



Three Years Later: The Impacts of Relationship Smarts PLUS on Youth in Georgia

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Presentation road map

- Overview of STREAMS evaluation
- Motivation and research questions
- Study setting and program implementation
- Study design
- Key findings
- Considerations for HMRE programs

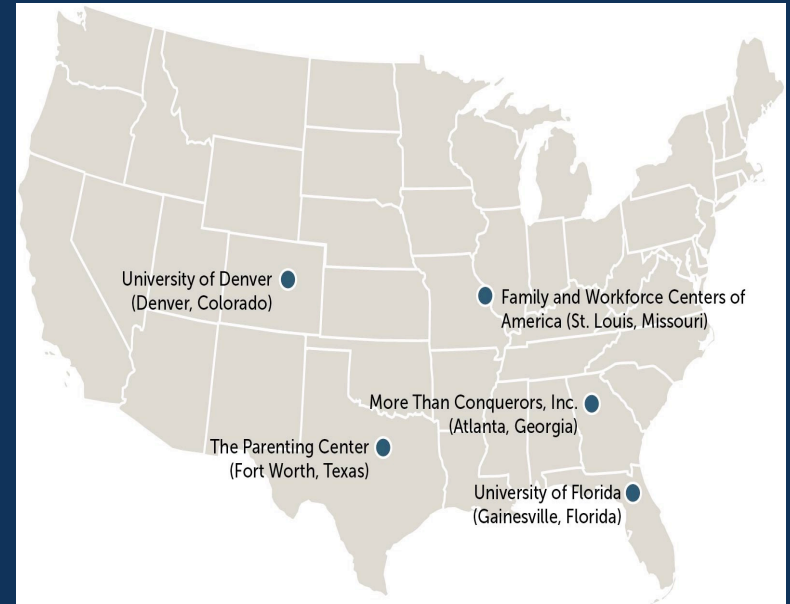


What are federally-funded HMRE programs?

- Since 2005, Congress has dedicated funding to healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs through competitive grants administered by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families
- HMRE programs aim to support strong, healthy, and happy families by teaching information and skills to help young people and adults form and maintain high-quality romantic relationships

Overview of the STREAMS evaluation

- Five separate random assignment studies of HMRE programs funded by OFA in 2015
- Focus on understudied populations and program approaches not included in prior federal evaluations, including programs for youth, programs for expectant and new moms, and programs that integrate relationship education and economic services



HMRE programs for high school students

- Many federally-funded HMRE programs offer relationship education to youth in high schools
- Programs aim to fill a gap in what students learn about relationships in schools, going beyond sexual health education to also cover the social and emotional aspects of romantic relationships
- Most youth HMRE programs feature a structured curriculum, such as those distributed by the Dibble Institute
- A common challenge is schools may not have enough time available to offer the full curriculum, leading some program providers to shorten the curriculum to fit within school schedules

Gaps in what we know about HMRE programs for high school students

- Prior studies have found positive impacts of HMRE programming on students' relationship skills, attitudes, and knowledge around the time the program ends
- There is limited evidence on whether programs have sustained impacts on students' outcomes years later
- There is also no rigorous evidence on whether shortening or significantly adapting an HMRE curriculum might interfere with the curriculum's intended effects

Research questions

- What is the impact of offering HMRE programming as part of the regular school curriculum on high school students' relationship skills, attitudes, knowledge, experiences, and quality one and three years after the program?
- How does shortening an HMRE program influence its impacts on these outcomes?

Study setting

- To conduct the study, Mathematica and Public Strategies partnered with More than Conquerors Inc. (MTCI), a nonprofit social service provider serving at-risk families and youth in the Atlanta area
- At the time of the study, MTCI had received two prior rounds of grant funding from OFA (2006 and 2011) to deliver HMRE programming to high school students

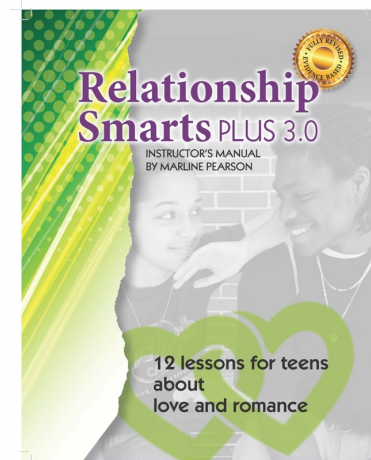


Study setting, continued

- STREAMS focused on MTCI's delivery of Relationship Smarts PLUS (RQ+) Version 3.0 in two high schools in Gwinnett County, northeast of Atlanta
- Schools located in communities with a large proportion of Hispanic/Latino families
- Programming offered as part of a semester-long health class for primarily 9th grade students
- Lessons were delivered by facilitators hired and trained by MTCI

Relationship Smarts PLUS (RQ+)

- RQ+ is widely used HMRE curriculum for youth ages 13-18
- Addresses PYD, RE, DV, and pregnancy prevention
- STREAMS evaluated RQ+ version 3.0
 - Contained 12 lessons, each lasting around 90 minutes
- Interactive and flexible lessons, featuring a mix of full-class and small-group discussions, activities like role-playing and games, workbook activities, and homework assignments to complete with a parent or trusted adult



Two versions of RQ+ used for this study

Content area	Number of lessons	Full curriculum	Shortened curriculum
1. Self-awareness	2	✓	✓
2. Healthy relationships	4	✓	✓
3. Dangerous relationships	1	✓	✓
4. Communication and conflict	2	✓	
5. Intimacy and sexual decisions	2	✓	
6. Social media	1	✓	✓
Total number of lessons		12 lessons	8 lessons
Total instructional hours		18 hours	12 hours

Study design

Sample intake and random assignment

- STREAMS study team enrolled students in health classes at both high schools over two school years (2016-2017 and 2017-2018)
- 61 health classes (containing 1,862 students) were randomly assigned to receive one of the following:
 1. Full, 12-lesson RQ+ curriculum
 2. Shortened, 8-lesson RQ+ curriculum
 3. No HMRE programming
- For classes assigned to the control group or the shortened curriculum group, MTCI staff delivered supplementary lessons from a job readiness curriculum

Data collection

- Students in all three study groups were asked to complete four surveys over the course of the study:

Survey	Response rate
Baseline survey	99%
Exit survey	84%
One-year follow-up survey	85%
Three-year follow-up survey	71%

Note: Response rate refers to the percentage of randomly assigned students who received parental permission for the study and responded to a given survey. For all surveys, response rates across study groups did not vary by more than 5 percentage points.

One-year outcomes

- Relationship skills
 - Perceived general relationship skills (6-item scale)
 - Perceived conflict management skills (5-item scale)
- Relationship attitudes and knowledge
 - Disagreement with unrealistic relationship beliefs (3 separate items)
 - Disapproval of teen dating violence (12-item scale)
 - Desire to avoid teen pregnancy (3 separate items)
 - Knowledge of pregnancy and STIs (5-item index variable)
- Exploratory analyses also examined relationship attitudes at program exit and relationship expectations and experiences at one-year

Three-year outcomes

- Relationship skills
 - Perceived general relationship skills (6-item scale)
 - Perceived conflict management skills (5-item scale)
- Relationship experiences
 - Currently in an unhealthy relationship (Y/N)
 - Ever had sex (Y/N)
 - Had sex without using a condom in the last three months (Y/N)
- Relationship quality
 - Relationship quality with parents (3-item scale)
 - Relationship quality with friends (3-item scale)
- Exploratory analyses also examined students' relationship status; romantic relationship quality (among students in a romantic relationship); and relationship attitudes, knowledge, and expectations

Characteristics of study participants

Female	47%
Grade in school	
9 th grade	87%
10 th grade or higher	13%
Race and ethnicity	
Hispanic	56%
Black, non-Hispanic	26%
White, non-Hispanic	5%
Other	13%
Primary language at home	
English	49%
Spanish or other	50%
In a dating relationship	30%
Ever had sexual intercourse	15%

Source: Baseline survey (N = 1,836)

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Key findings

RQ+ was well-implemented with students in all three groups receiving the intended dosage of programming

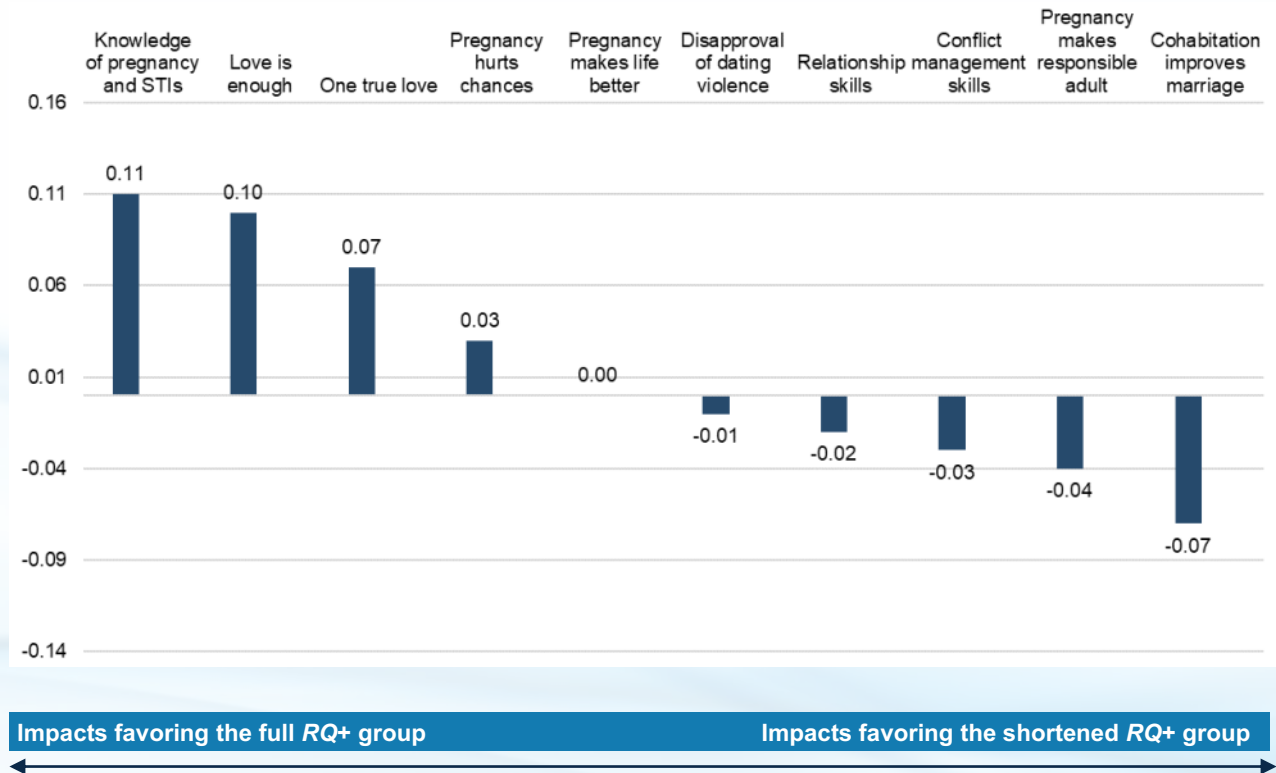
	Full RQ+	Shortened RQ+	Control
Attended at least one class period (%)	99.5	99.5	100.0
Average attendance rate (%)	89.3	88.6	89.0
Average hours of RQ+ content received	16.5	11.2	0.0
Sample size	604	658	600

After one year, students reported similar levels on most outcomes

- Students offered the full RQ+ curriculum and students in the control group reported similar levels on 9 of 10 outcomes related to their relationship skills, attitudes, and knowledge
- For one outcome related to unrealistic relationship beliefs, students offered the full RQ+ curriculum were more likely than students in the control group to disagree with the belief that feelings of love are enough to sustain a happy marriage

After one year, there was no evidence that shortening the curriculum led to different impacts

- The shortened curriculum had slightly smaller impacts for some outcomes but slightly larger impacts for others (none were statistically significant)



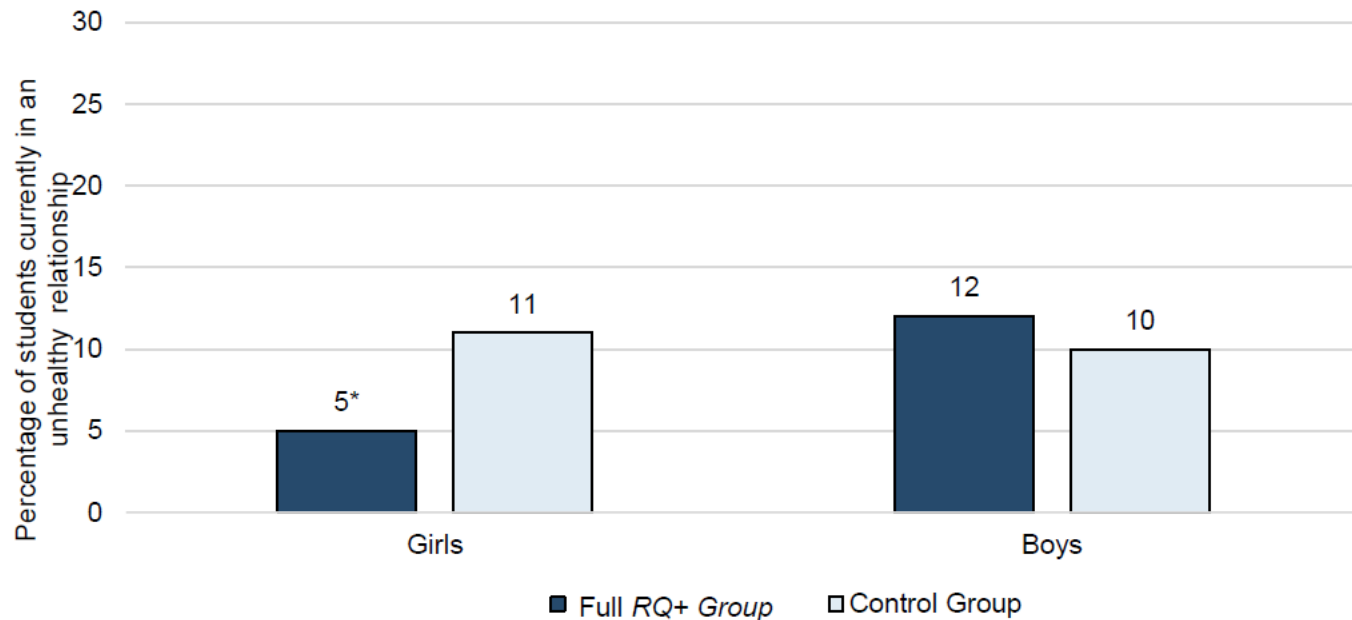
After one year, exploratory impact findings from exit survey had faded

- Like prior studies, exploratory analyses of data from the program exit survey showed that both the full and shortened versions of the curriculum had impacts on students' relationship attitudes immediately after the program
- These impacts appear to have faded by the time of the one-year follow-up survey
- Similarly, exploratory analyses showed no evidence of impacts on students' relationship expectations and experiences after one year

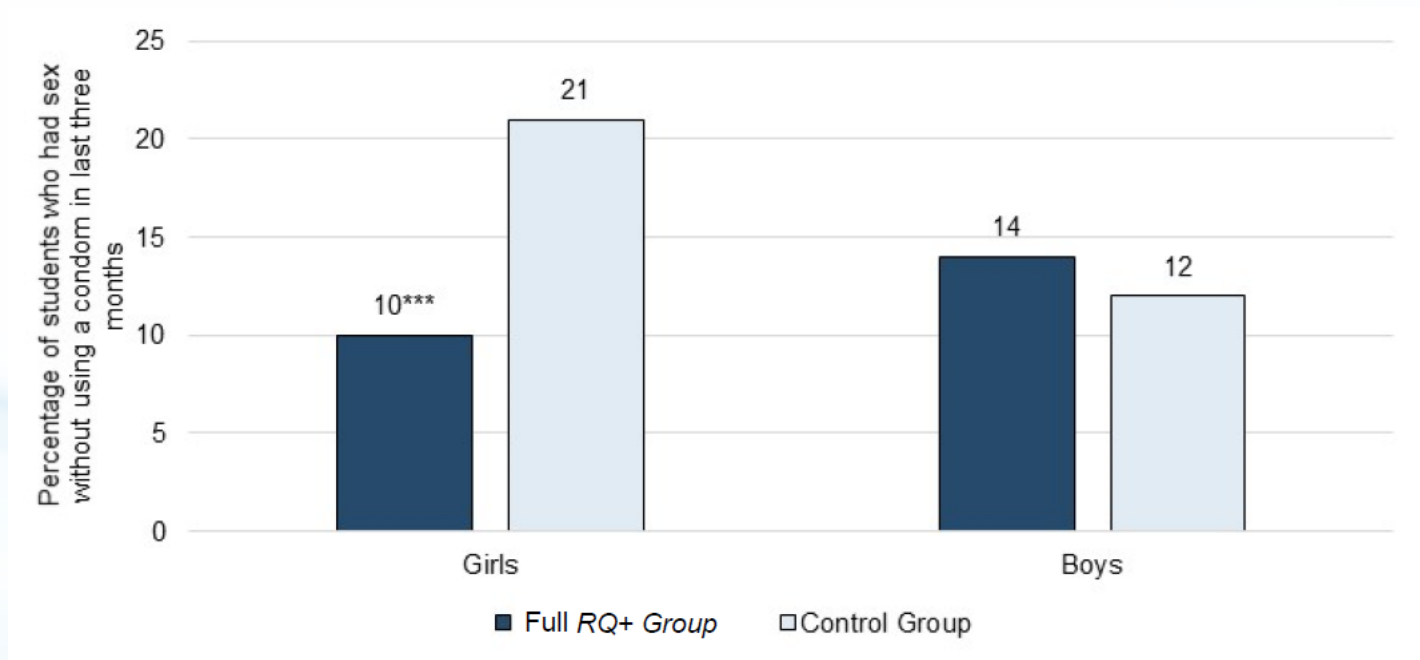
After three years, students reported similar levels on outcomes

- Students offered the full RQ+ curriculum and students in the control group reported similar levels on all 7 outcomes related to their relationship experiences, quality, and skills
- Students offered the shortened RQ+ curriculum and students offered the full RQ+ curriculum reported similar levels on 6 of 7 outcomes
 - Students offered the shortened curriculum were more likely to report having sex without using a condom in the last 3 months
 - This impact did not remain significant when using other estimation strategies or adjusting for total number of significance tests conducted

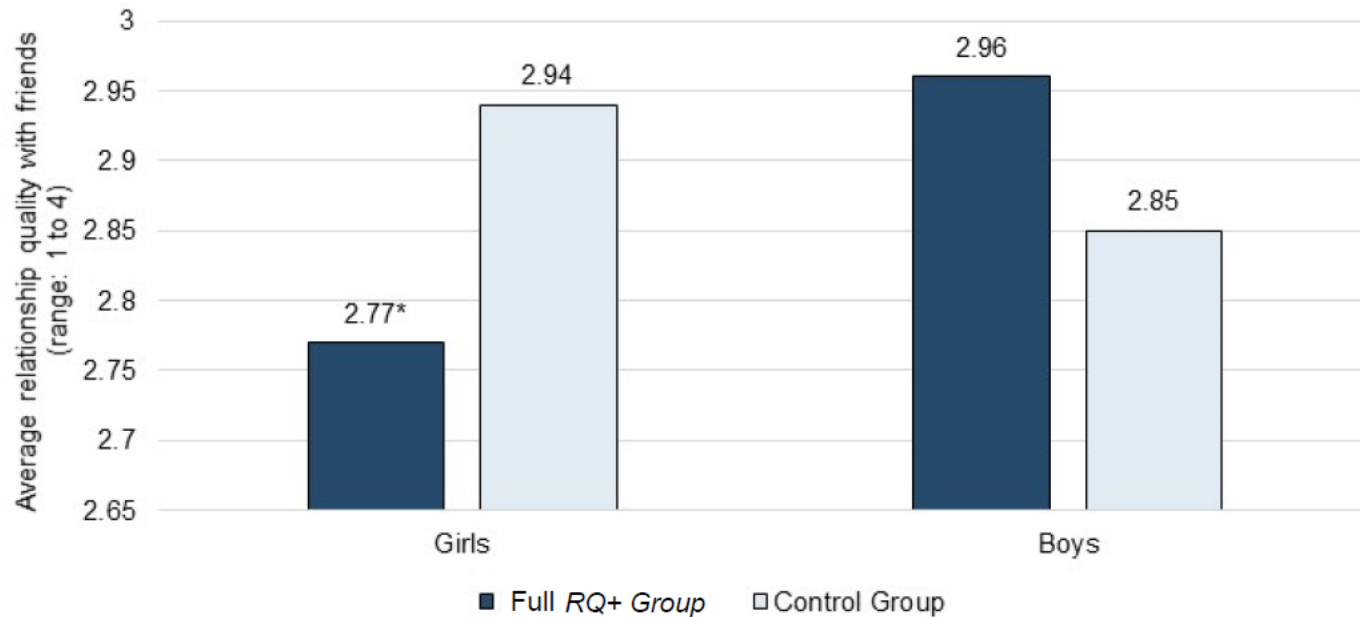
After three years, girls offered the full RQ+ curriculum were less likely to report being in an unhealthy relationship than girls in the control group



After three years, girls offered the full RQ+ curriculum were less likely to report having sex without a condom than girls in the control group



After three years, girls offered the full RQ+ curriculum reported lower average relationship quality with friends than girls in the control group



After three years, students reported similar levels on exploratory outcomes

- Students in all three research groups reported similar levels on outcomes related to relationship status and relationship quality
 - No impacts on students' likelihood of ever or currently being in a romantic relationship
 - Among students in a romantic relationship, no impacts on reported relationship happiness or satisfaction
- Consistent with findings from the one-year survey, students in all three research groups generally had similar levels on outcomes related to relationship attitudes, knowledge, and expectations for the future

Key takeaways

- Programs can reasonably expect impacts on students' relationship skills, attitudes, and knowledge around the time the program ends
- These impacts are likely to fade after the end of programming
- Choice of 8 or 12 lessons had little influence on the results
- Programs are also unlikely to have sustained impacts on relationship experiences and quality for all students
 - We did find some evidence of impacts on these outcomes for girls, but not boys

Considerations for HMRE programs

- For programs that want to increase the chances for sustained impacts for all students, they could consider:
 - Offering more programming (more than 18 hours), either in a single class/grade or sequenced across multiple grade levels
 - Offering programming to older students, who might have more opportunities to apply the concepts and skills taught in class
 - Offering programming tailored to certain groups of youth in order to better address students' needs, questions, and experiences

For more information

- To read the reports upon which this presentation is based:
 - MTCI implementation study:
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/implementation_of_relationship_smarts_plus_in_georgia_2018_11_29_v3_508.pdf
 - One-year impact study:
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/healthy-marriage-and-relationship-education-high-school-students-one-year-impacts-two>
 - Three-year impact study: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/healthy-marriage-and-relationship-education-high-school-students-longer-term-impacts>
- To learn more about the STREAMS evaluation:
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/opre/research/strengthening-relationship-education-and-marriage-services-streams>

For more information

- For questions about this work, please reach out to:



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Questions??

