

ABSTRACT

Helping Our Parents to be Educators (HOPE) PROJECT

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Introduction

The HOPE Project utilizes a parent-focused and parent-driven approach. The project is divided into two phases. During its initial phase, a diverse group of parents were recruited and tasked with developing a curriculum to increase the capacity of parents to address sexual and other risky behaviors with their young adolescents, ages 10-14. The Parent Forum successfully designed and prepared a curriculum during Year 1 of the project. The second phase of the project involves the recruitment and training of new parents using the curriculum. The recruitment and training of new parents is done by parents including original members of the Parent Forum and other parents who have completed the training. The HOPE Project just completed its fourth year.

Four questions are raised about the influence of the program on participating parents and their children between the ages of 10 and 14.

1. Do participating parents feel empowered and motivated to discuss sexual and other risky behaviors with their children?
2. Do participating parents believe they have efficacy in communicating with their children about sexual and other risky behaviors?
3. Do participating parents have a greater sense of personal efficacy, communicate effectively with their children, have adequate social supports, have positive attitudes regarding their child and communicate with their child about difficult but important topics?
4. Do youth whose families participate in the model program express attitudes supportive of abstinence, greater knowledge about the risks of early sexual activity and fewer risky behaviors?

Methods

The evaluation of phase two of the project consists of both process and outcome assessments. The process evaluation includes an analysis of recruitment and retention of parent participants, an examination of the program implementation process and an assessment of the extent to which the program adheres to the fidelity of the original program development.

The outcome evaluation includes both qualitative and quantitative elements. An exit interview is conducted with all parent participants and their child or children who are in the target age range, 10-14 years of age. Parents are asked about their experience with the program as well their perceptions about the influence participation has had on their parenting and family life. Youth are asked if their parents' participation has changed how their parent relates to them. The evaluation procedures and the protection of human subjects for the HOPE Project are reviewed and have been approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Lourdes Hospital and Binghamton University.

The qualitative outcome assessment is being conducted using a pre-test/post-test, comparison group design. As with new participants, the recruitment of comparison families is the responsibility of members of the Parent Forum and project staff. The same procedures for obtaining participants are used for comparison parents and youth.

Parents complete an inventory that measures family communication, social support, self-efficacy, parental empowerment, attitudes toward child, and communication with child. Youth in the targeted age range complete the Adolescent Family Life Prevention Programs Core Evaluation Inventories. In addition, both parents and their children in the target age range of 10-14 years of age are interviewed

at the end of the program. Parents are asked about their views about the program and the effect of participating in the program. Youth are asked about whether they had noticed changes in their parents as a result of their participation in the program.

Results

Six hypotheses are examined. Strong support was found for four of the hypotheses, mixed support was found for two hypotheses, and no support was found for the one remaining proposition. The proposition that family communication would improve among participants was supported. Statistically significant improvement in one objective measure of family communication was observed (prob.=.008). When interviewed, many participating parents reported in improved communication. Their children in the target age range also reported in that communication with their parents had improved.

Another goal of the program was to reduce social isolation and increase social support for parents. About half of the parents reported having had contact with other participants outside the program. In contrast, no support was found that the HOPE Project influenced parents' perceptions of self efficacy regarding their abilities to accomplish things and to be a success (prob.= .984 & .179 for general and social, respectively).

Parental empowerment is at the heart of the HOPE program. The goal of the program is to help parents engage in their roles as parents and to become active agents in their education of their children regarding sex and other risky behaviors. Both quantitative and qualitative assessments provided support that the program is successful in enhancing parental empowerment. Knowledge about Parental Empowered was shown to improve after completion of the program (prob.= .001).

Participating parents will report more positive attitudes toward their child after their involvement in the HOPE program. Statistically significant improvements were observed among participants for an objective measure of parents' attitudes toward their children (prob.=.009). Parents reported that they had become more aware of their children and what they were going through.

Discussion

The most significant challenges in the coming years of funding involve increasing the number of participants who complete both the baseline and follow-up assessments and the recruitment and testing of controls. With regards to the first issue, part of the problem is an evaluation personnel problem. Data collectors are needed for a short period just as the program is beginning and finishing. Hopefully, by increasing the number of individuals who are available to collect information, we can assure greater participation in the evaluation.

Implications

Most programs to prevent teenage pregnancy focus prevention efforts on adolescents, yet programs that seek to strengthen parents influence on their children which will in turn reduce their risks of pregnancy have show promise. This particular project takes this latter strategy a step further by vesting responsibility for the development and delivery of parenting training with parents themselves. The evaluation should provide information for the field of adolescent health about the viability of such an approach.

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