

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



The Truth N' Trauma Project: Addressing Community

Violence Through a Youth-Led, Trauma-Informed

and Restorative Framework

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Trauma, community violence, restorative practice, mentoring, youth

POPULATION GROUP

Youth in conflict with the law

STEPPING UP THEMES

Strong, Supportive Friends & Families;
Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety;
Coordinated & Youth Friendly
Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

SOURCE

Academic Article

“I’ve learned the true definition of trauma. Basically it’s something that happens in your life that you can be affected by mentally, physically, and emotionally. And it just leads to a lot of things that I didn’t know about. I learned that some people can overcome it.”

1. What is the research about?

Trauma-informed practice, in combination with positive youth development (PYD), offers promise for preventing youth violence. In the United States, racialized youth from low-income communities are more likely to experience violence which often results in post-traumatic stress. Exposure to this stress can negatively impact educational outcomes and interpersonal relationships.

This article describes an innovative violence prevention model called the **Truth N’ Trauma (TNT)** program and the results of its evaluation. TNT combines PYD and trauma-informed restorative practices to prevent youth violence. The model works to build the capacity of youth to engage with each other and their community in productive ways. Restorative practice helps youth to recover from exposure to primary and secondary trauma. The program creates safe spaces for healing, facilitates peace circles, builds relationships, improves communication skills, and increases emotional literacy. TNT program participants receive training on trauma-informed practice and youth participatory action research. They meet regularly in a large group for shared learning and engagement; they also divide into smaller groups to focus on documentary production, action research, or theater.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about youth (aged 14-18) who are exposed to community violence in Chicago’s south side. 44 youth who demonstrated leadership skills and vocally expressed their concern about community violence were selected to participate in the study. 50% were male and 50% were female.

4. How was the research done?

This multidisciplinary, nine-month research project used mixed research methods including a pre-post survey (the Ozer Empowerment Survey) and a semi-structured interview protocol that asked:

- How and why did you become involved in the TNT program?
- What has been your experience in the TNT program?

- What is your experience with violence and violence exposure?
- What have been your responses to violence exposure?
- How are you involved in your school/neighbourhood/community?
- What is your involvement with your family?

Quantitative analysis used a paired comparison test. Qualitative data was analyzed using grounded theory. They also used a comparison group to better understand changes in participants as result of the program.

5. What are the key findings?

Findings from the survey found that TNT participants were more likely than non-participants to report positive changes related to: youth empowerment, school participation, and community involvement. Participants also reported gaining an increased understanding of political issues as well as research skills. An unexplained outcome that needs further investigation is that participants reported experiencing more community stress during the time of the project.

Findings from the interviews found that participants respond differently to their experiences of violence. Participants indicate that a stable family and disengagement from violence in their communities helps them. However, youth also reported experiencing trauma from secondary exposure by building relationships with youth who have had first-hand experiences with violence. Participants learned to incorporate and internalize restorative practices in order to mitigate these experiences as a result of their TNT training. Participants felt more empowered as a result of the program.

This model would benefit from further development of the trauma-informed curriculum, replication, and rigorous multi-year evaluation.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Programs working to prevent youth violence should consider integrating PYD, restorative and trauma-informed practices. Youth participants can be supported to learn skills to advocate for violence prevention and to design interventions to address roots of the problem as they define them.

It is important to take a strengths-based approach to working with youth who have been exposed to violence and experience associated trauma.

The researchers recommend the that model components remain flexible enough to adapt to particular youth work contexts.



Harden, T., et al (2015). The Truth N' Trauma Project: Addressing Community Violence Through a Youth-led, Trauma-Informed and Restorative Framework. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 32, 65-79.

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