

HISPANIC HEALTHY MARRIAGE INITIATIVE

The goal of the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) is to increase the number of Hispanic children who grow up in healthy, married, two-parent families by addressing the unique cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socio-economic needs of families in Hispanic communities. This includes increasing awareness of the HHMI and establishing readiness in the Hispanic community for accessing marriage related resources.

In October 2004, a national roundtable meeting was held in Washington, D.C., to advise leaders on goals and strategies for a nationwide HHMI. This event resulted in a two-fold strategy: 1) support a research agenda to inform the field; and 2) educate communities about the importance of marriage. Since then, HHMI leadership has convened researchers as well as faith and community-based organizations across the country to discuss marriage in the Hispanic community.

The first Hispanic Healthy Marriage Research Meeting took place in Washington, D.C., in September 2005. This meeting brought together researchers, practitioners and curriculum developers to discuss services and research related to Hispanic marriage and families. Two additional research meetings were convened, in San Antonio, Tex., and St. Louis, Mo., identifying areas where further research is needed and to discuss culturally relevant outcome measures. In support of this research agenda, memos were developed and a literature review was written by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation.

To reach out to practitioners, HHMI sponsored Roundtables and Marriage Showcases. TO date HHMI has hosted a total of 15 roundtables in seven States and Puerto Rico. Showcases were held in San Antonio, Tex; Chicago, Ill.; Denver, Colo.; and Miami, Fla. These events were attended by over 800 individuals interested in supporting healthy marriage within the Hispanic community. The Roundtables convened community leaders to develop strategies for delivering services while the Showcases engaged local organizations in planning an even for couples. In May 2006, the first National Hispanic Healthy Marriage initiative Conference was held in San Antonio, Tex. This conference convened professionals from various fields to discuss: lessons learned from a community delivery model perspective; working with youth, fathers and couples; adapting curricula for low-income Hispanic families; and building community coalitions. From these events a listserv was generated to connect practitioners and guidance tools were developed which can be found on the HHMI website.

The various HHMI events have stimulated an array of community-based healthy marriage activities. HHMI has been supported by national and State Hispanic organizations, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and State and local government agencies. Many served as co-hosts for HHMI forums or conference around the nation. Their interest and support has resulted in capacity-building activities and the development of local partnerships. Partnerships have been formed in Los Angeles, Calif.; Chicago, Illinois; Phoenix, Arizona; San Antonio and Houston,

Texas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Orlando, Fort Meyers, Tampa and Miami, Florida; and many other local Hispanic initiatives have been launched. most notably, 11 Hispanic – focused organizations competed and were successful in obtaining Federal funding awards from the Office of Family Assistance to provide healthy marriage services to Hispanic communities. Many more organizations serving Hispanic couples were also funded to deliver marriage education.

HHMI Working Papers

These documents are intended to provide support to program administrators as they expand or implement new marriage education services for Hispanic couples. They contain the most current information available but are not intended to provide a comprehensive review of the issues. The following is an excerpt from the working paper *Tip Sheet for Working with Recent Immigrants*.

Challenges

Some of the more common challenges facing recent immigrant couples may include but are not limited to: immigration, acculturation, and gender dynamic, children as cultural brokers, extended family, marriage license challenges, employment and language.

Listed below are some possible ways in which to provide services while remaining sensitive to these issues.

- Include exercises and activities related to partner expectations as a way of overcoming differing levels of acculturation and resistance to change.
- Provide an opportunity for couples to discuss gender role changes as a normative part of transition.
- Encourage couples to learn to maneuver in an English-speaking society in order to reinforce their own leadership role and eliminate the undo pressure placed on their children acting as cultural brokers.
- Be prepared to provide services in Spanish.
- Plan ahead to accommodate participants whose spouses may be living in the country of origin
- Consider providing special sessions for extended family members to discuss the general principles of healthy relationships, including making independent versus collaborative decisions.
- Learn about State marriage laws and investigate with the appropriate consulates procedures for undocumented couples seeking to be married.
- Be creative in offering various opportunities for couples to participate in activities since employment schedules may not always allow couples to participate together.
- Promote program services as an opportunity to strengthen family and parent-child relationships to help couples preserve their public image.

The following is an excerpt from the working paper *Cultural Adaptation and Relationship Dynamics*

Machismo: It refers to presence of males as the dominant figures in the family structure and as the primary decision maker. Machismo is often mistakenly understood only to refer to the dominance and pride of males relative to females, but seldom with positive attributes. Being “macho” refers to the ideals of men’s strength, their ability to contain feelings, tolerate pain and adversity, and being “man enough” to transcend these challenges. Machismo speaks to gaining a sense of control in a society that categorically limits Hispanic males’ sense of control over their lives. It also relates to the strength and work ethic that is characterized by Hispanics. A “macho” is a hard-working, responsible protector of the family who does not allow himself to be undermined by obstacles or fear.

Marianismo: This value typically promotes chastity and family-centered behaviors among women. It places the family healthy and well-being primarily in the hands of women. A limited understanding of this value may associate “Marianismo” with lack of power and the submissiveness of women. However, this underestimates the complexities of the role of females within the traditional Hispanic family. Women enjoy great power, although it is exercised in an indirect way; power comes through their submissiveness. His power lies in making decisions that are pleasing to alleviate her suffering or pain; her power is in creating a desire to please by showing her commitment.

The influence of machismo and Marianismo are essential for curriculum developers to understand.

For more information on the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative as well as more working papers, see http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/hispanic_hm_initiative.html

The African American Healthy Marriage Initiative

The African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI) promotes a culturally competent strategy within the broader Healthy Marriage Initiative for fostering healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, improving child well-being and strengthening families within the African American community. To move the initiative forward, the AAHMI has a three-pronged strategy:

Education and Communication with the African American community through the use of forums,

Enhancement of Partnerships, by enlisting the support African American media, and faith-and community-based organizations, Historically Black Colleges and University

Facilitating Access to Community and ACF Resources by building capacity to deliver marriage education services

The AAHMI Roundtable met in Washington, D.C., on August 1, 2003, convening a group of professionals and practitioners serving the African American community. This Roundtable crafted AAHMI's mission statement: "To promote and strengthen the institution of healthy marriage in the African American community."

The AAHMI Roundtable provided a blueprint for the Initiative in the earliest stages, and the AAHMI Forums have provided an arena for national public dialogue on issues pertinent to African American healthy marriage. Additionally, the Forums have served as community outreach efforts, developing in each host city a burgeoning community healthy marriage coalition.

- **Atlanta AAHMI Forum-** "Strengthening Families, Youth Making Healthy Choices." November 2003, Morehouse School of Medicine
- **Dallas Forum-** "Why Marriage Matters: The Role of Business and the Media." January 2004
- **Chicago AAHMI Forum-** "Why Marriage Matters: The Role of Faith Based and Community Organizations." May 2004
- **Los Angeles AAHMI Forum-** "African American Healthy Marriage: What's Hip Hop Got to DO with It?" September 2004, UCLA
- **New Orleans, La. -** "Healthy Marriage Curricula Institute." April 2005
- **Rome, GA. -** "Framing the Future: A Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Forum." May 2005
- **Detroit, Mich. -** "African American Mini-Academy: From Dialogue to Service Delivery." June 2005
- **Washington, D.C. -** "African American Mini-Academy: From Dialogue to Service Delivery." August 2005
- **Atlanta, Ga.-** AAHMI Youth Roundtable, Mini-Academy, and Youth Forum, May 2006

Youth Mini Academies: Lessons Learned

"Most Important Things Adults Can Do to Help Youth Be Sexually Abstinent until Marriage"

- Make sex an open and honest discussion
- Use Mentoring programs
- Stay Involved in youths' activities
- Talk about how hard it is to be a single parent
- Explain dangers of unprotected sex
- Guide Children in the Right Direction
 - Set examples
 - Expose to good, positive music
 - Take an active role in children's lives
 - Act like an adult and try not to fit in
 - Advise youth, give good foundation

- Take sex out of school and TV

“How to Engage Youth and Young Adults”

- Use a video with strong visual images; do platys
- Illustrate statistics in seminars through physical involvement
- Problem solving (identify problem)
- Define a healthy marriage, abstinence, etc.
- Communicate to understand different perspectives
- Educate as early as grade four

Connecting Marriage Research to Practice Conference: Highlights

September 11-14-2006

In September 2006, the AAHMI successfully convened the first ever AAHMI Marriage Research to Practice Conference at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This event brought together a diverse group of scholars, experts and practitioners to explore the available and emerging field of practice, and to identify and discuss the implications of research, data, findings and evaluations from various disciplines and perspectives of relevancy to the African American family experience that may have implications for sustaining and strengthening families and marriages. Twenty-seven States and the District of Columbia were represented. There are currently 30 self-identified AAHMI sites nationwide.

Plenary- Theory, Practice, and Research:

Preparing Black Teens and Young Adults for Healthy Marriages

Ann Wimberley: Young people want to know stories of successful marriages. Socialization occurs in families, but young people also receive messages from other sources (including the media), which present competing values and life paths. We risk losing the positive mediating structures (school, neighborhoods, church) that stand between individuals and the wider culture-the loss of village-and replacing these with such negative mediating structures as gangs.

“Techno-media” has taken over the ability of families to provide care and nurture their young. Violence, sex, and crime have become forms of consumer enticement. Parents may give up because culture supports the values of the market place over those of nurturance. Gangsta-rap’s destructive influence crosses the boundary of decency, driving constructions of masculinity and femininity. How is it possible to translate that language into “Husbands and wives, mothers and fathers?” Radio stations geared toward African Americans are becoming more liberal and are undermining African American values. We as leaders must (1) know what we want to share, (2) be grateful for youths’ critiques of us; (3) move from conversations to mentoring; and (4) include parental figures.

Plenary- Infidelity and Mistrust among Black males and Black Females: Is Infidelity Destroying Black Marriages?

Bradford Wilcox shared the following observations from his research: African American men and women are more likely than White men and women to have

children by more than one partner. The deinstitutionalization of courtship and marriage has hit African Americans the hardest. Historically, there have been three types of relationship models:

1. Seeking multiple sex partners
2. Romantically involved
3. married or marriage minded

Infidelity has been most common among poor and wealthy African American men, and less likely among middle class men. Some of the cultural factors contributing to marriage infidelity include:

1. The sexual revolution of the 1960-1970's
2. Pop culture and images targeted at African Americans
3. Lingering effects of slavery in which (a) slaves could not enter into marriages and (b) men could not provide for or protect their families, both issues that are still present today
4. Gender "mismatch" whereby African American females are strong and independent and African American males are afraid of commitment
5. Sex and gender norms, whereby African American fatherless boys tend to take cues from pop culture indicating that maleness= sexual prowess.

FACT: There are 30 self-identified AAHMI sites nationwide.

In 2006, the Gallup Poll found that Blacks embrace matrimony as an important institution, and in greater numbers than Whites.

For complete conference proceedings, including slides, video clips and minutes, see <http://ssw.unc.edu/jif/aahmi/>

For more information on the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative, see http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/aa_hmi/AAHMI.html