

TREND/ISSUE TEAM STATEMENT

ISSUE TEAM: Family Breakdown

DESIRED OUTCOME – Oklahoma couples will reduce their risk of separation or divorce and strengthen their relationships

TREND: Why is it an issue in Oklahoma?

Oklahoma ranks among the top 5 in all states for number of divorces. Additionally, a 2001-2002 OSU survey about marriage and divorce (<http://www.okmarriage.org/Research/>) indicated Oklahoma is a marrying state, with 82% of adults having been married at some point compared to 73% nationally. Oklahoma is also a divorcing state; 32% of all adults have divorced compared to 21% nationally and a higher percentage of married Oklahomans have thought about divorce (56%) than in the country as a whole (42%). Oklahomans marry an average of 2.5 years younger than the national median age at first marriage, and those marrying under the age of 20 are the most likely to have gotten a divorce. Regardless of gender and income level, those who have been divorced are most likely to give these two reasons for their divorce: a lack of commitment (85%) and/or too much conflict and arguing (61%).

INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES [Value to Participants]:

Participants in extension programs will have potential to change behaviors in these areas:

- Increase couple relationship quality and satisfaction as measured by:
 - Increased communication skills
 - Reduced couple conflict and violence
 - Increased commitment to relationship
 - Increased amount of quality time together
 - Increased levels of trust
 - Increased amount of time together
 - Increased skills in problem solving/decision making
 - Increased acceptance of difference
- Increased ability to manage personal and family finances as measured by:
 - Cooperation in establishing goals
 - Adoption of positive financial behaviors and skills
- Increase the ability to manage one's emotions as measured by:
 - Adoption of time out strategy and greater focus on the issues

SOCIETAL OUTCOMES [Public Value]:

Divorce is costly for society. Nationwide, each divorce costs society about \$25,000 to \$30,000 due of the costs of housing support, food stamps, bankruptcies, problems with youth and other related expenses (Schramm, 2006). In Oklahoma, single-headed families are more than five times as likely to be in poverty as families headed by married couples (Oklahoma Policy Institute). It is estimated that \$6 billion is lost by American businesses due to decreased productivity stemming from marriage and relationship difficulties (Forthofer, Markman, Cox, Stanley & Kessler, 1996). It may take up to 5 years for employee productivity to rebound after a divorce (Turvey and Olson, 2006). Workers in troubled relationships often have increased stress, anxiety; depression and substance abuse which result in

higher health insurance costs to employers. Couples in failing relationships are more likely to resort to physical abuse or violence to resolve tensions at home (Gallagher, 2002). Strong families are more likely to be productive contributors to society, resulting in a decrease in the need for public assistance. Oklahomans in healthy relationships will be more productive in the work place and result in lower costs to employers. Greater access and exposure to relationship support programs will increase the number of Oklahomans seeking help for domestic violence and substance abuse.

Communities/Counties will have the potential to make changes in these areas:

- County creates an accurate databank of divorces, first marriages, and remarriages
- County actively advertises reduced marriage license fee for couples that finish an approved marriage and relationship education class
- County will create a task force to promote relationship education in the county