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Exploring Extension Faculty Members' First-Time Experience With Funded Couple Relationship Education

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EXPLORING EXTENSION FACULTY MEMBERS' FIRST-TIME EXPERIENCES
WITH FUNDED COUPLE RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

by

Jacquelyn M. Alderete

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

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2014

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ABSTRACT

Exploring Extension Faculty Members' First-Time Experiences
with Funded Couple and Relationship Education

by

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Utah State University, 2014

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Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension faculty members are increasingly involved in offering couple and relationship education (CRE), but some have limited background in this format of family life education. This study used a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of Extension faculty members who offered CRE in their respective counties for their first time. Data were collected through face-to-face and telephone interviews. Four themes emerged from the interview data. First, considerations for offering this type of education included valuing CRE, having sufficient and specific knowledge about the needs of the county for CRE, and access to other forms of resources (mentors, previous training, or funding). Second, successes were discussed in terms of creating positive partnerships, successful recruitment strategies, and resources (utilization of funds and getting trained in CRE for the event). Third, faculty members described challenges including a lack of partnerships, limited resources, recruitment struggles, and lack of sufficient funds. Fourth, the reflections from the faculty

members included plans and changes for future programming as faculty members reflected back on their actual experiences. These findings provide guidance for Extension faculty members with limited experience who are interested in offering CRE.

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

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Jacquelyn M. Alderete, Master of Science

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Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension faculty members are increasingly involved in offering couple and relationship education (CRE), but some have limited background in this format of family life education. Using face-to-face and telephone interviews, this study explored the experiences of the Extension faculty members who offered CRE in their respective counties for their first time. Four themes emerged from the interview data. First, considerations for offering this type of education included valuing CRE, having sufficient and specific knowledge about the needs of the county for CRE, and access to other forms of resources (mentors, previous training, or funding). Second, successes were discussed in terms of creating positive partnerships, successful recruitment strategies, and resources (utilization of funds and getting trained in CRE for the event). Third, faculty members described challenges including a lack of partnerships, limited resources, recruitment struggles, and lack of sufficient funds. Fourth, the reflections from the faculty members included plans and changes for future programming as faculty members reflected back on their actual experiences. These findings provide guidance for Extension faculty members with limited experience who

are interested in offering CRE.

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CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
PUBLIC ABSTRACT	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	6
Theoretical Perspective	7
The Family Context	8
Extension and CRE	10
Need for Couple and Relationship Education	12
Successes and Barriers to CRE	15
Previous Research	18
Purpose of the Study	19
Research Questions	20
III. METHOD	21
Design	21
Sample	23
Instrument	23
Procedure	24
Data Analysis	24
Personal Experiences	25
IV. RESULTS	28
Considerations	28
Successes	34
Challenges	41
Future CRE Programming	45
V. DISCUSSION	51
Considerations	52

Successes and Challenges	54
Future CRE Programming	58
Summary	60
Limitations and Future Research	61
REFERENCES	63
APPENDIX.....	68

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Processes in the couple context have been linked to many family outcomes including well-being for both adults and children. In adults, healthy marriage has been linked to psychological health, less risk for substance use and psychological disorders, and better physical health for men and women (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Healthy relationships have also been found to support child well-being. Research suggests that committed, two-parent households are linked to positive child outcomes such as better school engagement and fewer behavioral problems (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Brown, 2004). Conversely, research has showcased many negative, long-term correlates of family disruption on children including poverty, likelihood of repeating a grade, and a higher likelihood of crime (Gallagher, 2000; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Parke, 2003). Given the benefits of family stability for children and adults, over the last decade the U.S. government has funded couple and relationship education (hereafter referred to as CRE) to strengthen families nationwide (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004). The rationale for this funding includes several assertions: (a) stable relationships protect children, (b) couple and relationship education may decrease taxpayer dollars spent on family instability, and (c) healthy relationships presumably increase family stability (Gallagher, 2000).

CRE has become the primary preventative tool for the aforementioned goals because it has been found to be effective in terms of couple communication and relationship quality (Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008). The results of a

recent analysis of national-level data give more compelling evidence of that argument (Hawkins, Amato, & Kinghorn, 2013). This study found that federally-funded CRE in the U.S. was linked to a small but significant decrease in family instability rates nationwide, including an increased rate in married adults, of children living with two parents, decreases in children living with one parent and of children living in poverty, and decreased numbers of children born to single mothers (Hawkins et al., 2013).

Many states throughout the nation have launched initiatives to help build stronger couple and family relationships. In an effort to increase family stability in the state, Utah State University's (USU) Cooperative Extension (Extension) teamed up with the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) to launch Utah's Healthy Relationship Initiative in 2009. Since then, the state of Utah has dedicated a portion of their annual funding to relationship education throughout the state (Hawkins et al., 2008). With that funding, USU Extension faculty members have provided some type of relationship education in approximately 70% of Utah's counties.

As research on the efficacy of family life education accumulates, it has become more important in recent years to find effective means for its implementation. Extension has become important in the delivery of CRE. Extension has seen many changes in the last 100 years due to its adaptations in meeting the needs of people. It began with the mission to extend university research to primarily help rural farmers, but as communities have become more urban, Extension programming has adapted to respond to challenges innate to urban living. There are currently six major areas of focus: 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture, Leadership Development, Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), and Community and Economic Development (United States

Department of Agriculture, 2011). Family and Consumer Science (FCS) faculty members are increasingly becoming involved in offering CRE; the purpose of this study is to examine their experiences in doing so.

Relationship education has typically had the goal of reducing poverty, strengthening families, and promoting child well-being (Hawkins & Ooms, 2010). There is a growing body of research that suggests that CRE is effective in improving relationship quality and may help reduce risk of family fragmentation (Hawkins et al., 2012, 2013); however, as the need for CRE continues, Extension faculty members will need to know which mechanisms are effective when implementing CRE. By studying the experiences of the Extension faculty members, the aim of this study is to provide future Extension faculty members with “lessons learned.”

Previous research from the USU CRE initiative has focused on low-income populations, intimate partner violence, and the general successes and challenges of the Extension faculty members in offering CRE. The proposed study seeks to examine the experiences among Extension faculty members who were relatively new to offering CRE. There were 14 Utah counties that participated during the first fiscal year (2009-2010) and 18 counties participating in the subsequent year (2010-2011). Seven of the 18 who participated in the second year had not previously offered CRE. Those seven Extension faculty members were interviewed and asked about their experiences with CRE: how they became involved, what they learned, and what they would do differently. The primary purpose of the study is to analyze the shared experiences of these Extension faculty members in offering CRE for the first time.

Symbolic interactionism theory was used to guide this work. This theory provides

an explanatory mechanism that asserts that people create individual meaning based on their perceptions and personal experiences. The theory views humans as agents of a symbolic world, influenced by those symbols to interpret and create human behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; White & Klein, 2008). People create meaning from the symbols that surround them through their personal lenses, suggesting that two people could experience the same event and create separate meanings from that experience. This theory is well suited for the proposed research because it allows the research to be fully explored through each Extension faculty member's meaningful lens. This theory also helps guide the analysis of data by allowing the researchers to interpret the results and create meaning from the data through their own personal lens.

This is a qualitative study that uses phenomenology for its design and analysis. Vaterlaus and Higginbotham (2011) explained that the primary purpose of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of an event, group of people, or an organization by gathering data in the form of interviews, observations, and documents. Results are presented primarily in narrative form, allowing the investigative discoveries to emerge as much in their raw form as possible, thus advancing the understanding of a phenomenon. Quantitative research tends to be concerned with condensing large amounts of information with the goal of understanding the details and processes of phenomena. This methodology fits the purpose of this study, which is to examine the collective experiences of the Extension faculty members through qualitative analysis. Phenomenology was chosen as a method because it is used to create common themes of meaning relevant to people whom experience the same event without prior hypothesis or preconceptions (Creswell, 2007). This will allow the researcher to examine the

experiences of all participants while finding common meanings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter summarizes the purpose of Extension, and situates faculty members' involvement in CRE within the context of the need for relationship education. This chapter also discusses the existing literature on successes and barriers to relationship education including collaboration, recruitment, retention, and other contextual influences. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to review literature regarding the need for and benefits of CRE, and second, to scrutinize the methods of dissemination of CRE, for the purpose of assisting Extension faculty members desiring to offer relationship education. The proposed research questions explore two sides of CRE: that of the Extension faculty members' experiences as facilitators of CRE, and lessons learned regarding the successes and challenges of offering CRE for the first time.

Extension faculty members who work in family and consumer sciences often have broad responsibilities including nutrition and food preparation, health issues, financial management, and in particular, family issues such as child well-being and family relations. Thus, family life education is often an important endeavor for many family and consumer science Extension faculty members. The National Council on Family Relations defines family life education as “using information about healthy family development within a preventative, family-systems perspective in order to teach knowledge and build skills so that individuals and families may function at their optimal levels” (National Council on Family Relations, n. d., para.1). CRE is becoming a common form of family life education, and because of this, more Extension faculty members in the nation are

becoming involved. Studies that identify successes and challenges in offering CRE are thus likely to be useful to faculty members in future endeavors.

Theoretical Perspective

Symbolic interactionism is used as a theoretical framework for this qualitative research. This theory holds that human behavior must be understood through the lens of the meanings of the actors, who define the meaning via context and situation (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; White & Klein, 2008). This suggests that all persons are agents of a symbolic world; that is, that we are consistently influenced by symbols, we create the meaning of those symbols, and meaning is created through the interpretation of those symbols. For example, the word “love” may contextually mean one thing in English-speaking cultures, but may mean something of a differing nature in an Asian culture—despite a preponderance of shared meaning. Hence, we create our own meanings through how we perceive the symbols around us.

Grounding phenomenological research in the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism is suitable because the two frameworks overlap in their search for the ‘meaning’ of human behavior. The theory and the method overlap by emphasizing the individual’s lived experience (Jeon, 2004). Phenomenology creates commonalities from individual’s shared experiences while the theory of symbolic interactionism creates the understanding of human behavior from the interpretation of symbols. Jeon (2004) also states that when using symbolic interactionism “the researcher must be able to actively interact with the persons being researched and see things from their point of view, and in their natural context” (p. 251). Similarly, phenomenological research examines individual

experiences, but seeks to make sense of them by finding common themes among the variations of experience (Creswell, 2007) and understands the shared experiences of the participants (Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, 2011).

Using the lens of symbolic interactionism, it can be assumed that Extension faculty members defined the meaning of their experiences through their individual contextual lenses (including an Extension-focused lens), meaning that the experiences of each person vary because they interpret scenarios differently. Symbolic interactionism complements phenomenology by allowing the researcher to explore common themes among these interpretations and grasp overlapping meanings those Extension faculty members experienced within the context of offering CRE.

The Family Context

Family structure and quality have received increased scrutiny due to their linkages to child well-being. Healthy marriage has been linked to adult well-being, including less risk for substance use and psychological disorders, and better physical health (Fincham & Beach, 2010). In terms of family structure, research suggests that children in single-parent families are, on average, more likely to be poor, have more chronic health problems, repeat a grade, commit a crime, and to become single parents themselves (Gallagher, 2000). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that children not living with both biological parents were about twice as likely to be poor, have a birth outside of marriage, experience behavioral and psychological problems, and not graduate from high school. Children living in single-parent homes are more likely to experience health problems such as accidents, injuries, and even poisonings (Parke, 2003). Brown (2004)

found that children in cohabitating families tend to experience worse outcomes than those with married parents. Studies suggest that non-resident fathers have difficulty in being engaged in the lives of their children financially, emotionally, and physically (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). It is because of these and other factors that the family context has become so crucial to understand healthy family practices so as to avoid negative outcomes in families.

In recent years, researchers have strived to understand the mechanisms of healthy families beyond the generalities of family structure. Biblarz and Stacey (2010) reviewed many different varieties of families and found that, while two-parent family environments were typically best for child outcomes, it tended to be the female gender, not specifically marriage, that was often linked to better outcomes. In terms of psychological and social well-being, lesbian couples—compared with heterosexual couples—were found to have better child outcomes in seven out of nine studies examined in this sub-category. Regardless of gender, one of the most important predictors of child well-being were parents who were committed to each other and who were also committed to the children (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). The benefits of families that provide this type of environment are often able to provide children with relatively more stability, which in turn may better support child well-being as compared to single-parent families and step-families, no matter whether the two parents are married versus cohabiting, or their sexual orientation. This research suggests that stability in couple relationships matters to the well-being of both children and adults, and that commitment supports stability.

Because of the increased awareness of the importance of children being raised in an environment with two committed and compatible parents (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010),

United States' policymakers have had an increased interest in CRE, resulting in many funding opportunities for it. Among the reasons that CRE came into being include: first, family stability protects the well-being of children (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010); second, separated and unwed parenting spawn large taxpayer costs (Scafidi, 2008); third, family stability and quality is a unique generator of social and human capital (Brown, 2004); and fourth, couple commitment creates a reasonable hope of permanence for the family (Gallagher, 2000). Children, on average, who grow up with their biological parents in a low-conflict family are better off than children in single-parent, step-family, or cohabitating families (Parke, 2003). In 2006 the federal government allocated 500 million dollars over a five-year period of time to support promising CRE programs. A growing number of states have followed suite and allotted significant amounts to support CRE, Utah being one of them (Hawkins et al., 2008).

USU Extension faculty members have played an important role in offering relationship education in Utah. With family life education as an important component of what they do, Extension faculty members have increasingly become involved in CRE. Thus, a study of the experiences of Extension faculty members may lead to more effective CRE in the future.

Extension and CRE

Extension was established in 1914 with the purpose of extending research to citizens about agriculture, home economics, and other practical applications (Goddard & Olsen, 2004; United States Department of Agriculture, 2011). Over the last few decades the focus of Extension's educational efforts has shifted from solely meeting the needs of

rural communities to including the current needs of urban and suburban communities as well. As a result, Extension expanded to include six major areas: 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture, Leadership Development, Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Community and Economic Development (United States Department of Agriculture, 2011).

County Extension faculty members hold either a bachelor's or master's degree and usually have a background in one of the following areas: 4-H and Youth, Agriculture, Energy, Families and Communities, Finance and Economics, Food and Nutrition, Horticulture, and Natural Resources. They are typically involved in teaching classes and workshops, research, public service announcements, and collaborating with other Extension faculty members. They provide an important bridge between university researchers and the general public by transmitting relevant, research-based information to address needs within their respective counties (Hill & Parker, 2005). Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension faculty members focus on "helping families become resilient and healthy by teaching nutrition, food preparation skills, positive child care, family communication, financial management, and health care strategies" (United States Department of Agriculture, 2011). Combining Extension with CRE is logical because Extension has a long history of educating families (Goddard & Olsen, 2004). In a sample taken from 213 Extension county faculty members, a strong majority of them felt they had the general knowledge and skills necessary for successful implementation of family prevention programs (Hill & Parker, 2005).

Need for Couple and Relationship Education

The aim of CRE is to support healthy couple relationships and reduce distress. In terms of family process, relationship distress (e.g., conflict) has been repeatedly linked to negative outcomes for children (Stadelmann, Perren, Groeben, & von Klitzing, 2010; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). In terms of family structure, family instability (e.g., breakup, divorce) places children at risk for a variety of negative outcomes (Milan & Pinderhughes, 2006). This is a primary reason that, over the last decade, the federal government and a handful of states have begun to fund CRE initiatives to help improve family relations. These funds have often been allocated in hopes of reducing poverty, strengthening families, and supporting child well-being by teaching the knowledge and skills needed for healthy marriages and family relationships (Hawkins & Ooms, 2010).

In addition to issues of child well-being, another rationale for CRE is the cost of non-intervention to taxpayers. Scafidi (2008) estimated that the annual cost of ‘family fragmentation’ to U.S. taxpayers nationally is 112 billion dollars, and upwards of 1 trillion dollars each decade. As mentioned earlier, there are clear links between family fragmentation and phenomena such as poverty, physical and mental illness, lower education, and conduct issues (Scafidi, 2008). Accordingly, there are associated tax expenditures for antipoverty programs, criminal justice, and education programs. In Utah, the TANF program sets aside funds for social services including CRE courses (Brower, 2010).

Yet another rationale given for CRE is the link between issues of couple

relationships and household income. There is a debate among researchers regarding the linkages between relationship instability and poverty because poverty is linked to relationship distress and instability, and relationship distress and instability are linked to poverty. In the absence of experimental evidence, it is difficult to determine directionality. In a decade review of poverty in the U.S., Edin and Kissane (2010) found that there are many direct results of poverty on children such as increased behavior problems and problematic reading in middle childhood. There are also indirect results of poverty on children via maternal stress and harsher forms of parenting. Positive factors that help alleviate the effects of childhood poverty on a child's intellectual development include cognitive stimulation, parenting style, children's health at birth, the physical environment, and childhood health (Edin & Kissane, 2010). The authors also found that the most common triggers for falling into poverty include employment change (which was the most important factor), transitions from a two-parent to a female-headed household, the birth of a child, leaving home to set up an independent household, and incurring a disability (Edin & Kissane, 2010). Thus, some literature suggests that relationship breakup can precede poverty.

The effects of poverty on relationships are still being studied. Conger, Conger, and Martin (2010) found in their decade review that socio-economic status is linked with romantic relationship quality and stability and personal earning, not household earning, increasing the likelihood of separation. Research shows that children's poverty rates are substantially higher in cohabitating and single-mother households than in married-couple families, and those women who have a non-marital birth have reduced odds of marriage (Smock & Greenland, 2010). Researchers have grappled with the issue of whether or not

marriage itself is likely to solve the economic problems faced by many unmarried mothers and they conclude that the answer is “probably not” (Smock & Greenland, 2010, p. 585). In some cases marriage is seen by researchers to cause more economic distress, for example, in situations of poverty and with single mothers (Williams, 2014). Some researchers do not see evidence that CRE is helping to alleviate the effects of poverty (Baumgardner, 2014), while others state that it was not intended to directly affect the effects of poverty but more specifically to help decrease family instability; but that there is evidence that it is effective for disadvantaged and minority couples (Hawkins et al., 2012; Wilcox, 2014). The research points more clearly to two-parent households as supportive of child well-being (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010), and to the benefits of low-conflict, stable households (Brown, 2004). Typically, the primary aim of CRE initiatives, including the present initiative, is to support general relationship health and thus to support child well-being.

Utah has been actively involved in CRE in the last two decades, and since that time it is estimated that there has been a decrease of about 3.5% in the divorce rate compared to what it would have been had no CRE been offered in Utah (Kickham & Ford, 2009). Kickham and Ford (2009) found that CRE is making a positive difference in the ‘high impact’ states where it is being utilized, whereas other states not actively involved in CRE have had little change in their family disruption rates over time.

One key issue is the extent to which CRE has been found to be effective. Recent research demonstrates that CRE helps couples to learn the necessary skills to improve relationship stability and quality, and decrease the likelihood of negative outcomes in their relationships (Hawkins et al., 2008). This success can be supported by the quality of

education they receive to make the relationship work well and avoid conflict and family disruption. Another important issue in offering CRE is whether it reaches the populations who most need it. A recent meta-analysis of 50 CRE programs (reaching over 50,000 low-income people) supported by federal funds, found statistically significant and moderate effect sizes for the target populations, and these effects were generally stronger for less educated participants (Hawkins & Fellows, 2011). In addition, Duncan, Holman, and Yang (2007) found that those who attended CRE commonly reported having relationship problems, but they also reported valuing marriage, kindness, and also maturity, suggesting a possible selection bias in people who attended CRE. The following discussion emphasizes what research has revealed about best practices and common pitfalls associated with providing community CRE.

Successes and Barriers to CRE

There are many components that contribute to, as well as detract from, successful relationship education. In a comprehensive description of components of relationship education, Hawkins and colleagues (2004) noted that content, intensity, methods, timing, setting, target audiences, and method of delivery each need to be considered in the course of implementing CRE programs. The topics of funding, collaboration and resources, and recruitment and retention will also be addressed.

Collaborating, Partnering, and Other Resources

Most Extension faculty members agree that collaboration with other organizations enhances their own efforts (Hill & Parker, 2005). They tend to make collaborative efforts

with other county Extension faculty members, community agencies, and schools, and are much less likely to seek collaborations from federal agencies, local businesses, and faculty from University departments (Bigbee, Hampton, Blanford, & Ketner, 2009; Hill & Parker, 2005).

It can be challenging to create an atmosphere of respect and of shared decision-making when multiple parties are involved. Rebori (2000) has suggested two ideas to help foster collaboration. The first is creating “suggested ground rules” as explicit guidelines the group agrees to follow, and the second is consensus decision-making to allow everyone the opportunity to support the decisions being made.

Carlton, Whiting, Bradford, Dyk, and Vail (2009) found six factors that contribute to the success of University-community collaboration: (a) mutual respect and trust, (b) clear and common goals and vision, (c) dialogue and communication, (d) developing and nurturing relationships, (e) involvement, (f) prioritizing the community, and (g) maintaining a community focus. They also found five factors that create challenges in a University-community setting: (a) differences in perspectives, vocabulary, concepts, cultures, and expertise, (b) divergent missions and motivations, (c) boundaries and turf issues and duplication of services, (d) local political climates and local needs, and (e) institutional climates, cultures policies, and procedures. Their research suggested that collaborative success is most likely the result of a series of consistent, regular generative actions by many people, over time, and in the right context. Adding to the research, competing demands for other worthy projects in the community coupled with funding to carry out the projects may impede collaboration (Futris, 2007). One aim of the current endeavor is to explore whether these same factors contribute to or diminish the success of

a first-time program.

Collaborating with groups and organizations that have the same cultural target can be an effective strategy. For example, Allen and Gudino (2012) found that pairing Extension with organizations that already served Latino populations proved very successful. Moreover, Brower (2010) sought support from the local DWS agency in making the CRE program targeted to low-income people more successful by promoting it to that population within DWS. Collaborations and partnering between differing organizations can create a positive environment for successful relationship education. Understanding how to forge stronger partnerships with internal and external groups helps Extension faculty members discover preferable methods of how to meet their goals more effectively.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention are both important factors to the success of any social intervention and both require significant time and attention. Different domains face challenges in connection with recruitment and retention. Although recruitment strategies change between and within settings, one example of marriage preparation classes suggests that recruitment is rather difficult. Silliman and Schumm (2000) reported “underwhelming participation” in the setting of relationship education courses, especially those found in small educational locations. Duncan and colleagues found that the most important predictors of attendance at marriage preparation classes included the extent to which both partners value marriage, the perceived kindness of both partners, and their emotional maturity (Duncan et al., 2007).

Retention also changes with each context. Practical obstacles such as time demands, scheduling conflicts, cost, lack of transportation and child care, and low perceived benefit effect attrition rates (Ingoldsby, 2010). However, maintaining ongoing participation, incentives, and scheduling flexibility helps to decrease attrition (Graziotti et al., 2012). In marriage prep classes, Brower (2010) found that once participants attended a class, an interactive style of participation can help keep the class members engaged and make the class materials personally meaningful reduces attrition.

Cultural sensitivity is important when working in any type of diverse setting. Being culturally sensitive can be accomplished in a number of ways including having staff that speak the language of the cultural group, having a cultural guide, and providing regular cultural competency training for staff. Each cultural group requires different outreach efforts, but Allen, Gudino, and Crawford (2011) found specifically that retaining Latino audiences requires cultural competency, strong relationships with community partners, and a relationship with Latino community members. Recruitment and retention both provide unique challenges that need to be addressed by considering the distinct scenarios in every situation.

Previous Research

A review of previous research conducted in this CRE initiative will help the reader to understand how the current study attempts to add to the field. Bradford, Skogrand, and Higginbotham (2011) reported that the level of risk of inter-partner violence among CRE participants was higher than qualitatively reported by county Extension faculty who served as the CRE educators. Vaterlaus, Bradford, Skogrand, and

Higginbotham (2012) reported on how Extension faculty actually served low-income and diverse populations. Major themes included planning with diverse audiences in mind, implementing programming with diverse audiences, and agents' knowledge and commitment to their communities. Through qualitative interviews with Extension faculty, Bradford and colleagues found that flexible, low-intensity, and low-cost activities attracted participants and reduced barriers to participation (Bradford, Huffaker, Stewart, Skogrand, & Higginbotham, 2014). These findings also underscored the importance of collaborating with community partners to glean participants, to make CRE culturally appropriate, and to gain access to resources. In terms of efficacy, Bradford, Higginbotham, and Skogrand (2014) analyzed data from 2,219 CRE participants from the first two years of the initiative and found an increase in relationship knowledge regardless of gender, SES, marital status, or previous relationship education. They found that relationship knowledge was initially lower for non-white participants, but that participants rated their levels of knowledge as significantly higher at the post-test, regardless of ethnicity. The current study is focused on the experiences of Extension faculty members in offering CRE for their first time, with the goal of exploring potentially overlapping and unique issues for facilitators relatively new to CRE.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the benefits of healthy relationships and the emerging evidence that CRE strengthens relationships, it becomes important to examine practices in implementing CRE. One decade ago, Doherty and Anderson (2004) stated that there was little known about the challenges of implementing community relationship initiatives. As

discussed previously, subsequent research has shed some light on these processes. Recently, Futris, Nielsen, and Barton (2011) discussed how important it is for Extension faculty to understand the complexity of disseminating research-based information in order to meet the needs of their respective counties. An important area of research, however, is an understanding of how Extension faculty can effectively deliver relationship education, particularly Extension faculty who are not CRE specialists. This study adds to the literature by helping to form a foundation for a “how-to” guide for Extension faculty members with limited CRE experience. Such research may help inform faculty members to make effective decisions concerning CRE, ultimately enabling them to better meet the needs of their communities.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the exploration of the Extension faculty members’ perspective of why they chose to offer CRE, what they learned through their experiences, and factors that proved to be successes and challenges.

1. What were the considerations for and experiences of USU’s Extension agents in implementing couple and relationship education in their respective counties for the first time?
2. What were the successes and challenges in executing CRE?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study examined Extension county faculties' decision to participate in offering CRE, and the lessons learned through their participation in this initiative. This study examined the interviews done with the Extension faculty members and reported its findings through a qualitative phenomenological approach to answer the research questions stated previously.

This study was designed in response to a grant funded through the Department of Workforce Services. The grant was awarded to Utah State University for the purpose of enhancing the quality of familial relationships among Utah residents. In the first programmatic year (2009-2010) 14 of the 28 Utah counties with Extension offices participated in CRE. In the subsequent year (2010-2011) 18 counties participated in offering relationship education. Out of the 18 counties that participated the second year 11 were from the original 14 counties that participated in the first year, with seven counties participating for the first time. The faculty members in each of the seven new counties were interviewed once the project was completed asking about their first-time experiences in offering relationship education. This chapter will describe the design, sample demographics, procedures, and analysis of the study's data.

Design

In contrast to quantitative data, which seeks to condense information, qualitative research is used to enhance information (Creswell, 2007; Vaterlaus & Higginbotham,

2011). Among the several styles of qualitative research, phenomenology was chosen to guide this work. Phenomenology takes a group approach, compared to a single case approach, to describe an event by creating common themes relevant to those experiencing the same event through the paradigm of their personal knowledge and subjectivity (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) further defined phenomenology to be “the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 58). Creating this meaning happens by describing phenomena that all participants have in common, such as occupation, sickness, or being overweight. Phenomenology explores shared experiences without prior hypotheses or preconceptions.

Using phenomenology, researchers analyzed data by reducing the information into major patterns, and creating further commonalities from those patterns. The researchers then created the essence of the experience by combining the textural (the “what”) and structural (the “how”) experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The researcher was also expected to acknowledge personal experiences as much as possible to have a fresh, unbiased perspective toward the phenomena being studied. Although this is hard to accomplish perfectly, it allows researchers to separate themselves so that the shared meaning of experience from participants can be relatively unobstructed by the researcher’s personal values. This was done before data analysis began.

Among other forms of qualitative methodology, phenomenology was deemed as having the best fit for this project for two reasons: first, it takes a collective approach at understanding the experiences of a group of people; and second, once themes begin to recur with more than one participant in multiple-person research, the strength of inference increases (Lester, 1999). By exploring the collective experiences of the

Extension faculty members through the lens of phenomenology, the results yielded a more unified understanding of how to successfully implement CRE.

Sample

In conducting phenomenological research, Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that researchers interview between 5 and 25 individuals who have all experienced the same phenomena. Subjects for this study included seven Extension county faculty members that participated in the Utah Healthy Relationship initiative. There were six female FCS faculty members and one male. The mean age was 40.4 ($SD = 12.9$), mean years of service in Extension was 10.3 ($SD = 8.3$), and four were married and three single. On average, 18% of the faculty's time was spent in family relations. Five faculty members' time was divided between FCS, 4-H, food and nutrition, with only one agent dedicating 100% to FCS. One faculty was primarily involved in natural resources, 4-H, finance, and food safety; not FCS. According to faculty members' descriptions, four of the counties were primarily rural, one was suburban, and two were urban. All faculty members were employees of Utah State University at the time the study was conducted.

Instrument

There were 19 questions asked of all seven faculty; these questions are found in the Appendix. Following Creswell's (2007) recommendations, the questions are largely open-ended, helping the researcher to understand rich structural and textural descriptions, ultimately allowing for understanding of the common experiences of the participants.

Procedure

At the conclusion of their first grant year in which they participated, a researcher from Utah State University interviewed four participants in person in their respective county Extension offices and three over the phone; the interviews were electronically recorded and later transcribed verbatim by a separate doctoral research assistant. The typical length of time between the Extension faculty members' events to the time of the interview typically varied between one to two months. Utah State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval prior to conducting the interviews. This IRB approval was obtained in order to make sure that the study was ethical, conducted in a proper manner, and that the study would not cause harm to the participants.

Data Analysis

Two researchers analyzed the data by highlighting significant statements, sentences, or quotes that identify meaning for the participants. This step is referred to as horizontalization (Creswell, 2007). The researchers then formed clusters of meaning from the main points to create conceptual themes. The themes were used to describe the faculty members' experiences, known as the textural description, and also understanding of how the setting impacted the faculty members' experiences, known as the structural description (Creswell, 2007). The essential structure is formed by drawing upon the textural and structural illustrations to aggregate a narrative that renders the 'essence' of meaning (Creswell, 2007). The last step of data analysis consists of discussing the

meaning of combined experiences of the faculty members, and presents readers with what it means to have experienced the project as a whole.

Qualitative research depends on the researcher being able to interact effectively with the study participants to gather the required data. In this study, interviews both in-person and by phone allowed researchers to interact and gather data effectively, despite obvious differences in the two types of interactions. In phenomenology, maximum learning is achieved when researchers suspend their judgments and biases to learn from others and represent their experiences. The researchers analyzing the data for this study needed to identify their experiences related to the study in order to recognize the alteration/disruption of already-occurring circumstances.

The two researchers who coded were an undergraduate student and the graduate student authoring this project. They independently read and re-read the interviews, discussed the emerging themes, then independently tested them against small portions of the interviews four separate times until both researchers unanimously agreed on the themes. They independently coded the data and the coders discussed any discrepancies until agreement was reached regarding coding. Intercoder reliability was found to be 98.2%.

Personal Experiences

In phenomenology, personal experiences are important to identify because they can potentially shape and influence data analysis. In the context of symbolic interactionism, meaning emerges, as words are mutually understood, otherwise they have no communicative meaning. In order to create this mutual understanding in the most

efficient way possible the researchers separated their personal lenses before analysis began. Here, I briefly examine my background and experiences toward monitoring my own values so they do not unduly influence data analysis, and to increase transparency of process. I obtained my Bachelor's degree from Utah State University in 2007 in Family, Consumer, and Human Development. I began my Master's degree at Utah State University in 2011 in the same field as my Bachelor's degree: Family, Consumer, and Human Development, with an emphasis in Family Relations. This research is being conducted for my thesis as a partial requirement for graduation.

I believe strongly in healthy family relationships and I respect the differences of all family dynamics. For many years I have felt passionate about educating families to make positive changes in their families' lives, in turn decreasing negative events and stress. Because of my personal values and beliefs about healthy family relationships I want to see a positive and increased understanding come from this study of how to present CRE more effectively. Having such awareness of my personal values is important because I am better able to grasp the experiences of the participants in the study without my values getting in the way, allowing me to see the data clearer.

I also am interested in pursuing Extension as a career in the future, this shows that I am already inclined to have similar values and practices that current Extension faculty members have. I find joy knowing that the findings of this study will be able to help people find better ways of offering relationship education. I have confidence that my efforts will help my future colleagues.

The last thing that I want to highlight about my personal experiences is my experiences in my own marriage. My husband is from Argentina and I am from Utah, and

have been married for a little over four years with no children to date. We are both of the same religious organization, but we have very different cultural values because of where we both grew up. My husband and I are both bilingual in English and Spanish and we are also learning to be “bicultural” in each other’s cultures. Because of some unique challenges we have encountered with cultural differences between our families of origin, my understanding of how important a healthy couple and family relationships are has multiplied significantly. I have gained increased understanding of how difficult family relationships can be and I am more motivated because of my personal experiences to help others understand how they can be better prepared in offering relationship education. My personal experiences have created a unique lens through which I see the world and measures will be put in place to minimize my personal views during analysis.

My biases and personal values could have impact in data analysis because I want to see relationships succeed and I also desire the county Extension faculty members to be successful. I recognize my perceptions could limit my ability to see and analyze the data objectively. By collaborating with another researcher the interviews were coded independently from each other and then discussed before being finalized to decrease the impact of personal bias during the coding process. In addition, by clarifying my personal values as I did above I can report more objectively by neither over-representing nor under-representing the data, which could happen when personal values and experiences are not accounted for. This allows me to more faithfully report the experiences of the study participants.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter reports the findings as they emerged from coding the faculty members' interviews. Despite differences among faculty members in their preparation and programming details, the themes that emerged were largely common among faculty members. This suggests the possibility of common experiences in implementing CRE with limited previous experience. As the results emerged they were categorized into four main categories: considerations for offering CRE, their successes as well as challenges of offering CRE, and lessons learned from offering CRE. The first theme involved the thought processes of the faculty members that occurred before making the decision to offer CRE. The second theme consisted of the successes faculty members had; the third theme consisted of challenges faced while offering CRE for the first time. The fourth theme was comprised of lessons learned; this theme focused on future directions as a direct result of the experiences gained from offering CRE for the first time. The themes are reported in a chronological manner, in contrast to the themes being organized by how often they were reported, because that is how the data presented itself. The four themes were broken into smaller components and are presented according to how frequently they were reported..

Considerations

The first theme consisted of considerations for offering CRE—that is, ideas that emerged and were considered before each faculty member contemplated the decision of

whether or not to offer CRE in their county. This theme has an element of time sensitivity, in that it focuses on the thoughts leading up to the decision to participate in relationship education. These thoughts included their previous experience or exposure with CRE, level of experience teaching or facilitating, obtaining and utilizing external resources, including funding, and faculty knowing the needs of their communities (awareness of the county's needs).

Previous Exposure

The idea of previous exposure included the extent to which Extension faculty members were introduced to the value of CRE from trainings or from colleagues before ever considering the needs in their county for CRE. This emerged in conjunction with the reasons faculty members discussed in making the decision to offer CRE. Even though all seven faculty members referred to this concept their experiences of exposure were varied: (a) two of the faculty members were exposed to CRE at an Extension conference where they were presented with curriculum training and saw presentations from other Extension faculty who had offered CRE. This exposure seems to have created a high value for CRE in their minds. The other forms of exposure were: (b) as part of an internship, one faculty member saw CRE as it was implemented in another county saying: "I knew how that worked and what it would take.... I can work that into my assignment," giving valuable experience when offering it locally; (c) similar to the Extension conference but on a smaller scale, another faculty member was exposed to the value of CRE at an Extension training meeting; (d) one faculty member saw a report about how successful CRE was in a neighboring county from a trusted colleague; (e) one faculty member reported being

exposed to CRE for a number of years before taking action stating “you know, I heard about it for years, I finally found a way to make it work;” and (f) finally, one faculty member had completed a specific training course for one of the CRE curricula offered in the state.

The experiences of each faculty member were, thus, varied but all were exposed to CRE at some time prior to them making the decision to offer it in their counties. Despite differences in prior exposure, the commonality was that faculty reported that the prior exposure through colleagues, trainings, or staff meetings as an important consideration in their eventual decision to offer CRE in their respective counties. In the minds of the faculty members this created value for CRE. One of the faculty members described this process of being at one of the training meetings in this way: “having the opportunity to attend the different things, primarily relationship-related, you are with people who are really excited about what they are doing and have had great successes and I feel like that becomes contagious.”

Identification of Start-up Resources

This encompassed faculty members’ identification of both their professional and personal resources to overcome the obstacles in offering CRE. Symbolic interactionism posits that humans are motivated to create meanings to help them make sense of their world (White & Klein, 2008); as the faculty members identified resources before the project began they were actively constructing meaning from what was available to them and relevant to offering CRE.

Funding emerged as a strong consideration for each faculty member; all seven

faculty members mentioned the critical role funding had in getting them started with CRE. One of them shared “without funding we wouldn’t have done it.... it was absolutely key. Initially in getting started, I think it is crucial.” Another of them stated that “I would not do it (CRE) without funding because you would be laying too many other things on the line in order to see if it was going to go or not.” Another faculty member stated “it gave [me] a reason for doing it,” and another stating that “it was *the* major piece in it.” Funding provided the faculty members with a direction for where to go because it created the justification for adding something new to other programming that was already in place. One faculty member stated that funding helped to offset the initial work involved in getting a new program launched, but ultimately because of the flexible nature of Extension, it was the priority of the faculty member to determine what programming is available, with or without funds.

Faculty members consistently discussed professional resources in considering whether to offer CRE. Due to lack of experience, five out of the seven faculty members discussed the need for support from outside resources for the initial phase of the grant. This support took many different forms including other Extension colleagues who had offered CRE before who were willing to be mentors, their office staff including interns and student support, Extension specialists who work on campus that provided beneficial curriculum or other forms of support, or CRE experts in their respective communities. The amount of needed support was different for every person and varied based on the number of resources available.

The faculty members discussed their personal and professional resources as relevant in their considerations of facilitating CRE. Two of the faculty members

discussed their personal experience in being married for a number of years, one highlighted having a single status, one had never married, and two had previously been married and were currently divorced. The nature of their personal relationships was seen as either a strength or a weakness based on their perspectives: those who were married found strength in the length of time being married, with one of them stating: “I’ve obviously been married a lot longer than a lot of them,” creating meaning from the individual context (length of the marriage). One faculty member had been divorced twice and found it to be a source of strength, enabling this person to relate better to certain populations, and one faculty member had several “failed” relationships and perceived that as a weakness in the role of facilitating CRE. One of the faculty members was single and stated: “to be quite honest I have never been married, I’m 25 years old and so I don’t have the life experience, I don’t have the years behind me that some do,” and from a theoretical perspective, suggesting a negative meaning was created from the context of being young and single.

In terms of their knowledge of the content of CRE, faculty members discussed discomfort in teaching CRE and voiced their desire to simply facilitate the events allowing someone with more expertise teach the course, while one faculty member discussed the desire to learn about CRE by studying up on certain topics. This is illustrated by one of the faculty members saying “I recognized the benefits in doing it and I knew I had the skills to do it, it was just intimidating.” Another illustrated this discomfort by saying “I did not see it as anything that I could do, mainly because it’s not something that I have the practical experience in.” Their voices can be explained through the Symbolic interactionism assumption that states that an actor defines the meaning of

context and situation (White & Klein, 2008); this happened as Extension faculty members defined their comfort level with CRE.

Awareness of the County's Needs

This refers to the level of knowledge the Extension faculty members had about the county's needs for programming. The needs varied from county to county and Extension faculty members spoke of their awareness of those needs and of tailoring their programming to meet those needs. This knowledge came from many sources including county statistics, community key-holders and partners, and from needs assessments. Six out of the seven faculty members discussed their knowledge of the need for CRE in their county with reference to their counties' high rates of divorce, domestic violence, or teen pregnancies, or something as simple as a community partner vocalizing the need for CRE on behalf of the clients they work with regularly. One faculty member responded saying "in this county there are lots of needs." In response to being asked about why CRE was added to the workload, one of the faculty member stated, "just being passionate enough and seeing that there was a need.... I was going to find a way to make it work" was what helped to make the decision to offer CRE.

Out of those six, some cited the needs their community partners had seen for curricula such as parenting programs, classes for communication and expectations, finance education, domestic violence education, premarital education, programs for low income families, programs for military families, and programs for "all aspects of relationship education" to strengthen relationships in general. There were many things that contributed to their considerations for offering CRE, but as the Extension faculty

members were exposed to what CRE is, why it is important, and (in some cases) were given ideas of how to implement it, they seemed to be prepared to find ways to meet the needs of their communities by offering CRE without having previously offered it.

Successes

This second theme refers to the events that led to positive CRE results, and included anything that added to the strength and quality of the event. Faculty members reflected upon the time period between making the decision to offer CRE and when it was completed, and discussed the key ingredients that contributed to the successful outcomes. There were many successes described by the faculty members as a result of the many different types of CRE offered but three major concepts emerged as faculty members described the occurrences of their individual events. These concepts included partnerships, recruitment, and resources. Partnerships refers to people outside of the Extension community who offered support to the county faculty members, some through obvious means like advertising and others through less obvious means like city council meetings. Faculty members discussed recruitment in terms of the successes they had in recruiting participants for the class. Resources included personal aspects such as comfort level and previous training, and resources such as interns and volunteers, as well as ways in which the funds actually helped facilitate the success of the events. Faculty members' discussion of success in terms of their use of funding and their own previous training and experience may at first appear to overlap with the first theme. However, these two areas affected multiple components of the experiences the faculty had in offering CRE. Under

the theme of “considerations,” faculty members saw funding and their levels of experience as ideas that facilitated their commitment to offer CRE. Conversely, under the theme of “successes,” faculty members spoke differently of the ways in which these resources contributed positively to success as they actually offered CRE.

Resources

Resources refer to any assets the faculty members identified that they drew upon in order for the CRE to function effectively. Even though there is some overlap between items mentioned in this theme and the identification of start-up resources as a part of the faculties’ considerations for offering CRE, they are different themes because of how the faculty members spoke about resources in different terms when asked about their considerations for offering CRE versus the actual CRE event. This illustrates the chronological presentation of the data because some resources were utilized only in terms of deciding whether or not to participate in the CRE grant while other resources were utilized only to enhance the efforts of the CRE. Some resources were used in both time periods but were referred to with very different language; for example funding was seen to be a critical component to getting started because it helped to dictate the programming they would focus on whereas funding was referred to during the time of the event in terms of providing the necessary supplies (e.g., food) for the event to run smoothly. The faculty members identified internal resources such as personal attributes and capabilities that helped to sustain them while offering CRE for the first time. They also identified materials, money, staff, and other external assets that allowed them to effectively offer CRE. This naturally fell into two main categories, the first being funding, and the second

being previous experience with CRE and training preparation.

All seven faculty members discussed how funding was utilized to create desirable, valuable programs for people in the community to participate in CRE. The funding from the grant translated into quality meals, educational materials for the participants to take home, and other “door prizes” to get people in the door. By utilizing the funding, faculty members felt like they were able to establish reliable and quality programs that were desirable for their communities and at least one of them expressed happiness that the funding allowed them to expand their previous CRE ideas to be able to help more people than what they were able to do with only their overhead county budget.

Funding afforded the faculty members the luxury of many more options to choose from when they planned their event. As stated previously, without funding the options for what to offer for CRE are very limited, but since all seven faculty members were awarded funding their common experiences were explored. Again, all CRE events were unique in how the funding was utilized but consistent themes emerged. Only one faculty member chose to take it upon themselves to be the presenter, while the other six faculty members were not comfortable enough with CRE to put themselves in that position so they hired others who were better equipped to educate. Some faculty members went over on their budget because of high attendance numbers and the expense of feeding everyone, but they highlighted the flexibility they had with their overall county budgets, creating a cushion for them. Some of the faculty members related the importance of having funding to be able to provide funds for interns, highlighting the importance of interns to help programs to run smoothly.

The second concept that emerged was the amount of previous experience and

training each faculty member had in CRE. Four of the faculty members had some sort of previous experience in FCS related fields, howbeit minimal in nature; leaving three with very little experience specifically offering CRE before in the Extension setting. Those who had previous FCS training tended to be more confident with their experiences saying things like: “I feel totally fine if it’s marriage and money,” and “I don’t have a problem,” with one of the faculty stating:

I’m very comfortable teaching, very comfortable helping people learn and it doesn’t matter whether it’s nutrition or couples or whatever it is. I know that I have the resources available to me, or the people who have the resources I can find those people to help me get the resources, and so my comfort level is not an issue there.

One of them shared “they saw my credibility in what I’ve done in my education.... and they saw this was useful information. They saw the so-what behind it.” This training included experiences from previous jobs or internships, curriculum training from USU Extension, and avenues of programming in Extension like nutrition or 4-H events. Six out of the seven faculty members chose to facilitate the event in order to compensate for their insecurity in teaching and presenting, but the faculty recognized that the more education and training they had in FCS topics the more confident and better prepared they were to facilitate the event. Two of the faculty members compensated for the lack of experience by seeking out a colleague who could be a mentor; for one of them, the result of the experiences gained this person became a mentor to other Extension professionals who wanted to follow those same footsteps, in turn gaining a new professional resource. Other faculty-related resources included the level of creativity that

faculty used to design the event, tailored to meet the participants' needs.

Partnerships

One important component of the faculties' successes was that of formed partnerships, which included many different groups of people and organizations. All seven reported having experienced various forms of positive partnerships with people in the community. These partnerships included religious figures in the community, newspapers, members of community coalitions, the experts educating the participants in the class, and businesses in the community. These partnerships were reported to be a successful piece of the event because they were described as being "the right partners." These partners were described as seeing the value of what was being offered in this way: "I do have a lot of partners that feel that this is a very crucial area and they see it very much in the demographic they work with." This suggests the partners were benefitting from their affiliation with Extension; becoming invested in making the event successful. One of the faculty members described one of the businesses in their community by saying: "They were excited about it and they wanted it for [their] people [in the community] and for those that work for them." Three of the faculty members enjoyed discounted prices on needs such as facility rental and food costs as a result of their partnerships. Five out of the seven faculty members specifically discussed how partnerships helped to determine the direction for the curriculum for the event and to advertise and recruit participants. One faculty member stated that many doors were opened to forming new partnerships with people in the community as a direct result of offering CRE in that county. One faculty member stated "I have a lot of partnerships in my county and I feel very strongly that many heads are better than one." While not all

shared that exact same opinion, the general consensus was that having quality partnerships, specific to the needs of the county, was very valuable to a successful event.

Recruitment and Attendance

Recruitment was discussed by all of the faculty members to be a successful component of their events. Many tactics were utilized to facilitate success. Having professional relationships with people in the county helped to facilitate recruitment. Faculty members who decided to hire experts to teach classes used name recognition of the presenter for recruitment efforts and they saw positive results from that. In terms of recruitment, one of the faculty members utilized many forms of advertisement and stated “we advertised, people came;” and another faculty member said, “You just have to be excited about it and not let it sit on the shelf.” One faculty member attributed the success of the event not specifically to recruitment but “because it was the people that saw the value in it (CRE) and not the advertising from that.” Specifically one faculty member reported repetition and consistency in advertising efforts as powerful tools for recruiting participants. Some of the things that all faculty members reported that helped to create repetition and consistency were television ads, newspaper announcements, monthly newsletters, paper fliers in strategic community locations like libraries, grocery stores, schools, and office buildings surrounding the area of the event, word of mouth advertising, radio ads, website ads, and advertising at other Extension classes. Based on their past experiences with other programs they learned that recruiting becomes easier with more repeated and consistent efforts. Affordability and availability of the event was an important compliment to positive recruitment efforts and it was noted that the

affordability would not be as likely without the help of start-up funds from the grant.

As an aspect of recruitment, all seven faculty members reported positive responses from the attendance of their participants with some participants asking when the next classes were going to be offered, and some offered their assistance to help for the next year's event. One faculty member said that they were only expecting about 75 people to show up but ended up having over 200 people come and everyone was pleased with the event. Another stated: "I was blown away by the attendance, blown away by the popularity, and they kept coming back; I had that many all three weeks." One faculty member shared that "the people are getting something out of it," while another commented about the response of their participants:

Three or four couples.... had their story to share with us about "oh I didn't want to come" or "my wife made me come" and "but these have been so great and they've really helped us." Hey, these people are actually enjoying this and getting something from it. One person even said, and I think that would probably be how a lot of people feel, and she said something to the effect of "this gets the conversation going at home," and she was like "even if it's just the conversation going" and I was like you know that's a very good point, it's just a little seed you know, we just want people to start talking about these kinds of things. I think that's a big part. She said "you know, he wouldn't go to counseling but I did talk him into to coming to these classes."

Another component to success was simply being aware of the scheduled events in the community. One faculty member mentioned that in their community there are a lot of sporting events during certain months and that they had to schedule around those

conflicts, resulting in a conflict-free time to offer CRE to their community. Four of the faculty members simply recognized that from their previous experience they knew what nights of the week worked best for their communities and scheduled their event accordingly to prevent conflicts.

Challenges

Challenges emerged as faculty members discussed the outcomes of their CRE programming. Faculty members reported situations that tested their abilities to offer CRE effectively; some of these situations caused discomfort. Similar to what was discussed that contributed to the success of their CRE events, the challenges also were identified as being partially internal (in part of the faculty member) and partially external. There is some overlap between concepts that arose describing the successes and challenges because—depending on the circumstances—the same concepts were seen as successes but become challenges in other circumstances. The researchers were also engaged in using symbolic interactionism to interpret the meaning each faculty member created from their experiences; the results suggested that for some, collaborations proved to be successful but for others they created challenges. The challenges that were discussed included recruitment, lack of resources, funding limitations, and lack of successful collaborations.

Recruitment

This theme refers to challenges in faculty members' efforts to get people from the community engaged and interested. Recruitment was a challenge across the board: some

reported having managed it relatively better, but it presented a challenge for all. Some of the barriers to recruitment included reaching high-risk populations and other diverse audiences effectively. For example, one faculty member said: “I would say most of the ones that are interested in coming are not the ones that are necessarily in relationships that are suffering. I think they are much more difficult to get out.” The faculty members described the recruitment challenge by not knowing how to track the attendance of an event, encountering resistant community members, and not knowing the most effective ways of advertising in the community. Some of these challenges came from not knowing the community very well and being new to the community as a professional in Extension. This is reflected in one faculty member’s statement: “It was just hard. I didn’t know the community at all so that was hard.... I think the biggest challenge was just trying to get the people and trying to get the commitment out of them to come.” Other challenges came from having limited relationships with key partners in the community. All seven faculty members reported that recruitment was challenging because CRE was a new program in their community, but some had a harder time than others with recruitment because they had had very little time in residence in their counties and did not have enough time to build strong collaborative relationships before beginning to offer CRE.

Lack of Resources

This component describes the lack of personal and professional assets the faculty members discussed, adding to their perceived challenge of offering CRE effectively. There were many limitations highlighted in the interviews: not knowing the community well in some cases, not knowing what other faculty members were offering, personal

physical limitations of age and health problems, lack of experience with CRE that led to nervousness and lack of confidence, not having a lot of staff support for things like writing the grant or support for the event, the location not being ideal for the circumstances, lack of training, lack of interest and support in the community for CRE, scheduling conflicts, and lack of effectiveness with one-time classes. In terms of expertise in FCS content, one faculty member said: “I have no issues with doing it before except for the expertise,” and another said: “I would say it is not one of my areas of strength. It just isn’t an area that I have picked up any expertise.” It required great effort to overcome the individual challenges that arose from the lack of resources the faculty members experienced while attempting to make the desired changes in their communities. After experiencing CRE for the first time one of the faculty members recognized that one-time classes can create challenges and are not the most effective strategy:

I think the one time classes.... oh they are nice, (but) it’s kind of fluffy. I don’t think it gets down to.... really trying to change behavior. Not that they aren’t useful, but not the best way to do it.

Funding Limitations

This section refers to the experiences the faculty members faced as they decided how to utilize the grant funds. Five faculty members mentioned limited options due to lack of funds. One challenging aspect that came with managing the funds was being considerate of the balance between the costs and rewards involved for participants and for the program. One faculty member provided a retreat and had to charge registration

fees in order to cover the cost of the venue they were using, even though funding was available from the grant. Other faculty members decided not to charge anything for their event and use the funds exclusively to provide for meals and other things to help promote the event. Faculty members reported that maintaining balance between the expenses and the rewards for participants and the program is something that comes with experience, but it is something that all faculty members struggled with. There were varied experiences with funds resulting in one faculty member spending over \$2,000 for a one-time CRE specific event, whereas another faculty member stated that they normally receive \$2,000 for a full year of programming efforts. Symbolic interactionism explains that how we define the situation in which we find ourselves explains what problems we define and what actions and solutions we undertake. Both of these faculty members defined their problems and their solutions very differently based on their unique situations.

The biggest frustration that arose was the expense of food. Two of the counties actually went over budget because of unexpected food costs, which forced them to use other funds from their county budget. The challenge of managing the funds presented itself in choosing the best solution for the event because there were many options including: catered meals, partially catered meals, a simple meal done by the Extension faculty member, or no food at all. Some of the challenge surrounding food included worrying about how much food to plan, working with the caterers, and ensuring food safety. Another challenging aspect of offering food is the need to be willing to meet the needs of the participants, and in some cases this presented last minute changes to the plan. For example, one of the faculty members experienced an incredibly high turnout for

the event, resulting in the need to buy more food once the presentation had begun.

Lack of Successful Collaborations

This section describes the effects of not having successful collaborations in place between Extension faculty members and community partners that held key positions in the community. Five faculty members mentioned their attempts to utilize either new partnerships or those that had already been formed but found resistance in the form of the partners “dropping the ball,” being too busy, and having a lack of excitement for the project. One faculty member mentioned the need to use a lot of follow-up with partners to get their desired results. Another barrier was communication with an outside source, meaning that sometimes other people took a long time responding to requests or they were never able to get in touch with the right person to get the job done. Sometimes that communication barrier happened as a result of territorial issues within an organization. While some faculty members found a lot of strength and support from USU, one of them said: “I don’t feel like there’s a lot of help on campus anymore, there never was a lot and it’s almost disappearing.”

Future CRE Programming

The fourth theme consisted of faculty members’ thoughts on directions for their future CRE programming. Faculty members reviewed the events that contributed or detracted from the success of their CRE and painted a picture of what the future would look like based on their positive and negative experiences from offering CRE for the first time. This theme is representative of the reflection time after the CRE events were

completed while looking forward into the future, considering changes in the programming. The faculty members identified three major ideas that contributed to future directions each one of them would take: first, their experiences in offering CRE; second, sustainability of the programs; and, third, considerations for offering CRE again in the future. Faculty tended to retrospectively consider their events as a whole, instead of in individual parts like they did with the previous themes.

Lessons Learned

This section covers the ideas that the faculty members learned as a direct result from their experiences in offering CRE. The lessons the faculty members learned varied widely based on their background experience with CRE and also with how they structured their events, resulting in unique successes and challenges, affording them moments of learning for the future. They reported these lessons from their past experiences and expressed what they would do different for the next time around, including ideas that were worthy of suggestion for other faculty.

All faculty members identified the need make changes in the structure and organization for future events. One piece of advice from one of the faculty members was to “use your volunteers, or get enough money to have enough staff to help you, but start small.” All seven faculty members echoed the same sentiment and suggested ways they planned to find volunteers, decrease their expenditures, or reduce the size of the event to create more affordable events. This was true of the faculty members who reported being overwhelmed with the attendance of their events and the financial burden it created to provide enough food for all the people in attendance. Reflecting on the financial

challenge of paying for a speaker, others suggested looking in different directions for more economical options for the future. All of the faculty members expressed the desire to change either the level of intensity of food service or the curriculum so that it could be facilitated better, and at the same time meet the needs of those in attendance more easily. Flexibility with the curriculum content and lower expectations for food options were highlighted throughout all of their experiences for better ease in future events.

Another concern in terms of future directions was the desire for better collaborative partners. The first idea that emerged was the need to utilize the community partners more for advertising in the future. The second idea was to constantly maintain positive relationships with the partners who saw the value of the program and who gave their support because “one day you might not have funding, you have to keep that in the back of your head.” The last idea that emerged was the need to create relationships with different partners to make the next event more successful by finding people who are more unified with the purposes of Extension.

Two of the seven faculty members mentioned the need to move towards having more of an online presence including Facebook advertising as well as being on the internet in other forms. One faculty member explained the need for an online presence this way:

That’s one thing I think Extension has to watch out for and keep up on is that we will be out of a job if we don’t keep up with the Internet age era and the ability to get our videos up on YouTube or stuff out there because that’s where they go.

The other faculty member explained their movement towards Facebook advertising in this way:

Our Extension office is on the brink, I think, of busting into the social media world so next year we might be able to have some ads maybe within the Facebook realm. It's kind of a different way of doing things but we'll see if it can work. Because I wasn't sure how it works and then attending some classes with my Extension marketing I'm learning about how you can target your audience and you don't have to be friends with everybody in the county you just target your audience and the picture comes up on the side of their Facebook page and it's kind of cool. So we might be trying some of that different this year.

Sustainability

This theme described how sustainability was an issue in considering future CRE. The results focused on access to funding and utilizing resources such as volunteers and collaborative partners. All faculty members ruminated over the possibility of CRE being sustainable with or without funding, but two out of the seven stated that funding was necessary to maintain the program. In order to accomplish sustainability without funding one faculty member suggested that “it’s possible, I think you just have to be creative.” They reported that this level of creativity requires a different type of work because of the lack of funds. This new and creative perspective includes finding and training volunteers, interns, and students, and thinking outside of traditional approaches to relationship education. One faculty member suggested that because there are so many natural resources in the county they could easily create a hands-on experience for couples with no cost.

Three faculty members believed that some degree of funding is required in order

to sustain the desirability of the program by “enticing people to come,” but the funding can come from donations, obtaining fees from already running programs in Extension, and having strong relationships with community partners that see the value in CRE.

Three faculty members reported that funding was necessary to help the program initially get started, at the same time they also recognized the importance of having some type of funding to help maintain the program until the program could become self-sustaining.

One of the faculty members reported that they were in their third year of offering CRE in that county and they were just beginning to consider ideas to help create the next year’s CRE become more sustainable. Of sustainability, one of them stated:

Yah, there are ways. Absolutely. Especially as the community members see the benefit. If you get their buy-in then they can take and run. You get a couple of really great volunteers and create a committee almost; it becomes its own thing. I could see that happening and just turning it over. Meeting with your committee and letting them connect with all of the people, I can see that. If you get community buy in. That's probably key to sustaining it, whether or not you create partnerships for money donations and all that. If you're still the only one really advertising and getting it out there I think you're still stuck until you have a couple volunteers—some key partnerships.

Considerations for Continuing CRE

This theme differs from the two mentioned above in that it explains the reasoning for why some faculty members chose to continue to offer CRE, why some chose to continue to offer it at a lower intensity than what they did for the grant, and why others

chose to move onto other programming. This theme emerged as the faculty members described the process of determining how CRE fits in with all the other programming they offer.

In considering whether to continue to offer CRE, all seven of these faculty members described their personal recognition for the need for CRE in their county after the first series of CRE was offered, and this is what helped them to determine the likelihood of maintaining CRE or not. They described how the need for CRE was fulfilled and received so well among participants and that gave them an increased understanding of the need for CRE and the motivation to continue applying for more grant money. For one of the faculty members, the process of applying to the grant for funding money was “too much work” due to a lack of limited staffing; the desire was expressed to continue CRE, but the faculty member was willing to explore other creative ideas such as charging for the classes or finding a presenter that would volunteer their time to teach. All other faculty members expressed willingness to reapply for more funds and seemed highly motivated to find ways to maintain the program in their communities. Two faculty members recognized that CRE would not be their flagship program but that they would maintain it as a part of their programming because of how valuable it was for the people in their county. Others recognized their ability to facilitate or present the material, reducing their overall costs, but were highly interested in obtaining further training to help them feel more confident in their role as the presenter or the facilitator.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

There are powerful social implications for offering CRE, including increasing relationship skills and decreasing relationship stress; but there are also challenges for professionals who engage in offering CRE (i.e., recruiting and engaging high-risk populations). Having a better understanding of how to effectively offer CRE is important for professionals, especially for those with limited CRE experience. The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of Extension faculty members who had little prior experience in offering CRE, and their successes and challenges in implementing it. The Extension faculty members' interviews were analyzed through a phenomenological lens, which provided the opportunity to observe the common experiences among the faculty members who were new to offering CRE. There has been little research done on reasons for which Extension faculty members decide to offer new programming, especially when the content may not be central to their training. This research represents an effort to examine the process of why faculty members would consider offering new programming and their experiences in doing so.

Four themes emerged from the data: considerations for offering CRE, the successes in offering CRE, the challenges of offering CRE, and lessons learned based on first-time experiences. Generally, the results were consistent with previous research (Bradford, Huffaker et al., 2014; Carlton et al., 2009), and included themes such as recruitment successes and challenges, positive and negative collaborative outcomes, awareness of the needs of their respective communities, the need for creating an online

presence, and ways in which flexible, low-cost, and low-intensity events reduced barriers to participation. The discussion will follow the outline of the four separate themes specifically discussing how the results from each theme either supported current research or expanded upon it.

Symbolic interactionism guided this research, providing a lens to understand the meanings and experiences of the Extension faculty members. This theory explains that humans are agents of a symbolic world, being influenced by those symbols, and creating meaning through their personal lens (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; White & Klein, 2008). This theory is consistent with the goal of seeking out commonality of experiences, while honoring the differences in meaning between faculty members. Symbolic interactionism will be addressed periodically to contextualize the results.

Considerations

The theme of faculty members' considerations included knowing to what extent their communities needed CRE, having previous exposure to the value of CRE, and the extent to which resources were available to the faculty member. The current findings support the idea that Extension faculty members need to have in-depth knowledge of their communities' needs (i.e., through knowledge of county statistics, awareness of community partners' observations, and recognition of the ever present need for CRE) so that they will be better able to support the community with specific resources. For example, Vaterlaus and colleagues (2012) found that successful relationship education incorporated planning for diverse audiences, and faculty members' knowledge and commitment to their communities. The current research findings confirmed that knowing

the needs of the community is an important first step to being prepared to meet those same needs.

Along with the knowledge of the community, the results suggested that one of the considerations for faculty members was their understanding of how valuable CRE was before deciding to offer it. For example, one faculty member said, “You know, I heard about [CRE] for years, I finally found a way to make it work.” Even though other faculty members had been exposed to CRE for varying lengths of time, the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism explains that each faculty member created their own unique meanings, in terms of their perceptions of the value of CRE, relative to the needs of their community. While the circumstances were different for each faculty member, each one of them created meaning and as CRE met the needs of their county, it was viewed with high value. It would be beneficial to further explore this supply-and-demand concept among Extension faculty members to help determine how to meet future programming needs more efficiently.

As the results suggest, the faculty members also identified both professional and personal resources as important considerations (e.g., professional support and personal relationship status). The literature identifies the importance of resources (Bradford, Huffaker et al., 2014; Futris, 2007; Hill & Parker, 2005) when offering CRE, but in the existing research, the focus tends to be on event-related resources to help the event be successful. Beyond professional resources, the faculty members in this study also discussed their own personal experiences in terms of resources to consider, seeing their own relationship histories as one relevant factor to consider, adding a new dimension of understanding to the extent literature.

Successes And Challenges

In the terms of actually offering CRE, a notable finding was that all faculty members in the current project had experienced successes and challenges similar to those found in previous research. As noted in the results, the themes of recruitment, access to funding, collaborations, and resources were discussed as both successes and challenges. Similarly, Carlton and colleagues (2009) found that certain defining factors (people, relationships, vision, and structure) could result in collaborative efforts being either positive or negative, depending on how these “challenge points” are dealt with (p. 36). Symbolic interactionism sheds light on why these concepts can be either positive or negative by understanding that humans are always interpreting the meaning of the symbols in their world. For example, communication, clarity, expectations, and commitment may be perceived differently; thus, for one person an interaction may be construed as positive, while for another that same interaction could be seen as neutral or even negative. These findings also expand our understanding of the process of offering CRE with limited prior experience because these commonalities suggest that other faculty members with limited experience may likely face the same challenges as experienced facilitators. Such overlaps might indicate patterns of how successes and challenges may materialize. This is encouraging because the faculty members saw the need to continue offering CRE, in turn potentially increasing family stability as a way of positively impacting child well-being.

One of the elements that emerged from faculty members’ interviews was how university-community collaborations added to or distracted from the success of first-time

programming. Community collaborations can create support mechanisms that ultimately help providers teach individuals skills to build healthy relationships (Futris, 2007). The successful collaborative efforts in the current project highlighted similar factors that have been identified previously in research: mutual respect, common goals, communication between partners, nurturing relationships, involvement, prioritizing and maintaining focus on the community's needs (e.g., Carlton et al., 2009; Futris, 2007). The faculty members discussed the need to find the "right partner," or partners who are highly invested in CRE, and because of their interest in the project they helped to determine curriculum, they advertised and recruited, and also opened new doors for other partnerships to be formed. A few of the faculty members also experienced the strength that comes from having diversity in the representative perspectives of their coalition members; this supports the current research because it has been found that having a broad and representative number of partners enables the collaborative efforts to effectively support relationship education in the community (Futris, 2007).

Collaborative challenges found in this study resembled those reported by other researchers: differences in perspectives, turf issues, divergent missions, political climates and local needs, and institutional climates, and policies (Carlton et al., 2009; Graziotti et al., 2012). The similarities between the current results and extent literature suggest that these same challenges listed above present themselves to all who are trying to create change in their community, whether they are seasoned or inexperienced. It is conjectured that because of the similarity in findings from this research and the current body of literature that there is evidence to suggest that offering CRE with limited experience is more process-oriented rather than content driven. Taken together, the findings highlight

these areas of challenge, and also the areas of success for those who are new to offering CRE. Some researchers (e.g., Futris, 2007; Pritchett, Fulton, & Hine, 2012) have already offered suggestions of how to avoid the challenges commonly faced with new programming (e.g., define leadership and goals, identify funding and other resources, implement strategies to achieve the goals, and create and sustain positive collaborations), and this research confirms their suggestions to be of value. The results also add a qualitative depth to the current understanding by suggesting that resistance, lack of communication, and lack of support and/or excitement for the project are areas of collaborative challenge, especially for faculty members new to CRE.

Recruitment and retention were found to be challenging in this project, even though some faculty members had positive experiences recruiting because of the collaborations they had built previously, and also due to the resources they had to draw upon. Nonetheless, recruitment required a large amount of time and attention. As reported, the faculty members stated that recruitment was made easier by utilizing the funds from the grant to offer food, by bringing in instructors well recognized in the community, and by paying for effective forms of advertising. These details confirm prior research that has found recruitment and retention to be a difficult component of social programming. This was due to how recruitment challenges changed within each context, including external factors (scheduling flexibility, cost, incentives, and child care) and intrinsic motivation (valuing healthy relationships, emotional maturity of participants, and the perceived benefits) for people to participate in CRE (Brower, 2010; Duncan et al., 2007; Graziotti et al., 2012; Ingoldsby, 2010).

These findings also suggest that faculty members new to CRE face similar

recruiting challenges. However, despite being new to offering CRE, some of the agents already had depth of experience in other areas. As reported earlier, for the faculty members in this study the mean years of service in Extension was 10.3. Although the length of each faculty member's employment differed widely, successful recruitment was attributed to the relationships each faculty member had built with key people in their community. The results from this study suggested that that there was more difficulty in creating positive relationships with community partners the less time someone had in Extension. These relationships varied from working with political leaders, community boards, religious leaders, and also supporting outside organizations or colleagues by writing articles or teaching supportive classes. Some partnerships had already been established, but most were newly created in the context of helping to strengthen families through CRE. This confirms our knowledge of the importance of professional relationships, and shows wide variation in forms of collaborative relationships and how positive that diversity can be.

Prior research suggests that at least three things impact retention efforts: maintaining ongoing participation, perceived benefit for the participants, and scheduling flexibility (Brower, 2010; Graziotti et al., 2012). In the current study, the content of each CRE event varied but the results show that the content and structure of the classes did have a positive impact on retention because people kept coming back as they saw the value in it. The success in recruitment was enhanced with the available funds that went to providing good food, door prizes, and educational materials that could be given to the participants. This idea is contextualized as one faculty member stated that "funding brings the participants back week after week," while others suggested that the rewards

would be relatively more difficult to offer without the help of funding sources. In some counties, faculty members did not provide a lot of food or other external motivators for recruitment purposes, revealing the intrinsic motivation some participants had in participating in CRE. Similar to findings by Vaterlaus and colleagues (2012) flexibility in scheduling also arose as an important concept. Along with flexibility in scheduling, faculty members reported having learned the need for flexibility from previous experiences in scheduling other types of programming in their county, emphasizing their knowledge of the culture and values of their community (Vaterlaus et al., 2012).

Future CRE Programming

All faculty members reported the desire to continue offering CRE in the future, but some ideas were identified, as a result from what they learned, for improvements in their future CRE programming. Extant research suggests that flexible, low-intensity, and low-cost activities attract participants and reduces barriers to participation (Bradford, Huffaker et al., 2014). Consistent with this research, the faculty members from this study expressed that they would change certain components for future events, such as using volunteers more widely, simplifying the food offered, and decreasing expenditures. As these ideas were shared in retrospect of the event, the faculty members reflected upon their past experiences as they contemplated what changes to make for the future (i.e., reducing cost of food, utilizing partners better, advertising online, and receiving more training). This suggests that their ideas for change came about as a social construct after they personally experienced CRE for the first time. This supports the basic premise of symbolic interactionism as the guiding theory because faculty members created meaning

derived from their experiences and modified these meanings through interpretation to make sense for their future programming. However, this research does not venture to identify whether or not this new meaning was unique to them *only* because they had just experienced offering CRE for the first time.

As previously reported, the desire for creating an online presence was mentioned. There was a division in opinion when it came to whether using online tools was necessary for success. One of the purposes of Extension is to provide trustworthy, informative, and research-based information—often via internet—that addresses specific questions and issues for people in the community (United States Department of Agriculture, 2011). There are many Extension faculty members who have created a strong online presence by offering FACT sheets, videos, and using Facebook for marketing. As explained by Diem, Hino, Martin, and Meisenbach (2011), Extension faculty members may struggle using technology to serve their purposes because they often face the barriers of limited training, money, and time to fully harness its capabilities. Research shows that there is a progressive and growing population of people in U.S. communities who not only desire, but also expect to find all forms of information online (Diem et al., 2011). The current findings echoed, to a small degree, concerns about Extension and technology use, as well as the desire to continue to expand the online dissemination of information by Extension.

Sustainability is defined as the capacity of programs to provide continued benefits to families and communities (Futris, 2007). With regard to offering new programming, the results from the current project confirm the validity of the approach of starting small, creating community interest, and letting participation grow, especially in rural counties

where CRE is new (Bradford, Huffaker et al., 2014; Mancini & Marek, 2004). One faculty member said that the programming was sustainable “especially as the community members see the benefit. If you get their buy-in then they can take it and run. You get a couple of great volunteers and create a committee, it becomes it’s own thing.” The faculty members echoed previous research in stating that key partnerships would be crucial to their future success with CRE, specifically for the purposes of getting help with advertising and other event-related items.

Summary

Through the lens of symbolic interactionism the common experiences of Extension faculty members were explored as they offered CRE for their first time. The findings support the idea that faculty members who desire to do so are capable of doing it successfully their first time. There is a recipe that emerges from the data for future success of Extension faculty members. This recipe suggests: first, being exposed to the benefits of CRE somehow (through colleagues or supervisors); second, recognizing how CRE would meet the needs of members in the community; third, finding the resources to do it successfully (funding, training, flexible scheduling, recruiting, knowing community, recruiting experts, interns/volunteers, mentoring, collaborations, etc.); and fourth, learning from their first experience, modifying their efforts to create more sustainable programming and be more effective in the future. As each faculty member thought through the individual needs of their counties, identified the resources available to them, and considered how to utilize those resources, they considered themselves as better equipped to offer CRE more effectively, in turn being poised to affect the lives of more

families by promoting skills strategies that ultimately support healthy processes which positively impact child well-being.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations to exploring faculty members' experiences is the diversity of the programming of each county. There were no requirements for all faculty members involved in this project to offer the same program, which led to unique and differing first-time experiences. The differences to note are: (a) length and style of programming (i.e., some had one-time guest speakers and others offered a series of classes); (b) size and population of the county (i.e., some rural and some urban); (c) amount of training and experience with CRE widely differed among faculty members; (d) and differences in available county staffing. This diversity in programming could also mean diversity in their facilitating experiences, possibly leading the researchers to focus more on the different forms of programming rather than shared experiences. Another limitation might be researcher bias. As a researcher, I identified my personal beliefs and values as related to the topics discussed in this research before data analysis began in hopes of acknowledging and limiting my personal biases as much as possible. However, there is naturally a degree of subjectivity to the process. The collection method of the interviews could be viewed as a limitation because some were done in person with the researcher recording the interview; others were recorded as the interview was conducted over the phone. Although this was not considered to be a large limitation it is worth noting.

Future research could build upon the lessons the faculty members retrospectively identified by determining if they are truly unique to faculty members who have

experienced offering CRE in their county or if someone new to CRE could vicariously learn these lessons to avoid some of the challenges that these faculty members faced, simply by reading about them beforehand. Funding was identified as important, but as previously discussed, some faculty members explored the possibility of offering short-term CRE with little to no funding by utilizing creativity and volunteers. This is an area that could be worth further investigation. The next steps might include providing quantitative analysis that explores further the generalizability of the experiences of faculty members offering CRE for the first time, allowing researchers to determine more conclusive information to help others offering CRE. It would be helpful to explore the process of offering CRE for the first time—faculty members’ considerations, successes and challenges, and future CRE programming—in more depth, providing a greater magnitude of understanding for how to offer CRE with limited training. Finally, studies that come from projects funded by nonfederal sources would help contribute to findings that are more generalizable, as would a degree of separation between the researcher and the project.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. When you started initially, what did you think about implementing relationship education?
2. What do you think about doing relationship education now? (have your views changed?)
3. What do you perceive are the needs in your county for relationship education? (what have you found out in that regard?)
4. How did you get started?
5. Have you tried to do relationship education prior to this? (If so, how do your experiences with this project compare to prior ones?)
6. How comfortable do you feel in presenting or facilitating this kind of material?
7. What led you to decide to include this project in your workload?
8. Thinking about the project that you implemented as a whole, what worked?
9. What didn't work?
10. Talk about your partnerships and collaborations (most successful partnerships), (least successful), (successes & challenges to partnerships?), (any partnerships you wouldn't use again? Why?)
11. How did you decide on a format and curriculum?
12. What role did funding play in getting started?
13. To what extent could other Agents do this [relationship education] with low or no funding?
14. Talk about how you got people to attend. [Talk about successes and challenges regarding recruitment. (What were the key ingredients in getting people to attend), (Why did people stay away or not attend)]
15. Overall, what is your feeling about the extent to which participants benefited from

what you did?

16. What part will relationship education play in your Extension programming? How do you plan to build on this programming, or do you plan to cut it?

17. What do you need in terms of support?

18. To what extent do you think this program gave participants further access to other resources within your community?

19. Is there anything else you'd like to add that would help others understand your experiences?

Thank you for your time! We appreciate it!