Child Abuse & Neglect 38 (2014) 677–686

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Child Abuse & Neglect

Youth exposure to violence prevention programs in a national sample☆

David Finkelhor[a,*], Jennifer Vanderminden[a], Heather Turner[a], Anne Shattuck[a], Sherry Hamby[b]

[a] Crimes Against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, USA
[b] Sewanee the University of the South, Sewanee, TN, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 10 October 2013
Received in revised form 17 January 2014
Accepted 21 January 2014
Available online 12 March 2014

Keywords:
Bullying
Crime
Victimization
Sexual assault
Dating violence

ABSTRACT

This paper assesses how many children and youth have had exposure to programs aimed at preventing various kinds of violence perpetration and victimization. Based on a national sample of children 5–17, 65% had ever been exposed to a violence prevention program, 55% in the past year. Most respondents (71%) rated the programs as very or somewhat helpful. Younger children (5–9) who had been exposed to higher quality prevention programs had lower levels of peer victimization and perpetration. But the association did not apply to older youth or youth exposed to lower quality programs. Disclosure to authorities was also more common for children with higher quality program exposure who had experienced peer victimizations or conventional crime victimizations. The findings are consistent with possible benefits from violence prevention education programs. However, they also suggest that too few programs currently include efficacious components.

What is known on this topic?

- Many schools profess to use violence prevention programs. Evaluations have shown some such programs to be effective.

What this study adds

- This study provides some of the first national data on how many children actually were exposed to prevention programs. It also reveals how they react to the programs.

Introduction

Youth violence prevention has been a major public policy initiative in the United States for at least a generation. Hundreds of educational prevention programs have been developed, with a wide variety of targets including dating violence, sexual assault, bullying, and gang violence. They include locally developed efforts and curricula designed and disseminated by national research and development operations, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus & Limber,

☆ For the purposes of compliance with Section 507 of PL 104-208 (the "Stevens Amendment"), readers are advised that 100% of the funds for this program are derived from federal sources, (this project was supported by Grant Nos. 2006-JW-BX-0003 and 2009-JW-BX-0018 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice). The total amount of federal funding involved is $2,848,809. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the US Department of Justice. The authors have no financial relationships relevant to this article to disclose.

* Corresponding author address: CCRC, University of New Hampshire, 126 Horton Social Science Center, 20 Academic Way, Durham, NH 03824, USA.

0145-2134/$ – see front matter © 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.01.010

2010) (http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus_bullying_prevention_program.page) and Steps to Respect (http://www.cfchildren.org/steps-to-respect.aspx). Many research studies and meta-analyses have also been conducted to assess the value of such programs and guide their development (Hahn et al., 2007a, 2007b; Park-Higgerson, Perumean-Chaney, Bartolucci, Grimley, & Singh, 2008; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007; Wilson, Lipsey, & Derzon, 2003). Overall, they have shown that programs *can* reduce violence and aggression, but that many do not (Mytton, DiGuiseppi, Gough, Taylor, & Logan, 2002; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). A consensus has developed that in order to be effective, such programs need to have certain components such as adequate dosage, multiple components, varied teaching methods, and opportunities to practice (Cooper, Lutenbacher, & Faccia, 2000; Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003; Jones, 2012; Nation et al., 2003).

In spite of the large violence prevention mobilization and indications of effectiveness, there are reasons to think that program dissemination has stalled. Schools, which are the venue for much prevention, have been challenged in recent years by budget cuts and mandates to improve learning outcomes in the conventional curriculum, leading them to abandon prevention programs (Ahmed-Ullah, 2012; National School Safety and Security Services, 2010).

There has been little formal monitoring of how many schools and communities make prevention programs available or how many children are exposed to such programs. In the early 2000s, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned a systematic study that found that violence prevention curricula were present in 75% of middle schools, 71% of high schools, and 56% of elementary schools (Cantor et al., 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). However, the report noted a dearth of information about whether some programs are more effective than others and whether certain program characteristics lead to effective outcomes.

Collecting information from schools is one way of tracking prevention efforts, but querying students and families about their experiences with prevention programs is another crucial component. We had the opportunity to assess children's exposure to prevention programming as part of a national survey on children's exposure to violence. This paper reports the findings.

Methods

Participants

The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence II (NatSCEV II) is a "non-experimental" study designed to obtain up-to-date incidence and prevalence estimates of a wide range of childhood exposure to violence and related risk factors. It consisted of a national sample of 4,503 children and youth ages one month to 17 years in 2011. Study interviews were conducted over the phone by the employees of an experienced survey research firm. For this analysis, we used a subset of 3,391children ages 5–17 for whom we had information on prevention programming exposure.

The primary foundation of the design was a nationwide sampling frame of residential telephone numbers from which a sample of telephone households was drawn by random digit dialing (RDD). Two additional samples were obtained in order to represent the growing number of households that rely entirely or mostly on cell-phones: a small national sample of cellular telephone numbers drawn from RDD methodology ($N = 31$), and an Address-Based Sample (ABS; $N = 750$). The ABS sample started with a national sample of addresses from the Postal Delivery Sequence File (DSF). These addresses were mailed a one page questionnaire. The ABS study sample was drawn from the pool of returned questionnaires that represented households with children 17 years old and younger. These households were then re-contacted by interviewers and asked to participate in the survey. Approximately one-half of the eligible households obtained through ABS were cell-phone-only households, and thus this method represented an effective way of including households without landlines in our sample.

Procedure

Respondents were promised complete confidentiality and were paid $20 for their participation. The interviews, averaging 55 min in length, were conducted in either English or Spanish. Respondents who disclosed a situation of serious threat or ongoing victimization were re-contacted by a clinical member of the research team, trained in telephone crisis counseling, whose responsibility was to stay in contact with the respondent until the situation was appropriately addressed locally. All procedures were authorized by the Institutional Review Board of the University of New Hampshire. To begin, a short interview was conducted with an adult caregiver (usually a parent) to obtain family demographic information. One child was then randomly selected from all eligible children living in a household by selecting the child with the most recent birthday. If the selected child was 10–17 years old, the main telephone interview was conducted with the child. If the selected child was under age 10, the interview was conducted with the caregiver who "is most familiar with the child's daily routine and experiences." To address the possibility that caregivers might have systematically different levels of knowledge about prevention programs than youth themselves we examined rates of exposure to programming among 9-year-old children (oldest age of proxy reports) and 10-year-old children (youngest age of self-reports). Exposure in these two groups was similar, so we analyzed caregiver reports and youth self-reports together for the purposes of this paper, controlling for age and testing for interaction effects by age.