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Health Rocks! Program: The Association of Youth Engagement with Program Outcomes

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"Health Rocks! Program: The Association of Youth Engagement with Program Outcomes"

Sarah Taylor, Yan Xia, Anh Do, Shen Qin, and Maria Rosario de Guzman



Outline

- Concern of youth substance use
- Health Rocks! Program
- Evidence-Based Youth Programming
- Purpose
- Sample Description
- Evaluation Design
- Findings
- Implications





Youth Substance Use

Youth substance use is a public health concern in the U.S (CDC, 2014)

- 41% smoked tobacco

- 66% used alcohol

- 41% smoked marijuana

Detrimental impacts of youth substance use

- More likely to develop nicotine dependence (Breslau & Peterson, 1996)

- Drinking & driving (Miller et al., 2007)

- Risky sexual behaviors (Miller et al., 2007)

- Mental health problems (Gonzalez et al., 2012)



Health Rocks! Program

- National 4-H curriculum
- Developed to promote positive knowledge & attitudes toward substance-related risky behaviors.
- Aims to reduce youth risk behaviors by promoting healthy decision-making skills, stress coping, and socio-emotional skills
- Adopted into hundreds of after-school programs & camps in 14 states
- Funded by 4-H National Council



**Health
Rocks!**®



Evidence-Based Youth Programming

- Successfully aids in development of positive behaviors among youth
- Previous research documented key factors of successful programs:
 - Engaging activities & lessons
 - Incorporate youth interests & hobbies
 - Foster bond between youth and program adults





Evidence-Based Youth Programming

- However, research hasn't examined how youths' program engagement is associated with their program outcomes.



Purpose

- Address knowledge gap
 - To what extent are youth reports of their program engagement associated with program outcomes?





Sample Description

- 103,774 participants from 13 states completed the program
- 27,774 completed evaluation surveys
- We took a random 10% sample for this analysis (2,792 participants)
 - 44.8% boys
 - Majority ranged in age between 10-15
 - Ethnically & racial diverse
 - 50% rural, 25% suburban, 20% urban



Evaluation Design

- Survey consisted of 13 items measuring program outcomes of:
 - **Knowledge of substance use consequences**
 - **Coping skills**
 - **Assets related to healthy decision-making**
- Additional survey 4 items measured program engagement:
 - **“The training was interesting”**
 - **“The staff members were friendly”**
 - **“I learned a lot during the training”**
 - **“I actively participated in training activities”**



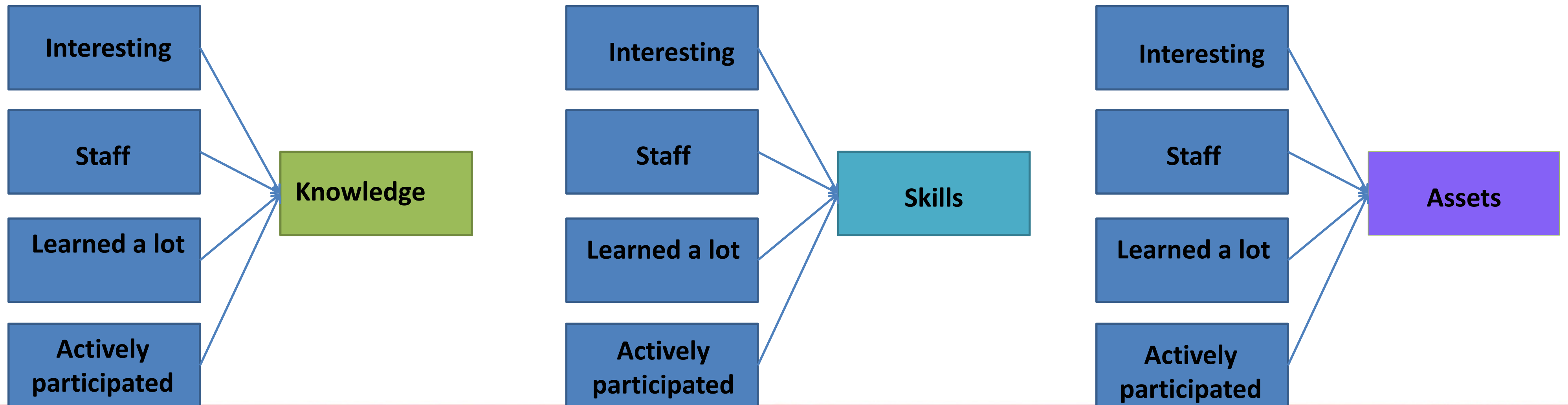
Findings

- First, we assessed whether participants reported increased knowledge, skills, and assets after completing Health Rocks!
- MANCOVA analysis
- Health Rocks! significantly impacts program outcomes of knowledge ($p < .001$), skills ($p < .001$), and assets ($p < .01$), even when controlling for participant age.



Findings

Next, binary logistic regression analyses were used to predict participants' outcomes of knowledge, skills, and assets using 4 program engagement items





Findings - Knowledge

- Model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 23.318, p < .000$

Predictor	β	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio
Knowledge						
Training was interesting	.120	.772	.024	1	.876	1.128
Staff were friendly	1.541	.667	5.331	1	.021*	4.670
Learned a lot	.585	.721	.658	1	.417	1.795
Actively participated	1.187	.654	3.293	1	.070	3.276
Constant	1.036	.511	4.119	1	.042*	2.819

- Participants who reported staff were friendly – 82% more likely to report knowledge after program



Findings - Skills

- Model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 55.959, p < .000$

Predictor Skills	β	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio
Training was interesting	2.412	.563	18.391	1	.000***	11.161
Staff were friendly	1.475	.600	6.037	1	.014*	4.369
Learned a lot	.203	.618	.108	1	.743	1.225
Actively participated	.132	.660	.040	1	.841	1.141
Constant	.455	.450	1.020	1	.312	1.575

- Participants who reported training was interesting – 92% more likely to report skills after program
- Participants who reported staff were friendly – 81% more likely to report skills after program



Findings - Assets

- Model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 46.382, p < .000$

Predictor	β	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio
Assets						
Training was interesting	1.075	.769	1.957	1	.162	2.931
Staff were friendly	2.052	.704	8.487	1	.004**	7.783
Learned a lot	.110	.795	.019	1	.890	1.116
Actively participated	1.479	.725	4.163	1	.041*	4.388
Constant	.540	.460	1.378	1	.240	1.715

- Participants who reported staff were friendly – 89% more likely to report assets after program
- Participants who reported they actively participated – 81% more likely to report assets after program



Findings

- Overall, youths' engagement was associated with their program outcomes.
- Big take-away: Youth who viewed staff as friendly were more likely to report knowledge, skills, and assets after program





Findings

Youth perspectives that support these findings:

“I really liked how the staff were excited to train us!”

“I am thankful that Mrs. O. comes to teach us not to do drugs!”

“Having all the hands on projects really got the point across.”

“I loved making the commercial to show why drugs are bad.”



Implications

- Future youth programs should emphasize the role of adult leaders and staff.
- Include staff in programs that fully engage youth
- Staff member training prior to the program should detail the importance of staff-youth relationships
 - Emphasize professionalism & empathy
- Ask yourself: “Are we employing staff that are excited about both the program and interacting with youths?”



Implications

- Youth benefit more from a program when they are actively engaged.
- Include activities that youth find both fun and meaningful
- Program curriculum development should emphasize engagement
- Ask yourself: “What specific methods are we using to engage youths? Have these methods been found enjoyable by youths in the past?”





Implications

- Include rigorous evaluation with youth programs
- Don't only measure objective outcomes, but also measure youths' subjective perceptions of their experiences
- Investigate what aspects of programs youth appreciate
- Incorporate qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions)



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Thank you!
Questions?

