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ABSTRACT

The Abuse Prevention program of the Santa Barbara (California) public schools has been providing presentations to students for the past 18 years. This study examined the impact of this abuse prevention program through the self-reports of former participants. Data were collected from 138 high school students, 84 of whom were male. Approximately half of the students reported having attended a presentation on abuse prevention. Those who did not remember attending a presentation were grouped with those who had not been exposed to the program. Students in all categories thought that they understood concepts associated with abuse. Students who had been exposed to the abuse prevention program reported fewer subsequent abuse incidents than students who had not seen a presentation, although it is not clear whether the program itself was responsible for this difference. Responses from students about the perceived effectiveness of the prevention program were not clear-cut, and these findings suggest that there is no simple "one-size-fits-all" strategy for such programs. (Contains 7 tables and 20 references.) (SLD)

Assessment of the Effectiveness of a School-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program: Follow-Up in High School

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Assessment of the Effectiveness of a School-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program: Follow-Up in High School

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Since their conception in the 1970s, school-based child abuse prevention programs have grown and proliferated. Kohl (1993) surveyed 126 school-based victimization prevention programs nationwide and determined that most of them serve between 1,500 and 12,000 students each year. Recent studies have found that almost 88% of elementary school districts in the US offer some sort of prevention presentation to their students (Breen, Daro, & Romano, 1991). The actual number of children who have participated in these programs is unknown, but Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman (1995) estimate that two-thirds of all American children have had some exposure. Fueling this movement was the increased social awareness of child sexual abuse (Plummer, 1986). As one of the pioneers of these programs wrote, "If we inform children about sexual abuse, and ways to prevent it, ...we adults believe children can be empowered to avoid or interrupt their own victimization" (Plummer, 1986).

One purpose of these programs was to prevent future incidents of abuse by targeting all children and equipping them with knowledge and protective strategies before any signs of dysfunction are seen. This is referred to as primary prevention. Another purpose held by these school-based prevention programs is to increase the rate of reporting and disclosure of abuse by giving children information about abuse and permission to break the silence. Supporters of prevention justified the development of such programs by examining the research regarding the prevalence of sexual abuse, the

profiles of the victims and perpetrators, the characteristics of abuse and the traumatic short- and long-term effects of sexual abuse. Schools were considered the obvious choice for the dissemination of the prevention information because of their ability to reach large numbers of children. Elementary schools were especially targeted because this age group has a high incidence rate. Specifically, studies indicated that 30-50% of abuse occurred to victims under 7 years of age (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin) and that the median age of abuse was 9.6 years for girls and 9.9 years for boys (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990).

Despite the proliferation of these programs, there are few empirical studies that provide data to support their continuation. Evaluation of prevention programs is difficult for a number of reasons. Specifically, the impact of abuse prevention programs is intended to occur at a future time. Further, evidence as to the effectiveness of abuse prevention lies in the ability to document the absence (or reduction) of abusive incidents that might have occurred without a program. Most of the research evaluating prevention programs have made certain assumptions about victimization programs. However, these assumptions have not been fully tested.

School-based prevention programs assume that there is a link between children's knowledge and their behavior, that experts know which prevention strategies work best, and that children can be empowered to prevent their own abuse. In addition, they assume that there are no or few negative effects compared to the positive effects and that parental involvement is important, but not crucial for success (Reppucci, Land, & Haugaard, 1998).

Does an Increase in Knowledge Indicate a Change in Actual Behavior?

Prevention programs (and evaluations of prevention programs) have commonly linked an increase in children's knowledge about abuse and protective strategies with actual changes in behavior. This assumption is largely untested. The majority of program evaluations consist of testing the children's knowledge of sexual abuse before and after the presentations, with no long-term follow-up (e.g., Hazard, 1993; Binder & McNeil, 1987; Kolko, Moser, Litz, & Hughes, 1987; Dhooper & Schneider, 1995). For example, Dhooper & Schneider (1995) administered questionnaires to 796 children in grades three to five. They used a quasi-experimental design, testing children from schools that provided an abuse prevention program as well as children who attended schools that did not participate. All the children were given a twelve-item pre- and post-intervention questionnaire that assessed their ability to recognize physical and sexual abuse and their knowledge of safety strategies. The post-tests were given directly after the presentation and the control group received the tests in a similar manner without viewing the presentation. The researchers found that the children who received the presentation were more knowledgeable about the concepts presented in the program compared to those who had not participated in the program. Reviews of other evaluation studies (e.g., Reppucci et al., 1998) show that an increase in knowledge is a consistent finding. However, the questions remains, do children respond differently and in more self-protective ways after participating in a prevention program when confronted with a possibly abusive situation?

Some researchers have argued that children are not protected by solely learning the concepts of abuse prevention but need an opportunity to actually practice the strategies

in order to benefit from the knowledge. In order to test this hypothesis, a few studies have attempted to use role-plays and simulated abduction scenarios to test children's actual behaviors in potentially abusive situations (e.g., Fryer, Kraizer, & Miyoshi,1987; Kraizer, Witte, & Fryer, 1989). For example, Kraizer and her associates tested a sample of 670 children ranging in age from three to ten years (Kraizer, Witte, & Fryer, 1989). The prevention program the researchers evaluated taught basic safety concepts and followed this by role-playing, discussion and activities in the classroom that allowed children to gain mastery of the skills taught. Researchers administered questionnaires measuring children's knowledge of the concepts presented. They also used a role-play measure to determine if children could terminate unwanted touch effectively in the face of flattery, emotional coercion, rejection, bribery and secrecy (e.g., "If you won't stay here with me and let me hug you, I'll think you don't like me anymore," p. 24"). The group of children who had participated in the program were more able to tell the researchers that they were uncomfortable with the role-play situations and were more able to resist the researchers' use of coercion and flattery. This difference between the two groups could not be explained by the increase in the knowledge test scores. Some children received education about abuse and abuse prevention strategies but were not given an opportunity to practice these skills. Although these children's knowledge scores were just as high as those who were presented the information and allowed to practice, only the children who received both components were able to successfully resist the coercion and flattery.

Although the results from the Kraizer and colleagues (1989) study have promising implications about the effectiveness of prevention programs, the majority of prevention

programs used by schools do not involve such a large experiential component (i.e, an opportunity for children to master the concepts taught to them by video, books or discussion through role-playing activities). In addition, although the design of the study allowed the researchers to examine actual behavior changes in the children rather than just a change in knowledge, the ethics involved with putting children through experiences that they may find anxiety-provoking make these kind of studies difficult to implement. Finally, these studies assume that engaging in these type of behaviors will result in the child being able to escape from abusive situations. However, this reduction in abuse cannot be presumed without further investigation.

Finkelhor and his colleagues (1995b) conducted a study in which they interviewed 2000 children around the nation via telephone in order to determine whether children who had participated in prevention programs had been able to avoid abusive situations. If they had not been able to avoid the situation, the researchers wanted to know whether they responded differently compared to children who had not participated in a program. The children ranged in age from ten to sixteen and were asked in one-on-one interviews whether they had ever participated in a prevention program and whether they had ever been victimized (i.e., sexually or physically abused). If the child responded affirmatively, they were asked further questions about the situation, their responses and the results of their actions.

Supporting previous results, those who had participated in programs answered more questions correctly when queried about abuse and prevention concepts in a questionnaire testing their knowledge. Unfortunately, there was no correlation between

participation in a prevention program and a decrease in the incidence of completed victimization or injury. However, there was an increased likelihood of disclosure of the abusive incident if the child participated in a program in the past. In addition, there was a decreased tendency for the child to blame herself and an increased feeling of being successful in protecting herself from more serious consequences (Finkelhor et al., 1995b).

This study has started to examine on a larger scale the impact of prevention programs on children and has several important implications for future work. The large number of subjects and the nationwide sample suggest that the results are fairly generalizeable. However, limitations exist due to the nature of self-report design of the study and the sensitive nature of many of the questions asked. Results may be influenced by effects of memory and time as well as an unwillingness to discuss such difficult topics with someone who is basically a stranger even though the interview was anonymous.

Research designs for evaluating prevention programs have become more sophisticated and have started to address the question of whether these programs actually do result in behavioral changes in children that would allow them to escape and avoid abusive situations. However, better measures are still necessary to assess children's knowledge of the concepts being taught and to show the link between a gain in knowledge and acquisition of actual skills. In addition, further research is necessary to determine how long these changes last.

Do prevention programs know what types of strategies and skills to teach children to make them less vulnerable?

As previously mentioned, interviews with perpetrators suggest that they choose children who are vulnerable in some way or are hungry for attention. Those interviewed often say that they target children who they think will be compliant and easily persuaded not to disclose (Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989; Budin & Johnson, 1989). In addition, common risk factors associated with children who are victimized include a passive, quiet and trusting nature, young age, depression and a strong need for attention, affection and approval (Berliner & Conte, 1990; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). Based on this information, many prevention programs attempt to teach children certain skills that will make them more assertive and less compliant with situations that make them uncomfortable. They are usually taught to say "no!" in a loud voice, to run away or get a way and to keep telling adults about the incident until they are believed. However, there is little empirical evidence that these strategies actually work in protecting children in abusive situations.

In their longitudinal telephone interview study, Finkelhor and his colleagues (1995a) also questioned children about the strategies they used when confronted with an abusive situation. Those who participated in prevention programs in the past used the recommended strategies (e.g., insisting to be left alone, yelling or screaming, threatening to tell, and actually telling) more often than those who did not participate. Exposure to school-based prevention programs was associated with a greater likelihood that the child would use one of the preferred strategies in an abusive situation. However, the use of these preferred strategies was not associated with a reduction in the seriousness of the assault and the children in this group experienced more serious injury compared to

children not exposed to prevention programs. This finding is disturbing with it's implication that the strategies that are taught to children may be putting them in more danger rather than protecting them. It lends support to the criticism that more research is necessary to determine which strategies should be taught to children.

Are there negative effects associated with teaching children prevention concepts and skills?

It is assumed by most prevention proponents that there are no negative effects associated with teaching children to avoid victimization, and if there are, these effects are negligible compared to the amount of good these programs are doing. In reality, there are few studies to support that assumption and more are necessary before this assumption can be accepted.

In a national telephone survey of thousands of children, Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman (1995) found that over 60% of the children questioned by the researchers felt that the programs either made them worry a lot or worry a little about being abused and about a fifth of the children reported that the programs scared them of adults. Parents of 16% of the children reported that their children seemed more fearful of adults after exposure to the programs and 15% said that the programs made their children more anxious in general. However, these responses were found among the group of children and parents who gave the most positive feedback about the programs and their usefulness. This may indicate that a certain amount of fear and anxiety is necessary and a appropriate as now these children are more prepared to identify abusive situations and

are more cautious for adaptive reasons. Supporting this hypotheses, the children who reported the highest fear reactions were children who have been associated with several risk factors: younger children, African-American children and those with lower SES backgrounds. In addition, those with increased worries were also the ones who were more likely to use the skills they had been taught. For example, 65% of the children who said the program made them "worry a lot" about being abused also used the knowledge in some specific incident compared to only 33% of the children who hadn't worried "at all" (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995). The findings of this study suggest that more information is needed before assuming that an anxiety or fear reaction among children should automatically be considered a negative outcome of prevention programs. In some cases, these reactions may be appropriate and considered an adaptive response.

In summary, although many studies have been performed to examine many aspects of prevention programs, there still remain many unanswered questions that need to be clarified. For example, although several studies have shown changes in behavior following prevention studies, how long do these changes last? Also, do these strategies actually help protect children when they are in abusive situations and will children use them at the appropriate times? In other words, do they really prevent victimization as they propose to do? In addition, which strategies should be recommended for which situations? And, if no general strategy can be suggested for all children and all situations, are we asking too much of children to be able to make those decisions if they find themselves in a potentially dangerous situation? Other studies are necessary to clarify these issues.

The present study is proposed to replicate some of the findings previously reported and to evaluate a local prevention program that has been providing presentations to students in the Santa Barbara area for the past 18 years. In addition, this is one of the few studies that has a opportunity to examine the impact of a prevention program on behavior through retrospective self-reports of former participants of victimization prevention programs.

Purpose of Study

Santa Barbara has implemented Abuse Prevention programs in the schools since 1982. At that time, the Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) approved a grant allowing several local agencies, including CALM (Child Abuse Listening and Mediation), to provide such programs to schools in Goleta and Santa Barbara. This grant ended in 1990, but CALM found funding to continue the program and expand it within the Santa Barbara school district. Students who attended Santa Barbara elementary schools, who are currently in local high schools, may have received these one- or two-day presentations in pre-school, kindergarten, 4th and/or 7th grade.

An evaluation of these Abuse Prevention presentations is made possible by two factors: (1) Students from feeder schools where Abuse Prevention presentations had been implemented are now old enough to be in high school. A number of the students who attended Santa Barbara elementary schools, and who are currently attending Santa Barbara high schools, are likely to have been participants in one or more of these Abuse Presentations; and (2) Given student mobility (i.e., new students to the district), and other factors (e.g., absence from school during presentations) it is also likely that a

number of current high school students might not have been exposed to the presentations. Thus, we anticipated that there would be two groups: one which has had prior exposure to Abuse Prevention presentations, and one which has not had that experience. By comparing the knowledge and experiences of both groups, differences associated with participation in Abuse Prevention presentations could be assessed.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To assess whether high school students who had participated in Abuse Prevention presentations in the schools had greater understanding of how to recognize and respond to abuse compared to students who had not received one of these presentations.
- To assess whether high school students who had attended Abuse Prevention presentations were more able to avoid abusive situations than students who had not participated in one of these presentations.
- To assess whether high school students who had attended Abuse Prevention presentations were able to respond more effectively to abuse than students who did not receive one of these presentations.

Method

Subjects

Data were collected anonymously on 138 students at one high school in Southern California. All students were assessed during their Health class. Students are required to

take this class, but can be exempted on philosophical or religious grounds if their parents offer a written request. The data were collected in the spring and fall of 1998. Questionnaires were administered to all students in the four class periods in which Health was offered, with the exception of 7 students who had parental requests on file for their children not to participate in this type of evaluation.

Sixty-one percent of the sample (N = 84) were male. Figure 1 shows the ethnic composition of the group. The largest number of students (N = 66, 47.8%) were European-American, followed by Latino/Hispanic (N = 40, 29%), Asian-American (N = 13, 9.4%), and African-American (N = 8, 5.8%). Three students (2.2%) reported that they identified themselves as Native American, 7 identified themselves as "other" and 1 declined to say.

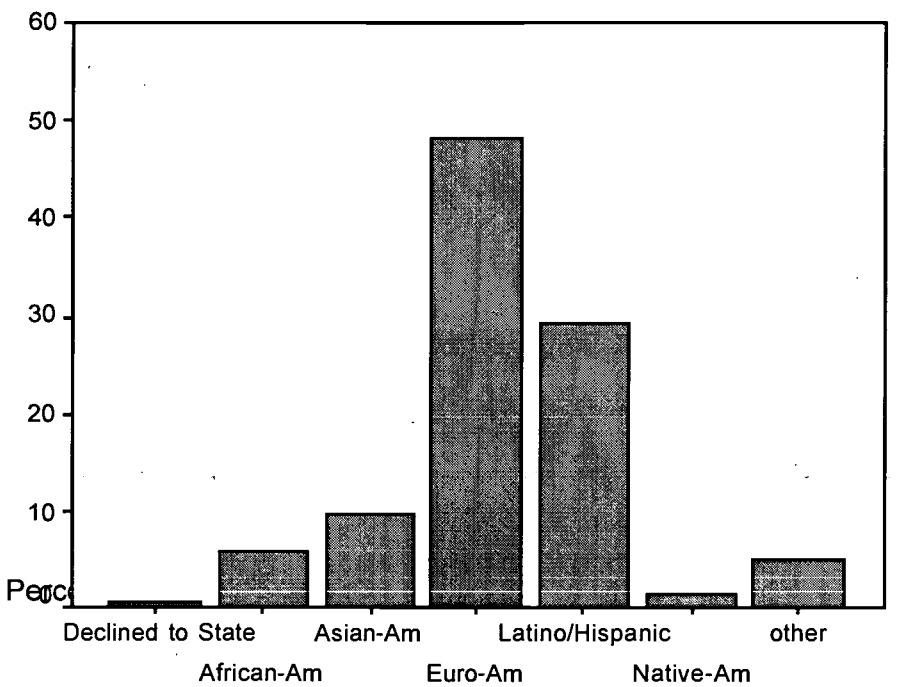

Figure 1. Ethnicity of Students

A majority of the students (Asian-American (N = 96, 69.6%) were in 9th grade, with the rest distributed among 10th, 11th, and 12th grades (see Figure 2).

Questionnaire

The investigators developed the questionnaire. Items were multiple selection, True-False, or short answer formats. The following areas were covered:

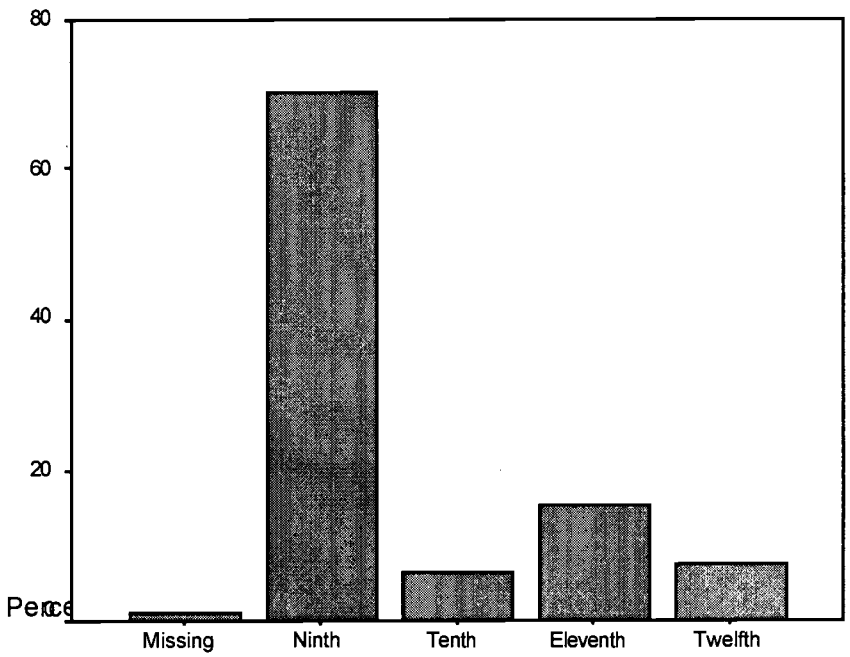

Figure 2. Current Grade in School

- ***Demographics***. Although questionnaires were administered anonymously, students were asked to report their age, sex, ethnicity, current grade level and zip code. They were also asked to list the schools they attended in the 3rd, 4th, 7th and 8th grades. This was a fidelity check on their response to whether or not they had participated in Abuse Prevention presentations, as it was known historically which schools had implemented these programs. The second time the questionnaires were administered,

students were also asked about the make-up of their families, how often their families have moved in the past 10 years and the number of fist-fights they have been involved with in the past 2 years as indicators of the stability of their lives. This information was available for 70 students.

- ***Attendance at Abuse Prevention Programs***. Students were asked whether or not they remembered attending Abuse Prevention presentations in their schools. Those who reported participating in a presentation were asked to provide additional details about the experience, including when they occurred, what they remembered about the content of the program, and whether or not they felt the presentations have been helpful.
- ***Knowledge about Abuse and Abuse Prevention***. Students rated their perceived level of knowledge about different types of abuse (e.g., "How well do you understand what is meant by sexual abuse? Very well, somewhat well, not well at all."). In addition, students were given a brief (10 item) test of their actual knowledge on what constitute physical and sexual abuse.
- ***Experiences of Physical Abuse and Responses***. Students were asked whether an adult, or anyone older than them, tried to hurt or injure them non-accidentally in such a way that left a mark (or worse). This definition of physical abuse was taken from the lesson plans of the CALM Abuse Prevention program. Respondents who responded in the affirmative were also asked to indicated when the abuse occurred, who perpetrated the abuse, their response, their perception of the effectiveness of

their response, whether or not they told anybody about the incident, and whether they received counseling afterwards.

- ***Experiences of Sexual Abuse and Responses***. Students were asked whether an adult, or anyone older than them, tried to touch them sexually against their wishes. Respondents who indicated that they had been abused were asked additional questions about the abuse, including their response to the abuse, the effectiveness of their response, whether or not they told anyone about the incident, and if they ever received counseling for the abuse.

Procedures

The investigators briefly explained the purpose of the study. Students were asked to fill out the questionnaires at their desks at the beginning of class. Participating students were given a pencil with CALM's number in appreciation and also as a reference if they needed to talk to someone afterwards. Investigators emphasized that no names were to be written on the papers. The administration took approximately 20 minutes.

Results

Determination of whether or not students attended an Abuse Prevention presentation was made through students' self report. That is, students indicated on the questionnaire whether or not they remembered having a presentation that taught them about abuse and how to avoid sexual and physical victimization.

Approximately half of the students in the sample reported having a presentation on those topics (N = 73, 52.9%). This item was used to categorize students for subsequent analyses. Students who said 'yes' comprised the Abuse Presentation (AP)

group, while students who stated 'no' or 'don't remember' were combined into the No Prevention (NP) group. A majority of students who reported receiving Abuse Prevention presentations had them more than once: 11 (15.1%) said they had one presentation, 15 (20.5%) indicated they had two presentations, 18 (24.7%) had three presentations, and 26 (35.6%) reported four or more presentations. The average time since their last presentation was 3 years with a range of 1-9 years.

Participation in an Abuse Prevention Program would be associated with increased knowledge on how to recognize and respond to abuse.

Both students who participated in a program and students who didn't reported feeling as if they had a very good understanding of what constituted abuse. A one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no statistical difference between the students' *perceptions* of their understanding of what constitutes abuse ($F(2,137)=.183$; $p>.05$.

The ANOVA performed to examine differences between the AP students' total True/False test of knowledge scores and the NP students' total scores showed no statistically significant difference ($F(2,137)=.730$; $p>.05$). In addition, both groups tended to miss the question concerning date rape and pornography, indicating that all students need more information on those topics. However, a closer examination of specific items on the test did result in a difference between the two groups. Examining the item concerning fault ("If a child or teenager is physically or sexually abused, it is partly their fault."), there was a significant difference between the two groups ($F(1,136)=5.9$, $p<.05$). More specifically, the NP group was more likely to answer this item wrong. The idea that the child is never at fault for the abuse is one of the primary

messages of prevention programs and this finding suggests that children exposed to prevention programs do retain the knowledge fairly well. In addition, the researchers examined a subset of items that focused on the ideas greatly emphasized in prevention programs, namely the need for children to tell adults of the abuse, the idea that the perpetrator can be someone the child likes, that boys can be victims as well and the idea that victims are not to blame for the abuse. An ANOVA found a significant difference between the groups, with the AP group correctly answering these items more often than the NP group ($F(1,136)=6.2$; $p<.05$).

However, as mentioned previously, an increase in knowledge does not necessarily correlate with a change in behavior. The following analyses focus on whether there are behavioral differences between the AP and NP groups.

Participation in an Abuse Prevention Program would be associated with a lower number of incidents of physical and sexual abuse.

One of the primary goals of the Abuse Prevention presentations was to decrease subsequent incidents of sexual or physical abuse. It was hoped that students would be able to use the information given them in these presentations to put themselves in fewer dangerous situations, identify dangerous situations quickly and get out of them, or respond to the abuse circumstances as effectively as possible (e.g., seek help by telling someone and not blaming themselves).

All students in the sample were asked whether or not they had been physically abused ("Has an adult or someone much older than you ever tried to hurt or injure you non-accidentally in such a way that you were bruised, burned, bitten, had bones broken or

hit so hard that it left a mark?") or sexually abused ("Has an adult or someone much older than you ever tried to touch you sexually or use you sexually against your wishes? This includes incidents such as indecent exposure or incidents such as fondling, sexual intercourse, or oral stimulation."). In response to the physical abuse question, 33 students (23.9% of the entire sample) reported prior physical abuse. Fewer students in the AP group reported instances of abuse than did students in the NP group: in the AP group, 11 students (15.3%) reported physical abuse while, in the NP group, the number of students was 21 (32%). This difference was significant, $F(1,136)=5.68$; $p>.05$. A majority of students across both groups (N=25) indicated that the abuser had been a family member (parent or other relative), 5 students reported abuse by a stranger, and 2 by a family friend (see Figure 3a).

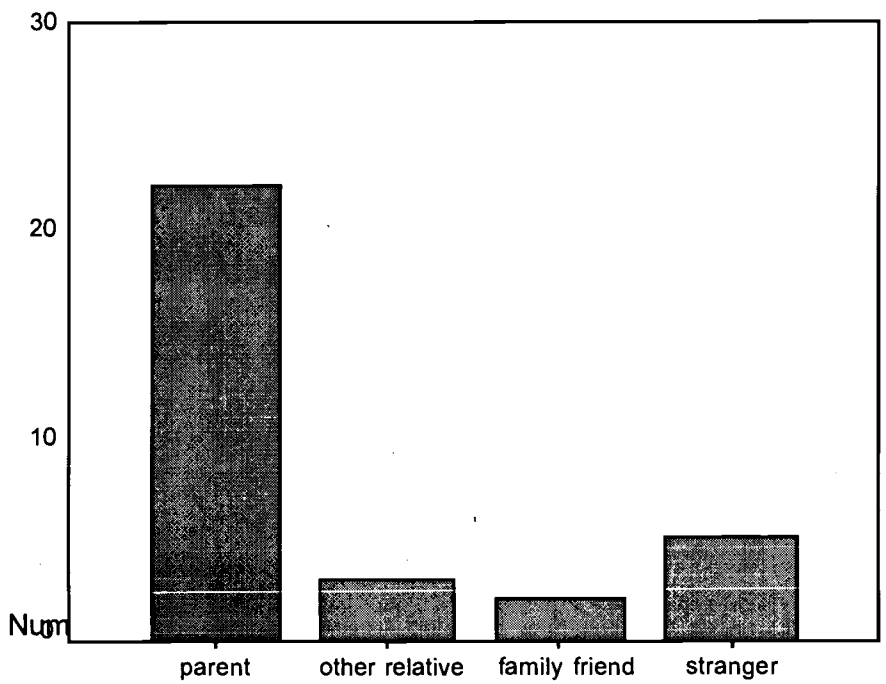

Figure 3a. Perpetrator of Abuse (Physical)

Overall, only 10% of the students (N=13; 6 in the AP group and 7 in the NP group) reported prior sexual abuse. Surprisingly, a higher number than expected reported that the abuser was a stranger (N=3; 23%). However, consistent with the finding that most perpetrators are people children already know and trust, the majority of responses showed that the offender was someone the child was already familiar. Four stated that the abuser was a family friend, 3 stated it was a family member and 2 reported that the perpetrator was a parent (see Figure 3b). The low numbers across both groups suggest either (a) that sexual abuse did not occur often, or (b) that it was difficult to report this in writing even in the anonymous classroom context in which these data were collected.

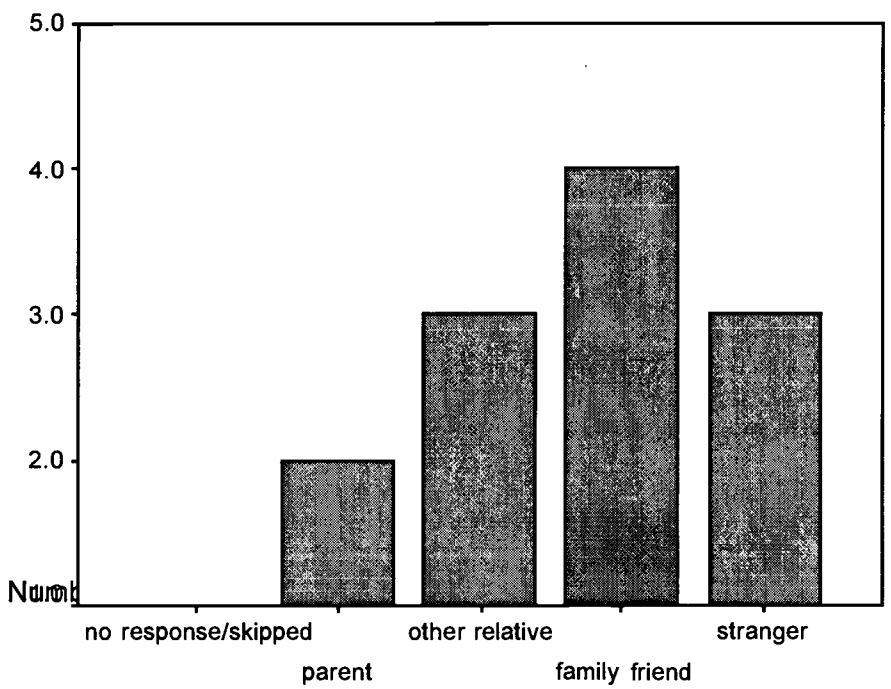

Figure 3b. Perpetrator of Abuse (Sexual Abuse)

In summary, the overall rates of abuse (when physical and sexual abuse was combined) was lower for students who had prior Abuse Prevention programs than by

those who had not participated in a program. The researchers had other information about a smaller portion of the entire sample. Namely, information about family make-up, the number of times the family moved and the number of fights the child reported being involved. Comparing the AP group with the NP group, there were no significant differences with the two groups when examining these variables.

Participation in an Abuse Prevention program would be associated with different ways of responding to abuse when it occurs?

Students who had been abused were asked to indicate how they responded to the abuse. Figure 4 presents the responses to physical abuse for students in AP and NP groups. As there were few students in the AP group reporting prior abuse, statistical analysis of response patterns was prohibited. However, some general trends can be seen. Those in the NP group tended to run away or fight back while those in the AP group either yelled and screamed or ran away. No student in the AP group reported fighting back.

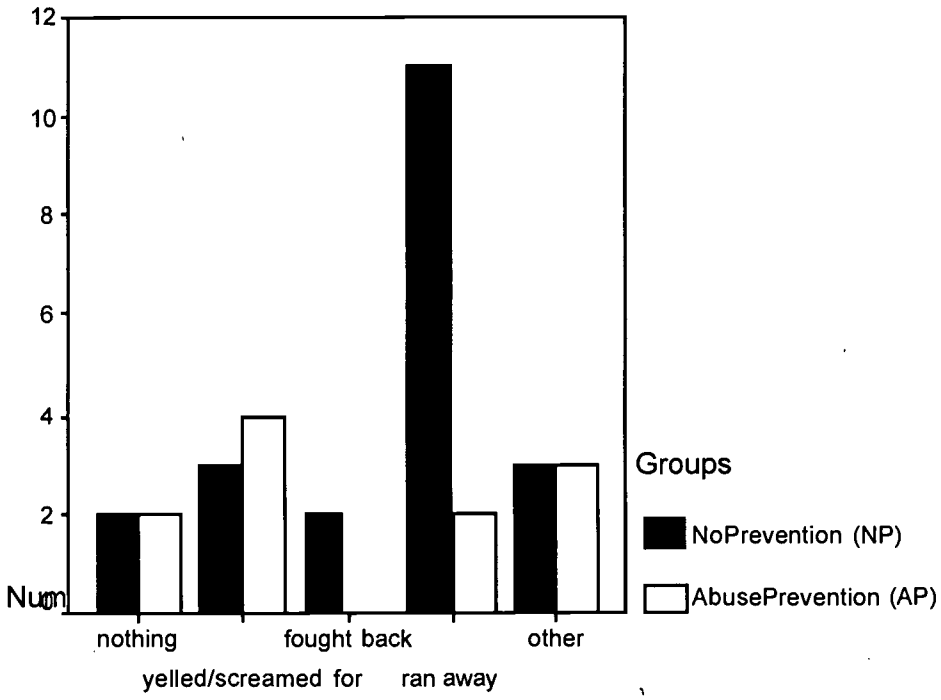

Figure 4. Responses to Physical Abuse

Students were also asked to describe the effectiveness of their response. While the numbers are small, it is interesting to note that approximately half of the NP students felt that their responses prevented abuse or at least protected them from more serious abuse while the AP students described their responses as ineffective or harmful (see Figure 5). Although puzzling, this may suggest that those children who participated in Abuse Prevention programs may have been more aware of potentially abusive situations and were more successful in avoiding them. Therefore, the situations they couldn't avoid were more serious and any actions they took to protect themselves would not have made protected them. This is one possible explanation for the lower numbers of abuse reported by the AP group.

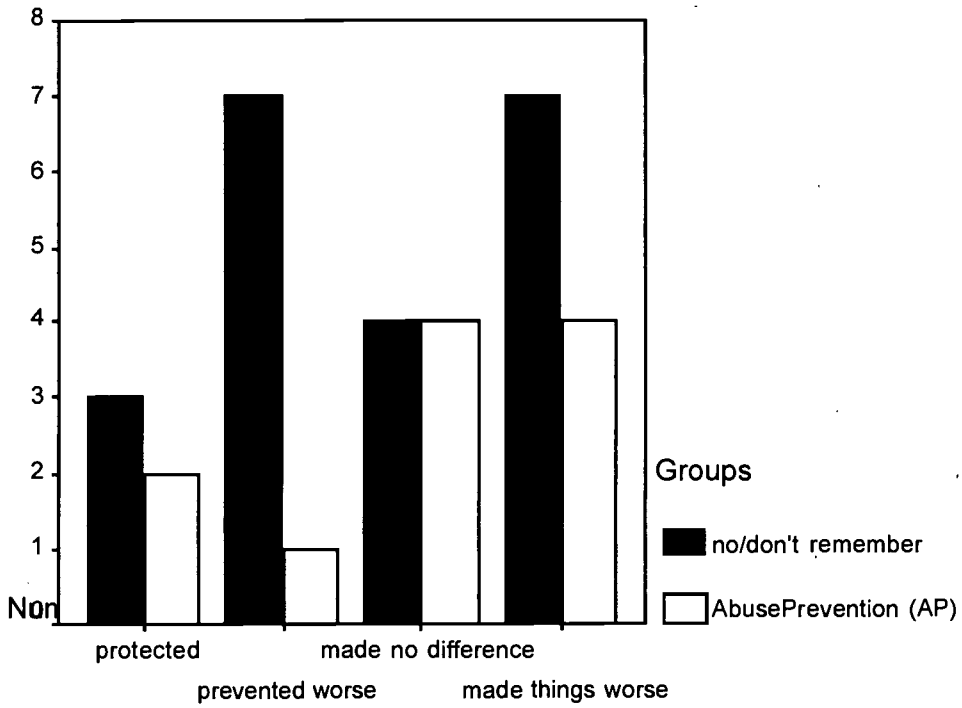

Figure 5. Perception of Effectiveness

When looking at both groups combined, there seems to be a contradiction in the findings: the actions that many children thought protected them were also considered by some children to make the situation worse. See Figure 6.

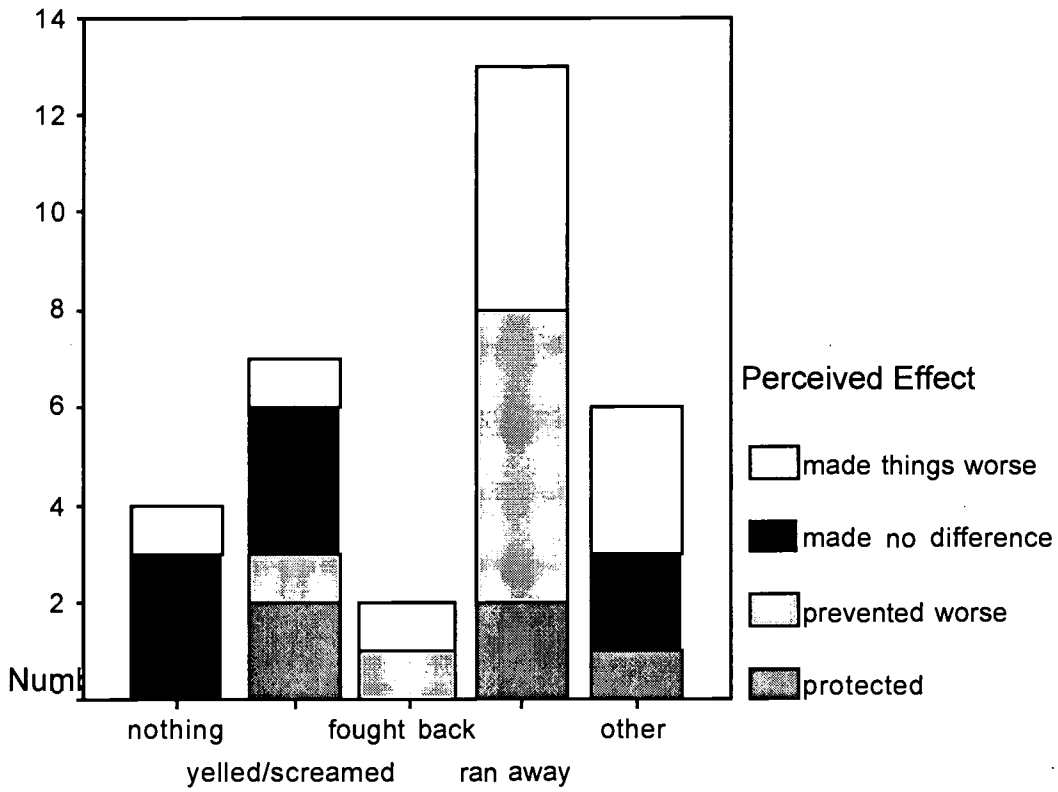

Figure 6. Response and Perceived Effectivess

Students were also asked if they told anyone about the abuse and if they had received counseling to deal with the impact of the abuse. Looking at those who reported prior sexual or physical abuse, 13 of the 17 students who had been abused in the AP group reported that they told someone about the incident. Eighteen of the 27 students in the NP group stated that they had disclosed the incident(s).

Discussion

This study was successful in identifying two groups of students: those who participated in Abuse Prevention presentations as part of their early schooling experiences, and those who did not attend, or remember attending, these presentations. This provided a naturalistic opportunity to examine the impact of Abuse Prevention

programs on students after they occur. Most students who reported hearing a presentation indicated that they had participated in more than one, with an average elapsed time of 3 years. Thus, while the Abuse Prevention programs students were exposed to were not intensive, they were part of an ongoing, systematic effort to raise student awareness about these issues.

Methodologically, it is important to note that some students were willing to describe, anonymously, and in writing, their abusive experiences. However, from Finkelhor's review of 19 surveys of adults estimate that at least 20% of women and between 5-10% of men in North America have experienced some type of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1994). Our findings are at the very low end of this estimate and may indicate that changes need to be made in the administration of the questionnaire to increase the confidence the students have in reporting information on this sensitive topic. The experience of this pilot study should inform later research that changes should be made to the administration of the questionnaire to increase confidence in the anonymity of the situation. Possible changes include spacing the desks as far as possible from each other to maximize the amount of privacy that can be afforded.

A number of key findings were obtained. For example, both students in the Abuse Prevention group and those in the No Prevention group felt they understood concepts associated with abuse. This may be true as many of the concepts can be learned from other sources, such as parents, peers and health classes. Reppucci, Land and Haugaard (1998) criticize that the increase in knowledge following a prevention presentation, although statistically significant, is slight-usually only a one or two item

difference in a questionnaire of ten to forty items. Furthermore, even before the intervention, children tend to score highly on the knowledge questionnaires (e.g., in the Dhooper & Schneider, 1995, study, the mean score on the 12-item test was 8.4 for both the intervention and control groups before the presentation was presented). This suggests that children are already aware of many of the concepts presented by the programs due to the media, parents, health classes or other influences. This is why we have chosen to focus on those items that are given special emphasis in prevention programs. When we focused on knowledge specifically emphasized in Abuse Prevention programs, those in the AP group had more knowledge when the item concerned blame and the identity of the victim and offender. As this is a pilot study, future research will try to expand on this and create more items that may be more sensitive to the differences between the AP and NP group. In other words, a new instrument assessing students' knowledge will be developed to focus on being more sensitive to show the increase in learning.

Students who had been exposed to Abuse Prevention programs had fewer subsequent abuse incidents than students who had not seen a presentation.. This is interpreted as due to one of two factors. Either (a) the presentation made a difference in helping students identify and avoid abusive situations, or (b) the students who saw the presentations were different in some other critical way from those who did not see the presentations. The first interpretation can be supported if future studies indicate that students who did not participate in Abuse Prevention presentations differed from students who did not participate only in that they did not have the same programmic

opportunity (e.g., their school district did not offer such presentations). This view would also be supported if the mechanisms by which prevention programs helped students avoid or address abuse were more clearly delineated and studied.

The second interpretation may be accurate if it is shown that the students in the NP group are different than students in the AP groups in ways that interfered with their participation in these presentations (e.g, higher school mobility and school absenteeism) and which also put them at a greater risk for abuse. In the present study, the AP group did not differ from the NP group in school mobility, family make-up, or in number of fist fights involved. However, this study only involved students with parental permission to take part in the research. Those who did not gain permission were also probably those children who did not gain permission to participate in Prevention presentations in the past. The question remains: How are those students different from the students who have missed Abuse Prevention presentations due to absenteeism or because the school did not offer such presentations to the students.

The responses from the children regarding their perceived effectiveness of the protective strategies they used showed a murky picture. This is consistent with other research that seems to indicate that there are no easy answers to the kinds of strategies we should recommend to children to use in potentially abusive situations. What may be effective in one case may be harmful in another. In addition, the definition of "effective" is dependent on who defines that term. Although some children may feel effective in fighting back in that they feel as if they have done all they could to protect themselves and have shown their self-efficacy, this strategy may result in more injury. If the

purpose is to protect children from injury, this would not be seen as an effective strategy to recommend. In a national telephone survey of over one thousand boys and girls between ten and sixteen years of age, Asdigian & Finkelhor (1995) found that different children felt successful with different types of strategies. Compared to younger children and girls, adolescent boys preferred to use more aggressive forms of resistance and felt that these actions had been effective. In addition, children with fathers who advised them to stand up and fight also felt more successful when they used more aggressive strategies. The effectiveness of the strategies used was based on the children's subjective perceptions of how successful they felt they were. The measure of effectiveness may result in different findings if other measures for effectiveness were used. For example, although the children who felt they were effective in using aggressive strategies to protect themselves were also at an increased risk of physical injury. Although some children, particularly boys, feel that fighting back is effective for them, the question of whether educators should recommend this technique exists. Along with the greater risk of injury, there is the idea that teaching children to fight back may promote the aggressive, pro-violence attitude that educators do not want to endorse (Asidigian & Finkelhor, 1995). The findings suggest that there are no simple, one-size-fits-all type of strategies that will work for all children. Educators may need to tailor their message to different subgroups of children. This implication is supported by the findings of Kraizer and her colleagues (1989) showing that a generalized approach to prevention may not work for children at risk for abuse. In their study, the researchers found that, within the group that received the prevention program, the ten percent who failed the role play test were also the

children who scored the lowest on the self-esteem measure. This finding suggests that education and practicing safety behaviors may not be the only things these prevention programs need to do to keep children safe.

It must also be kept in mind that we are looking at children's perceptions of effectiveness and many things affect that perception: in one study, many boys felt that their actions resulted in effective protection even though it was associated with a higher risk of physical injury. In addition, although adolescent boys felt that fighting back was the best defense, this was not perceived as an effective response by younger children and girls (Asidigian & Finkelhor, 1995). This points to the importance of doing more research on which strategies are the most effective and should be recommended. Also, it may suggest, as other research has (e.g, Asdigian & Finkelhor, 1995) that there is no "one-size-fits-all" method to abuse prevention. Just as it is difficult to tell women what to do in case of rape because different situations may call for different actions, it is difficult to tell children one strategy that would work in all possible situations of abuse.

Future Directions.

This pilot study has pointed out many things that should be addressed in a future study. Students who saw presentations seemed to have retained the knowledge imparted by the presentations, although years have passed since the presentation. Future studies need to address the question of how that knowledge helped students avoid abusive situations. In addition, how can programs be modified to more effectively help students avoid, or deal with, dangerous situations? Finally, how can students who have not had Abuse Prevention presentations be reached and allowed to benefit from the

information provided by these programs. These issues need to be addressed in future studies.

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