

Predicting Readiness to Adopt Evidence-Based Programs for Divorcing Families: Champions, Attitudes, and Access to Funding

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This paper attempts to identify the factors that explain service provider readiness to fund and implement evidence-based programs for children from divorcing families. Representatives from 128 family courts in United States counties were surveyed about the programs currently being offered for families of divorce and plans for changes in the services provided. Path analyses provided evidence that readiness to adopt effective programming was predicted by (a) the presence of champions who could potentially advocate for adoption, (b) county size, and (c) community attitudes favorable to services for families of divorce. The counties' ability to access funding to support programming did not predict ultimate readiness to adopt extended programming. Implications for research on the dissemination of prevention programs for children of divorce are discussed.

Keywords: organizational readiness, divorcing parent education, program implementation, dissemination, family court

Children who experience parental divorce are at approximately two times higher risk for negative mental health outcomes as compared to children from homes in which the child's parents do not divorce (Howard, Cornille, Lyons, Vessey, Lueger, & Saunders, 1996; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). The deleterious effects of divorce on children are especially worrisome when one considers that approximately one million children experience parental divorce each year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992).

Over the past two decades, prevention researchers have made steady progress in developing programs to reduce the negative effects of divorce on children and in demonstrating the efficacy of these programs to improve children's well-being. Programs can have positive effects on children by working with multiple target populations including custodial mothers (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Wolchik, Sandler, Winslow, & Smith-Daniels, 2005), children (Pedro-Carroll & Jones, 2005), and noncustodial fathers (Braver, Griffin, Cookston, Sandler, & Williams, 2005; Cookston, Braver, Griffin, deLusé, & Miles, 2007). However, few of the

programs that have demonstrated positive gains for participants are being offered on a regular basis to families who have experienced divorce.

The next logical step for prevention research with families experiencing parental divorce is the dissemination of evidence-based prevention programs for implementation in community settings. In this paper, we argue for a specific service delivery context for intervention programs for divorcing families, review a conceptual model of factors that may influence the adoption of innovative programs in community settings, and provide a test of these factors as predictors of readiness to adopt prevention programs for children of divorce in the family courts.

Community Contexts for Delivery of Prevention Programs for Children From Divorced Homes

Services for divorcing families have been provided in a variety of contexts including schools (Pedro-Carroll, 1997; Pedro-Carroll, Sutton, & Wyman, 1999; Stolberg & Mahler, 1994), universities (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Wolchik et al., 1993, 2000), community service agencies (Shifflett & Cummings, 1999), and family courts (Kramer & Washo, 1993). Each of these service delivery contexts has its relative strengths and weaknesses. School-based programs may provide immediate access to children; however, access to parents may be limited. Furthermore, children's participation in school-based programs may place them at increased risk for stigmatization among peers should their parents' marital status become known. Community service agencies may offer programs for families who are seeking help, but only a small proportion of the divorced population may take the initiative to utilize their services. Family courts have the potential to reach the full population of divorcing families, but courts may not use their access to deliver programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in rigorous evaluations, and typically offer programs that are shorter than

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those that have previously demonstrated efficacy (Wolchik et al., 2005).

Although each of these service delivery contexts has relative advantages and disadvantages, there are a number of reasons we believe that the family court is a particularly appropriate institutional context for the delivery of divorcing parent education programming. First, because only judges within the family court may grant a legally binding divorce, the court has a virtual monopoly on access to divorcing families. Second, the family court is a logical setting for intervention services for divorcing family because family courts recently have shown more interest in providing services for divorcing families. Between 1994 and 1998 the number of states that enacted legislation requiring divorcing parents to participate in divorcing parent education programming quadrupled (Clement, 1999). The results of a 1998 nationwide survey of counties reported that approximately half of the family courts in the United States currently provide divorcing parent education programming (Geasler & Blaisure, 1999), and these numbers represent an increase of 180% in the number of counties that provided such services since the survey was last administered in 1993 through 1994 (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996).

As a service delivery context, the family court presents certain challenges. Some divorcing parents may be wary of providing information about their parenting skills, psychological functioning, or child behavior to court officials for fear that the information they provide may play a role in the judge's decision. Family courts also typically operate on limited budgets and may not have the resources to devote to divorcing families or to staff education programs. Finally, many family courts have divorcing parent education programs in place and may not be interested in adopting new programming. Although few of the existing court-based programs have demonstrated efficacy to improve outcomes for children (Wolchik et al., 2005), they have demonstrated high levels of consumer satisfaction from most stakeholders in the court system (Schepard, 2004). Thus, although family courts are potentially an ideal setting for delivery of evidence-based prevention programs, little is known about factors that influence their interest or readiness to adopt programs that have demonstrated efficacy to promote the well-being of children following divorce.

Numerous preventive intervention programs for divorcing families with proven efficacy exist (Braver, Griffin, & Cookston, 2005; Cookston et al., 2007; Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Pedro-Carroll, 1997; Pedro-Carroll et al., 1999; Stolberg & Mahler, 1994; Wolchik et al., 2002, 1993). Efficacious programs tend to differ from those being offered in court settings in the following ways: they tend to be longer, they tend to be derived from theories present in the empirical literature, and they tend to be highly manualized so that fidelity of implementation is believed to be important in achieving positive effects. Each of these differences offers unique advantages and disadvantages for the adoption of a program into an existing court setting (Cookston, Braver, Sandler, & Genalo, 2002).

Intent to Adopt Efficacious Programming

For our study, we focused on the *intention to adopt evidence-based programs for children from divorced homes* as our primary outcome variable. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986) indicates that the intention to perform a behavior typically

precedes the observed behavior. Furthermore, evidence from the organizational readiness literature suggests that innovative ideas are rarely adopted quickly (Rogers, 1983). Instead, groundbreaking ideas are more typically introduced into organizations—oftentimes in the face of fierce opposition—and adaptations are made gradually to ensure that the growth coheres with the organizational philosophy. Only then will the innovation begin to affect the functioning of the organization. Recognition of the inherent challenges in the adoption of model prevention programs has led some to argue the process is a form of organizational reinvention (Price & Lorion, 1989). Change within organizations is not uncommon. One study found that 84% of managers reported that their organization was in the midst of at least one major change and 46% reported three or more ongoing changes (Peak, 1996). The authors of the organizational readiness model refer to this “unfreezing” as an essential first step in organizational change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993), thus, we view the intention to adopt as movement toward implementation.

We posit three levels of influence on readiness to adopt evidence based prevention programs in the family court: (a) attitudes, beliefs and practices of the court and the community that favor or oppose such programming, (b) champions and opponents of such programming and (c) demographic characteristics of the community being served. Community-level attitudes and beliefs toward new programs and practical barriers to adoption of the program might each exert an influence on the adoption of new programs. In a review of the barriers to institutionalization of research in mental health service organizations, Wells and colleagues (1988) delineated a number of complex factors that had the potential to interfere with the translation of basic research to service delivery. The barriers they identified included the need for community agencies to recognize the value of research, the necessity of translating research models into accessible services, and the gap between the expectations of researchers and service providers, among others.

These concerns are relevant to the family court as well. Key personnel in the courts or in the community served by the court might be favorable to or opposed to increased services for children, an expanded role of the court to provide those services, and court innovation of new programs. Even if the court and the community favor innovation, there may be logistical and practical barriers that make it difficult to adopt such programs, such as a lack of space or personnel to carry out the program.

It is also important to focus attention on the community *stakeholders* who have the potential to influence the decision to adopt prevention programming. The organizational readiness literature is rife with efforts to identify, understand, and court the stakeholders who are committed to, influenced by, or involved in the adoption of new programs (Gold, 1981, 1983; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Individuals must be highly motivated for change to occur (Nadler, 1981), and this motivation may either favor or oppose the adoption of new programs. Before change can occur, it is important that someone argue for the need for change (Maurer, 2004). For our purposes, attention was paid to both the champions of the intention to adopt new programs as well as those individuals who oppose adoption. In the case of divorcing family education programming, potential champions/opponents include the judges, lawyers, and program staff within the family court, elected officials within the state and county, child advocacy groups, and

influential community leaders. Any one or all of these change agents has the potential to either support or oppose the adoption of new programs.

County population is another important characteristic of the county being served by the court that may have an impact on court services. The size of a county may have implications for the ability to acquire funding as well as the intention to adopt programming though the direction of this association is unclear. On the one hand, it is possible that larger counties—as compared to smaller ones—would have a greater pool of resources to draw from to offer programming, however, larger counties would also be responsible for serving more consumers that would increase the cost of mounting their services. Although these seem reasonable possibilities, to date no one has explored the role of county size in determining organizational readiness for the implementation of effective intervention programming.

In this paper we attempt to determine the factors that predict readiness to implement effective programs. Whereas the literature suggests we will observe bivariate associations among readiness to adopt, community attitudes, county size, and stakeholder interests, we estimated a model that includes each of the factors reviewed above as predictors of readiness, and in which each of the relations of each of these predictors is estimated independent of the effects of the other predictors. Furthermore we conceptualized that the ultimate likelihood of adopting programs would be mediated by the proximal step of ability to access funding for the program. Thus we tested a model in which four factors (county size, champions vs. opponents, severity of barriers, public attitudes) predicted ability to access funding that in turn predicted likelihood of adopting the programs.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Participants were representatives from 128 family courts across the United States. As we describe in greater detail in earlier work (Author citation, 2002 UNMASK) a random sample of the 3,140 counties in the United States was stratified into four county size groups. *Large* counties had a population greater than 1 million, *medium-sized* counties had a population greater than 300,000 but less than 1 million, *small* counties had a population greater than 100,000 and less than 300,000, and *tiny* counties had a population less than 100,000. According to these criteria, 30 large, 124 medium-sized, 306 small, and 2,680 tiny counties were identified. Before sampling, the tiny counties were excluded from data collection because it was believed that their divorce rates were too small to support divorcing family education programming. To control the margin of sampling error below 5% we used a stratified random sample and sampled 100% of the large counties, 66% of the medium-sized counties, and 40% of the small counties. This resulted in a targeted sample of 30, 83, and 122 by county size, respectively.

Two screening criteria were established for a county to participate in the study: (a) the county had to have a divorcing family education curriculum (DPEC) in place and (b) a specific individual within the county who was closely associated with the program had to be identified and interviewed. Eighty-one percent of large counties, 83% of medium-sized counties, and 70% of small coun-

ties had a DPEC in place leading to an estimate of 76% of all counties. Twenty-nine counties, including three large, 12 medium-sized and 14 small counties, were screened out when a key informant could not be identified. The interview lasted approximately 40 minutes and was conducted by telephone. The final sample included 22 large, 58 medium-sized, and 74 small counties, and 26 cases were excluded because of missing data for a final interviewed sample of 128. Given these criteria, our sample was comprised of a cross-section of large, medium, and small counties in the United States with a DPEC.

The majority of respondents were connected to the program as administrators of court services (46.8%), were responsible for delivering the program (17.5%), were the designer of the program (10.4%), were in charge of referring parents to the program (5.2%), or had served as a liaison for the program to community (20.1%). Most counties offered a single-session program (70.1%) and some offered a two-session program (24.7%) or longer (5.2%). On average, the program had been in place 6.69 years ($SD = 3.33$) with a range of 1 year to 21 years. Considering county-level characteristics, participants reported a mean of 2,833 divorces per year ($SD = 2,883$) with a range of 400 to 24,495.

Measures

Demographic variables. Information on two variables was obtained to assist in explaining influences on whether a county was ready to consider adoption of lengthier, evidence-based programs for families of divorce. First, an ordinal county size variable was constructed (1 = small county, 2 = medium-sized county, 3 = large county). In addition, participants were asked how their current program was designed, and three dichotomous variables were created where a value of 1 was assigned to each county's design history: the county purchased their program from an outside source ($N = 34$), the county adapted their program based on another program ($N = 48$), or the county designed their own program ($N = 57$). The counties that had purchased their program or had adapted a program were asked to indicate the source of the program. None of the counties had adapted or adopted a program that had previously demonstrated efficacy in a randomized field trial.

Champions and opponents. Respondents were asked whether seven different stakeholder groups who are influential in family court practices at the county level would support "an extensive parenting skills program for divorcing parents in your county" that was voluntary and offered through the court. The stakeholder groups included the judges in the county, members of the bar who work with divorces, county supervisors, majority of state legislators, child advocacy groups, the administrative offices of the State Supreme Court, and county or state agencies with an interest in divorce, parents and children. A *champion/opponent* difference score was created as the number of stakeholder groups that would support parenting skills programs minus the number of stakeholder groups who would oppose programming. Scores ranged from -4 to +7 with a mean of 4.52 ($SD = 2.73$).

Barriers. Respondents were provided with 10 different potential barriers to the implementation of a new voluntary program for divorcing families and were asked to indicate the level of problem that would be associated with each barrier. The barriers included procuring sufficient funding, finding quality presenters/leaders, finding space for the program, gaining cooperation from judges,

receiving support from within the court, having adequate personnel to staff a new program, lacking community interest, getting parents to attend, showing the value of the program to the court administration, and gaining support from lawyers. Respondents were allowed to indicate the level of problem associated with each barrier on a scale of one to five from, respectively, "no barrier" to "very large barrier." In the interests of creating a single barrier scale score, the sum of the problem estimates was computed with a possible and observed range of 10 to 40. The reliability for the 10 items was adequate ($\alpha = .66$) and the mean of the scores was 24.99 ($SD = 5.75$).

Attitudes toward new programs. Eleven attitudes about the implementation of new programs were read to the respondents and were answered on a 4-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Based on a priori scale construction, two scores were created from the items to represent attitudes of members of the court community and attitudes of public community outside of the court. The *court attitude score* represented the sum of five items including, "Our judicial system prides itself on adaptability and flexibility within the limits of legality," "Our judges are committed to reducing the burdens for divorcing families," "We are a conservative court and dedicate our energy strictly to legal matters," "We have a lot of innovators within the leadership of our court," and "Our courts believe we should reach out to families by providing needed services." The five items demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$) and had a mean of 15.52 ($SD = 3.36$). Scores could theoretically range from 5 to 20 and did range from 6 to 20 where higher scores reflected more openness to consider the needs of divorcing families.

The *public attitude score* was comprised of six items that addressed attitudes of the nonjudicial legal community, the public community, and the respondent to the adoption of new programs for divorcing families. These items included "Tax payers in our county will not support any new programs run by the court," "Children's needs are neglected in our county," "I know that if I show a compelling need for additional funding, I will be supported within our system," "Most or all of the judges in our system would oppose offering a more extensive parenting skills program through the courts," "Attorneys in our jurisdiction would strongly encourage their divorcing clients to participate in a lengthy parenting skills program," and "There are too many agencies, groups, individuals, and forces in our county that would not want money spent on a lengthy parenting skills program for divorcing families." The six items demonstrated adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .63$), had an observed range of 8 to 23 (out of a possible 6 to 24), and had a mean of 15.58 ($SD = 3.48$). Higher scores accounted for more favorable public attitudes toward services for divorcing families.

Perceived ability to access funding. Participants were asked whether their court could obtain the funding necessary to support the proposed expanded programming. The issue of perceived ability to access funding availability was assessed using the scenario provided below:

Let's say that \$12,000 a year is a pretty accurate figure for the cost of a family education program that would be 10 weeks long which parents would be expected to attend once a week, that would be taught by two trained therapists, that would be designed for about 10 parents in a group, and that would be offered four times a year. How likely is

it that your court could get the money to do this more extensive parenting program in the next five years?

Participants responded to the item on a 5-point scale from a score of 1 for "very unlikely" to a score of 5 for "very likely" but were also provided an opportunity to indicate that the "court would not do it." Only four participants perceived their court could not obtain the funding whereas the remaining participants had an average score of 2.52 ($SD = 1.19$), excluding those who indicated their court would not obtain the funds.

Adoption index. An index score was created to approximate the likelihood that a court would be willing to adopt lengthier, empirically validated programs for divorcing families. Three separate items were presented to participants to determine whether the county would adopt three different programs: a program to help kids cope with divorce, a program intended to affect the parenting skills of custodial parents, and a program focusing on the parenting of noncustodial parents. In response to each program, participants indicated whether their county would adopt such a program on a 3-point scale from "no" to "maybe" to "yes" scored from, respectively, 1 to 3 and were also allowed to indicate whether their county already had such a program. Seventeen counties already had a program to help kids cope with divorce, 13 counties had a parenting skills program in place for custodial parents, and 11 had a program in place for noncustodial parents. Analyses indicated that county size did not explain the difference between counties that already had a program in place versus those that did not.

Because the likelihood of adopting any or all of the three programs was highly related and because the three items had a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$ for three items), we created an index score representing the tendency of the county to be open to the adoption of lengthier, empirically validated programs for families experiencing divorce. The index score, thus, was equal to the sum of the participants' response to the likelihood of adopting each of the three programs and higher scores represented a greater likelihood of adoption. The adoption index scores ranged from the minimum value of 0 to the maximum value of 6 with an average score of 3.94 ($SD = 1.95$).

Results

First, before conducting our main analyses we assessed whether respondent characteristics (e.g., connection to program, length of program, number of years program was in use) related to any of the main study variables. A single significant association was observed among 24 correlations: larger counties tended to have more divorces annually ($r = .66, p < .001$). Next, in Table 1 we report frequency counts and percentages for how often participants agreed with attitudes related to the adoption of effective programming separated by county size (e.g., small, medium, large). The responses for the attitudes collapsed across "strong agree" and "agree somewhat" into a single "agree" category with a similar method to create a "disagree" group. Although there were no significant differences according to estimates of chi-square and phi (Bobko, 2001), large and small counties tended to receive lower levels of endorsement for items as compared to medium-sized counties.

The bivariate relations among the three program design history variables and other study variables are presented in Table 2. Given

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Participants Who Agreed With Statements About Court and Public Support for the Adoption of Divorcing Parent Education Programs With Proven Efficacy by Manner of Program Design and County Size

	County size			Significance estimates
	Small	Medium	Large	
Our system is adaptive and flexible	45 76.3%	40 78.4%	13 72.2%	$\Phi = .05, c^2 = .03$ $p = .87$
Judges committed to divorcing families	45 76.3%	40 78.4%	13 72.2%	$\Phi = .06, c^2 = .44$ $p = .80$
Conservative court focused on legal issues	13 22.4%	10 19.6%	4 22.2%	$\Phi = .03, c^2 = .14$ $p = .93$
Court has innovative leadership	42 71.2%	40 78.4%	13 72.2%	$\Phi = .08, c^2 = .79$ $p = .67$
Court should reach family needs	49 83.1%	36 70.6%	14 77.8%	$\Phi = .14, c^2 = 2.43$ $p = .30$
Tax payers will not support program	29 50.9%	20 41.7%	10 58.8%	$\Phi = .12, c^2 = 1.75$ $p = .42$
Children's needs are neglected in county	29 49.2%	22 43.1%	7 38.9%	$\Phi = .08, c^2 = .75$ $p = .69$
Funds are available when needed	31 52.5%	27 54.0%	8 44.4%	$\Phi = .06, c^2 = .50$ $p = .78$
Most judges would oppose program	19 33.3%	21 43.8%	5 29.4%	$\Phi = .12, c^2 = 1.69$ $p = .43$
Attorneys would encourage program	30 50.8%	21 42.0%	9 52.9%	$\Phi = .09, c^2 = 1.07$ $p = .56$
Too many groups would oppose program	23 39.7%	22 43.1%	4 22.2%	$\Phi = .14, c^2 = 2.51$ $p = .29$
Total <i>n</i>	58	51	18	

our sample size of 128, our power was .95 to detect a correlation of .30 and .20 to detect a correlation of .10. Counties that bought a program were more likely to have more barriers to the implementation of new programming and tended to have less favorable court and community attitudes about services for divorcing families. Counties that had adapted a program tended to have more favorable court attitudes and scored higher on the index of the readiness to adopt proved programming. Counties that designed their own program, on the other hand, were less likely to score high on the index of the readiness to adopt empirically tested programs.

Correlations among county size, champions and opponents, court and public attitudes, barriers, perceived ability to access funding, and the adoption index are shown in Table 3. County size was not significantly related to any other study variable. Court

attitudes favorable to the implementation of empirically supported programs were associated with more positive community attitudes, the presence of more champions than opponents, and fewer barriers in the implementation of new programming. Community attitudes were related to more champions, fewer barriers, the perceived ability to access funding, and greater readiness to implement proved programming. The presence of champions was associated with fewer barriers to the implementation of programming, greater likelihood of perceived ability to obtain funding, and increased readiness to implement proved programming. The severity of barriers to the implementation of proved programming was not associated with either the perceived ability to access funding or general readiness to adopt programming. Furthermore, the perceived ability to access funding and the readiness to adopt programming were unrelated.

Table 2

Relations Between Program Design History and Readiness to Implement Programming

	County bought program	County adapted program	County designed program
Champions/opponents	-.16	.13	-.11
Court attitudes	-.21*	.19*	-.01
Public attitudes	-.22*	.13	-.03
Barriers to adoption	.21*	-.07	-.03
Perceived ability to obtain funding	.02	-.14	.11
Index of adoption readiness	.01	.20*	-.22*

* $p < .05$.

Path Analyses

Our analyses were tested in two steps using LISREL 8.3 (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1997). First, a saturated model was estimated in which no paths were excluded, and the results of the model were used to guide subsequent estimation. In this stage of analysis we were interested in which predictors could account for unique variance in the ability to access funding and the intent to adopt when multiple predictors were in the model. In the saturated model, court attitudes was not a meaningful predictor of either the perceived ability to access funding nor the index of the readiness for adoption and was dropped from the next model. Second, nonsignificant predictors (e.g., court attitudes) and paths (e.g., the path from county size to perceived ability to access funding) were dropped and the model was re-estimated. Figure 1 presents the

Table 3
Relations Among Readiness to Implement Programming Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. County size						
2. Court attitudes	-.02					
3. Public attitudes	-.01	.51**				
4. Champions/opponents	.02	.31**	.57**			
5. Barriers	.05	-.44**	-.49**	-.35**		
6. Perceived ability to obtain funding	.09	.02	.23*	.32**	.04	
7. Index of readiness to adopt	-.16	.15	.32**	.35**	-.17	.17

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

model that estimates the index of adoption, the perceived ability to access funding, community attitudes about divorce programming, the presence of champions, and the severity of barriers to the implantation of programming. The goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the exclusion of variables and paths did not affect model fit greatly because the chi-square statistic was low (.84) and

nonsignificant ($p = .657$) and the root-mean-square-residual was .0001.

Turning to the findings in the reduced model, the perceived ability to access funding was predicted by the number of champions present in the community and by the severity of barriers to the adoption of expanded programming. However, the hypothesized path from community attitudes did not add uniquely to the prediction equation. The index of the readiness to adopt expanded programming was significantly predicted by the presence of champions and marginally significantly predicted by county size and community attitudes favorable to the adoption of extended programming for divorcing families. Furthermore, as in the initial model, there was a nonsignificant relation between the perceived ability to access funding and the index of the readiness to adopt extended programming.

Discussion

This study tested a model of family court readiness to adopt empirically validated programs for divorcing families as explained by county size, community attitudes about expanded programming, and the presence of champions for change. Our results

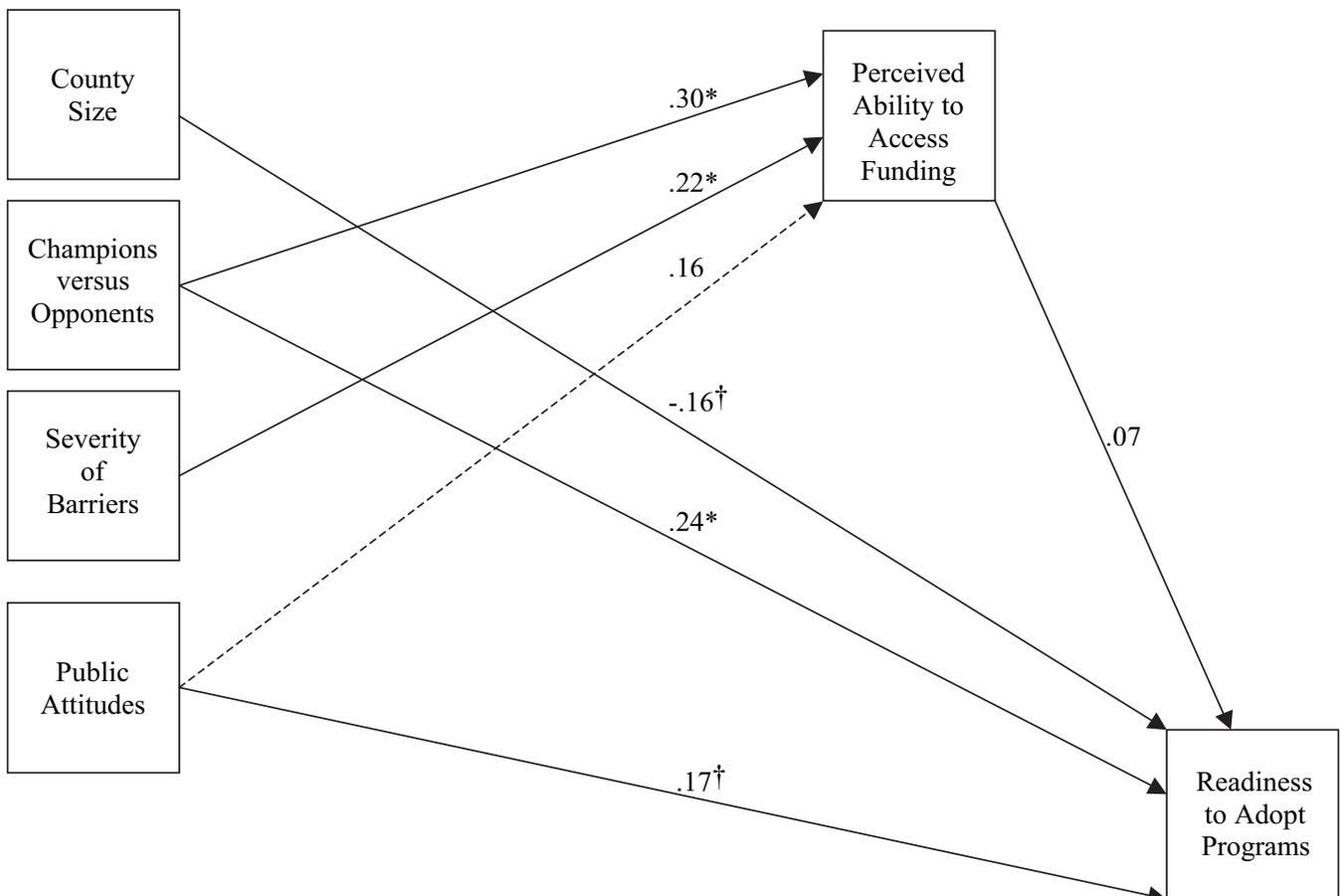


Figure 1. Empirically supported model of community readiness to adopt empirically supported divorcing parent education programs. Goodness of fit: $\chi^2 (2, N = 127) = .84, p < .60$. RMSEA = 0.0001. CFI = 1.00. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

provided evidence that the presence of (a) champions (and the absence of opponents); (b) community attitudes favorable to the adoption of extended programming, and (c) a larger county size were each significant (or marginally significant) predictors of the intention to adopt evidence-based programming for divorcing families. Interestingly, having more champions for program adoption (rather than opponents) and seeing more barriers to program adoption were positively related to perceived ability to access funding for these programs, yet perceived access to funding did not account for a significant amount of the variance in the prediction of court readiness to adopt extended programming.

Understanding readiness to adopt evidence-based programs is a general issue for prevention researchers, and is not unique to adoption of programs for children of divorce. Although a wealth of basic research exists to demonstrate the efficacy of prevention programs, widespread adoption of these programs by community service organizations is considerably more rare (Rothram-Borus & Duan, 2003). Developing more effective approaches to the dissemination of programs that have demonstrated efficacy in well-designed prevention trials is an important research priority for the field. One aspect of developing effective dissemination strategies is to better understand factors that affect the likelihood that institutions, such as the family court, will adopt evidence-based prevention programs.

The Public Policy Implications of Champions and Opponents

The presence of champions for program adoptions was the only factor that significantly predicted both perceived readiness to adopt a program and perceived ability to access funding for the program. Because both a perceived readiness to adopt and an ability to access funding are important aspects of actually implementing a program in a community these findings strongly confirm the critical role that champions are seen as playing in program adoption. In the organizational and management literature, the individuals who are likely to influence the decision to oversee change are generally referred to as stakeholders and are the individuals who tend to have power and legitimacy when it comes to change within an organization. They also bring a sense of urgency to the need for an organization to affect such change and thus are a strong influence on bringing about movement (Maurer, 2004; Mitchell et al., 1997).

In our study, we operationalized stakeholders as the individuals who would not only play a role in the adoption of a program in principle but who were also those individuals who could stand in the way of the program's implementation in practice. Descriptively, it is useful to look at which stakeholders are seen as more likely to be the champions or opponents of court adoption of programs that have demonstrated efficacy to help children. In a previous paper, we reported that 77% of family court judges and 97% of child advocacy groups would support the implementation of efficacious parent education programs while only, respectively, 11% and 1% would oppose such programs (Cookston et al., 2002). On the other hand, 22% of state legislators might oppose such programs with only 63% in support. The different perceived likelihood that each of these stakeholders would be champions or opponents of adoption of efficacious parenting programs by the court indicate where change agents might want to promote

adoption of such programs. Some change agents may offer a natural alliance and others may need to be won over. Because the legislature controls many of the sources of funding for such programs, developing support from these stakeholders might be particularly important.

The Role of Perceived Ability to Access Funding for Service Delivery or Preventive Interventions

Contrary to the prediction in our conceptual model, the perceived ability to acquire funding to support the implementation of efficacious programming was not related to the intention to adopt in either the bivariate analysis or in the path model. The lack of an association between perceived ability to access may reflect that the reports of likelihood to adopt effective programs might reflect program desire rather than realistic plans in terms of what programs they can actually implement with the resources they are able to generate. Alternatively, it may be that because each county in the survey already had at least one parenting program in place that they may have considered the readiness to adopt a new program more as a reallocation of existing funds than as a problem of generating new funds. Finally, it may be a function of limited power to detect a small association. Subsequent power calculations suggest that our observed correlation of .17 had a power estimate of .49 given our 128 participants whereas subsequent power estimates suggest a sample size of 350 would have been necessary to detect such an association with power of .90.

Curiously, in the path model severity of barriers was *positively* associated with ability to access funding rather negatively related (as originally expected). One possible explanation for this unexpected relationship is that people who are realistically planning such program might be working through all of the potential obstacles to program adoption and may thus be more confident of their ability to access funding. Similarly, those who have not thought much about accessing funding are not aware of the barriers to doing so.

Readiness to adopt was marginally predicted by a larger county size and public attitudes in addition to the significant prediction of the presence of champions. It is logical that readiness to adopt would be related to perceived public attitudes that are favorable to such programs, indicating that the philosophy of the court may reflect to some extent the attitudes of their communities. It is somewhat surprising that larger counties were seen as somewhat less likely to adopt programs to benefit children, although many factors may influence this relationship that were not assessed and are not represented in the model, such as ethnic composition of the counties, their prior history of adopting such programs or the strength and orientation of powerful stakeholders such as lawyers or religious leaders across counties. Further investigation of the influence of such community and state level variables goes beyond the scope of the current paper, but is important to consider in future studies.

Implications for the Dissemination of Efficacious Programming

Our observed relationship between program design history and intention to adopt proven programming has far-reaching implications for the dissemination of proven divorcing parent education

programs. In Table 2 we reported that whether a county had adapted another program for use in their country was positively related to their readiness to adopt proven programming whereas counties that designed their own program were less likely to consider adopting proven programs. These findings speak to the powerful role of institutional history and change. Counties that designed their own programs will likely have devoted time, energy, and resources to the creation of a program. As a result, they may have a stronger commitment in the status quo with the goal of maximizing their investment in their existing program. Such a trend was present in our results as counties that bought programs had higher barriers and lower court and public attitudes. It is not surprising that there would be more opponents to the adoption of new programs, suggested by the negative (but nonsignificant) association between champions/opponents and whether the county had designed their program. Alternatively, in courts where existing programs were adapted for use in the court, there may be openness to other programs. These courts may have spent time shopping the market for programs and have a more comprehensive awareness of the various programs in existence. However, because they adapted their program and did not simply implement a purchased program, there may be a correlated desire to improve upon the services that are being offered. The role of program design history likely plays a salient role in whether services are simply implemented or are constantly being improved upon.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although the findings of this study offer an important contribution to the existing literature on the organizational readiness of family courts to implement efficacious divorcing education programs, our study was limited in a number of ways. First, our primary dependent variable was an index of a county's readiness to adopt one or all of three different types of divorcing family programs including a program for children, custodial parents, and noncustodial parents. It is quite possible that our index failed to capture the various alternatives that family courts might choose in terms of offering a menu of services to separating families. For example, a court might be very committed to offering a single program for both custodial and noncustodial parents but no program for children. In this case, the respondent might have endorsed a single item at the highest level and might not have endorsed considering the other programs. As a result, the score for this respondent would be similar to the score of respondents who claimed their family court might adopt all three programs. In a related concern, although the theory of reasoned action suggests that the intention to behave in a certain manner likely precedes the act, intention to adopt does not necessarily lead to actual adoption. Intention might best be viewed as a precursor to adoption and, thus, an important indicator of whether follow-up might yield subsequent adoption.

Finally, we did not ask whether the counties actively evaluate their programs. Most family courts do not rigorously evaluate their services beyond consumer satisfaction surveys. Consumer satisfaction almost always yields positive results and is useful in demonstrating positive acceptance of the program by participants. Many program decision makers in the court may not be overly impressed by the statement that programs have been demonstrated to improve outcomes in *rigorous evaluations*. Instead court deci-

sion makers may be equally or more impressed by other program characteristics such as reputation with other professionals and fit with available court resources (Smith-Daniels, Sandler & Wolchik, 2007). In counties where courts are conducting ongoing and regular evaluation, there may be willingness to give high priority to programs that have been tested in rigorous evaluations. Future research on adoption should more carefully study what factors are valued by courts as they seek to meet the needs of the families and various stakeholders, and what factors that were not in the current study might predict readiness to adopt new programs.

The current study relied on the report of a key informant to speak for whether a stakeholder might support or oppose programming, community attitudes, barriers, ability to fund and court readiness to adopt. Although this informant was selected to be the person in the court who was most knowledgeable about the program, the data ultimately involved the perceptions of this reporter on all variables, and thus is limited by the unknown biases of this reporter. Future studies should obtain the reports of multiple informants including multiple stakeholders representing different perspectives. The value of the current study is that it provides insight into the perspective of one important stakeholder, the person most knowledgeable about such programs in the courts, but its limitation is that it does not reflect the perspective of other key stakeholders.

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