



Strengthening Unmarried Parents' Relationships: The Early Impacts of Building Strong Families

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MATHEMATICA
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The BSF Program Model



The Eight Local BSF Programs

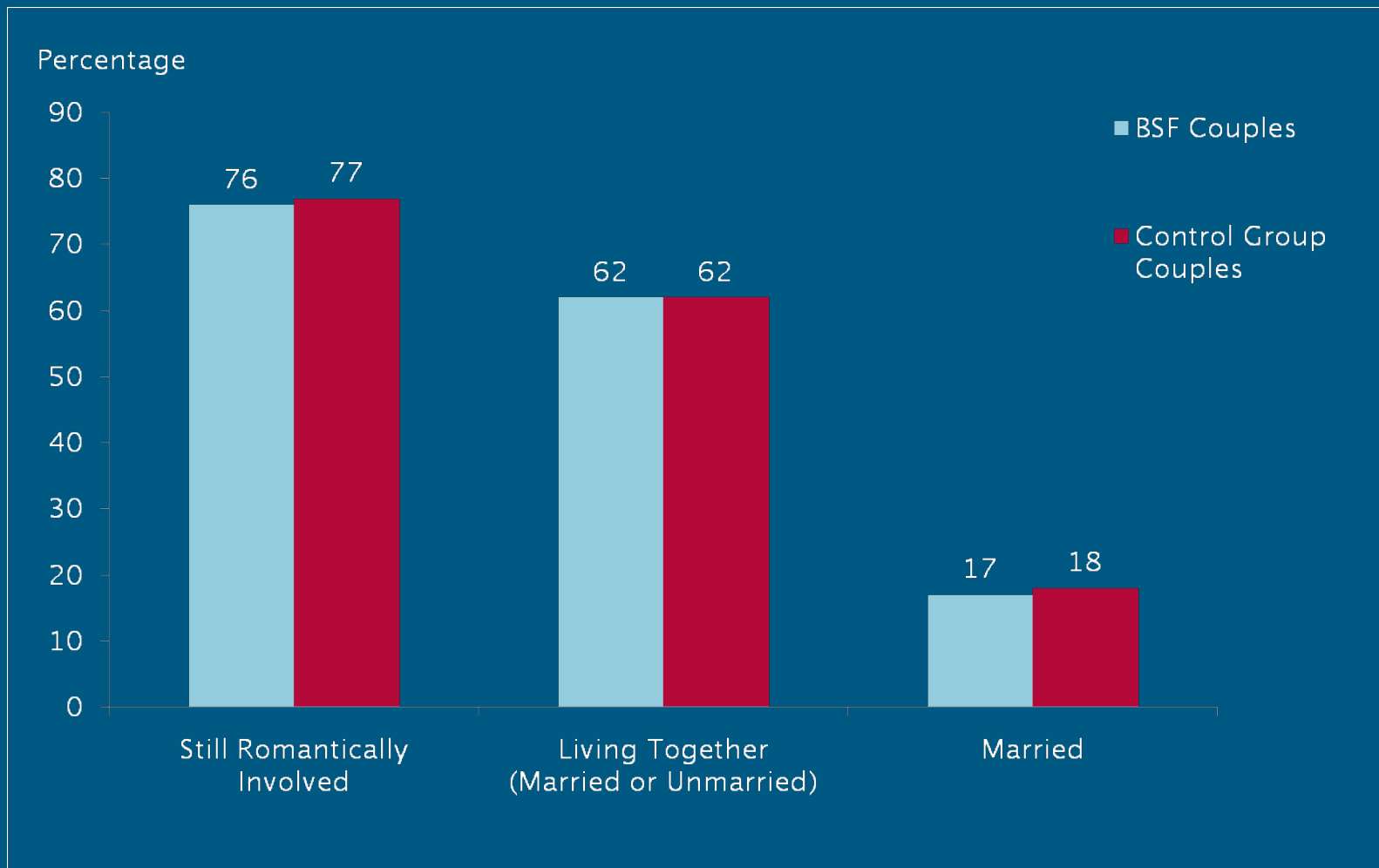
Location	Sponsor Organization	Curriculum Used
Atlanta	Georgia State University, Latin American Association	Loving Couples, Loving Children
Baltimore	Center for Urban Families	Loving Couples, Loving Children
Baton Rouge, Louisiana	Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge	Loving Couples, Loving Children
Florida (2 counties)	Healthy Families Florida	Loving Couples, Loving Children
Indiana (3 counties)	Healthy Families Indiana	Loving Couples, Loving Children
Houston	Healthy Family Initiatives	Love's Cradle
San Angelo, Texas	Healthy Families San Angelo	Love's Cradle
Oklahoma City	Public Strategies, Inc.	Becoming Parents for Low-Income, Low-Literacy Couples



Overview of BSF Impact Evaluation

- **Evaluated using random assignment research design**
- **More than 5,000 couples randomly assigned**
- **Surveys at 15 and 36 months**
- **This analysis based on 15-month survey**

Averaged Across All Programs, BSF Had No Effect on Relationship Status

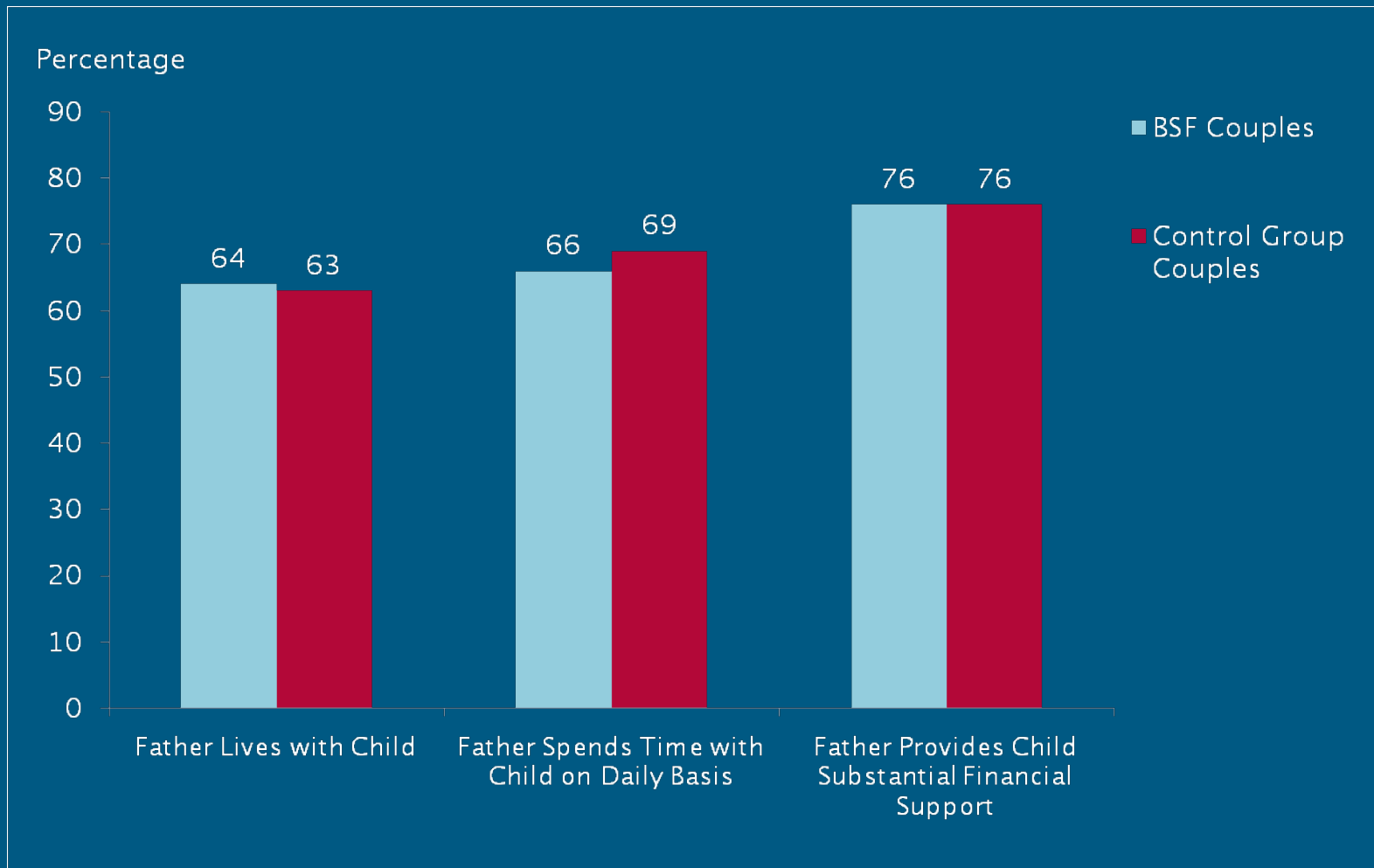




Averaged Across All Programs, BSF Had No Effect on Relationship Quality

- **Examined five dimensions of relationship quality**
 - Relationship happiness
 - Support and affection
 - Use of constructive conflict behaviors
 - Avoidance of destructive conflict behaviors
 - Fidelity
- **Also examined intimate partner violence and co-parenting**
- **No effects on these measures**

Averaged Across All Programs, BSF Had No Effect on Father Involvement



When Examine Impacts for Each Program Separately, a Different Pattern Emerges

- Most programs show little or no effects on relationships
- But two notable exceptions:
 - Oklahoma with a consistent pattern of positive effects
 - Baltimore with numerous negative effects

Oklahoma: Consistent Pattern of Positive Effects

- **Increased likelihood that couples remained romantically involved**
 - 5 percentage point positive impact
- **Positive effects on all five dimensions of relationship quality examined**
- **Improved quality of co-parenting and father involvement**
- **But no effect on marriage**

Baltimore: A Number of Negative Effects

- **Reduced likelihood that couples remained romantically involved**
 - 11 percentage point negative impact
- **Reduced ratings of support and affection**
- **Reduced quality of co-parenting and father involvement**
- **Increased intimate partner violence**
 - 15% of BSF mothers experienced a severe assault, compared with 9% in control group

What's Distinctive About Oklahoma?

- Only BSF program to use *Becoming Parents*
 - Shorter curriculum and delivered in longer sessions
- Greater use of financial incentives to encourage attendance
- Couples more likely than those in other programs to receive most of the curriculum
- Program served low-income *married* couples in the same groups as BSF couples

What's Distinctive About Baltimore?

- **Used a curriculum used by several other BSF programs—not distinctive in that way**
- **Couples, on average, were in less committed relationships initially than those in other programs**
- **Couples from more disadvantaged backgrounds—particularly the men**

BSF Improved Relationship Quality for African American Couples

- **Positive effects on four of five quality measures**
- **Also improved co-parenting and reduced intimate partner violence experienced by men**
- **No effect on staying together or getting married**

Closing Thoughts

- **Hard to make this approach work**
 - 7 of 8 programs did not achieve primary objective
- **And it may not be right for some unmarried parents**
 - Particularly those in less steady relationships initially
- **BSF model can work in some circumstances**
- **Full report available at:**
 - www.buildingstrongfamilies.info