

Executive Summary

Purpose of Program

In an effort to increase reporting, bystander intervention, and ultimately prevention of perpetration of sexual violence, the Orange County Rape Crisis Center (OCRCC) has delivered the elementary school-based Safe Touch program for approximately 30 years. At early ages, Safe Touch increases students' knowledge of how to recognize sexual violence and teaches students the steps to take to get help if they experience inappropriate interactions with adults or other children. In fourth grade, students are taught how to be safe and respectful online, including recognizing and reporting cyberbullying. In fifth grade, students are taught how to identify and intervene against sexual harassment and sexual bullying. This outcome evaluation focused on fourth and fifth grade Safe Touch.

Program Activities, Setting & Population Served

Each grade's program is a 45-minute session that includes interactive multimedia presentation, group discussions, and sometimes role-plays. In the 2013-2014 school year, Safe Touch was implemented in all seven Orange County Schools (OCS) elementary schools and all eleven Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS) elementary schools.

Purpose of the evaluation

Although Safe Touch has been in schools for nearly 30 years, program impact on students has never been fully evaluated. To inform future revisions to Safe Touch curricula, as well as to inform future program dissemination and adaptation to other communities, OCRCC collaborated with a Capstone team, comprised of graduate students from UNC's Department of Health Behavior, to evaluate the short-term outcomes of the Safe Touch program's fourth and fifth grade curricula.

Overview of findings or outcomes

The evaluation was carried out in 31 classrooms total in two intervention schools and two comparison schools in CHCCS. By fourth grade, most students who had third grade Safe Touch correctly identified the "Safety Saying." Students had significantly higher knowledge of respectful internet use after receiving the Safe Touch program and were more likely to correctly identify cyberbullying situations from non-cyberbullying situations. After receiving the Safe Touch program, students were also more likely to have positive beliefs regarding reporting cyberbullying. There were no differences between intervention and comparison students on knowledge of safe internet use, intention to report cyberbullying, and self-efficacy to report cyberbullying.

By fifth grade, most students who had fourth grade Safe Touch correctly identified cyberbullying situations from non-cyberbullying situations. After receiving the Safe Touch program, students were significantly more likely than comparison students to correctly identify sexual bullying as different from flirting behaviors. After receiving the Safe Touch program, students were also more likely to have positive beliefs regarding intervening in a bullying situation. There were no differences between intervention and comparison students on intentions to report sexual bullying or be an active bystander and self-efficacy to report sexual bullying or be an active bystander.

Overview of recommendations

Safe Touch's strengths are in improving students' knowledge and positive beliefs. Outcome areas for improvement include students' behavioral intentions and self-efficacy to report an act of cyberbullying; respectfully use the internet; report an act of sexual bullying; and be an active bystander. We recommend that Safe Touch incorporate additional evidence-based and theory-based strategies into the curriculum in order to achieve the aforementioned improvements. Such efforts may require additional time with students, beyond the allotted 45-minute session. Furthermore, if the resources are available to OCRCC, our recommendations on evaluation tool revision and evaluation sustainability should allow OCRCC to continue to implement outcome evaluations in future years. Eventually, it may be desirable to incorporate process evaluation as an overall strategy for assessing both the feasibility and challenges of implementation and for better understanding of the Safe Touch program outcomes.