Combining Risk Factors and Preventative Measures to Help At-Risk Youth

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Introduction

- Any youth who has a "low probability of gaining an education, getting a job, effectively parenting, or being able to participate in the political process" (Lever et al., 2004).
- Risk factors include but are not limited to: aggression, family issues, gang involvement, poverty, stress, depression, learning disorders, and exposure to violence.
- The preventative measures we will be discussing include: school involvement, afterschool programs, mental health care, mentor relationships, teaching coping skills, and family involvement. These are often provided through after-school programs, mentor programs, and family and school involvement in the teen's academic career, and are mainly aimed towards developing healthy coping skills and relationships, and providing healthy environments for students to spend their time.
- Studies have confirmed the importance of considering risk factors and preventative measures, and their effects of risk of high school drop out (Anthony, 2008; Logan-Greene, Nurius & Thompson, 2012).

Main Points

- School programs and counseling centers have been shown to decrease the drop-out rates in areas where the population is more exposed to risk factors (Miano, Forest, & Gumaer, 1997)
- These researchers found that coping skills and stress levels have a huge impact on the level of risk for drop-out among these adolescents (Logan-Greene et al., 2012).
- Peer interactions and mentor programs seem to be the most effective way of teaching adolescents important coping skills (Grant et al., 2014; Lever et al., 2014; Stirtzinger et al., 2001).
- Researchers found that a multimodal intervention method used to decrease aggression and increase healthy social interactions among peers was very effective in reducing the chances of delinquency and dropout rates (Stirtzinger et al., 2001)
- A lack of proper guidance and parental involvement has often led to students turning away from school and towards gang violence (Barnert et al., 2015).
- Children with depression were 2.75 times more likely to drop out of school (Quiroga et al., 2012).
- Even among students from middle class families, students who experienced some family issues were more likely to drop out of high school (Franklin & Streeter, 1995).

Methods

- Research articles were found on the PsyINFO Database.
- Studies used middle school and high school students ages 11 to 18.
- Some articles included program evaluations of youth programs, including art and other community based programs (Averett, Crowe & Hall, 2015; Grant et al., 2014).
- Assessments included but were not limited to: SAVRY (Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth) (Gammelgard, Koivisto, Eronen, &Kaltiala-Heino, 2015), GREF (Gang Risk of Entry Factors) (Hennigan, Kolnick, Vindel, & Maxson, 2015), and HAP (Hilson Adolescent Profile) (Franklin & Streeter, 1995).
- Phone interviews, surveys and focus groups were also used.

Table 1
Parent and Student Reported Reasons for Leaving School
(*N* = 200)

Reason*	Frequency	Percent
Failing at least one class	108	54.0
School authority problems	79	39.5
Truancy	72	36.0
Family problems	59	29.5
Learning problems	47	23.5
Drug/Alcohol problem	43	21.5
Other**	43	21.5
Suspended	27	13.5
Took full-time job	24	12.0
Runaway	15	7.5
Trouble with police	10	5.0
Pregnancy	7	3.5

*Reasons are not mutually exclusive. It was not uncommon for more than one reason to be reported for the same student
**Includes such reasons as illness, death of a parent, moved to live with another relative, thrown out of the parental home, school phobia, beaten up at school by gangs and other related to psycho social stressors.

Table 1: (Franklin & Streeter, 1995)
Sample of 200 middle school dropout youth.

Status dropout rates of 16- to 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity: 1990 through 2014

U.S. Department of Education, 2016

Conclusions/Future Implications

- Research shows that it is important to take specific risk factors into consideration when preparing a youth development program.
- Future research should focus on combining specific risk factors with specific preventative measures to help improve effectiveness of reducing high school drop out rates.
- At-risk youth who are at high risk for aggression and do not have frequent access to programs would most benefit from learning better coping skills; this will allow them to apply their learned behaviors in various aspects of their lives, including confrontations in school and other social settings.
- Youth who are commonly exposed to local street gangs would most likely benefit from having more frequent access to programs. An after school youth program which provides activities and a safe and healthy place to study would be the best way to help the youth with this risk factor.
- Students with learning disorders would most likely benefit from having more help in school, such as, extra attention from their teachers, or taking special education classes where the teacher is aware of their learning disorder.
- Adolescents with high levels of stress, depression, low self-esteem, and substance abuse disorders, would best benefit from one-on-one attention from a counselor, either in school, or outside of school.
- A lack of family involvement can also lead to higher rates of drop out. These students would benefit most from receiving more attention in school and, with the school's involvement, the parents may be encouraged to step in and become more informed of possible concerns with their child.
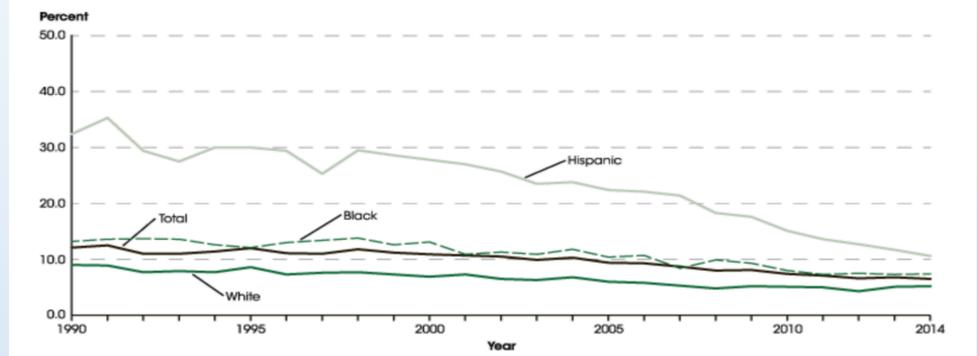
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