

Paper Session E3: Risky Behaviors of Adolescents and Young Adults: Assessment and Intervention

A Longitudinal Evaluation of an Evidence-Based Intervention to Reduce Risky Behaviors and Promote Abstinence and Health in Teenagers: Implications for Health Policy

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Purpose: Newark teenagers exhibit high rates of risky behaviors including sexual activity contributing to STD's/HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy and drug/alcohol use which affect health. This presentation describes an evidence-based intervention (Newark Best Friends/Best Men) which reduces risky behaviors, promotes abstinence behaviors and health in teenagers and has implications for local and national health policy.

Theoretical Framework: Bandura's Social Learning and Piaget's theories guided the intervention on sexuality discussions, mentoring/role modeling, health/fitness classes, cultural activities, community service and recognition.

Methods: Quasi-experimental design, with pre-tests and post-tests of students in four intervention and five comparison schools over four years. Sample was high-risk, economically disadvantaged, and primarily African American adolescent girls and boys. For post-tests, 1,618 intervention and 970 comparison students participated.

Measures: AFL Core Baseline/Follow-up and Demographic Questionnaires.

Analyses: Pearson Chi Square and Mann Whitney U Tests. Level of significance was .05.

Results: More intervention participants made plans work, had self confidence, and bright future. Post-test II- More intervention than comparison participants said: no to wrong activities ($p=.003$); stayed away from trouble ($p=.007$); important to remain abstinent ($p<.001$) and future spouse to remain abstinent ($p<.001$); abstinence is certain way to avoid pregnancy/STD's/health problems ($p=.047$). More comparison than intervention participants reported: drinking ($p<.001$); having friends that drink ($p<.001$); used marijuana/drugs ($p=.001$). Findings were similar for post-test III and IV. Post-test III-More intervention participants remained abstinent ($p<.001$), believed future spouse should remain abstinent ($p<.001$). More comparison participants had friends who drink ($p<.001$), tried marijuana/drugs ($p<.001$). Post-test IV-Intervention participants continued remaining abstinent ($p=.001$)/future spouse should remain abstinent ($p=.003$). Comparison participants had friends who drink ($p=.001$) and tried marijuana/drugs ($p<.001$).

Conclusions and Implications: Findings indicated that the intervention program was effective in reducing risky behaviors like drug/alcohol use and promoting abstinence attitudes and behaviors among youth over four years. Findings have implications for local and national health policy for teenagers and educational programs in school settings.