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
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.
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, $\chi^2(4) = 23.318$, $p < .000$

<table>
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<th>$\beta$</th>
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<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$p$</th>
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- Participants who reported staff were friendly – 82% more likely to report knowledge after program
Findings - Skills

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

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

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• 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
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)
References


Thank you!
Questions?