



Findings for **Youth** Participants in Relationship Education (RE) 2011-2015

Alabama Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Initiative

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Overview

The Alabama Healthy Marriage & Relationship Education Initiative, or "AHMREI", is funded by a 4-year grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Family Assistance. It is a partnership between Auburn University, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Family Resource Centers, and local schools who have joined together to provide resources and education focused on building and sustaining healthy relationships and stable marriages to individuals, couples, and youth throughout Alabama. These educational programs for youth are focused on enhancing knowledge and promoting the skills identified in research as key components of healthy relationships and a stable marital relationship. Data are provided through evaluation surveys completed by participants each year in order to test for positive changes in areas of individual well-being and relationship knowledge and functioning as well as dating/marriage attitudes.

Methods

Participants. Overall 11,829 youth participants completed the relationship education classes provided by relationship educators in Alabama between October 2011 and September 2015. The sample of 9,812 youth participants who completed evaluation surveys represents 83% of the participants and is diverse and consists of:

- 59% female; 41% male.
- 2% were in grade 8; 33% were in grade 9; 44% were in grade 10; 14% were in grade 11; and 7% in grade 12
- Median age of 15 years old
- 54% were European American; 36% were African Americans; 3% were Hispanic/Latino; and 7% selected bi-racial or other
- A majority of participants (40%) reported living in a traditional nuclear family; 34% reported living in a single parent family; 26% reported living in a stepfamily
- 13% indicated that their mother had less than a high school diploma; 28% reported that their mother had completed HS; 33% reported that their mother had some college or a technical degree; and 26% reported that their mother had a 4 year degree or higher
- 17% indicated that their father had less than a high school diploma; 38% reported that their father had completed HS; 26% reported that their father had some college or a technical degree; and 19% reported that their father had a 4 year degree or higher

Measures. The youth intake and post-program questionnaires include demographic questions, valid and reliable social science measures, and questions developed based on the 7 core National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network (NERMEN) principles associated with healthy couple relationships (Adler-Baeder & Futris, 2014). The questionnaires are designed to assess individual, couple, parent-child, and peer functioning (i.e., awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills, behaviors, relational quality, and individual well-being). For a reference listing, please contact AHMREI at www.alabamamarriage.org.

Results

To test for statistically significant changes from pre-test to post-test, paired-sample t-tests are used to compare pre-program and post-program means. Analyses revealed that in multiple areas, the mean level scores reported by participants before taking the RE class is significantly different than their reported scores after participation in the RE class; changes are in the desired direction (See Table 1). Effect sizes range from .17 to 1.02, and are mostly in the moderate effect size range (i.e., .20 is considered small, .50 – moderate, and .80 – large; Cohen, 1977).

Table 1. Paired Sample T-test for mean change over time

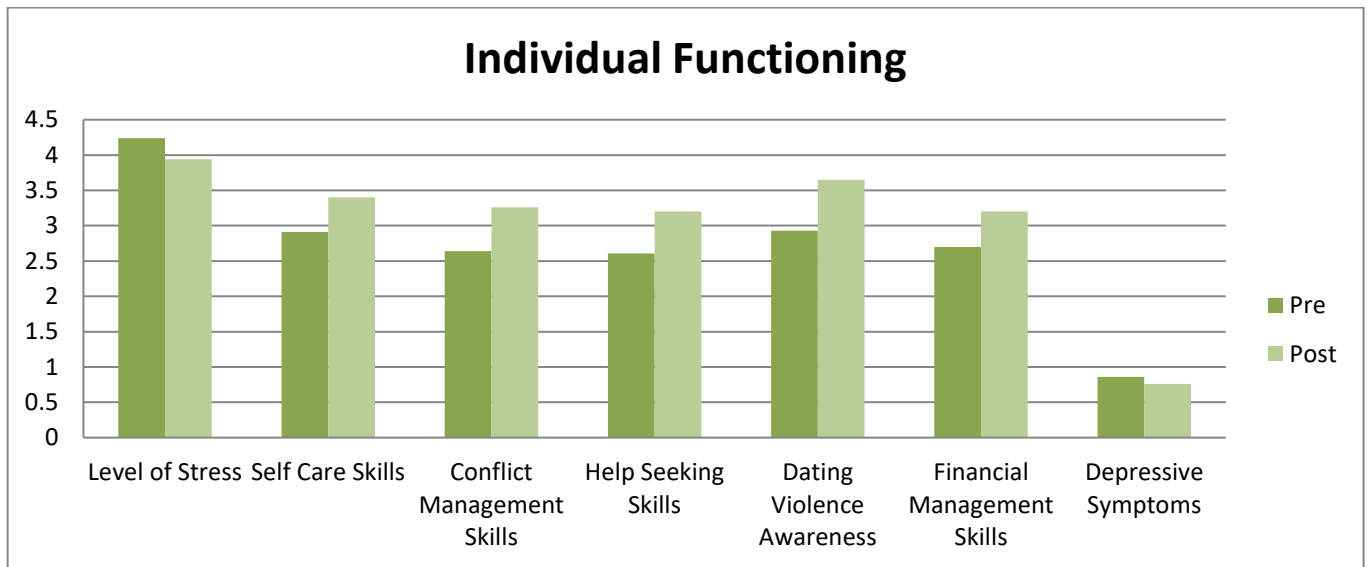
	Pre-Test		Post-Test		df	t	Cohen's d (Abs. Value)
	M	SD	M	SD			
Individual Functioning							
Level of Stress ^a	4.24	1.89	3.94	1.78	7936	14.89***	.17
Self Care Skills	2.91	.66	3.39	.55	8406	-80.69***	.89
Conflict Management Skills	2.64	.76	3.26	.61	8472	-78.98***	.87
Help Seeking Skills	2.61	.62	3.20	.57	8481	-92.66***	1.02
Dating Violence Awareness	2.93	.97	3.65	.76	8366	-64.08***	.71
Financial Management Skills	2.69	.81	3.20	.73	8241	-71.24***	.79
Depressive Symptoms	.86	.72	.76	.69	5030	9.66***	.14
Dating Relationship Functioning							
Understanding of Significant Other	2.87	.71	3.41	.65	6594	-66.27***	.83
Caring Behaviors toward Significant Other	3.12	.71	3.52	.62	6598	-54.58***	.67
Communication Skills in Relationship	2.90	.74	3.37	.66	6591	-60.35***	.75
Commitment to Healthy Relationship	3.10	.82	3.47	.74	6497	-43.65***	.54
Parent-Child Relationship Functioning							
Understanding of Parent	2.72	.78	3.18	.71	8196	-70.36***	.78
Caring Behavior toward Parent	3.05	.76	3.42	.79	8184	-46.09***	.52
Commitment to Healthy Relationship	3.01	.84	3.37	.75	8121	-48.64***	.56
Peer Relationship Functioning							
Understanding of Peers	3.01	.67	3.39	.66	8172	-57.76***	.64
Caring Behavior toward Peers	3.16	.73	3.49	.59	8168	-48.55***	.56
Commitment to Healthy Relationship	3.20	.88	3.50	.75	8128	-32.77***	.36

a. Mean level scores decreased, indicating greater stability and fewer negative interactions. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ two-tailed test

INDIVIDUAL FUNCTIONING MEASURES

Statistically significant ($p < .05$) changes in the desired directions were documented for:

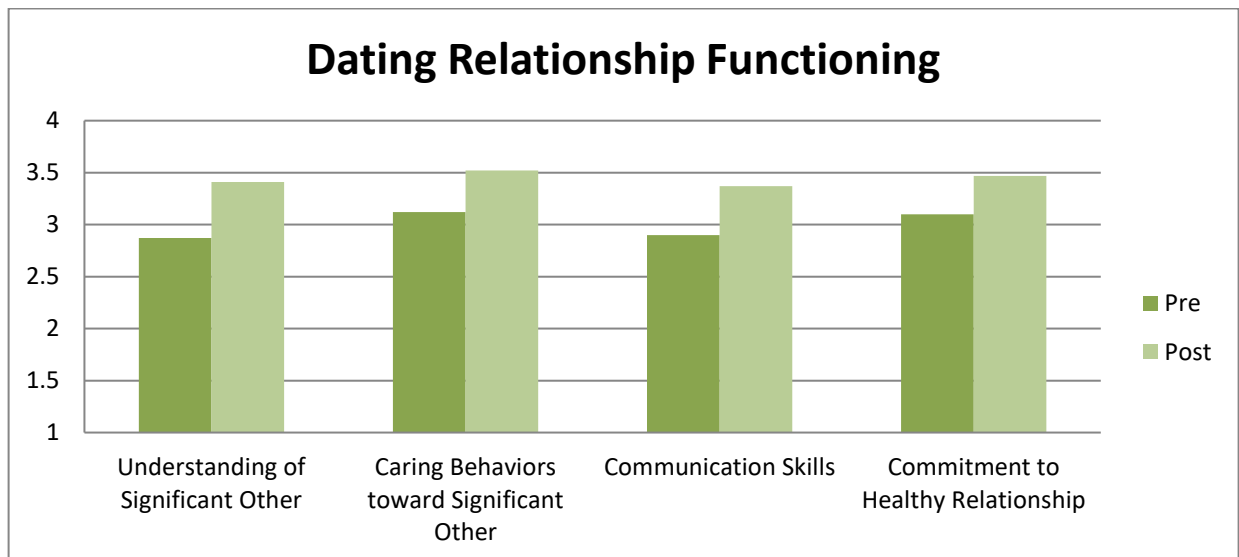
- **LEVEL OF STRESS**
- **SELF-CARE SKILLS**
- **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS**
- **HELP SEEKING SKILLS**
- **DATING VIOLENCE AWARENESS**
- **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS**
- **DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS**



DATING RELATIONSHIP FUNCTIONING MEASURES

Statistically significant ($p < .05$) increases in the desired directions were documented for:

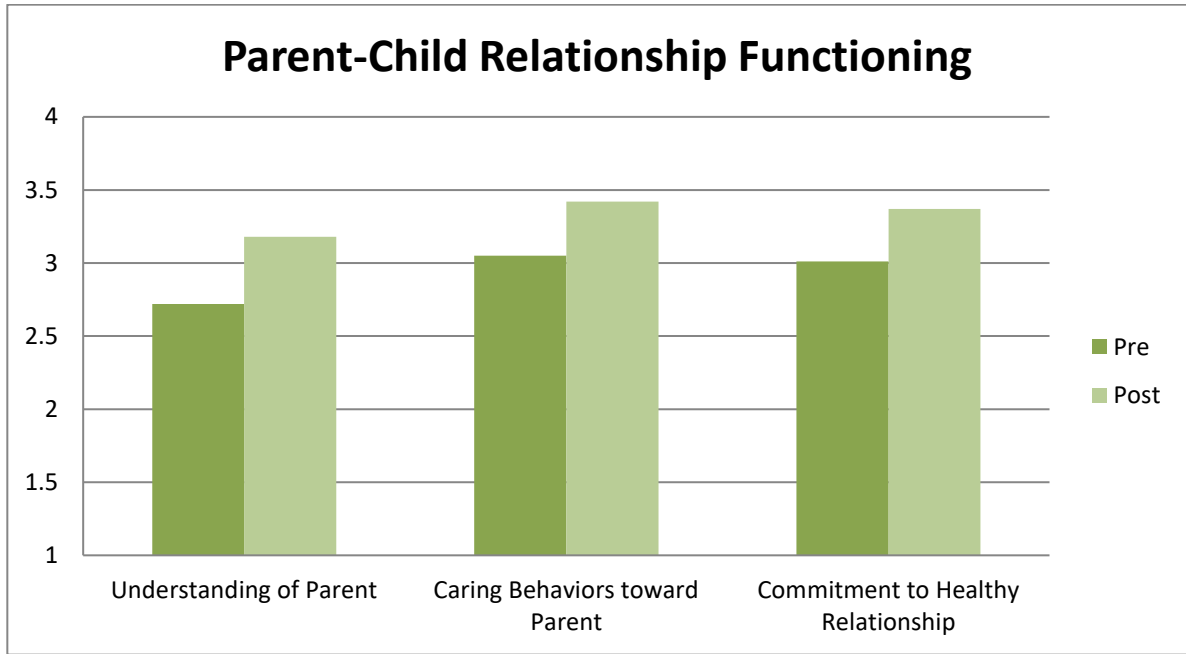
- **UNDERSTANDING OF SIGNIFICANT OTHER**
- **CARING BEHAVIORS TOWARD SIGNIFICANT OTHER**
- **COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN RELATIONSHIP**
- **COMMITMENT TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**



PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP FUNCTIONING MEASURES

Statistically significant ($p < .05$) increases in the desired directions were documented for:

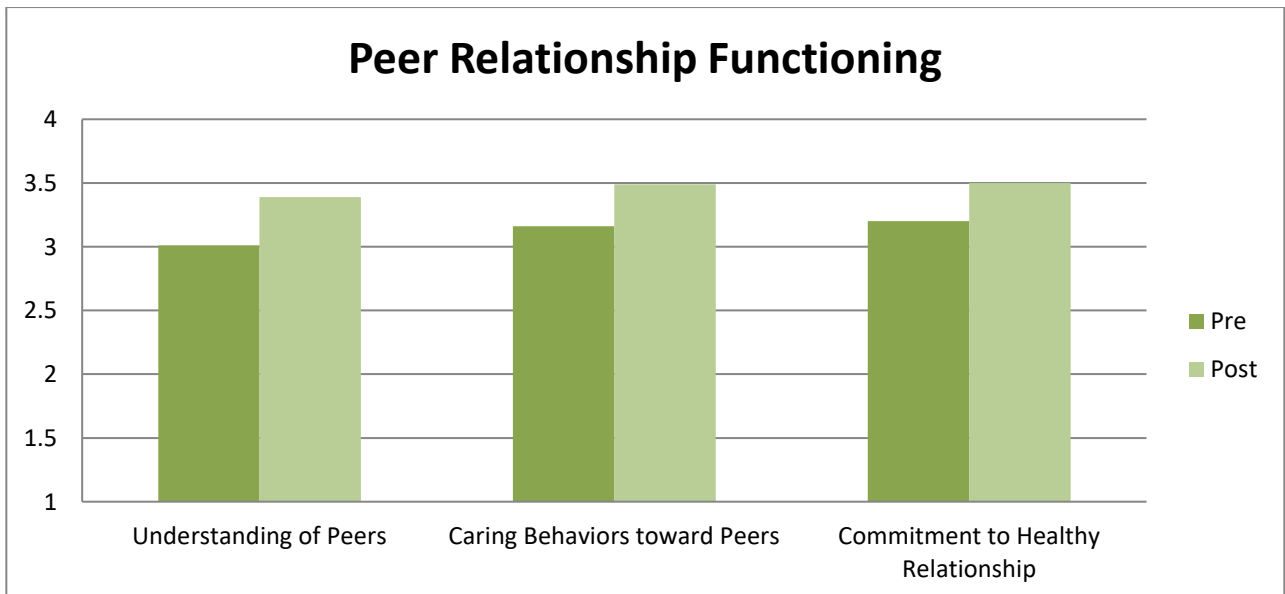
- **UNDERSTANDING OF PARENT**
- **CARING BEHAVIORS TOWARD PARENT**
- **COMMITMENT TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**



PEER RELATIONSHIP FUNCTIONING MEASURES

Statistically significant ($p < .05$) increases in the desired directions were documented for:

- **UNDERSTANDING OF PEERS**
- **CARING BEHAVIORS TOWARD PEERS**
- **COMMITMENT TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**



Qualitative Comments

“Your class was fun. I learned a lot of knowledgeable things that can help me in the future with relationships and even marriage in the long run, getting to know your partner and being self-confident. I enjoyed having you come talk in front of our class.” – Male, 15, European-American

“Y’ all really did a good job, I learned a lot and really enjoyed it.” – Female, 14, African-American

“This was a good program and it helped a lot in my life” – Male, 16, African-American

“This program was really great. Keep doing what you’re doing! It made a huge impact on me and my current dating situation. Thank you!!” – Female, 15, European-American

Discussion

Results provide empirical evidence that youth in Alabama Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Initiative’s relationship education programs for 2011 through 2015 showed **significant improvements in a number of targeted outcome areas: understanding of and use of healthy relationship skills in dating relationships, with peers and with parents; individual well-being; and awareness of signs of abusive relationships.**

Because comparison groups were not utilized, we cannot say definitively that these patterns of change were solely due to program participation. We can, however, note the calculated effect sizes (appropriate formulas for paired comparisons were used). Effect sizes ranged from .17 to 1.02; the average effect size was moderate (.64), which is well beyond the point that indicates a “practical” or meaningful change following an educational program (i.e., > .25; Wolf, 1986). Because of their magnitude, we can have some confidence that these documented changes over a short period of time are due to program participation. Clearly, the comments from participants indicate that they are receptive to the programs and results from these analyses provide encouragement for continued work in this area of family life education as a means for empowering youth, enhancing relationships, and strengthening families.

