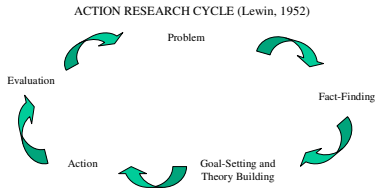




Virginia Commonwealth University

HISTORY OF OUR UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION TO PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE

In 1992 a collaboration between VCU and the Richmond, VA community was initiated out of increased community awareness and concern for high rates of violence among youth in this urban community. VCU faculty worked in collaboration with a management team of representatives from key city agencies to develop and evaluate youth violence prevention programs for middle school students within the City. This effort was guided by an action-research approach in which we went through several iterations of (a) collecting relevant information about the problem; (b) developing interventions based on this information, (c) implementing interventions; (d) evaluating their effectiveness; (e) revising them based on the findings of our evaluation and input from participants; and (f) repeating this process. The end product was a middle school violence prevention program that showed some promising results with high risk youth in several randomized trials.



CURRENT FOCUS OF THE VCU CLARK-HILL INSTITUTE FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Our current work represents a logical extension of our previous efforts. Although evaluations of universal violence prevention programs for adolescents have produced some encouraging results, we believe additional work is needed to improve their effectiveness. A critical issue is their relevance for their intended population. Our current projects involve a series of qualitative and quantitative studies designed to clarify our understanding of the multiple forces that serve as risk factors for violence, and the protective factors that promote positive youth development. We are also evaluating the impact of intervention components designed to support school-based efforts. All of these projects have been conducted in collaboration with our community partners.

The goals for the surveillance and research core of the ACE grant include:

1. Identifying risk and protective factors associated with the development of violent behavior most relevant to the youth within our intended population.

Studies relevant to this goal include: a) Barriers and supports for youth violence study, b) Risk and protective factors study, c) Improving prevention relevance study, d) Dating experiences in adolescence study, e) Project COPE, f) Interpersonal violence risk study, g) Inclusive violence prevention intervention study, and h) the Metasynthesis project.

2. Identifying skills and competencies that promote positive outcomes among youth within our intended population.

Studies relevant to this goal include: a) Barriers and supports for youth violence study, b) Risk and protective factors study, c) Improving prevention relevance study, d) Dating experiences in adolescence study, e) Project COPE, f) Inclusive violence prevention study, and g) Metasynthesis project.

3. Identifying effective strategies to reduce the prevalence of violence and victimization within our intended population.

Studies relevant to this goal include: a) Expressive writing intervention study, b) Building social capital, and c) Inclusive violence prevention study.

4. Identifying factors that facilitate the adoption and enhance the impact of violence prevention approaches.

Studies relevant to this goal include: a) Improving prevention relevance, b) Barriers and supports for community level youth violence prevention, and, c) Family engagement project.

This poster highlights several of the above projects.

University-Community Collaboration to Address Youth Violence in Richmond, Virginia

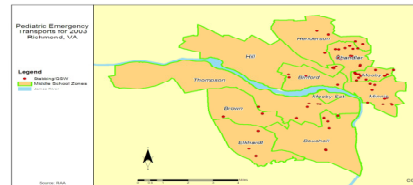
Albert Farrell, Wendy Kliewer, Kevin Allison, Terri Sullivan, Robert Cohen, Rosalie Corona, Elizabeth Erwin, Saba Masho, Anne Greene, and Aleta Meyer
Clark-Hill Institute for Positive Youth Development

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS STUDY

The primary goal of this project is to improve the effectiveness of violence prevention efforts by increasing their relevance for our defined community. Efforts to reduce aggression and promote positive behavior require an understanding of both individual and environmental factors that influence these behaviors in specific populations of youth. Specific objectives of this project are to: 1.) develop and evaluate measures of factors that inhibit and support both violent and nonviolent strategies for addressing problem situations; 2.) determine the prevalence and relative influence of these factors on the development and maintenance of both aggressive and effective nonviolent behavior in our target population; and 3.) identify subgroups of adolescents who differ in their pattern of risk and protective factors and who are thus suited to different intervention strategies. This information will be used to guide efforts to develop effective intervention components for our target population of youth in Richmond.

This project builds on previous work guided by Goldfried and D'Zurilla's (1969) behavior-analytic model. Thus far we have: (a) identified problem situations relevant to our target population, (b) determined the range of responses youth make in response to these situations, (c) evaluated the effectiveness of these responses, and (d) identified factors that appear to influence the use of aggression and of effective nonviolent strategies in these problem situations. Over the past year we have identified key constructs based on this previous work and have developed a battery of measures that assess these constructs. The battery includes both established scales and scales we have developed based on previous work with our target population. Over the next few months we will be pilot testing these measures to evaluate their psychometric properties in preparation for a larger study designed to determine their prevalence and influence on both aggression and prosocial behavior among youth in our target population.

This work is based on a series of studies that included both quantitative and qualitative components. The qualitative components included interviews with a variety of key informants including youth in the target population and their parents, school personnel (e.g., teachers, security staff, bus drivers, cafeteria workers), and other adults within the community. The measures we have developed are based on the factors identified by community members through these qualitative efforts. We have also consulted with youth and community members to obtain input on the wording of our measures to ensure their relevance. A final empirical study to establish the prevalence and relevance of these factors will enable us to develop interventions that best meet the needs of youth in our community.



BUILDING COMMUNITY SOCIAL CAPITAL

Strong social connections among neighbors have been identified as an important community-level factor associated with positive outcomes for youth. "Social capital," that is, interpersonal or social resources that come to individuals from their social relationships have been linked to a community's sense of effectiveness in connecting with and sanctioning young people and in handling challenges within their neighborhoods. These social connections are believed to be important sources of information and information exchange, support a sense of shared community values and provide a sense of social control through obligation and the sense of mutuality. In our current work, we focus on social capital at the community level as a resource to reduce community-level risk for youth violence.

The goal of the current project is to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a community-based prevention process targeting increases in community-level social capital relevant to the reduction of youth risk, with particular emphasis on youth violence and adolescent sexual health. This intervention builds on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's "Plain Talk" model where community residents (a) interact with community residents to obtain perceptions of community challenges and discuss current indicators of community challenge; (b) return to community residents and present summaries of community perceptions, discuss ideas for change and invite residents to community forums to address these challenges; and (c) hold community meetings that support community efforts to support positive youth development, youth access to resources and opportunities (e.g., health clinics, youth development opportunities, employment supports), and the development of messages and interactions with adults that support positive youth outcomes (e.g., supporting non-violent means of resolving conflict, helping adults talk with youth about sexual health).

In our work, credible communicators and grassroots leaders will assist in the finalization of the outreach strategy and will participate in a "community academy" to strengthen their skills and capacity and their work as "Walker Talkers" in the intervention. Community advisors assist in the identification and selection of target neighborhoods and residents act as collaborators in the design of the community academy, and lead discussions with community members and community meetings. We have also established a collaboration with the City of Richmond to implement a replication of the original Plain Talk model that links youth to resources targeting adolescent sexual health.



THE INCLUSIVE VIOLENCE PREVENTION STUDY

"Inclusive Violence Prevention" is a project conducted in partnership with Richmond City Public Schools that focuses on expanding promising programs in the area of violence prevention to meet the needs of youth with disabilities. The promotion of health and well-being among youth with disabilities is an important public health issue. Almost 54 million Americans have disabilities that may interfere with life activities, and health promotion programs may benefit these individuals greatly. Although schools offer a practical and important social context for implementing such efforts, most school-based violence prevention programs were developed for the general population and the effectiveness of these programs has not been evaluated among youth with disabilities. A key step to making progress is to modify such programs using best teaching practices with the goal of creating a school-based violence prevention program that is effective for youth with and without disabilities. As part of this project, we formed an advisory board that includes exceptional education teachers, youth with disabilities and their parents, community members, and VCU research faculty to help guide the steps of this project. We also conducted interviews with 80 youth with disabilities and their teachers to identify the most commonly faced problem situations that place these youth at increased risk of violence involvement and supports and barriers that may help or hinder youth in addressing these situations. Subsequent steps of this project will include revising the violence prevention curriculum and delivery method to meet the needs of youth with and without disabilities and evaluating the effectiveness of this curriculum for youth with and without disabilities.

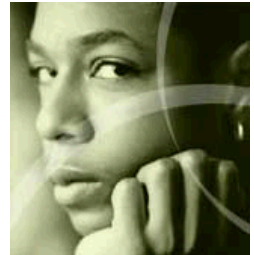
THE DATING EXPERIENCES STUDY

Dating Experiences in Adolescence" is a project conducted in partnership with Richmond City Public Schools and the City of Richmond Public Health Department. This project focuses on learning more about situations faced by adolescents in the context of dating experiences, including both problem situations that may lead to exposure to violence as well as positive situations. The project also focuses on learning about protective and risk factors that may help or hinder adolescents in addressing the specific problem situations. We conducted 50 interviews with adolescents and held five focus groups with parents, teachers, and community service providers who work directly with adolescents to identify commonly faced problem and positive situations associated with dating. We also conducted follow-up interviews with the adolescents to talk about protective and risk factors that may help or hinder adolescents in addressing specific problem situations and also to talk about what would be most helpful for dating violence prevention efforts. Finally, we conducted follow-up focus groups with adults to talk about the themes of problem and positive situations that emerged from the first set of interviews and to talk about directions for prevention programs. We are in the process of analyzing this information and it will be used to inform prevention efforts in our community and to contribute to future prevention efforts focused on youth violence prevention.

THE EXPRESSIVE WRITING STUDY

In the 2005-06 we partnered with the Richmond Public Schools to implement an expressive writing intervention with 7th graders in 17 classrooms in 3 middle schools. The intervention used expressive writing - writing about one's deepest thoughts and feelings related to violence - as a way of helping youth manage their emotional responses. Classrooms were randomly assigned to a control writing condition or two expressive writing conditions. Preliminary analyses using multi-level modeling indicated that the intervention had promising effects on some outcomes, including teacher-rated emotional lability and peer sociability. The intervention appeared to be most beneficial for youth experiencing high levels of community violence or who had high levels of intrusive thoughts at the start of the intervention.

Currently we are revising the intervention based on feedback from focus groups with teachers and students, as well as observations of process monitors. Based on additional analyses, we will develop recommendations regarding including expressive writing in violence prevention programming for youth.



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