Healthy Youth: Strong and Connected- Preventing Youth Violence
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INTRODUCTION
Youth violence is a health epidemic that negatively impacts its victims physically and psychologically. In 2009, 74% of Milwaukee Public Schools Middle School students reported fighting and 47% had been in a fight on school property, a place where they are supposed to feel safe. Over 320 youth annually are treated for violence related injuries at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin’s Emergency Department. The consequences of violent acts become dire, as homicide is the leading cause of death in young Wisconsin African American males. (www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars)

PURPOSE / GOAL
The purpose of this initiative, “Healthy Youth: Strong and Connected (HYSC)”, is to teach Milwaukee Public School 6th grade students how to positively respond to their anger through communication and healthy relationships. The school-based violence prevention curriculum, Project Staying Alive, born from the HYSC initiative is working toward improving the mental and physical health of Milwaukee’s youth as they develop into young adults. The goal of Healthy Youth: Strong and Connected is to decrease violent injuries and death in our community.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
• 2,983 MPS Students received the 5 part curriculum during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years
• 61 classrooms in 24 schools received the curriculum. The schools that were chosen to be a part of the study service impoverished areas that experience a high rate of violent crimes.
• An additional 768 youth in 9 classrooms received the curriculum through funding from MPS’s Safe Schools, Healthy Students Initiative
• Two of the sessions were taught by Firefighters/Project Ujima Liaisons and three were taught by the 6th grade teachers. Techniques used to teach included the following:
  • Role playing situations that could lead to fights
  • Small group breakout discussions sessions
  • Interactive PowerPoint presentation about the causes and effects of violence
  • Personal stories from Firefighters/Project Ujima Liaisons

Students completed pre- and post- program surveys using audience response cards

OUTCOMES

Baseline:  
10 It’s OK to hit someone who hits you first.  
Disagree a lot 10.9% 210  
Disagree a little 9.8% 182  
Agree a little 14.6% 289  
Agree a lot 35.9% 715  
Totals 100.0% 1319  

17 If a student hits me first, my family would want me to hit him back.  
Disagree a lot 20.3% 209  
Disagree a little 15.8% 162  
Agree a little 17.3% 179  
Agree a lot 46.6% 491  
Totals 100.0% 1319  

8 Anyone who won’t fight is going to be "picked on" even more.  
Disagree a lot 19.5% 196  
Disagree a little 18.4% 191  
Agree a little 25.4% 257  
Agree a lot 26.7% 277  
Totals 100.0% 1319

OBSERVATIONS/ NEXT STEPS
• Student improved on each of the “knowledge” based questions regarding violence
• Students’ baseline attitudes and beliefs about violence:  
  • 70% of students “agree” that they will get picked on if they do not fight.  
  • 69% of students responded that their parents would want them to hit someone who hit them first.
• Future efforts:  
  • Comparing male vs. female responses and also determining if there is any statistical significance between related questions on the survey (such as #10 and #17).
  • Assess long term outcomes such as decreased suspension rates for fighting and less injuries due to fighting.
  • Engage parents and family members in violence prevention efforts at MPS
  • Expand program to 9th graders and include cyberbullying module

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Sponsored by a Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Grant
Pippa Simpson, PhD; Melodee Nugent, MA  
Section on Quantitative Health Sciences, Dept of Pediatrics