



Whole Child Intervention and Prevention Program for Youths at Risk of Gang Involvement

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Gang prevention, gang intervention, juvenile prevention, diversion, whole child, trauma, violence

POPULATION GROUP

Youth in conflict with the law

STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety; Coordinated & Youth Friendly Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

SOURCE

Academic article (peer-reviewed)

“Violence is both cause and effect in the spiral of emotional trauma.”

1. What is the research about?

Youth in poor neighbourhoods with a lot of gang activity tend not to have access to or seek out effective, culturally relevant, mental health supports. To address this gap, the School Board, Police Services, Families in Schools, and a State University collaborated to develop a “whole-child” program to improve academic, social and mental health outcomes of youth who have been exposed to trauma and are at increased risk for involvement with the criminal justice system. School administrators refer students to the program as an alternative to suspension or another “positive behavior intervention”. The purpose of this study is to describe and present findings from an outcome evaluation of a holistic – whole person or ecological – gang intervention and prevention program called Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program (JIPP).

2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in a low-income district of Los Angeles. The researchers describe the neighborhood as notable because of its large percentage of immigrants, non-status residents, low-educational achievement outcomes, second-language speakers, and high concentration of organized crime.

3. Who is this research about?

387 youth participated in the program over 2 years. Approximately two-thirds were high school age and the remaining were middle-school age students. Participants were predominantly Latino (91%) and male (71%).

4. How was the research done?

The researchers assessed program impact using three pre-post-program outcome measures related to psychosocial emotion, behavior, and academic achievement. Researchers measured psychosocial emotion (depression) using the Beck Depression Inventory. They measured behavior using school discipline and suspension rates and they assessed academic achievement using test scores.

5. What are the key findings?

Based on 2 years of data, the researcher report that JIPP participants saw improvement across the programs three outcome areas: mental health, academic achievement, and behavior. As a result of the JIPP, participant suspension rates decreased by 50%.

Participants mental health improved according to the Beck Depression inventory: the number of students “in the normal range increased from 35% - 66%”. Most JIPP participants test scores in core subject areas, English and Math, increased on the average by a minimum of 10%.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The JIPP program offers a promising “whole child” approach to prevention. The wrap-around support model takes three levels of youth experience into account: school, family, and community. The model supports youth development across four areas: mental health, academic performance, behavior, and relationship with caregivers. The JIPP model is structured into three phases that are each 6 weeks long:

- **Resilience phase:** This phase focuses on physical accomplishment. Young people develop a sense of self-discipline through a combination of physical fitness training, goal-setting, and testing. By achieving goals, the youth gain a sense of accomplishment, which builds self-esteem.
- **Empowerment phase:** This phase employs interactive software called “Ripple Effect”. The tutorials followed by group discussion focus on developing social emotional skills, problem-solving skills, and social responsibility.
- **Leadership phase:** In this phase, young people participate in individualized personal, academic, and employment counselling (job interviewing and public speaking).

Parents and caregivers are offered a parallel 18-week skill development program. The JIPP model works to reduce risk factors and build strengths across four interrelated domains: self, school, family, and community.

In order to reduce risks and increase protective factors of youth, youth workers can strive to design “holistic” interventions that address the multiple overlapping and interrelated contexts where youth develop.



Koffman, S., Ray, A., Berg, S., Covington, L., Albarran, N. M., & Vasquez, M. (2009). Impact of a comprehensive whole child intervention and prevention program among youths at risk of gang involvement and other forms of delinquency. *Children & Schools, 31*(4), 239-245.