

High School FLASH: A Public Health Approach to Sex Education

The Office of Population Affairs (OPA) funded the development and rigorous evaluation of the High School FLASH program to determine if it is an effective innovative approach to preventing teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This program joins the ranks of Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) programs that have experienced positive outcomes when evaluated for effectiveness. OPA's TPP Tier 2 grantees develop, replicate, refine, and rigorously evaluate additional models and innovative strategies to reduce teen pregnancy. The TPP programs that experience favorable impacts are then considered evidence-based and become eligible to replicate in communities across the country.

Program Overview

High School FLASH (FLASH) is a 15-session comprehensive sexual health curriculum designed for classroom settings in grades 9 to 12. The basis of FLASH is a public health approach to behavior change. Shifting behaviors and attitudes is the primary strategy used in the FLASH curriculum for preventing teen pregnancy, STIs, and sexual violence. To this end, FLASH uses a harm reduction and behavior change framework, implements best practices, addresses risk and protective factors for program goals, and rests on the theory of planned behavior. The instructional approach of FLASH employs key concepts in every lesson, which enables teachers to hone in on the risk and protective factors outlined in the curriculum. The curriculum covers the following topics: the reproductive system, pregnancy, sexual orientation and gender identity, healthy relationships, coercion and consent, online safety, abstinence, birth control, preventing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and other STIs, condoms, STI testing, communicating and decision making, and improving school health.

Evaluation Study Design and Results

The evaluation employed a cluster randomized controlled trial design, with randomization at the school level. Randomization was stratified by region (Midwest and South) and by school size. All data collectors responsible for the consent and survey administration were blind to study condition. The control arm of the study used a five-session knowledge-based comparison curriculum. The schools had to be from regions with teen birth rates at or above the national average at the time of study recruitment. The schools agreed with randomization to

Program/Intervention Name

High School FLASH

Program Overview

High School FLASH is a 15-session comprehensive sexual health curriculum for classroom settings.

Setting

High school

Population

High school students grades 9 to 12 in the Midwest and South

Type/Mode

Curriculum-based intervention

Length/Duration

15 lessons, 50 minutes each



either the FLASH curriculum or a five-session knowledge-based comparison curriculum. Trained data collectors administered the survey three times over the course of the study - at baseline, three months post-intervention, and 12 months post-intervention. The surveys were collected during school hours using handheld tablets and data collection was identical across conditions. For the implementation evaluation the evaluation team collected data on fidelity, attendance,

and quality through observations, attendance logs, and fidelity logs. Observations were conducted for over 10 percent of all FLASH sessions; attendance and fidelity logs were collected for every session.

High School FLASH was found to be effective at reducing sex without a condom or birth control among sexually inexperienced youth. Additionally, participants had improved ability to refuse sex, self-efficacy to get and use condoms, attitudes toward birth control and condoms, and perceived peer norms about having sex and using birth control among the full sample, including youth of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities.



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