



Identifying research to inform your CQI efforts

When Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) programs encounter a challenge, research can yield valuable insights that guide the continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts used to address the issue. For example, research findings can inform a program's understanding of a challenge by shedding light on the challenge's underlying root causes. After learning more about the root causes of the challenge, research findings can also serve as source for possible strategies other programs have implemented, which can be road tested to address the challenge. Additionally, research on a new strategy can provide details about how it was implemented in other programs, including focal population, timing, location, and staffing, which can inform how a team wants to try out the strategy as part of its road test.

This tip sheet highlights the value of research when conducting CQI and describes how HMRF programs can access and critically think about relevant research as part of their CQI efforts. This is the first in a series of two tips sheet on using research for CQI: see the [Incorporating Evidence-Supported Practices Into CQI Efforts resource](#) for tips on implementing research in CQI. Also, explore the CQI office hours for [August](#) and [September](#) 2024 to find additional information on using research in CQI.

How to find relevant research

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), and other agencies provide several tools for finding research that is highly relevant to HMRF programs.

- **OPRE's resource library** includes many resources specific to HMRF programs as well as adjacent program areas. The library, located at <https://acf.gov/opre/resource-library>, offers filtering by keyword, topic, and project. See Figure 1 for an illustration of a search.

Figure 1: Searching OPRE's resource library

For best results, search topics (e.g. "youth" or "recruitment strategies"), rather than specific questions (e.g. "How do we improve attendance at the first workshop?")

Use filters to narrow your search to certain programming types or grant streams

Home > OPRE > Resource Library

By Keyword

 🔍

Topic

☒ Strengthening Families, Fatherhood, Healthy Relationships & Marriages (40)

☐ Youth Services (9)

Project

☐ Building Usage, Improvement, and Learning with Data in Healthy Marriage

Resource Library

🔊 Listen

The page you're

Further refine results by entering a keyword or sel

Sort Results

Publication Date Relevance



TIP: To access the page dedicated specifically to HMRF resources, click or enter this address into a web browser: <https://acf.gov/opre/resource-library?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A688>

- **Research and evaluation clearinghouses** are another great source of information to inform your CQI efforts. These clearinghouses collect, assess, and summarize the research on various interventions for a given field. Studies are rated based on federally approved standards for that field. The ratings are intended to provide readers with confidence that when a study meets clearinghouse standards, it provides strong evidence about the effectiveness of an intervention.

Clearinghouses have user-friendly designs to help non-research audiences search for research that is relevant to their needs, populations, or outcomes of interest. They provide detailed descriptions of evidence-based practices—these can be a good source of inspiration for improvement ideas even if your program opts to try just one aspect of a comprehensive model.



TIP: Access the OPRE-sponsored clearinghouses at: <https://acf.gov/opre/research-and-evaluation-clearinghouses>. Two are most relevant to HMRF programs:

- **Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse** may be useful to HMRF programs with a jobs component. This clearinghouse assesses the evidence on programs or interventions aimed at improving employment-related outcomes for individuals with low incomes.
- **Title IV- E Prevention Services Clearinghouse**, which reviews research on programs and services to support children and families and prevent foster care placements, may be useful to HMRF programs with a parenting component.



TIP: Want to see walk-throughs of how to efficiently search the OPRE library or an ACF Clearinghouse to inform your CQI efforts? Check out the [August 2024](#) office hours.

- **Conference websites** highlight research on emerging topics that may be of interest to your program and your CQI efforts. ACF, OPRE, OFA, and other health and human service agencies host conferences relevant to HMRF programs. The conference websites—such as OPRE’s Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-sufficiency (RECS) site—host presentations from prior conferences as well as topics and agendas for upcoming conferences and events.

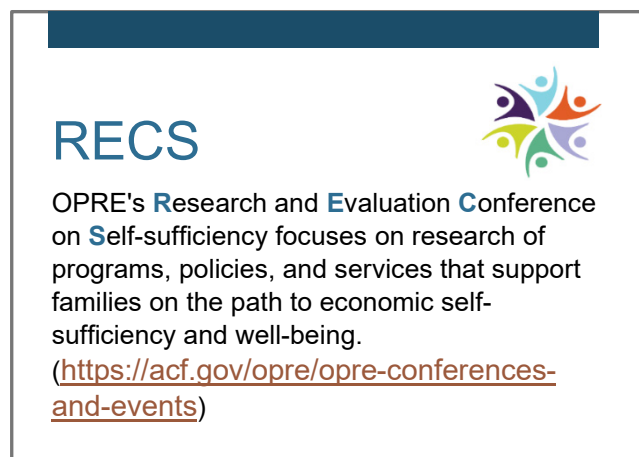


TIP: Find OPRE’s conferences and events at <https://acf.gov/opre/opre-conferences-and-events>



TIP: Conference sites often organize presentations by year and topic.

- **Other research tools** can also be useful for learning more about programmatic challenges or to find ideas or strategies to test. However, CQI teams should keep in mind that these tools do not fully vet resources or curate them for specific audiences, such as HMRF programs.
 - **Google scholar** works just like a regular Google search but identifies journal articles or books from a very wide variety of research areas. Resources are not vetted for relevance and rigor, and some may only be accessible through a paywall. (<https://scholar.google.com/>)
 - AI tools like **ChatGPT** (<https://chatgpt.com/>) or **Gemini** (<https://gemini.google.com/>) may also be a source of ideas for your team, particularly if tools don’t provide many useful resources. However, AI tools do not vet resources for relevance, rigor, or source.



What to look for in the research you find

With so many research studies available, it is important to know what level of evidence supports the information you are drawing from. **Research-informed practices** are validated by scientific methods and provide strong evidence to support the claims of how well they work. For example, causal studies compare two similar groups—one group that uses the practice and one group that does not—to identify whether changes in outcomes are due to the practice. **Best practices** have been associated with success in specific contexts; research on best practices can provide insights and suggest trends, such as how outcomes change after a new

practice is introduced, but do not provide evidence that the new practice was the reason for the change. **Best practices** are useful for generating ideas for solutions, while **research-informed practices** can help you refine improvement strategies.

When reviewing research for use in CQI efforts, consider the factors in Figure 2 to assess what you are looking at and ensure it is a helpful resource for your specific issue.

Figure 2: Four factors to consider when assessing research

Consider	Ask yourself....
Generalizability	Was the research done in a similar context to our program? If not, can the research apply to other contexts?
Relevance	Is the research applicable to the challenge our program faces? Did the research find that different approaches than ours could be successful?
Rigor	Is the research high quality? Is the research method valid and reliable to answer our specific question?
Feasibility	Are the solutions described in the research feasible for our team to implement?

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