

Healthy Respect Youth Development Program

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BACKGROUND

Program REACH's Healthy Respect Youth Development Program is a Title V, Section 510 funded abstinence curriculum that serves Brooklyn and Yonkers, New York. HRYDP began operation in 2003. The program serves New York City teens, who are at high risk of sexually transmitted diseases and out-of-wedlock childbirth. In 2005, HRYDP received funding through the federal Community Abstinence Based Education (CABE) grant. HRYDP's goals are to reduce 1) the number of teens who engage in premarital sex, 2) the incidence of out of wedlock pregnancies and 3) the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases by using a "best practice" based curriculum with New York area middle and high school students.

The core of the HRYDP program is a school-based abstinence program that provides roughly sixty hours of instruction over three years and uses a curriculum focused on criteria A-H for abstinence education as outlined in the Social Security Act. HRYDP also provides after-school activities that promote abstinence, and the program reaches out to parents and community leaders with various workshops.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In June 2006, HRYDP conducted seven focus groups with high school students in the program as a part of program evaluation. A random sample was selected from class rosters. There were four focus groups of girls and three of boys.

In fall 2006, HRYDP began its second wave of evaluations, based on lessons learned in the previous year. The new crop of students in the program took pretests at the beginning of the school semester and then again at the end. The same procedure was followed with a comparison group. In preliminary analyses, we matched the pretest and posttest responses of 444 students in the Healthy Respect class (70% of responses) and of 149 students in the comparison group (65% of responses). We compare the responses of the two groups at pretest and posttest using cross-tabulation.

IMAGES FROM CLASSES



STUDENT VOICES

SERVING STUDENTS AT RISK

"My block is not the best block in the world. It is not the worst, but I live close to things. . . . where Angel got shot is right down the block I don't want to live here any more; it is scary." (Female student)

"[In my neighborhood] People sell illegal things. People sell their body." (Male student)

"I seen somebody get shot; I seen somebody get stabbed. This woman on my block got raped by this guy who lives in her building." (Female student)

"[My grandmother] She drinks a lot. So when she is sober, that is when she can teach me stuff, but when she is not, that is when she is crazy and she is not influencing me at all." (Female student)

"[When teenagers] fail the grade more than one time, that make them want to do drugs . . . They want to smoke this stuff, drink this stuff. Like they trying to make something out of their self, but school keeps holding them back." (Male student)

STUDENTS HAVE MAINSTREAM LIFE GOALS

"A car, a job, a house" (Male student)

"[To be] a father" (Male student)

"Money, a job, a good education" (Female student)

"A career, a family" (Female student)

"To go to college, pursue a career and take good care of my son" (Female student)

"To have a better life" (Female student)

"Kids, job, money" (Male student)

"Power" (Male student)

"Honesty, respect" (Male student)

OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVEMENT

"If you weak-minded and you learning bad stuff in school and then it have a bad influence on you." (Female student)

"Some people are hard-headed; so they have to do it the hard way." (Male student)

"Some people are stronger than other people." (Male student)

"You get a little misguided because everybody else is doing all this wrong stuff and you think there is nothing wrong with it, and you might join in with all that." (Female student)

WHAT STUDENTS LEARNED FROM THE PROGRAM

"Every long-term goal should be set with short-term goals before." (Female student)

"It showed us to plan it out more – consequences – more precisely." (Female student)

"Abstinence is the safest way to make sure you don't get any STDs that ruin your life." (Male student)

"They taught us how you might have a baby, and your whole life will be messed up at a young age." (Male student)

"They try to teach you about things you really, really need in life." (Male student)

FINDINGS

Students served by the HRYDP told numerous stories of violence, incarceration, poverty, and addiction experienced by their friends, neighbors, family members and occasionally, themselves. Despite the difficulties around them, most of the students, both male and female, reported very mainstream goals: education, a good job, a family. While the students were fairly unified in their goals, they also expressed a lot of concern that obstacles could prevent them from reaching those goals. Many of these obstacles were framed as external, such as family and school pressures.

The students tended to frame the ability to overcome obstacles as a passive character trait, – one that someone either had or did not have – and reported a low sense of personal efficacy – the belief in one's ability to control one's own life, which is predictive of many bad outcomes including poor health and low educational attainment. Thus, HRYDP students reported productive goals but appeared not to have all of the skills needed to overcome barriers and achieve these goals.

One of the aspects of the HRYDP that students reported liking best was the focus on how their actions were likely to affect them both emotionally and in terms of their long-term goals.

They said the class helped them to figure out how their actions now were likely to affect them in the future. In addition, they liked the emphasis on how their actions might affect the perceptions and behaviors of others. Students also reported learning about abstinence and STDs.

The overwhelming sense from the focus groups was that the class had been a positive experience for the students. They reported getting real information about topics that were important to their lives right now. The students also seemed to relate very well to the HRYDP teachers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ABSTINENCE PROGRAMS

Students reported connecting to the program's message of setting and pursuing life goals and of protecting oneself from STDs and out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FOR 2006-2007 PROGRAM EVALUATION

The preliminary results from fall and winter 2006 compare the pretest and posttest results for the Healthy Respect group (444 students) with a comparison group (149 students) of students from the same schools.

	Healthy Respect Pretest	Healthy Respect Posttest	Comparison Group Pretest	Comparison Group Posttest	Chi-Sq.	Prob.
Strongly agree that abstinence always prevents pregnancy.	53.81%	80.52%	55.00%	52.90%	96.00	0.000
Strongly agree that abstinence always prevents STDs.	49.18%	75.35%	49.29%	48.57%	88.95	0.000
Strongly disagree that it is ok for teens to have sex as long as they are using birth control.	28.86%	34.92%	20.71%	18.44%	34.28	0.000
Will definitely remain abstinent until marriage.	19.71%	26.68%	28.15%	16.55%	17.55	0.008