

Understanding the Effects of Healthy Relationship Programs for Youth

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Sponsorship

- Funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
 - The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) manages the project
- OPRE project personnel
 - Jesse Coe, Samantha Illangasekare, and Kriti Jain (Project officers)

Presentation road map

- Overview of FRAMING Research project
- Focus of our analysis
- Background on HMRE programs for youth
- What is an evidence and gaps map?
- Description of studies included in our review
- Findings from our evidence and gaps map
- Implications for future research



FRAMING Research

- Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research) project
- Conducted by Mathematica and Public Strategies
- Aimed at providing ACF with information to support the development of its learning agenda for healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) and responsible fatherhood (RF) programming

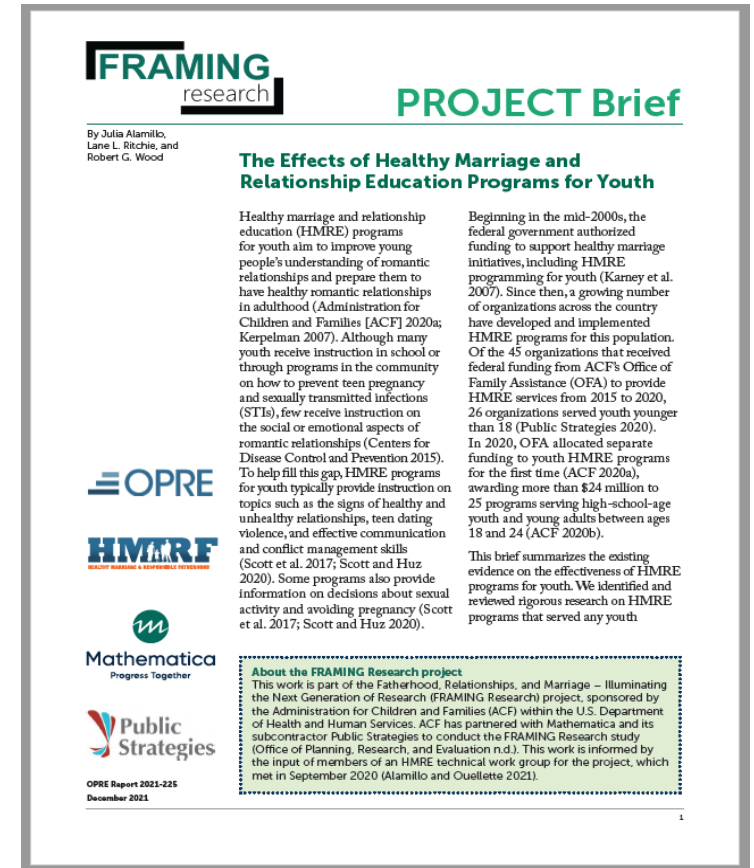
Identifying research gaps

- To identify new research directions for ACF, we are using:
 - Reviews of the literature
 - Input from researchers, program practitioners, and other experts
 - Guidance from ACF on agency priorities
- We are sharing this information by producing:
 - Summary briefs of technical work group meetings
 - Practice and research briefs
 - Evidence and gaps maps
 - White papers

Focus of our analysis

- In February 2022, Mathematica released an evidence and gaps map summarizing the impact literature on HMRE programs for youth¹
- The analysis addressed two research questions:
 1. What do we know about the effectiveness of HMRE programs for youth at improving youths' romantic relationship attitudes, skills, behaviors, and experiences, as well as other related outcomes?
 2. What do we know about the effectiveness of these programs in the short-term versus the longer-term?

¹ Alamillo, J., L. Ritchie, and R. Wood. (2021). The Effects of Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Programs for Youth. OPRE Report 2021-225. Washington, DC: OPRE, ACF, HHS.



Federal funding for youth HMRE programs

- Since the mid-2000s, the federal government has authorized funding to support healthy marriage initiatives, including HMRE programs for youth
- Funded by OFA within ACF, HHS
- In 2020, OFA allocated separate funding to youth HMRE programs for the first time
- Awarded more than \$24 million to programs serving high-school-age youth and young adults between ages 18 and 24

What do youth HMRE programs cover?

- Programs aim to help youth improve their relationship skills, attitudes, and behaviors in order to form healthy relationships in adolescence and adulthood
- Most feature a structured curriculum, such as those distributed by the Dibble Institute (e.g., *Relationship Smarts PLUS*, *Love Notes*)
- Address topics such as identifying personal values, understanding the characteristics of healthy relationships, and improving communication and conflict management skills

How are youth HMRE programs delivered?

- Most programs are delivered in high schools in a class during the regular school day (e.g., health, consumer sciences)
- Can be delivered by outside facilitators or classroom teachers
- Some programs are delivered after school or in other community settings (e.g., places of worship, community centers)
- Programs typically consist of 10-15 lessons, each lasting 60-90 minutes

What is an evidence and gaps map?

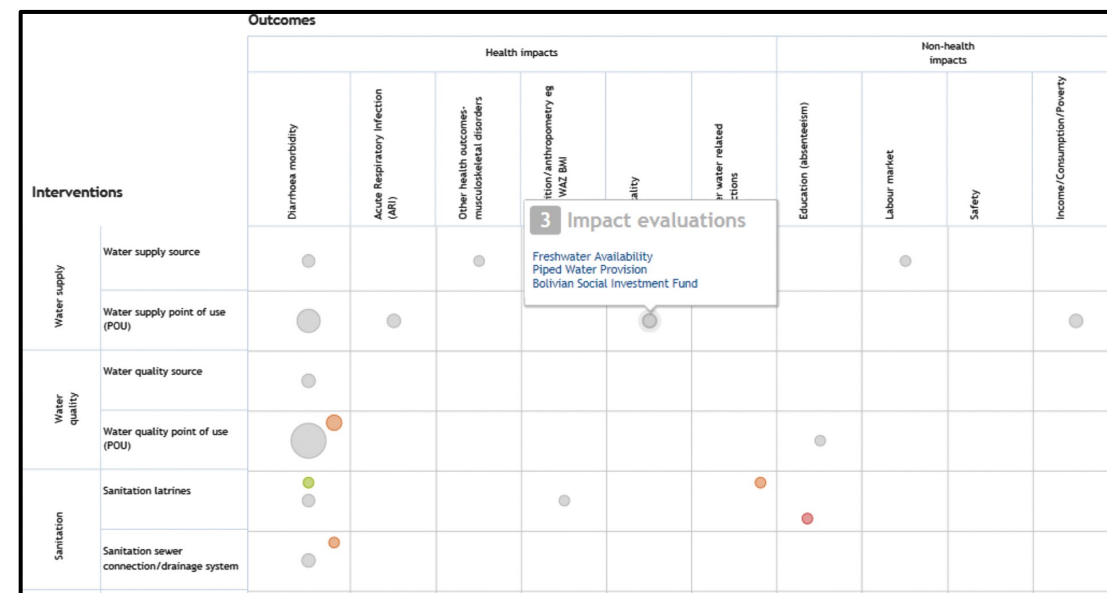
- An evidence and gaps map is a grid or matrix that presents what is and is not known about the evidence on a given topic
- Maps must have a systematic search strategy, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematically report on all eligible studies



Source: Campbell Collaboration. “Evidence and Gaps Maps.” Oslo, Norway: Campbell Collaboration, 2020. Available at <https://campbellcollaboration.org/evidence-gap-maps.html>.

What is an evidence and gaps map (continued)?

- Often used to show whether different sorts of interventions impact different outcomes
- Can also show how evidence for program impacts varies based on study design
- Can be interactive so users can click on a cell or icon and see a list of studies that found a particular impact



Source: Snilstveit et al. 2016 “Evidence and gaps maps: A tool for promoting evidence informed policy and strategic research agendas.” *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 79, Pp. 120-129.

Inclusion criteria for studies in our review

1. Measured impacts relative to a comparison group (randomized control trial or quasi-experimental design)
2. Examined a program that served any youth younger than 18
3. Examined an HMRE program, not a teen pregnancy or dating violence prevention program

Description of studies in our review

- In total, we identified 15 impact studies of HMRE programs for youth
 - 13 evaluated programs offered in school, 1 evaluated a program offered at a day camp for high-risk youth, 1 evaluated a program for youth aging out of foster care
 - Program length varied from 1 week to 1 school year
 - *Relationship Smarts, Connections, and Love Notes* were the most commonly-used curricula
 - Sample sizes ranged from about 200 to 2,000 youth
 - 9 studies measured outcomes immediately after the program, 3 measured outcomes less than a year after the program, and 6 measured outcomes a year or more after the program

Studies looked at a variety of outcomes

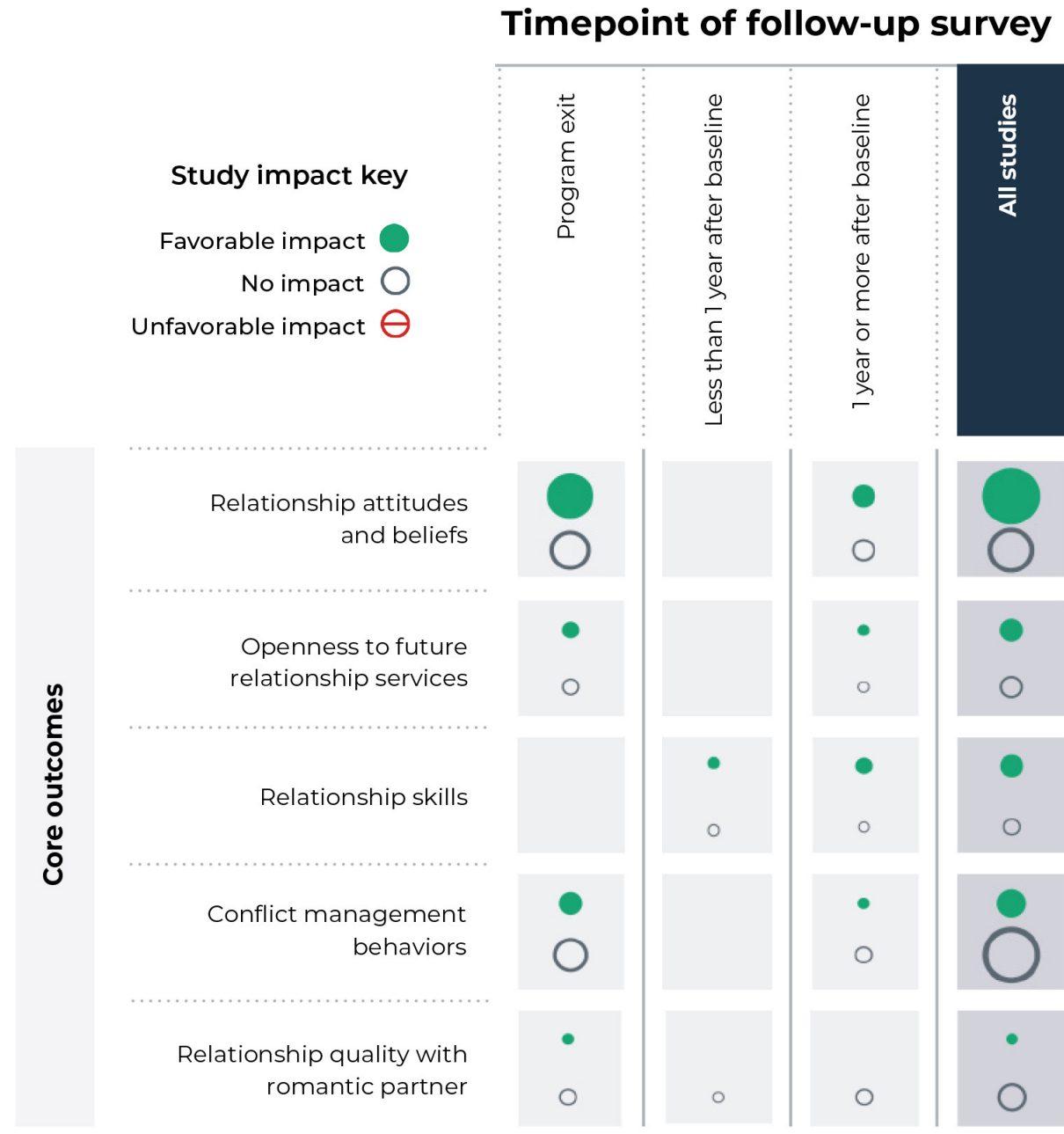
Core outcome domains

- Relationship attitudes and beliefs
- Openness to future relationship services
- Relationship skills
- Conflict management behaviors
- Relationship quality with a romantic partner

Additional outcome domains

- Sexual risk behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes
- Personal well-being
- Relationship quality with parents and friends

Findings from our evidence and gaps map on the effectiveness of HMRE programs for youth

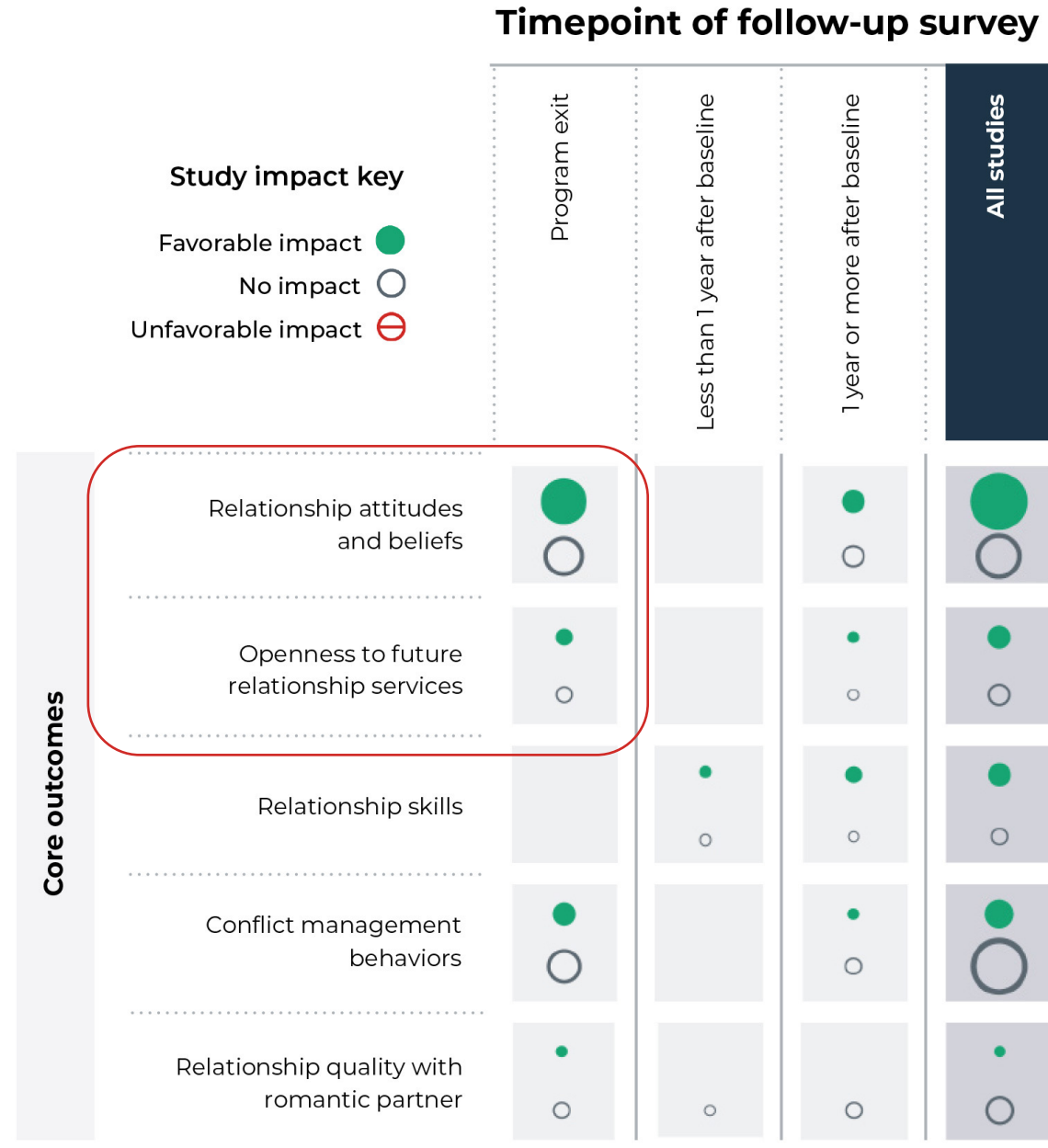


Evidence and gaps map: Table view

| | | Timepoint of follow-up survey | | | |
|------------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| | | Setting | | | |
| Study Impact Key | | | | | All Studies |
| | | Program exit | Less than 1 year after baseline | 1 year or more after baseline | |
| Core outcomes | Relationship attitudes and beliefs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Alamillo & Goesling 20213. Gardner 20014. Gardner et al. 20045. Gardner et al. 20166. Ma et al. 20147. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Alamillo & Goesling 20213. Gardner et al. 20044. Gardner et al. 20165. Hutson et al. 20216. Leip 2021 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alamillo & Goesling 20212. Kerpelman et al. 20093. Kerpelman et al. 2010○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alamillo & Goesling 20212. Gardner & Boellaard 20073. Hutson et al. 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Alamillo & Goesling 20213. Gardner 20014. Gardner et al. 20045. Gardner et al. 20166. Kerpelman et al. 20097. Kerpelman et al. 20108. Ma et al. 20149. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Alamillo & Goesling 20213. Gardner & Boellaard 20074. Gardner et al. 20045. Gardner et al. 20166. Hutson et al. 20217. Leip 2021 |
| | Openness to future relationship services | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gardner et al. 20042. Gardner et al. 2016○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gardner 20012. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Kerpelman et al. 2009○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gardner & Boellaard 2007 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gardner et al. 20042. Gardner et al. 20163. Kerpelman et al. 2009○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gardner 20012. Gardner & Boellaard 20073. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012 |
| | Relationship skills | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Halpern-Meekin 2011○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Rhoades et al. 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Kerpelman et al. 20092. Kerpelman et al. 2010○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alamillo & Goesling 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Halpern-Meekin 20112. Kerpelman et al. 20093. Kerpelman et al. 2010○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alamillo & Goesling 20212. Rhoades et al. 2021 |
| | Conflict management behaviors | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Gardner et al. 20043. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Gardner 20013. Gardner et al. 20044. Gardner et al. 20165. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gardner & Boellaard 2007○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gardner & Boellaard 20072. Kerpelman et al. 2009 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Gardner & Boellaard 20073. Gardner et al. 20044. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adler-Baeder et al. 20072. Gardner 20013. Gardner & Boellaard 20074. Gardner et al. 20045. Gardner et al. 20166. Hutson et al. 20217. Kerpelman et al. 20098. Rhoades et al. 20219. Schramm and Gomez-Scott 2012 |
| | Relationship quality with romantic partner | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Hutson et al. 2021○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Hutson et al. 20212. Leip 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Rhoades et al. 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alamillo & Goesling 20212. Hutson et al. 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Favorable Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Hutson et al. 2021○ No Impact<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alamillo & Goesling 20212. Hutson et al. 20213. Leip 20214. Rhoades et al. 2021 |

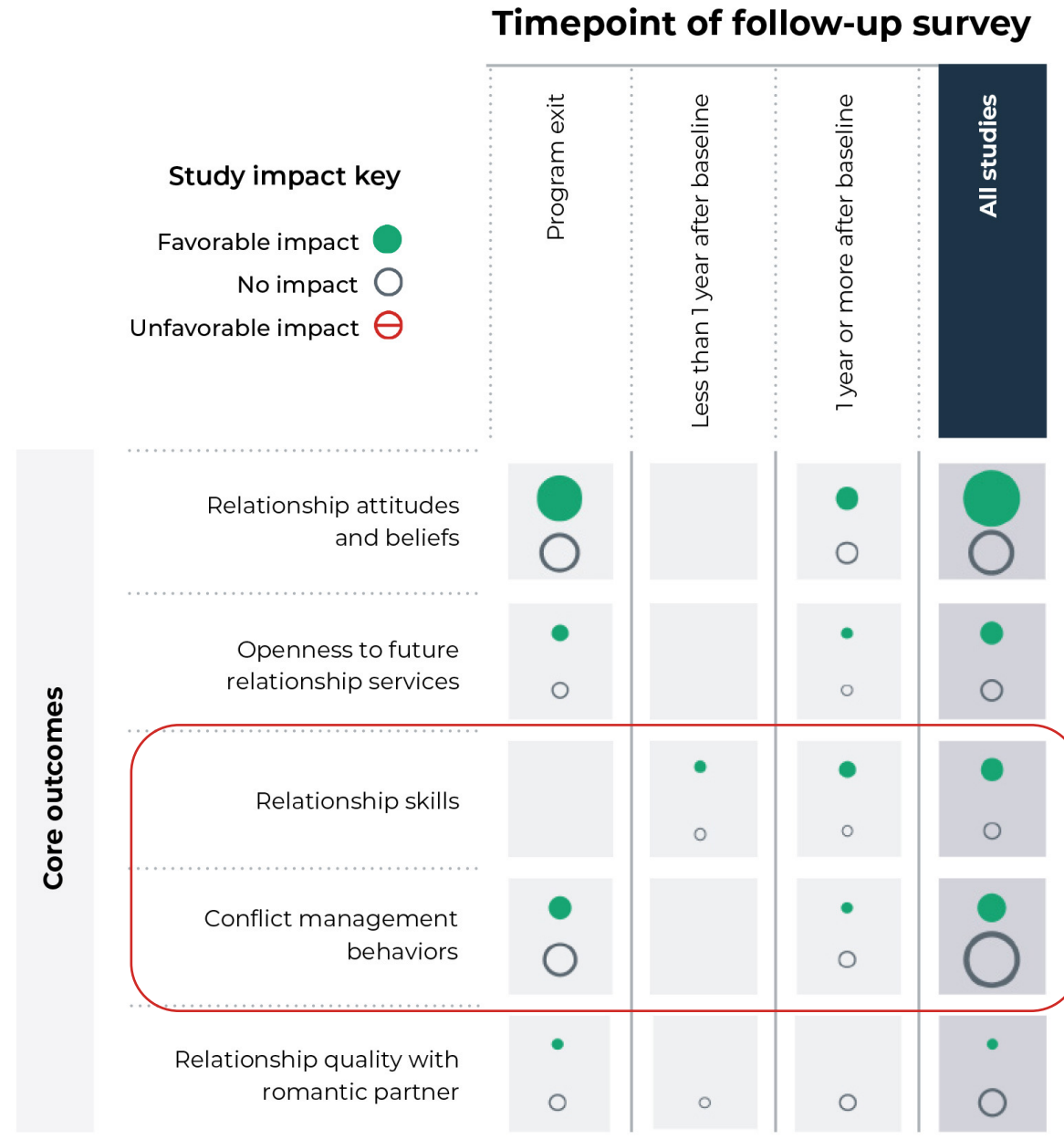
Finding #1

Several studies found favorable impacts immediately after the program on youths' relationship attitudes and beliefs, including their willingness to use relationship services in the future



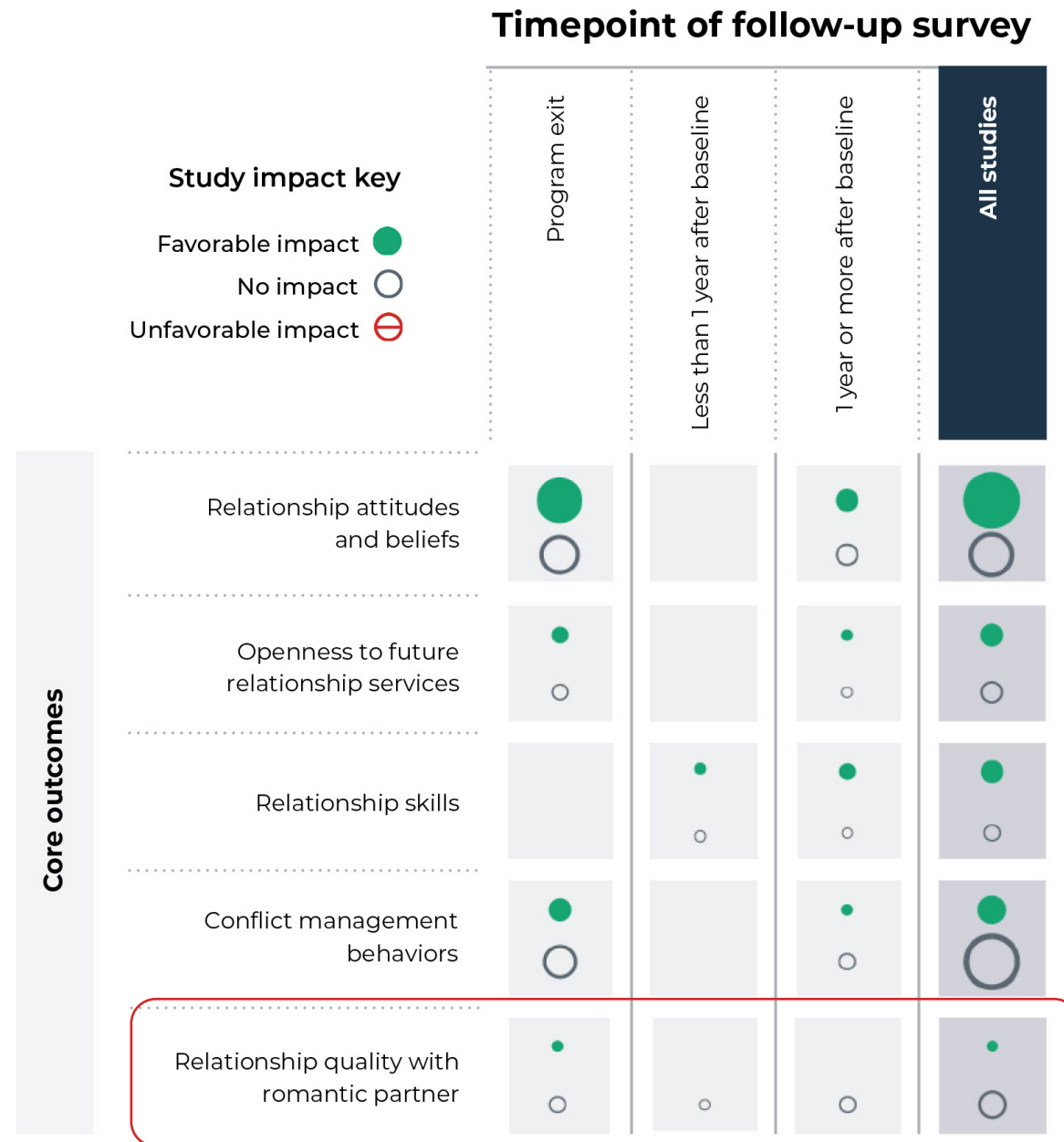
Finding #2

The evidence of impacts on youths' relationship skills and conflict management behaviors is mixed



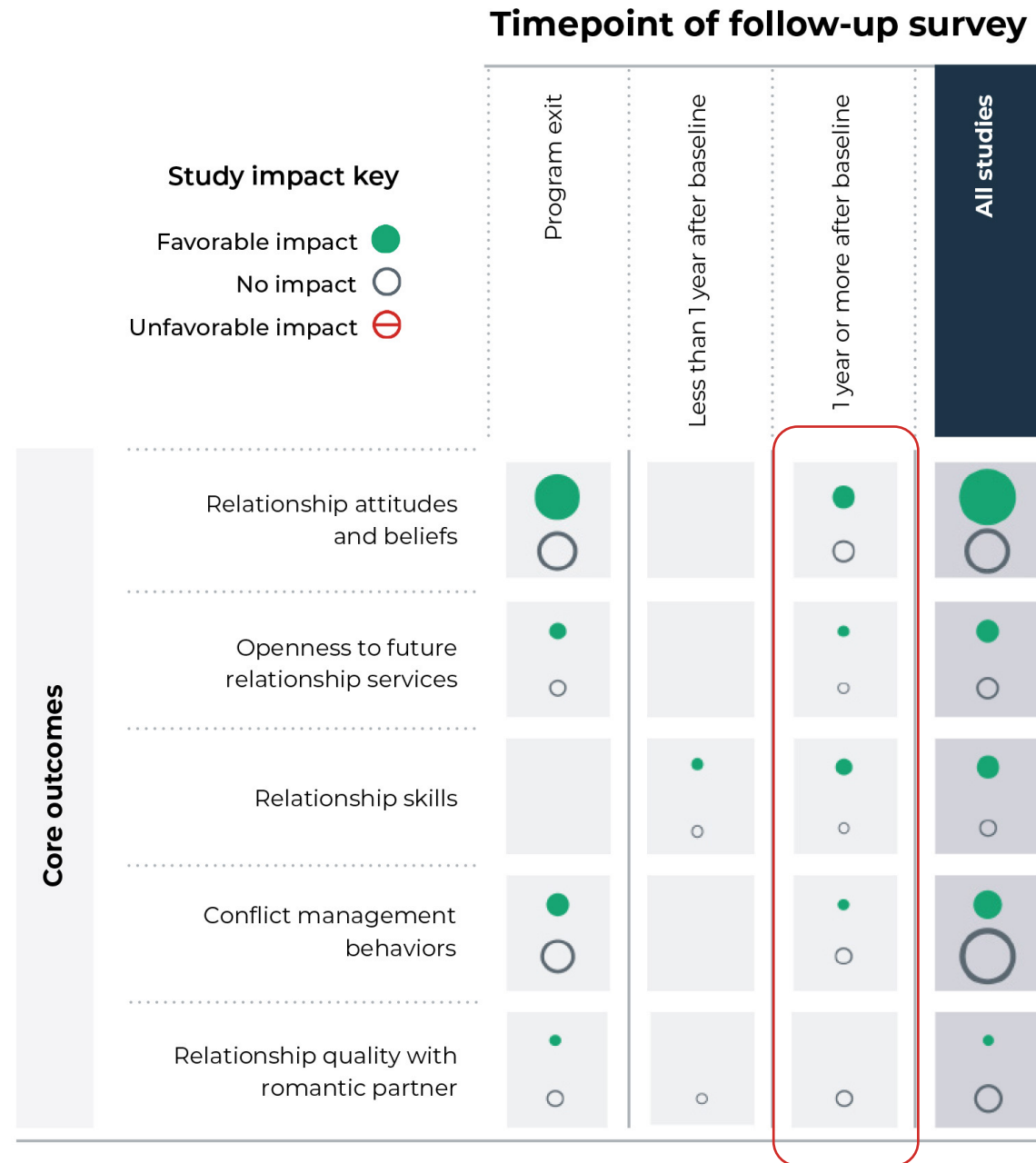
Finding #3

Few studies examined impacts on the quality of youths' romantic relationships



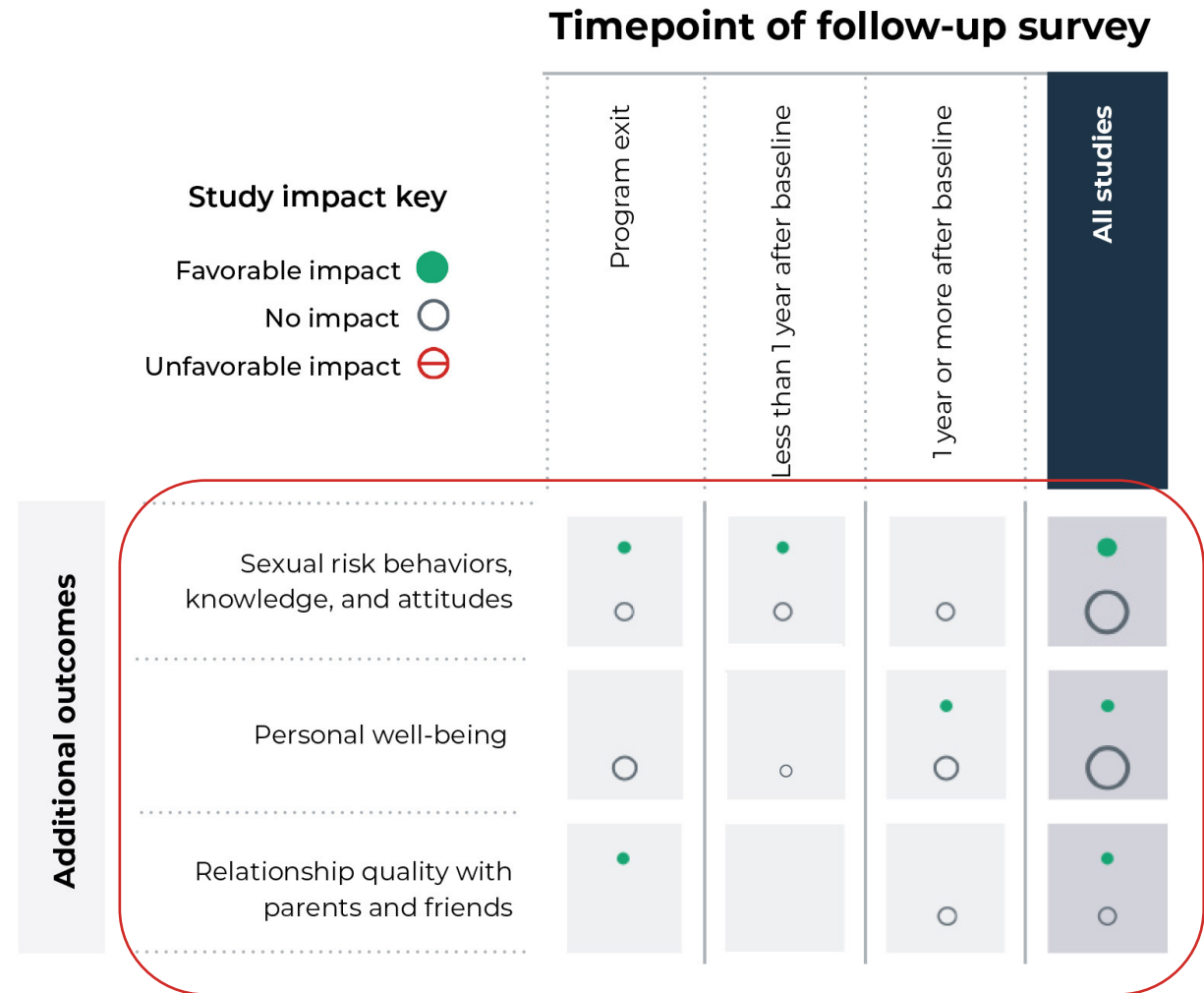
Finding #4

There is limited evidence of longer-term impacts, particularly for studies with higher response rates



Finding #5

There is limited evidence that programs affected attitudes and behaviors in the additional outcome domains



Implications for future research

- Formative research could help identify new delivery models that could strengthen longer-term impacts on youths' relationship attitudes and beliefs. Changes could include:
 - Increasing dosage
 - Sequencing programs across multiple grade levels
 - Offering programs later in adolescence when youth are more likely to be in romantic relationships

Implications for future research (continued)

- We still don't know much about the impact of HMRE programs for youth on the quality of their current and future relationships
 - Researchers may need to assess outcomes when youth are older and have more dating experience
 - Should consider a broader array of outcomes related to relationship quality, such as exposure to dating violence or sexual harassment

Implications for future research (continued)

- More research is needed to understand the impacts of programs offered outside of schools for specific subgroups of youth at higher risk of negative relationship outcomes
 - Almost all studies we reviewed examined the effectiveness of HMRE programs offered in high schools to a general population of youth
 - Programs offered outside of schools often serve higher-risk youth who could potentially benefit more from relationship education

For more information

- To view the full evidence and gaps map and details of the studies included in our review, visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/effects-healthy-marriage-and-relationship-education-programs-youth>
- For questions about this work, please reach out to:



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