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Research Synthesis

REDUCTIONS IN HIV RISK AMONG RUNAWAY YOUTHS

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Intervention Goal(s): To determine the effects of a small group intervention to reduce HIV-related sexual and drug-related risk behaviors.

Intervention Setting: Shelters for runaway adolescents.

Population: Of the 312 runaway and homeless youths who enrolled in the study, 51 percent were male and 49 percent were female; 57 percent were African-American, 22 percent were Hispanic, 16 percent were white or of other racial/ethnic groups, and race/ethnicity was unknown for 5 percent. The average age of the youths was 16 years.



Description of Intervention: Street Smart

This intervention was based on Social Learning Theory, using small groups (a) as practice and role-play opportunities, (b) to mobilize and reinforce positive behaviors and (c) to maintain support networks. The intervention consisted of ten group sessions on a rotating basis, three times per week, repeated every four to six weeks, and one individual counseling session. Sessions were led by trained counselors in shelters for runaway youth in the New York City area. The intervention had four primary components:

1. HIV-related knowledge. Activities included video and art workshops where youth developed soap opera dramatizations, public service announcements, commercials, and raps about HIV prevention, and they reviewed and discussed commercial HIV/AIDS prevention videos.
2. Social skills. Training on assertiveness and coping skills, including use of a “feeling thermometer,” were employed to develop skills for use in HIV-risk reduction.
3. Access to resources. Participants visited a community-based comprehensive health and mental health center.
4. Personalized beliefs, attitudes and norms. Participants had a private counseling session during which they could assess individual barriers to practicing safer sex and discuss their own attitudes and behavior patterns. Dysfunctional attitudes and behavior patterns were targeted.

Incentives included food and \$1 for carrying condoms and arriving to the program on time.

Comparison Condition: Usual services available in the runaway shelters.

Behavioral Findings: Adolescents who participated in the intervention reduced both the number of unprotected sexual acts and their substance use significantly more than adolescents in the comparison shelters.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV/AIDS Prevention Research Synthesis Project. Compendium of HIV Prevention Interventions with Evidence of Effectiveness. Atlanta, Ga.: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: November 1999, Revised, [1-23].

For more information, call the technical assistance analyst at the Mississippi Urban Research Center, 1-866-JSU-MURC (578-6872).

