

Pre- and Post-Evaluation of Decisions for Life: An Abstinence-Based Youth Program in San Antonio, Texas

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Introduction

Decisions For Life (DFL) is a fourth year abstinence-based program in San Antonio, Texas, with a target population of impoverished 11 to 14 year old Latino middle school students (partnering school) and their families. The DFL program focuses on positive youth development, emphasizing the fostering of resilience, personal development, self-efficacy, positive identity, pro-social behaviors and family involvement. DFL contends that increasing the developmental assets of youth yields protective factors that help them avoid risk-taking behavior, including premature involvement in sexual activity. One program objective, for example, is to increase the percent of program students who report intent to remain abstinent from premarital sex by 10% each year. But is the program working? This presentation reports the third year pre- and post-intervention results. If the program is working, student participants' developmental assets should increase over the course of the program and reflect an increase in the protective factors that assist in avoiding risk-taking behaviors.

Methods

A quasi-experimental design with a comparative (control) middle school was utilized. Pre- and post-intervention questionnaires using items from the AFL Prevention Program Core Baseline Questionnaire and the Developmental Assets and Abstinence Behavioral Inventory (DAABI) were developed. Post-intervention questionnaires were implemented at the end of the program (approximately five months from start of program). From these surveys, indices representing composite dimensions of students' attitudes and perceptions of their developmental assets (family rules, their ability to have discussions with their parent(s)/guardian(s) about risky behaviors for teens (like having sex), perceptions of their self-control, self-esteem, academic confidence, academic ability, communication skills, values, ethnic identity and abstinence) were created for comparative analyses. Differences in means and multiple regressions were utilized.

This presentation reports overall findings and the multiple regression results for one scale (SEXUAL VALUESINDEX) for demonstration purposes. This model represents all students that participated in both pre- and post-intervention surveys. In this index, respondents assessed the extent that they agreed or disagreed with ten statements (see Table 1). Independent variables include respondent's pre-intervention scores on sexual values index, family structure/living arrangement (does respondent live with mother only,

TABLE 1: SEXUAL VALUES INDEX

Variable Label	Question
MSEX	(4.1) it is best to wait until marriage to have sex;
SEXPRESS	(4.2) it is wrong to pressure someone into having sex;
FTPREGNANT	(4.3) a girl can get pregnant the first time she has sex;
SRIGHT	(4.4) you always have the right to say "NO" to having sex;
SEXRISK	(4.5) having sex is a high-risk behavior for young people;
ADMIRE	(4.6) I admire teens who remain abstinent (do not have sex) until marriage;
WRONG	(4.7) I believe it is wrong to have sex before marriage;
FADMIRE	(4.8) my friends admire teens who remain abstinent;
PREFERENCE	(4.9) I prefer boyfriends/girlfriends who do not pressure me to have sex;
NOSEX.	(4.10) it is important to me not have sex until marriage.

father only, other adult relatives, both parents), partnering school (dichotomized) and sex.

Hypothetically, if the program is operating as expected, partnering school participants should demonstrate increases in from their pre- to post-intervention averages, like sexual values, and significant increases over control group students.

Results

Analyses reveal only modest program impacts among partnering school participants and no overall differences in comparative results in the aggregate between the partnering and control school participants. Difference in means tests, for example, found partnering school students increased in their abilities to discuss with parents risk behavior but decreased in their overall communication abilities in pre- to post-comparisons.

On the other hand, comparing males and females at the partnering school on the ten pre- and post-indices reveals that males exhibited higher averages in their perceptions of academic ability after the program (18.47 average) compared to their female counterparts (16.38 average; t-test prob.=.000). In contrast, females at the partner school had a higher sexual values index average (32.2) than their male counterparts (30.2; t-test prob.=.04) after the program. Overall, partnering school males increased their average index scores in eight of the pre- and post-scale indices and stayed the same in one index average. Female counterparts increased their averages in only two of ten pre- and post-indices.

Regression analysis for post-intervention sexual values index score are revealing. First, the sexual value scores ranged from 10 to 40, with higher values indicating conservative views about sexual behavior (mean score= 30.58 ($SD = 6.299$); Cronbach's alpha= .887). Overall, 44% of the variation (Adj-R-Square) of the respondent's post-intervention sexual values can be explained. In this model, the respondent's pre-intervention sexual values index score is the principal contributor (beta=.62) followed by school (Partnering School), family structure/living arrangement and the respondent's sex. Here, respondents' pre-intervention sexual values (index) score is having 9.5 times the relative influence over the next highest standardized regression coefficient, school (beta=.21). While multicollinearity diagnostics are within acceptable tolerance, the bivariate correlation between pre- and post-sexual values indices is strong (.60). This finding suggests that respondents with high scores on the pre-intervention sexual values index also had high post-intervention sexual values. Clearly, the predicted value of the dependent variable in this model is driven by the pre-intervention sexual values index. Moreover, the intervention curriculum also had a positive impact (.21 standard units). In addition, the respondent's sex (dichotomized 1=female) and family structure/living arrangements, while smaller in overall impact, provide important contextual information. In sum, the regression findings suggest small effects for the DFL curriculum among respondents who completed both the pre- and post-intervention surveys.

Discussion

Because the pre- and post-data are not representative samples of the partnering or the control schools, an examination of the numeric increases on the ten indices created reveals that program school participants increased in five of ten abstinence values and attitudes from pre- to post-examinations. In contrast, numerically, control students also increased in seven of the ten index averages.

Males at the partnering school increased in their average index scores in eight of the ten pre- and post-scale indices and stayed the same in one additional index average. Females at the partnering school increased in only two of the ten pre- and post-indices.

Regression analyses demonstrate small DFL affects at the partnering school on post-sexual values (SEXUAL VALUESINDEX2). These analyses also point to positive and differential impacts for females over the course of the DFL program year. Moreover, respondents' pre-sexual values had the largest impact on post-sexual values. Students with strong pre-intervention sexual values over the course of the program maintained strong post-intervention sexual values and being in the DFL program increased these post-values.

Implications

Within the DFL curriculum, students with high pre-intervention sexual values maintained and increased these same values over the period of the intervention. Seemingly, a single curriculum over simplifies the "dosage" effect required to attain desired changes. In addition, family structure and context calls attention to "holistic" approaches rather than one-dimensional approaches. Additional comparative year analyses are required to examine changes over time, especially among returning students.

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