



Research Snapshot

A school-based violence prevention program offers a protective impact for youth with maltreatment histories

What is this research about?

Child maltreatment substantially increases the risk for delinquent and violent behaviours during adolescence. The more types of maltreatment youth have experienced, the higher their risk. Researchers examined whether participation in the Fourth R, a 21-session classroom-based violence prevention program, had long-term effects in reducing acts of violent delinquency for maltreated youth. This program emphasizes knowledge, awareness, and skill development.

What did the researchers do?

Male and female students from 20 high schools in Southwestern Ontario received the program sessions during their regular health class. This program teaches healthy relationships, emphasizes skill development, and focuses on positive youth development. Students were presented with all or most of the curriculum in single-gender groups, rather than mixed-gender groups. Ten schools implemented the Fourth R intervention program and 10 followed the standard Grade 9 health curriculum. Teachers delivering the program attended a 1-day training session to gain familiarity with the curriculum. The Fourth R has been shown in other research to reduce dating violence.



What you need to know:

The Fourth R provided a protective factor against delinquency for maltreated youth at a 2-year follow-up. For these students, increasing levels of child maltreatment did not translate into higher levels of violent delinquency during adolescence.

All intervention schools received a training manual to help develop a Youth Safe Schools Committee which involves students in all grades and a teacher discussing school safety and related youth concerns. In addition, parents were provided with program information prior to and throughout the term in order to inform them of the curriculum and to encourage communication with their children.

Researchers examined the impact of the program at both the student and the school level. At the school level, researchers examined the overall rate of youth who had engaged in violent delinquency at each school. Further, they examined student-level predictors of violence to determine which had the most impact on individual rates of violent delinquency.

What did the researchers find?

Researchers found that several factors predicted increased violent delinquency in Grade 11. Males had rates of delinquency that

were almost 5 times higher than delinquency rates in females. Higher rates of maltreatment during childhood were associated with much greater risk of violent delinquency during adolescence. Further, students demonstrating violence in Grade 9 were more likely to exhibit violent behaviour in Grade 11.

There were also predictors of delinquency at the school level. Attending a school with a lower perceived sense of safety as rated by the students increased the risk of violent behaviour. However, for students who participated in the program, there was no significant relationship between the frequency or severity of childhood maltreatment and increased risk of violent delinquency during adolescence.

How can you use this research?

This research highlights the benefits of an inexpensive school-based violence prevention program. This program demonstrates support for the reduction of dating violence among students and the protective effect for maltreated youth, lowering their likelihood of engaging in violent delinquency. These results also suggest that a short-term violence prevention program can have significant and meaningful long-term results. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that incorporating this program into the health class curriculum is a viable way to reach the entire student population with relatively minimal intrusion upon the established school curriculum.

Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Crooks, C. V., Scott, K., Ellis, W., & Wolfe, D. A. (2011). Impact of a universal school-based violence prevention program on violent delinquency: Distinctive benefits for youth with maltreatment histories. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35, 393-400.

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