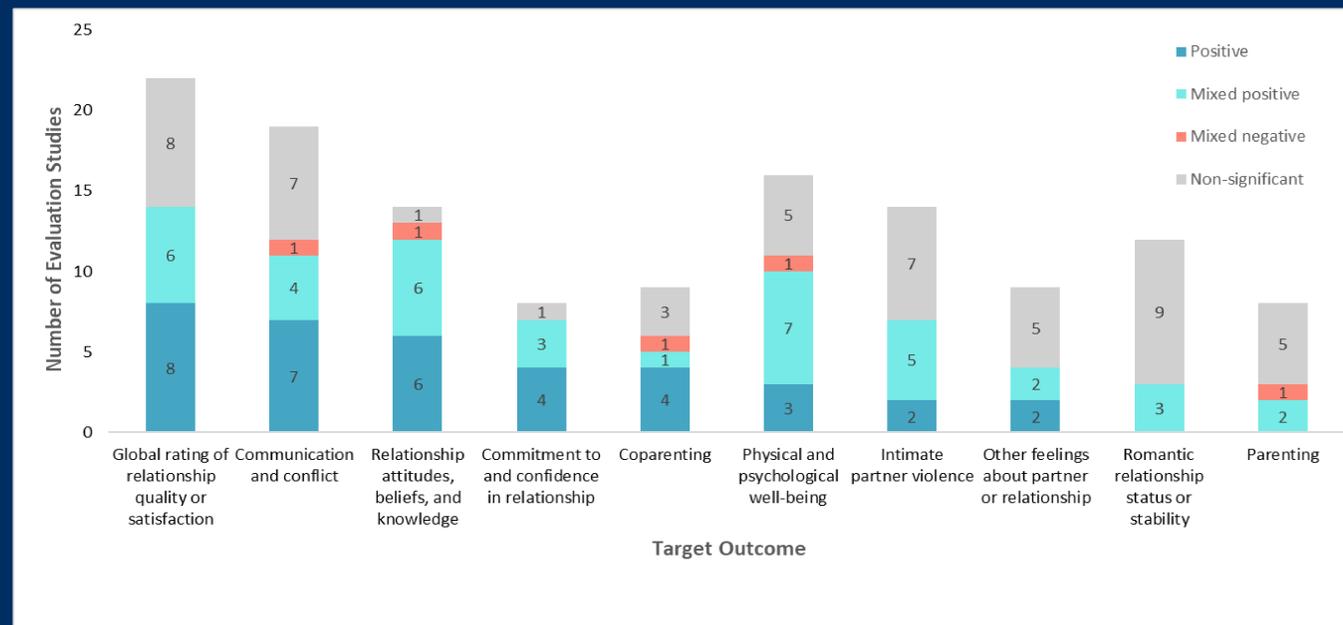
## Conclusions

- Results from meta-analyses show that HMRE programs have statistically significant positive effects on most outcomes, but effect sizes are small or very small (Cohen's  $d \leq 0.3$ ).
- Outcome domains with almost exclusively positive results include participant relationship attitudes/beliefs/knowledge and commitment and confidence in the relationship.
- Outcome domains with mostly non-significant results, suggesting that HMRE programs often have no effect on these outcomes include relationship status/stability, parenting, and family economic outcomes.
- Evaluation research has examined several program features that may lead to improved program outcomes (see Table 1). However, the evidence for these factors remains limited, both in terms of the number of studies and the rigor of the evaluation techniques.

The primary outcomes assessed in meta analyses of HMRE program evaluation studies are relationship quality, communication, and overall effect. HMRE programs have **small but positive** effects on most outcomes, with **slightly larger effects on communication** (see Figure 2).

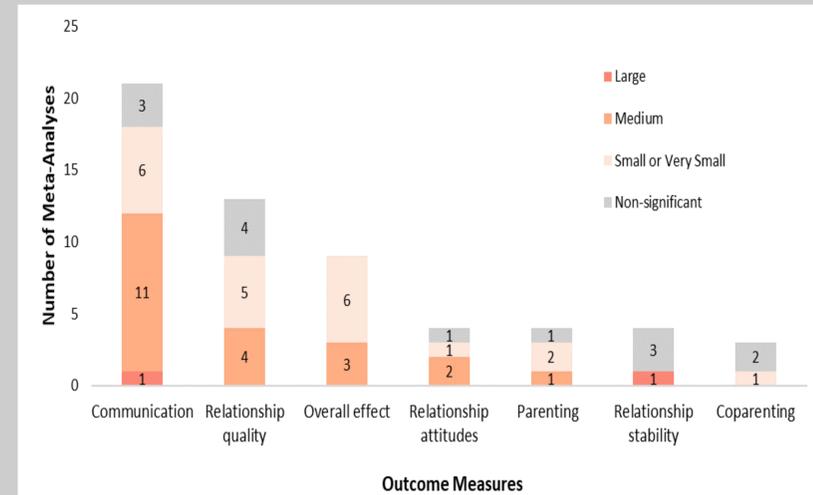
Positive HMRE program effects are most commonly found for global ratings of relationship quality or satisfaction; communication and conflict; relationship attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge; commitment and confidence in one's relationship; and coparenting (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Number of evaluation studies (n=44) that found positive, mixed, or non-significant results for specific outcomes**



The **HMRE program features** most commonly examined in relation to participant outcomes are dosage/duration (intended and actual program length and duration), topics addressed, program format (e.g., class, counseling, or self-directed), and group composition (or the characteristics of program participants in the group) (see Table 1).

**Figure 2. Effect sizes found in 11 meta-analyses**



**Table 1. Program features examined in 6 meta-analyses and 16 evaluation studies**

Program Feature	Number of Studies
Dosage/Duration	9
Topics	7
Program format	6
Group composition	6
Facilitation alliance and Group cohesion	4
Facilitator characteristics	4
Activities	4
Setting	2
Adherence	1

For more detailed findings, contact Mindy Scott at [mscott@childtrends.org](mailto:mscott@childtrends.org)

This publication was made possible by Grant Number #90PR0012 from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

