

March 2024 Webinar

The Power of Relationship Education from a Policy Perspective

Presenter:

Dr. Jocelyn Wikle

School of Family Life
Brigham Young University

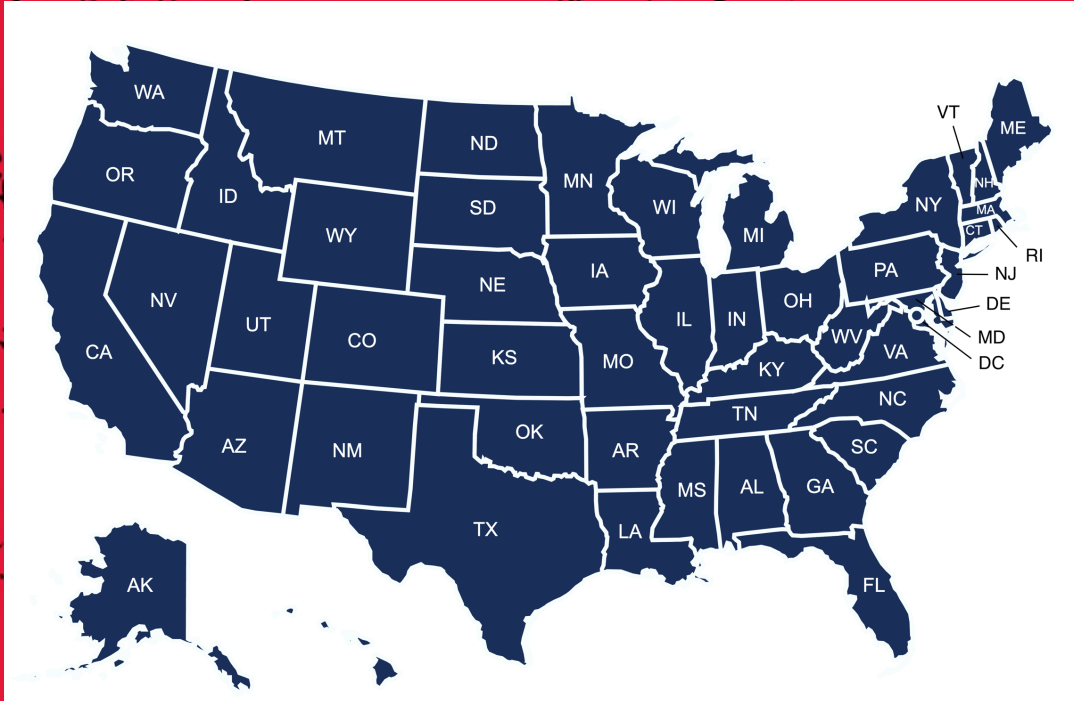
Technical Questions

1. If you cannot hear this presentation, please exit the webinar and opt to call in on your phone, as this can solve most audio problems.
2. Locate the “hand” on your GoToWebinar control panel to indicate if you are new to Dibble webinars.
3. You will find **handouts** and the **questions box** located in your control panel.

Charlie and Helen Dibble



2022-2023 Clients
serving over 126,000 youth



The Dibble
Institute is a
national,
independent non-
profit
organization.

Our Mission

Empowering teens and young adults with knowledge and research-based skills to successfully navigate their intimate relationships.



We believe in research.



We believe in stable, safe, and nurturing families.



We believe that relationship education is for everyone.



The Power of Relationship Education from a Policy Perspective

Dr. Jocelyn Wikle
School of Family Life
Brigham Young University

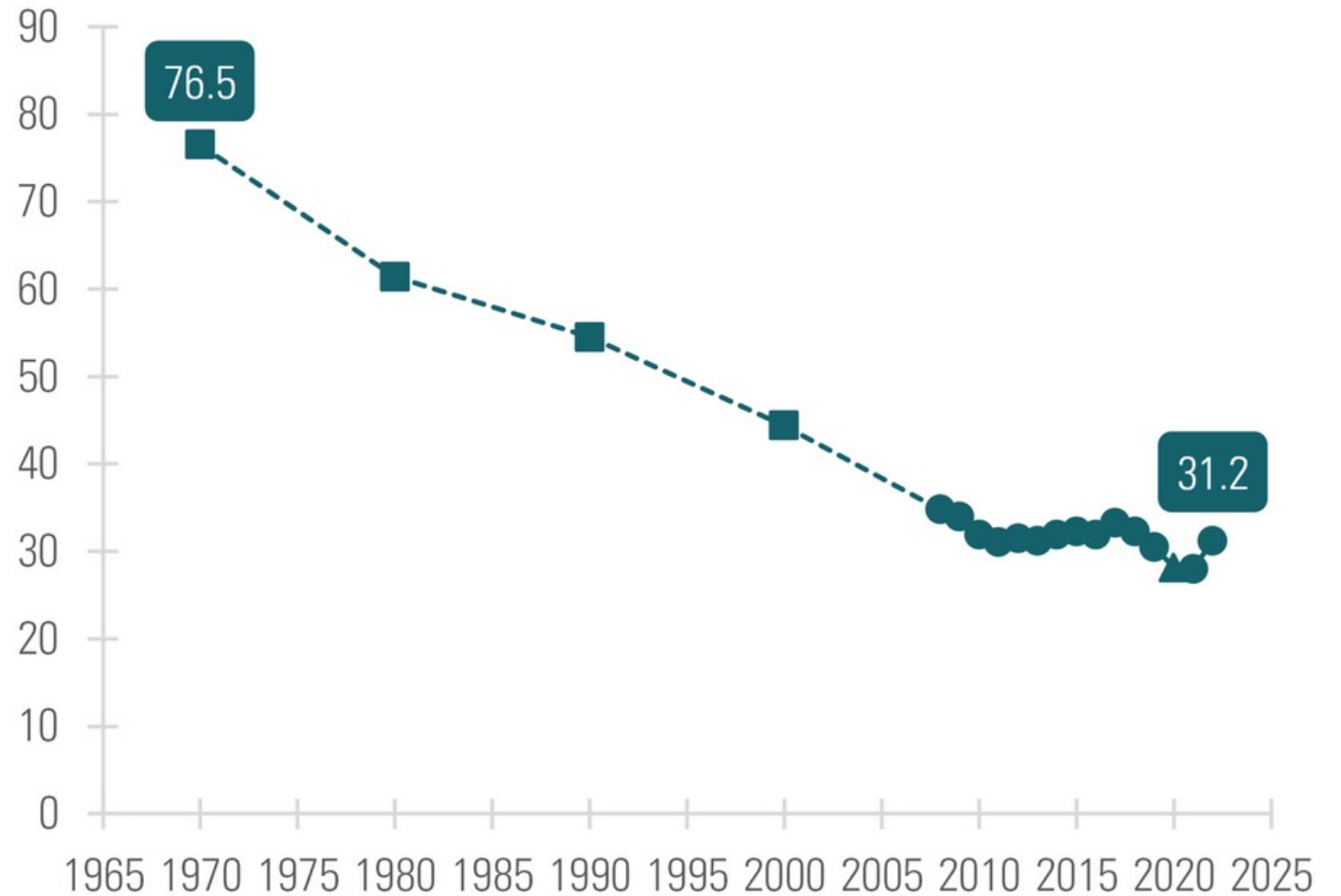
Dibble Institute:

“We believe in safe, stable, nurturing families”

- A factor that supports safety, stability, and nurturing for children is a two-parent home
 - Growing up with two parents is a source of advantage:
 - Financial resource advantages
 - Time resources (relationship building, reading, playing, one-on-one attention)
 - Emotional bandwidth of parents (engagement, responsiveness)
 - Living with two parents translates into short and long-term benefits for kids (Anderson, 2014; Chetty et al., 2014; Hawkins & Boyd, 2018; Kearney, 2023; Maasoumi et al., 2009)
 - Economic outcomes - education, income
 - Better health
 - Longevity
 - Greater life satisfaction
 - Stronger parent-child relationships

Retreat from Marriage

Women's marriage rates, United States



Source: NCFMR analyses of 1970-2000, National Center for Health Statistics; 2008-2019 and 2021-2022, U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-yr est., and 2020 American Community Survey, 1-year Experimental PUMS



THE TWO-PARENT

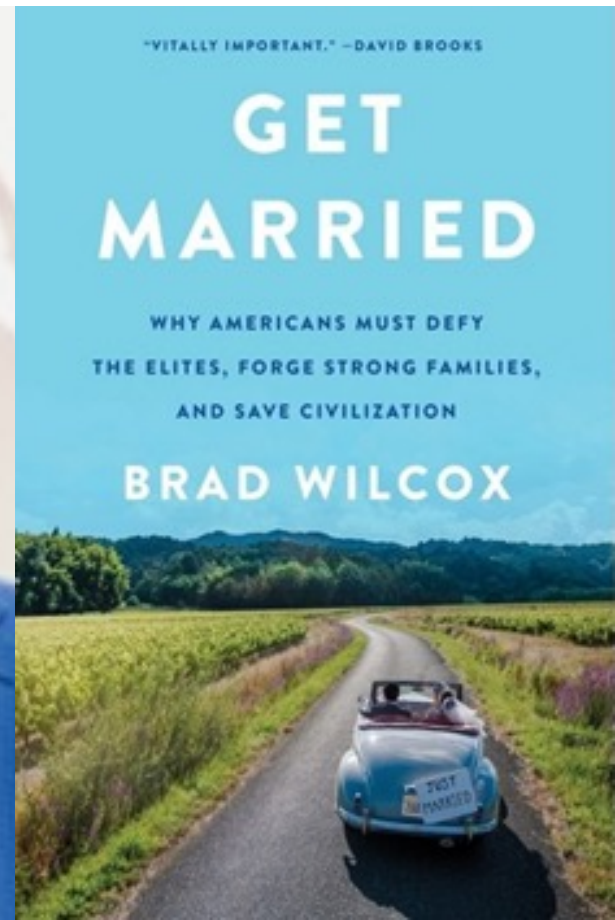


PRIVILEGE

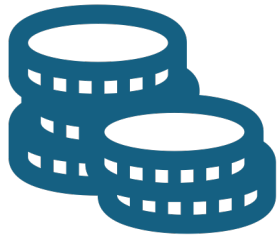


HOW AMERICANS STOPPED
GETTING MARRIED AND
STARTED FALLING BEHIND

MELISSA S. KEARNEY



Why aren't people getting married?



Economic drivers



Social change



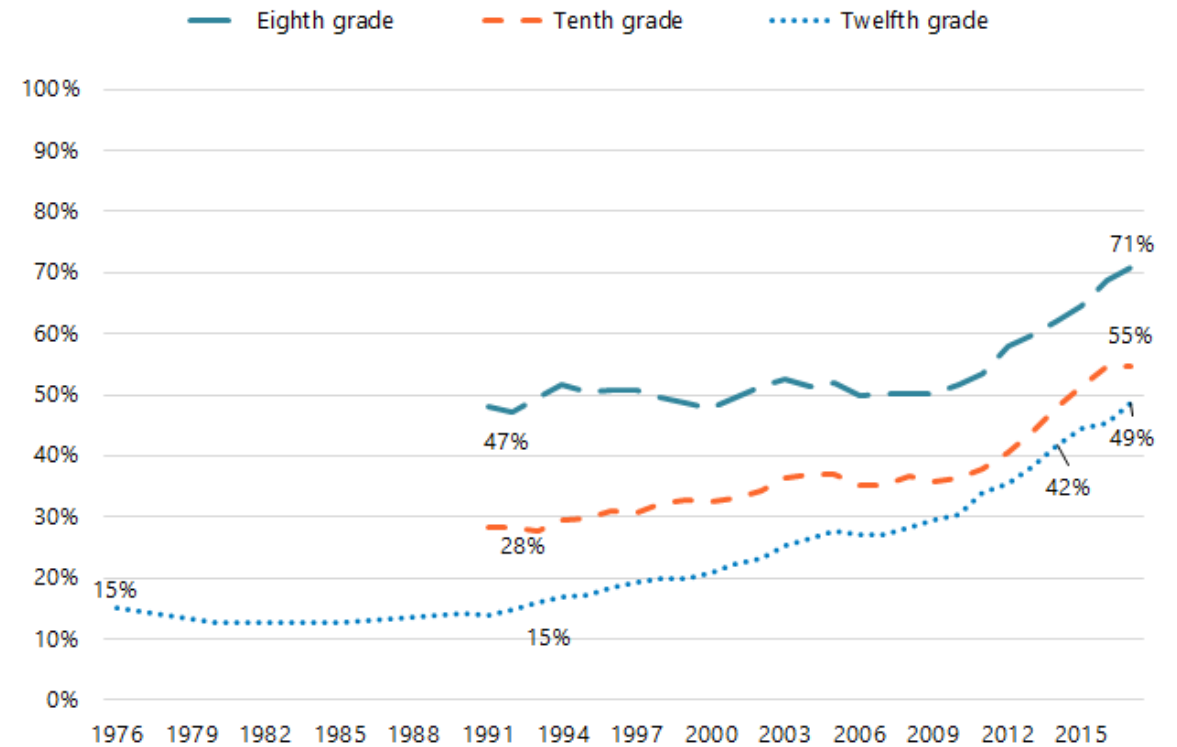
Relationship skills

Why aren't people getting married?

- Relationship skills
 - people have fewer models
 - media distortions about relationships
 - less social interaction
 - fewer opportunities to develop social skills

Intimate family relationships are worth addressing, considering that they are at the heart of many of our social difficulties.

Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th Graders Who Report They Never Date: Selected Years, 1976-2017



Source: Child Trends' original analysis of data from *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth, 1976-2017*.

Relationship Education (RE)

- Any course, program, or brief intervention that teaches people how to strengthen intimate and family relationships (Markman et al., 2022).
- RE includes relationship literacy education for individuals, including youth and young adults, to help them envision and prepare for healthy romantic relationships.
- RE courses teach concepts such as communication, conflict management, setting realistic expectations, and deepening commitment to a partner (Hawkins & Boyd, 2018).



Relationship Education is a Vital Part of Multi-faceted Policy Solutions to Support Families

- Money alone is not going to be enough to turn things around.
- Given the micro-level nature of the issue, Relationship Education has strong potential to make a difference.
 - Healthy Marriage Initiative
 - The quality and design of family sustaining programs has gotten stronger over time, and needs continual improvement
- There are many groups around the country currently reaching individuals and families who want to get married but face barriers.



The Case for Relationship Education as a Policy Tool

Effectual

Relationship Education has proven to improve outcomes in a variety of settings related to families.

Preventative

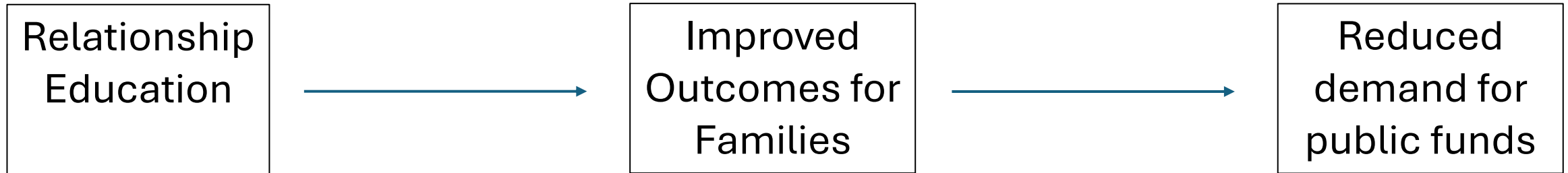
Because many of the issues that public policy seeks to address are affected by family instability and parental conflict, Relationship Education can act as a preventative measure that diminishes risk factors that originate in the home.

Cost effective

Addressing a problem after it has taken hold is often more expensive than stopping it from happening in the present.

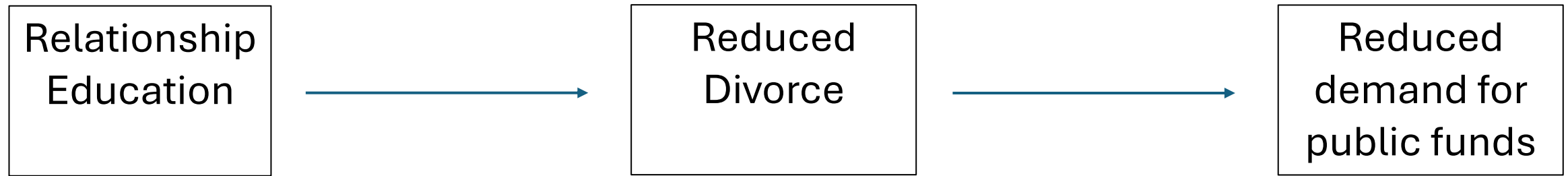
- \$4.23 ROI for each \$1.00 invested (Shamblen et al., 2018)

Relationship Education Improves a Variety of Social Issues



- Divorce
- Children's mental health
- Children's academic outcomes
- Foster care
- Teen pregnancy
- Incarceration
- Domestic violence

Relationship Education Reduces Divorce



Families of divorce have greater reliance on public assistance.

\$33.3 billion each year
(Schramm, 2006)

Consequences of Divorce

- Divorce is connected to high levels of stress and decreased quality of life (Sander et al., 2020; Strizzi et al., 2021).
- Divorcees report increased depression and anxiety following the event (Hald et al., 2023; Sander et al., 2020).
- Household income drops at the time of a divorce (splitting resources into two households).
- Divorce creates a less stable environment for children.

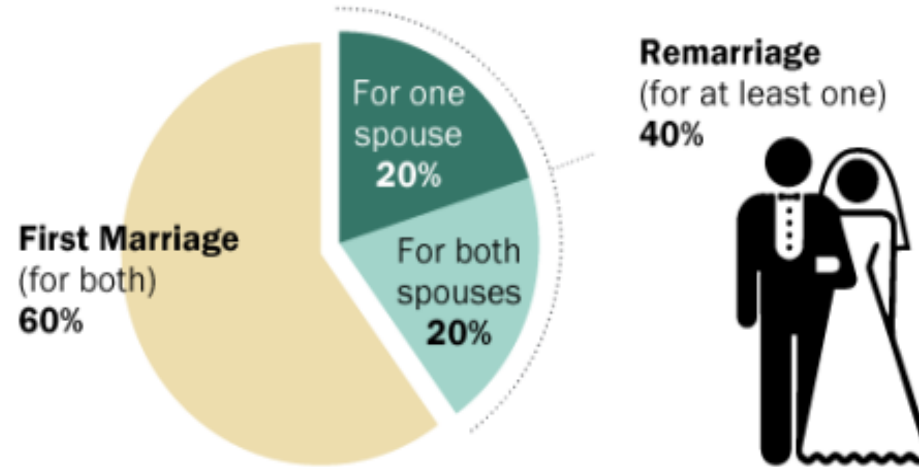
Relationship Education Reduces Divorce

- Studies have shown that Relationship education can reduce divorce rates (Engl et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2018; Stanley et al., 2014).
- Relationship education
 - teaches couples how to maintain their relationship
 - gives practical relationship skills.
 - connects couples to resources which could help them stay together through crises that may have otherwise ended the relationship.
- Participation in premarital relationship education can reduce the divorce rate by preventing marriage for couples who would be at high risk for divorce in the future (Stanley, 2001).

What about remarriages?

4-in-10 New Marriages Involve Remarriage

Percent of new marriages in 2013



- 40% of all married couples in the U.S. are remarried (Livingston, 2014). Of these, 60% are likely to end in another divorce.
- Average RE courses seem to be less effective for remarried couples (Lucier-Greer et al., 2012).
- Relationship education that is designed for remarriage yields more positive results in co-parenting, relationship satisfaction, and communication (Lucier-Greer et al., 2012; Garneau & Adler-Baeder, 2015).

Relationship Education Contributes to Improved Mental Health for Children



The average cost of treating a child's mental illness is between \$1800-\$2300 per year (Davis, 2014).

Many low-income children receive services through Medicaid/CHIP.

Schools are an important channel for children to receive help with mental health.

Children's Mental Health

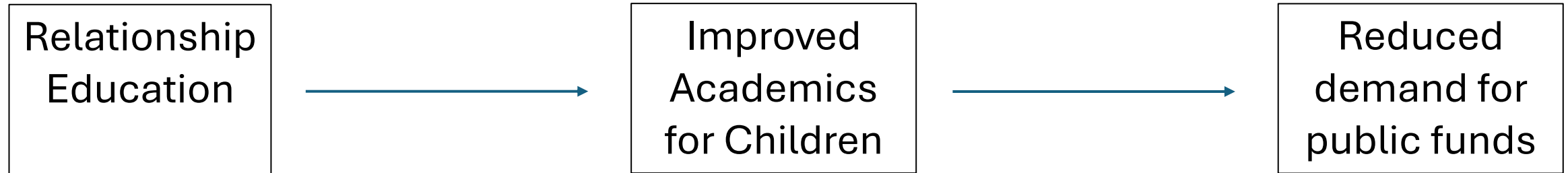
- The development and well-being of children are significantly influenced by the stability of their environment and the quality of the relationship between their parents (Gattis et al., 2008).
- Instability, such as divorce, parental conflict, or other disruptions in family life, can have negative effects on children's emotional and mental health (D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019; Brown, 2010).
- Parental conflict can result in self-blame and impaired emotional regulation in children, as well as an increased risk of perpetuating conflict in future relationships and dropping out of high school (Sterrett-Hong et al., 2018; Doss et al., 2020).
- Mental health issues can leave an impact that continues to affect the rest of their lives.

Relationship Education Improves Children's Mental Health

- Reducing interparental conflict through RE is one way to reduce mental health symptoms that are observed in children (Sterrett-Hong et al., 2018).
- Supportiveness from parents resulted in decreased behavioral problems in children, largely due to communication skills that were taught in their relationship education classes (Goldberg & Carlson, 2014).

Focusing on parental relationships may seem indirect, but the effect that it has on children is noticeable and can be an effective method of prevention.

Relationship Education Contributes to Improved Academic Outcomes for Children



Children from stable, two-parent homes are more likely to receive a college education than children who experience instability (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2015; Wu et al., 2015).

Education is an important factor in reducing poverty, crime, and homelessness, while simultaneously increasing health, economic improvements, and stable families (Boessen et al., 2023; Dhaliwal et al., 2021; Gayle et al., 2018).

A good education can cultivate individual development and promote a person's ability to contribute to society (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2006).

Relationship Education and Children's Academic Outcomes

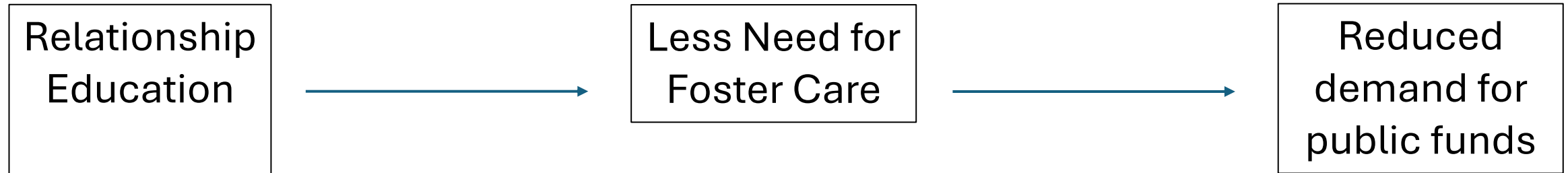


There is an important relationship between emotional health and academic outcomes for children, and a timely intervention of children's negative emotions can help improve their ability to study (Blair, 2002).

RE courses often emphasize the skill of communication and can teach couples how to build it into their relationship and into their interactions with their children (Hawkins & Boyd, 2018).

Relationship education indirectly influences the educational outcomes of children by fostering a better environment for their growth and learning.

Relationship Education Addresses Foster Care



It costs about \$78,500 to support each child in foster care every year. (Stoltzfus, 2023).

There are nearly 400,000 children in foster care at any given time (National Foster Care Month, 2023).

Relationship Education and Foster Care

It can serve as a preventative measure.

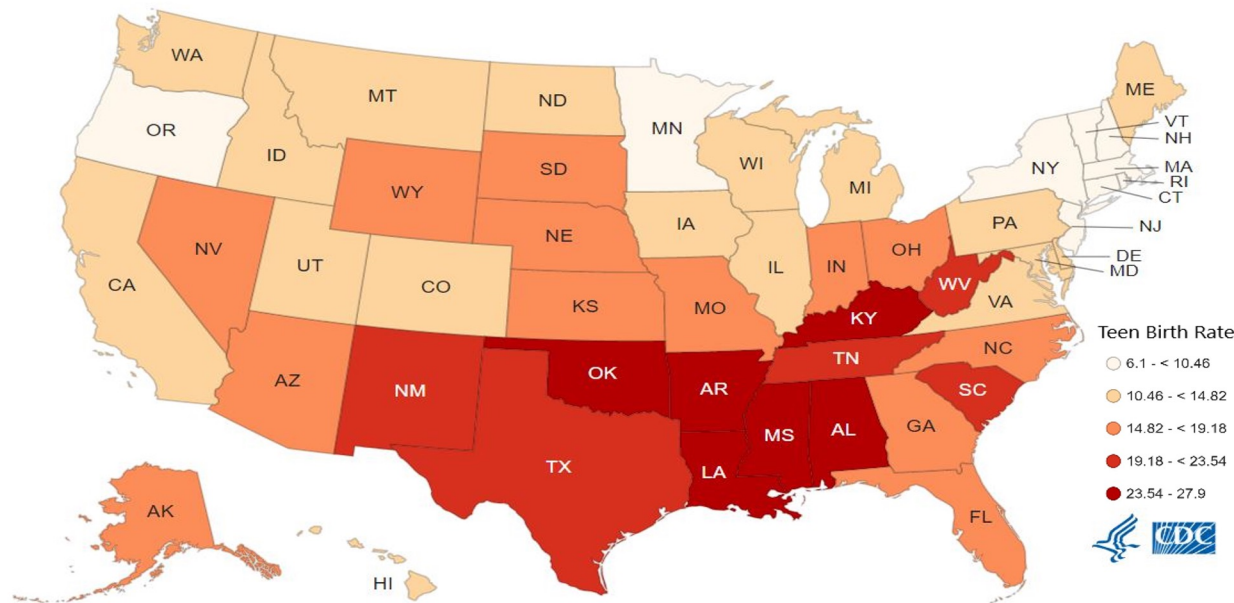
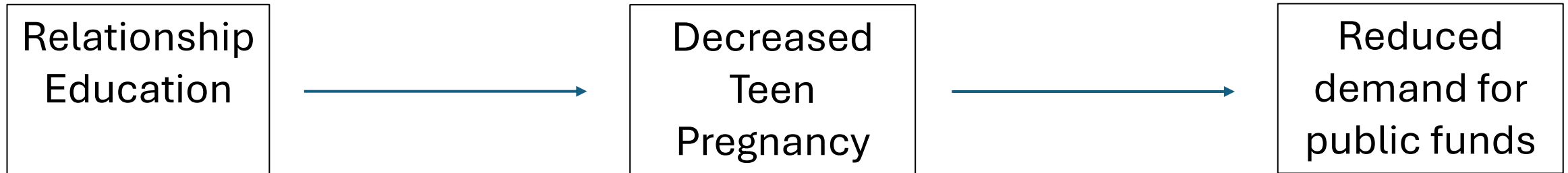
- RE can be used to teach about safe sex as well as healthy relationship practices, which are useful to many of these youth who grew up with parents in struggling relationships.
- Foster youth who receive RE have reported that it changed their intentions for future behavior in their relationships, demonstrating that it is an effective tool for this population (Futris et al., 2019).

It can shorten time spent in foster care by increasing reunification rates.

- Increases in reunification has been observed when RE programs are offered to parents involved with the child welfare system and those parents use the service to their full extent (D'Andrade & Nguyen, 2014).



Relationship Education Reduces Teen Pregnancy



Teen pregnancy costs taxpayers about \$11 billion each year, mostly in increased health care costs and loss of revenue due to lower educational attainment in teen mothers (youth.gov).

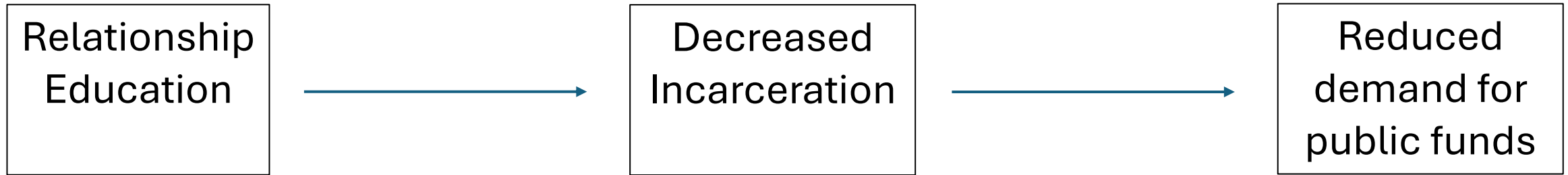
Relationship Education as a Prevention Tool for Teen Pregnancy

When teens are ignorant of how to form healthy relationships, including ones that involve sex, they are more vulnerable to risky sexual behavior and unhealthy relationships.

RE encourages youth to consider their goals and aspirations for the future and equips them with the skills to determine how to plan their family formation accordingly.

According to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (2017), relationship education can also help teens communicate better with romantic partners about avoiding risky sex.

Relationship Education and an Incarceration Context




About half of people in state prisons are parents to children under 18

In fact, there are as many children with a parent in prison as there are adults in prison.

1,248,300 ADULTS IN STATE PRISONS NATIONWIDE



 = about 50,000 adults in prison



 = about 50,000 minor children

1,252,100 MINOR CHILDREN WITH A PARENT IN STATE PRISON

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics' *Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016* and *Parents in Prison and their Minor Children*.

PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with over 2.1 million people currently incarcerated (Gramlich, 2021).

Incarceration costs \$40,000 per inmate per year (Wills, 2022).

Among those affected are the 1.25 million children coping with an absent and incarcerated mother or father (Wang, 2022).

Incarceration

By disrupting families, incarceration can undermine and contribute to

- Public Safety
- Cycles of poverty
- Crime
- Recidivism in America

Relationship Education as a Prevention Tool

Healthy relationships can contribute to a reduction in crime and incarceration rates by providing a stable and supportive environment where individuals are less likely to feel isolated and disconnected (Cobbina et al., 2012, King et al., 2007).

For both men and women, being married decreases the chances of a criminal lifestyle and future incarceration by 35% (Sampson et al., 2006).

In addition, a healthy parent relationship is a protective factor against a child's involvement in crime (Wildeman & Wang, 2017).

Relationship Education for Incarcerated Individuals

RE has been employed as secondary prevention in prison settings. Multiple RE programs have shown positive results (Accordino & Guerney, 1998; Cox & Shirer, 2009; Einhorn et al., 2008; Harcourt et al., 2017; Tadros et al., 2021)

RE reduce recidivism by providing incarcerated individuals with the tools they need to build healthier relationships and make prosocial life choices once released from prison (Accordino & Gurney, 1993; Einhorn et al., 2008; Harcourt et al., 2017).

Relationship Education and Domestic Violence



Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious issue in the United States, resulting in nearly 1,300 deaths and 5.3 million incidents each year and touching the lives of 1 out of every 3 women over a lifetime (Emory Department of Psychiatry, 2023).

Domestic Violence was declared a national public health crisis that must be addressed (CDC, 2021).

Domestic violence (DV) has a national economic cost of \$12 billion dollars every year (Huecker et al., 2022). There may be an additional cost of \$3-5 billion for absenteeism due to violence, court dates, and stalking, and \$10 billion for healthcare costs (Brown, 2008).

Relationship Education as an Intervention for Domestic Violence

RE tends to be especially effective for couples who are engaging in low-level, reciprocal IPV and/or low-income couples, who often need additional support in dealing with stress (Halford et al., 2011; Heyman et al., 2020; Hurless & Cottone, 2018; Karantzas et al., 2023; Stith et al., 2022)

RE can also be implemented to educate youth about the warning signs of DV (Heard et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2019).

Relationship education programs aimed at teaching youth about DV have been found to change teens' attitudes about violence and increase awareness (Antle et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2019).

Policy Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Relationship education should be implemented on a broader scale.

Currently, the primary public support for these programs comes from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the form of the Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) initiative (Hawkins, 2019b). This initiative should continue to be funded and supported.

Broadening funding for RE to other federal agencies that address the social problems outlined above has the potential to reach vulnerable populations and make a greater impact.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendation #2: Relationship education should continue to be tailored to better reach target populations with unique needs.

The Department of Justice could promote RE programs for offenders of domestic violence and to prepare parents for their return to civilian life.

The Department of Education could prioritize RE preventative programs in high schools, perhaps in conjunction with efforts to improve teen mental health and reduce teen pregnancy.

Policy Recommendations (State Level)

Recommendation #3: States should play an active role in integrating RE into school, marriage, and divorce processes.

States can use their natural touchpoints with families to connect them to RE offerings.

Policy Recommendations (State Level)

Recommendation #4: States should tap into more funding for RE.

Approximately 90% of public funding for RE comes from the federal government in the form of grants (Hawkins, 2011).

Federal Statute designates that TANF dollars can be allocated for RE programs to strengthen fatherhood, marriage, and families. Currently, around 1% of TANF dollars are allocated to RE (very low), and in all but 10 states, Federal TANF dollars are being left on the table.

Other state funding streams may be available to support RE.

Focusing on increased funding and including all levels of government has the potential to create relationship education programs that have greater reach and reduce the public costs associated with a variety of problems.



Let's continue the conversation. I would love to hear your thoughts about what was shared today.

wikle@byu.edu

Thank you for joining us today!

There is a brief survey after the end of this webinar.
Thank you for providing us feedback by completing this survey.

Webinar will be available in 3 days:

<http://www.dibbleinstitute.org/webinar-archives/>

Questions? RelationshipSkills@Dibbleinstitute.org

Second Wednesday Webinar

April 10, 2024

“But you know I’m just like you, right?”

Exploring Adolescent Dating and Disability

Dr. Heidi Rueda

University of Nebraska