

EVALUATION ABSTRACT: *EVALUATION OF WILL POWER/WON'T POWER IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY*

Grantee

Girls Inc. of Greater Los Angeles

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Evaluator

Advanced Empirical Solutions (AES)

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Intervention Name

Will Power/Won't Power

Intervention Description

Volunteers of America Los Angeles (VOALA) implemented Girls Inc.'s *Will Power/Won't Power* (WPWP), an age-appropriate curriculum designed to teach girls in grades 6 and 7 (approximately 11 to 13 years old) about anatomy, hygiene, contraceptives, and positive, independent decision making. The 11-week abstinence-plus curriculum focuses on helping girls develop skills, insights, values, personal tools, peer support, and gain complete information on sexual and reproductive health. It uses interactive learning strategies, such as open discussions, role-play, and small-group activities, to encourage skill development. The goal is to motivate all WPWP participants to make smart choices—either choosing to postpone sex or, if not, using effective protection against pregnancy and disease.

VOALA invited girls randomly assigned to the intervention group to participate in 11 weekly voluntary afterschool group sessions delivered consecutively (and simultaneous to the counterfactual sessions), each lasting approximately 1.5 hours. Ten of the 11 sessions provided program content. The last session was a parent/guardian and daughter workshop during which participants shared what they learned with their accompanying adult(s).

Girls Inc. Program Specialists led all sessions. Program Specialists are women ranging in age from their early 20s to mid-30s experienced in successfully engaging and communicating with teens. Twice during the school year/implementation year, each specialist completed WPWP and counterfactual training. The Program Manager randomized Program Specialists to classrooms, requiring that specialists be well versed in both curricula.

Counterfactual

Equal Earners, Savvy Spenders

Counterfactual Description

VOALA implemented Girls Inc.'s *Equal Earners, Savvy Spenders* (EESS) curriculum, an economic literacy curriculum designed to teach middle school girls about personal finance and economics. Sample topics include loan options, investment risk and return, consumer tips, credit card use, labor laws, economic equity for women and girls, work-life balance, and global economics. This curriculum uses interactive learning strategies, such as group discussion about how girls are a part of the economy, hands-on activities on how to budget and save, and opportunities to practice skills learned. Other key topics include how to manage, invest, and save money and how to help others through philanthropy. The curriculum imparts skills about how to manage personal finances responsibly and become an economically independent adult.

Girls in grades 6 and 7 received 10 weekly afterschool EESS sessions, with each session lasting approximately 1.5 hours. All 10 sessions provided program content and were implemented simultaneous to WPWP sessions on campus.

Girls Inc. Program Specialists led all sessions. Program Specialists are women ranging in age from their early 20s to mid 30s who have experience successfully engaging and communicating with teens. Twice during the school year/implementation year, each specialist completed WPWP and EESS training.

Primary Research Question(s)

What is the impact of the WPWP curriculum relative to the EESS curriculum on participants' sexual activity onset one year after the end of the program?

What is the impact of the WPWP curriculum relative to the EESS curriculum on participants' pregnancy incidence one year after the end of the program?

Sample

The study sample includes 803 6th- and 7th-grade girls from Los Angeles, Culver City, Lynwood, and Downey Unified School Districts. There were five cohorts of middle school girls, including two cohorts during Year 3 (Cohorts 2a and 2b). To be eligible for the study, girls must have parental/guardian consent, understand the English language, have no prior engagement with the study. During Year 4 (Cohort 3), VOALA expanded eligibility requirements to require that interested participants attend a pre-session to verify their likelihood of committing to the semester.

Setting

Girls Inc. Program Specialists implemented WPWP and EESS sessions after school in public middle school classrooms. Fourteen schools across four school districts (Los Angeles, Culver City, Lynwood, and Downey) in the greater Los Angeles area participated in the study. Each school site hosted one intervention and one counterfactual classroom (two separate classrooms) concurrently each semester.

Research Design

The evaluation is a randomized controlled trial. For the 5-year duration of the grant, Girls Inc. discontinued their typical programming and adopted the WPWP or EESS, to which girls were randomly assigned. The girls who opted into the study received opportunities to participate in surveys and focus groups and were included in a study retention incentive structure. Girls who did not want to participate in the study only received the curriculum; while these girls remained in the classrooms, survey and focus group data were not collected (noted as missing data in the study).

Method

Program Specialists recruited girls during orientations, lunch periods and school fairs for approximately two weeks at the beginning of each semester and occasionally as early as the week before the academic year. Girls received program information and, if they expressed interest in the program, a registration packet (made available in English and Spanish). Specialists asked girls to complete registration packets with their parents/guardians then return completed paperwork to the Girls Inc. site contact within one or two days.

A parent/guardian consent form informed that girls would be randomized into either a reproductive health or economic literacy program. The form also described data collection activities and mandated reporting. The consent form covered both programming and evaluation activities.

Initially, the Girls Inc. Program Manager randomized participants as soon as they submitted a verified parental/guardian consent form. Beginning with Cohort 3, the Program Manager randomized participants after they submitted a verified consent form and attended an introductory session. The Program Manager randomly assigned girls to classrooms by adding names to each line of a school-specific randomization spreadsheet developed by the evaluation team. Lines were pre-assigned an ID number and classroom assignment for individual participants. Ten lines on each spreadsheet were coupled into five pairs for girls who enrolled with a friend using a *Girl + 1* clustering strategy. This strategy enabled girls to be assigned to a condition together to increase enrollment and retention. Although each line had a different participant ID for individual participants, coupled lines shared a classroom assignment so that a small number of the girls could be randomized in pairs. As a clustering adjustment, one randomly selected girl from each cluster was included in the analysis. Girls learned of their assignment during the pre-survey period. Each cohort completed pre-surveys together and, thereafter, were divided into intervention and counterfactual classrooms, during the first curriculum session.

Data Collection

Girls completed pencil-and-paper surveys with evaluation team members prior to, immediately following, then at 6 and 12 months following the end of the program. Program Specialists collected girls' pre-surveys and immediate post-survey on-site, in classrooms on designated survey days. The evaluation team collected 6- and 12-month post-surveys by ground mail. Survey periods at each site lasted two weeks. Each girl received two

opportunities to participate in a survey session. Survey sessions were staggered based on when school semesters started and school calendars.

In addition, the evaluation team conducted a program implementation study, examining implementation fidelity and quality using focus group, observation and attendance data. The evaluation team conducted focus groups with each cohort following the post-intervention survey to learn about implementation quality and cultural and/or religious practices that might shape what girls know about sexual activity, sexual intercourse, and pregnancy. The evaluation team also observed an average of 10% of all classes implemented during each semester to capture implementation fidelity and participants' engagement. Program Specialists collected attendance data to assess dosage.

Impact Findings

There is no evidence to suggest that WPWP has any long-term impact on either of the target outcome measures. Findings on the additional outcomes, however, suggests WPWP does have some long-term impacts, namely on STD knowledge. The significant difference between groups on STD knowledge (a 10.68 point difference, $p < .001$) indicates that girls within WPWP select a significantly higher proportion of correct responses (overall), when compared to girls in EESS, up to one year after the program.

Implementation Findings

With the assistance of 21 trained program specialists, Girls Inc. offered 714 1.5-hour intervention and counterfactual sessions across five cohorts. Participants attended 70% of intervention sessions on average. Observation ratings indicated high staff-participant interaction quality and high youth engagement with the program curriculum.

Schedule/Timeline

Sample enrollment, randomization, and pre-survey data collection ended in March of 2014. Collection of the immediate post-survey ended in June 2014, the 6-month post-survey in November 2014, and the 12-month post-survey in June 2015.