

A Snapshot of Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Programs for Youth



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Adolescents' romantic relationships can shape a variety of experiences during adolescence and beyond. Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) programs for youth can help improve youth attitudes and expectations concerning romantic relationships. They can also help youth develop key skills necessary for forming healthy relationships and avoiding unhealthy ones.

Through the Youth Education and Relationship Services (YEARS) project, Child Trends, in partnership with the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF), seeks to better understand the services HMRE programs, funded by ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA), are providing to youth. This fact sheet summarizes key findings from an analysis of quantitative and qualitative data provided by OFA's HMRE grantees from 2011 through 2015, focusing on Objective 1 from the list below. A future report will include analyses addressing all three project objectives.

YEARS project objectives

1. Describe the organizations implementing HMRE programs, the services they provide, and the youth served by these programs between October 2011 and September 2015.
2. Assess the alignment of HMRE programs for youth with best practices in the field.
3. Identify promising approaches used by grantees to better serve youth in HMRE.

Key Findings

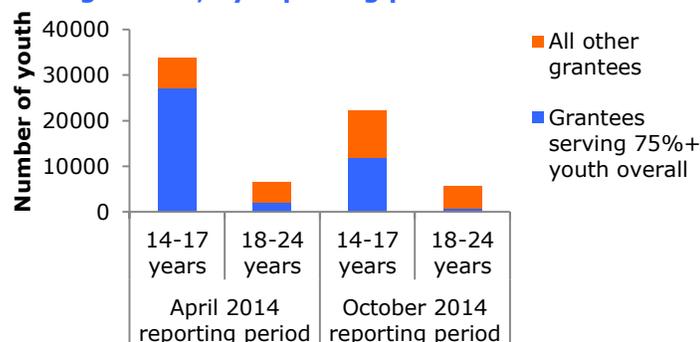
HMRE grantee characteristics

- The majority of youth-serving HMRE grantees ($n = 16$)¹ were **nonprofit organizations**, although public institutions of higher education and for-profit organizations were also funded to serve youth.
- Youth-serving grantees reported **partnering** with schools or school districts to help implement programming in school-based settings. Other community partnerships were important for referral to services, such as mental health services.

Youth characteristics

- Youth-serving grantees served **40,130 youth** (ages 14 to 24) between October 2013 and March 2014, and **27,864 youth** between April 2014 and September 2014 (**Figure 1**). This represents more than 50 percent of all HMRE participants served by grantees during these reporting periods (68,330 between October 2013 and March 2014, and 53,126 between April 2014 and September 2014).
- **Gender and race/ethnicity** varied among participants of youth-serving grantees. Across reporting periods, about half (53 percent) of HMRE participants were female and half (47 percent) were male. The majority of youth served were White (**Figure 2**), although compared to the demographic

Figure 1. Youth served by all HMRE grantees, by reporting period

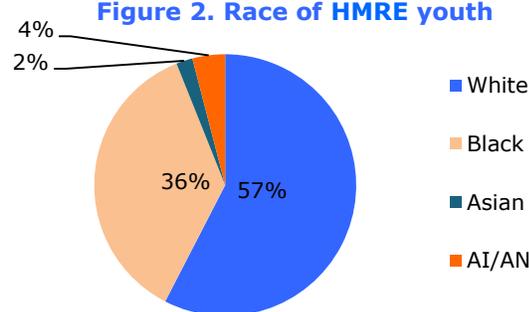


¹ See the "Data and Methods" box for more information about how youth-serving grantees were identified.

characteristics of youth in the United States,² a larger percentage of HMRE participants identified as Black or American Indian/Alaska Native. Twenty percent of HMRE participants identified as Hispanic (not shown).

- Of the youth-serving grantees who mentioned³ trying to enroll participants⁴ of a certain **relationship status** (n=8), 63 percent targeted couples, 50 percent targeted parents, 25 percent targeted pregnant/expecting participants, and 25 percent targeted participants not in a relationship (e.g., single individuals) (**Figure 3**). Grantees often targeted multiple groups. For example, 13 percent targeted both pregnant or parenting participants and those in relationships.

Figure 2. Race of HMRE youth



Note. AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.

Figure 3. Targeted relationship statuses of participants in HMRE programs that serve 75%+ youth

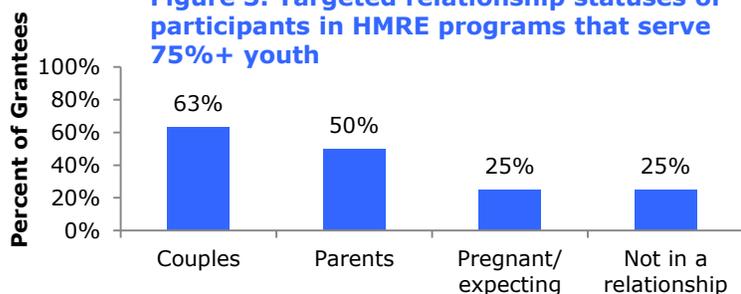
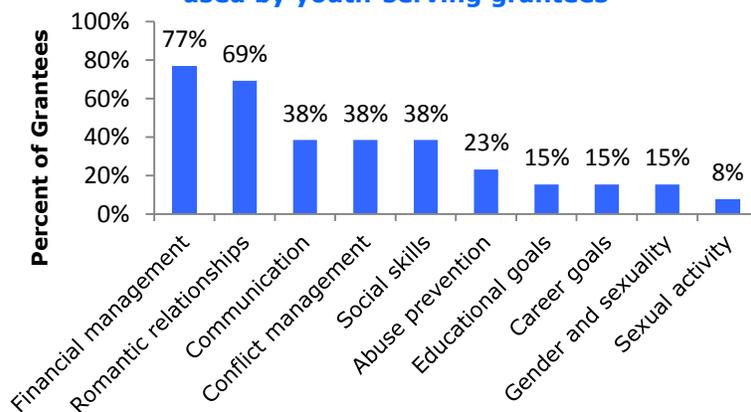


Figure 4. Topics covered by HMRE curricula used by youth-serving grantees



HMRE program implementation

- Goals and expected outcomes** related to romantic relationships (e.g., promoting healthy and safe marriages and relationships, and teaching teens how to develop healthy relationships) were those most frequently mentioned by HMRE youth-serving grantees. Other commonly mentioned goals and outcomes were financial management, abuse prevention, conflict management, career goals, and communication. A small number of youth-serving grantees also mentioned sexual activity and parenting as key outcomes.
- Table 1** shows the most commonly implemented **curricula** reported by youth-serving grantees.⁵ These grantees also reported whether their chosen curricula addressed specific topics (**Figure 4**). Of the 13 youth-serving grantees who mentioned specific topics,³ 69 percent reported that their chosen curricula addressed romantic relationships. The most commonly mentioned topic was financial management (77 percent), which is another important aspect of HMRE programming. Other common topics included communication, conflict management, and social skills (31 percent); sexual activity was the least frequently mentioned curriculum topic (8 percent).

Table 1. Common curricula implemented by HMRE grantees serving youth

Curricula	No. of grantees
Love Notes	5
PREP (Within My Reach/Within Our Reach)	3
How to Avoid Falling For a Jerk / PICK	2
Ready for Love	2
Connections	2

² Census estimates of the racial and ethnic composition of American youth ages 14 to 17 are 1.3 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 76 percent White, 16 percent Black, 0.2 percent Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 4 percent Asian, 2.4 percent two or more races, and 19.2 percent Hispanic (all races).

³ Because the data sources did not systematically document grantee activities for youth, some of the qualitative results (including target populations and program implementation) may not describe all 16 youth-serving HMRE grantees; they describe the results from youth-serving grantees who mentioned each topic. More HMRE youth-serving grantees may be addressing the populations and topics described in this fact sheet, but this information was not identified in their reports.

⁴ As described in the Data and Methods text box below, we cannot determine whether the targeted couples or parents were restricted to the youth being served.

⁵ Table 1 lists curricula implemented by two or more grantees. Two grantees are not included in the table because they implemented a curriculum that no other grantees used.

Data and Methods

We limited our analyses to 16 HMRE grantees funded from 2011-2015 who served 75 percent or more youth (ages 14 to 24) across all allowable activities.

Data were drawn from performance progress reports (PPR) and Online Data Collection (OLDC) reports submitted to the Office of Family Assistance on a semi-annual basis, as well as from grantees' profiles and initial and continuing applications.

Grantee profiles were completed in 2011, and grantee applications were submitted annually starting in 2011. PPR and OLDC data were drawn from the April and October 2014 reporting periods. Each reporting period collected information about the grantee organization and participants served during the last six months (April 2014 reporting was from October 1, 2013 – March 31, 2014; October 2014 reporting was from April 1, 2014 – September 30, 2014). We could not combine data across these reporting periods to describe participant characteristics across an entire year, because the data were reported at the grantee level and included all participants served during that reporting period. As such, there may have been participants who were reported by the same program in both reporting periods depending on when they enrolled and the length of the program. Additionally, we could not always distinguish HMRE programming for youth from services provided to adults because grantees did not report some information separately by age of participants served. Many youth-serving grantees also served adults. Given that the data cannot be disaggregated by participant characteristics, some of these participants may be adults (age 25 and older).

To describe the number of HMRE youth served, and participants' age, gender, and ethnicity, we ran quantitative descriptive analyses of HMRE OLDC Reports from all 16 youth-serving grantees. To describe target youth, curricula, and program/curricula topics and goals, we conducted qualitative analyses of grantee applications, profiles, and PPRs.



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