

The Role of Abstinence Education in Schools

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Introduction and description of the program

MADAME Butterfly is a five-year demonstration project designed to reduce teen pregnancy in girls located in selected Mississippi Delta schools through the implementation of an abstinence education program. The project intervention is given in three rural Mississippi Delta communities: Tallahatchie, Quitman, and Panola counties. Within those counties, three school districts were selected for the project: West Tallahatchie, Quitman County, and North Panola. The main aspect of the project is that girls receive an abstinence based education from the *Girls Circle Curriculum*. Three abstinence educators provided 12-1hour dosages of the curriculum during the spring semester (January-May) to 158 girls in the three school districts. One hundred and five girls are used in a comparison group from Tunica School District. There is one objective for the project related to the girls in grades 7th through 9th. By the end of the semester, 90% of 7th, 8th, and 9th grade participants will accept abstinence until marriage through having knowledge of high risk factors that leads to pregnancy, using refusal skills, communicating with their parents and developing protective factors such as self-efficacy, future orientation, and participating in extra-curricula activities as measured by a pretest and a posttest.

Method

A quasi-experimental pretest/posttest comparison group design is used. One hundred fifty eight girls in grades 7 through 9 participate in the quasi-experimental group and 105 girls participate in the comparison group. The girls in the quasi-experimental and comparison group were selected by the school administrators or teachers at their schools based upon being in an identified high risk category such as ethnicity (person of color), socioeconomic status (at or below the poverty level), academic failure in at least one grade level, or being at-risk for teen pregnancy as perceived by the school personnel. The girls, who participate in the quasi experimental group, received 12-1 hour dosages of the *Girls Circle Curriculum* for one semester (January-May). The abstinence education counselors administer two surveys prior to the intervention (one related to the *Girls Circle Curriculum* and the other is the Core Instrument) and a posttest (same as pretest) at 5 months and again at 12 months with plans to do the same at 24 months. The pretest/posttest administered to both groups test their attitudes on keys areas thought to lead the girls to abstinence such as having knowledge of high risk factors that lead to pregnancy, using of refusal skills, communicating with parents, and developing protective factors such as self-efficacy, future orientation, and participating in extra-curricula activities.

The data collected on the pretest and posttest is entered and analyzed in the SPSS program. The pretest and posttest results, for each girl, in the quasi-experimental group were initially compared to get baseline data at 5 months and posttest done again 12 months and again at 24 months. The results, from the quasi-experimental group are

compared to the same data collected from the comparison group. The SPSS program was also used to identify data such as race, age, grade, and school attended given by all of the girls in the quasi-experimental and the comparison group. The Western Institutional Review Board approved the MADAME Butterfly program in January 2009.

Results

Hypothesis: There is no difference between the quasi-experimental and the comparison group.

Comparing the pretests with the posttests for the quasi-experimental group demonstrate that there were significant differences in attitudes towards abstinence, knowledge of high risk factors that lead to pregnancy, use of skills, communication with parents and protective factors (self-efficacy, future orientation, and participating in extra-curricula activities), as measured by the pre/post test surveys at the $p \leq .05$ level using an Independent T test for the girls in grades 8 and 9. There were no differences from pretest to posttest for the girls in the 7th grade quasi-experimental group.

There were no significant differences between the quasi-experimental group and the comparison group at the $p \leq .05$ on the same key areas: attitudes towards abstinence, knowledge of high risk factors that led to pregnancy, use of refusal skills, communication with parents and protective factors such as self-efficacy, future orientation, and participating in extra-curricula activities in either 7th, 8th, or 9th grade.

Discussion

The data will be presented for girls by grade levels 7th, 8th, and 9th. The reason for this is that the baseline data is gathered for the quasi-experimental and comparison group in the 7th grade. Also based on the results, improvements in the key areas reviewed are not shown until 8th or 9th grade.

One explanation for there being no difference between the quasi-experimental group and the comparison group is that about 55% of the girls in the comparison group stated that they had abstinence education. It is assumed by the project evaluator that the girls in the comparison group think they had abstinence education by participating in the comparison group. The project evaluator has discussed this information with the project director and the project director has verified with the school personnel where the comparison group is located that the girls have not had any abstinence education. It should be noted that Tunica County where the comparison group is located is rated number one for teen pregnancy during the year 2006.

Problems

There appears to be threats to the interval validity that were not controlled for in the project that should be identified and controlled for in the future. What issues are present to make the comparison group think that they had abstinence education?