

EVALUATION OF THE ONE MINDONE MESSAGE PROGRAM: A LEADERSHIP ABSTINENCE PROGRAM TARGETING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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Introduction

Although it is promising that teenage pregnancy in the District (as in many other jurisdictions) is decreasing, the 2005 District teenage pregnancy rate of 64.4 pregnancies per 1,000 females between the ages of 15 and 19 years shows that far too many young people are having sex. As such, the District of Columbia still has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy rates in the country. In addition, Washington DC Youth are at a high risk for premature sexual activity and associated risks. In 2005, the most current year for which the Behavioral Risk Survey was conducted, as many as 48% of young people in the District of Columbia had initiated sex, and 11.1% of DC youth reported having their first sexual encounter before age 13 years. The proportion of District of Columbia youth initiating sex before age 13 was twice as high as the national average of 5.8%. In the same year, 16% of young people reported having at least four life time partners and 13.4% reported using alcohol or drugs before sexual intercourse. In 2005, as many as 11.2% of young people in Washington DC reported experience with dating violence.

For the past four years, the National Organization of Concerned Black Men has implemented the One Mind ...One Message Project, an abstinence program that combines youth education on abstinence with parenting workshops, leadership development and referrals to relevant social services. The project targets elementary and middle school youth in wards 5, 6, 7, and 8 in the District of Columbia. In school year 2007/2008, Concerned Black Men worked with 8 elementary and middle schools in these Wards. The project uses the WAIT Training and the Facts and Friends curricula to implement a series of 13 educational sessions. The sessions seek not only to increase knowledge on the dangers of premarital sex but also equip students with the skills, attitudes and support they need to maintain an abstinent lifestyle. The project's evaluation seeks to assess changes in knowledge and attitudes among participating students.

Methods

A total of 168 students participated in the program during the 2007-2008 school year. A quasi-experimental group strategy comprising of a pre & post test survey as well as a 10 month follow up for the intervention group is used for the evaluation. . Pre and Post test surveys also are used to assess parental goals. A youth comparison group recruited from young people attending similar schools also is included. The project's evaluation approach seeks to assess changes in the following constructs :i) knowledge of the consequences of premarital sex; ii) commitment to remaining abstinent; iii) ability to resist sexually related peer pressure; iv) parental discussion on abstinence and other sexual matters; and v) parents' knowledge on the consequences of premature sexual activity. Self administered surveys are used for parents and students. The youth survey includes sections on the following domains: family characteristics; youth demographics; peer pressure resistance; commitment to abstinence; attitudes towards premarital sex; adult support networks; and substance use. The parent surveys included questions on parent-child communication; youth monitoring and supervision;

and knowledge about teen sexuality. Data analysis comprises of both bivariate and multivariate techniques to compare changes within subject and group. The research was approved by the New England IRB.

Results

Fifty nine percent of the 168 students increased their perceived knowledge on the consequences of premarital sex, indicating statistically significant ($p=.038$) change in knowledge between pre and post tests. There was a statistically significant ($p=.027$) difference in the proportion of students committing to remaining abstinent between the pre and post testing time points. By the end of the school year as many as 62.8% of participating students had committed to abstinence and 22.2% of these maintained this commitment at the 10 month follow up. At post test, 77.3% of participants reported an increase in their ability to resist sexually related peer pressure. This gain was significant ($p=.013$). Nearly 10% of students still reported a high level of peer resistance skills at the 10 month follow up. Linear regression analysis showed that having friends who admire teens that do not have sex was a significant predictor ($p=.027$) of the participant's ability to resist peer pressure. Ability to resist peer pressure and knowledge of the consequences of premarital sex were significantly correlated ($p=.031$). The data also showed that having strict rules to monitor student whereabouts was significantly associated with commitment to remain abstinent ($p=.012$).

Discussion

The above indicates that the model used by the One MindOne Message Project is effective in changing knowledge of the consequences of sex and commitment to sexual abstinence especially in the short run. The organization will include assessment of behavior changes in its fifth year evaluation strategy. Additional analyses also are being conducted to examine other factors associated with the above outlined effects. CBM also is in the process of analyzing data from the parents.

Implication

The above findings underscore the need to reinforce information on the consequences of premarital sex. The findings also show that a well implemented curriculum can change intermediate outcomes related to sexual abstinence. Although, the leadership component was not specifically evaluated, the overall improvements seem to suggest that a combination of education sessions and leadership development can go along way in equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to maintain an abstinent life style.

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