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Research article

Examining the utility of a train-the-trainer model for dissemination of sexual violence prevention in schools



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ABSTRACT

Rates of childhood sexual abuse are unacceptably high, with potentially long-lasting consequences for those who have been victimized. Currently, there are a number of sexual violence prevention programs that have been developed to lower rates of victimization, increase awareness, and connect victims with resources. Within this area of research, there has been less focus on effective methods of program dissemination. For example, school-based sexual violence prevention programs have had positive outcomes; however, little is known about how these programs are disseminated. The train-the-trainer model of dissemination utilizes master trainers to equip others to implement programs, thereby allowing more adults to teach and subsequently more children to receive the program. This study used survey data from teachers and other school personnel ($n = 127$) to analyze the utility of a train-the-trainer model of dissemination for a sexual violence prevention program in the state of Hawai'i. Through responses of people who were trained to implement the program (59.8% of whom did implement), aspects of the training, the program itself, and factors affecting whether a person implemented the program were explored. Results suggest that time spent in training, job position, and time in that position predicted whether a person trained to implement the sexual violence prevention program followed through with teaching the program to students. Additionally, 54.7% of people who did implement the program had at least one student disclose sexual violence to them, indicating the importance of sexual violence prevention programming and dissemination of these programs.

1. Introduction

Sexual violence has been defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as completed or attempted penetration of a victim, unwanted sexual contact, or unwanted non-contact sexual experiences through force, coercion, or misuse of authority (CDC, 2016). Sexual violence victimization affects people of all ages; but prevalence rates are difficult to determine, especially among children for whom underreporting is particularly an issue. Nonetheless, previous research has found that at least 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 20 boys have experienced some form of sexual victimization in their lives before the age of 17 (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2014). For children and teens who are sexually victimized, consequences can be severe and long lasting, and include posttraumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, attention deficit disorder, panic disorder, cardiovascular problems, substance abuse, and conduct disorder (Draper et al., 2008; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013). Sexual violence victimization at any age can

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increase chances of mental health consequences, but these chances are heightened if the victimization occurs during childhood. For example, adults who experienced childhood sexual violence were found to be more likely to exhibit suicidal behaviors and were more susceptible to further sexual violence (Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Smailes, 1999; Devries et al., 2014; Dube et al., 2005; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

Part of the reason for elevated and continuing health and mental health consequences is that many children who have experienced sexual abuse do not disclose the abuse. A review of the literature found that, in most studies, less than half of the participants who were victims of childhood sexual abuse disclosed during childhood, if ever (McElvaney, 2015). Reasons for not disclosing include a lack of understanding of the situation, lack of opportunity to disclose, being unsure of who they can trust, and/or shame or fear associated with the abuse (Alaggia, 2010; Schaeffer, Leventhal, & Asnes, 2011). Disclosure can be facilitated if discussions of abuse occur in a safe place (e.g., support group) or if a child participates in a school-based prevention program (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995; Schaeffer et al., 2011). In a review of programs, Topping and Barron (2009) found that school-based sexual violence prevention programs increased the likelihood of disclosure in addition to preventing sexual violence.

Although evaluations of school-based programs have yielded promising results, questions remain as to the best way to disseminate these programs more broadly. As discussed below, programs are often implemented in schools, but there is limited information on who is presenting program content, as well as how presenters are trained. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to examine the efficacy of a specific sexual violence prevention program, but to examine the utility of using a train-the-trainer model to disseminate this programming in schools. We are especially interested in whether teachers and other school personnel can be trained to deliver the sensitive material associated with sexual violence prevention, and after the training, what factors predict whether they do, in fact, teach the topic to their students.

1.1. Sexual violence prevention programs by age group

To start, it is helpful to provide some background of the types of sexual violence prevention programs that have been implemented. Existing programs have targeted children as young as kindergarten age, all the way up through high school and a review of the literature by Fryda and Hulme (2015) found that use of role play, films, and group discussions were most often utilized across different sexual violence prevention programs. However, content and materials do vary by program and targeted age group. For example, the “Play it Safe” program has been implemented with younger children and utilizes videos and dolls to help children recognize, respond to, and report situations that are abusive while also emphasizing that the child is never to blame for any abuse (Blakey & Thigpen, 2015). For kindergarteners, there is also the “Good Touch—Bad Touch” program which includes film, role plays with dolls, interactive games, songs, and stories and has been found to increase knowledge and skills for preventing victimization at both three-week and seven-week follow-up (Harvey, Forehand, Brown, & Holmes, 1988). Within the existing programming, there is also an emphasis on encouraging disclosure so that children receive the support they need to stop the abuse and recover from these experiences (Kenny et al., 2008; Topping & Barron, 2009; Tutty, 1997).

For slightly older students, programs like “Safe Touches” have been found to improve 2nd and 3rd grade students’ knowledge of inappropriate touch through a brief 50-min workshop and take-home workbook (Pulido et al., 2015). Another program for elementary school aged children, called “Red Flag, Green Flag People,” has been found to have long term impacts on students through retained knowledge and intent to report inappropriate touching up to two years after the program was implemented (Wood & Archbold, 2014). Recognition of boundaries between a child’s body and other people is a focus of most programming for this age group.

Once students reach later developmental ages, many of the sexual violence prevention programming shifts to include or solely focus on dating violence, which becomes a risk starting in early adolescence and continues throughout teenage years. For example, the “Shifting Boundaries” program educates junior high school students on the laws regarding dating violence and sexual harassment as well as teaching students about healthy relationships, and was successful at reducing sexual violence victimization in 6th and 7th grade students in a randomized, longitudinal study (Taylor, Mumford, & Stein, 2015; Taylor, Stein, Mumford, & Woods, 2013).

For high school students, a number of programs have been developed that either specifically address sexual violence or address multiple risk factors for this age group, including sexual violence. “Safe Dates” is a well-established dating violence prevention program that can lower levels of physical, sexual, and psychological violence within teenage dating relationships while also increasing understanding of dating violence norms, gender stereotypes, and knowledge of services available (Foshee et al., 1998, 2004). “The Fourth R” intervention focuses on teaching high school students about healthy relationships, arguing that relationships are just as important and can be taught in schools in a similar way to the other school subjects making relationships the fourth R along with reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic (Crooks, Wolfe, Hughes, Jaffe, & Chiodo, 2008). This program includes a total of 21 lessons that focus on interconnected risk factors for high school students: violence, substance use, and unsafe sex. Through this program, high school students have been found to have improved abilities to identify dating abuse and to develop relevant social skills. Another method that has been used in high schools is to target specific populations of students in order to disseminate prevention programming. “Coaching Boys into Men” is a dating violence prevention program that utilizes coaches to implement perpetration prevention lessons with male athletes and has been found to lower rates of dating violence perpetration and abusive attitudes (Miller et al., 2012).

1.2. Sexual violence prevention in the schools: Teachers as implementers

In addition to the different content being presented to each age group, it is also important to determine who is delivering this content. For prevention programs targeting younger students, prevention educators from outside agencies (e.g., rape crisis

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