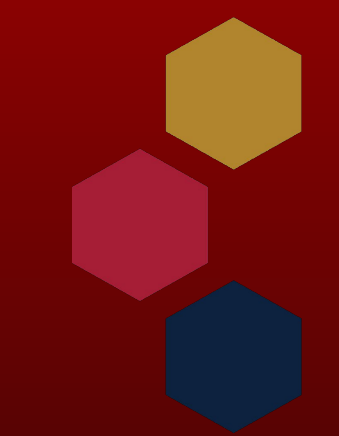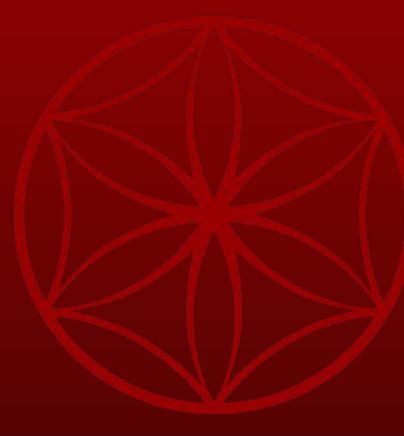# Teaching Healthy Relationships as a Sexual Violence Prevention Measure: Examining Three Years of Community and School-Based Interventions

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Overview of the Healthy Relationships for Rural Youth Initiative (HRRYI)

Background

This program, the Healthy Relationships for Rural Youth Initiative (HRRYI), aims to reduce the prevalence of sexual violence in rural Indiana through an **ecological approach**. Childhood trauma and adversity are risk factors for sexual violence victimization and perpetration. Given that Indiana has some of the highest rates of forced intercourse and children reporting two or more adverse childhood experiences, efforts to address these rates of child maltreatment and sexual violence in rural Indiana are imperative. This program is delivered to school and community-based organizations to promote healthy relational norms that serve as protective factors against sexual violence.

Program Description

Since 2019, this project has focused on implementing psychoeducational programs for youth, professional development trainings, and parent workshops with the goal of reducing the risk of first-time sexual violence victimization and perpetration. The program integrates evidence-based interventions and prevention measures. At the individual level, **577 elementary-aged students** have participated in educational sessions focused on **interpersonal boundaries, consent, bodily autonomy, trusted adults,** and **digital safety**. At the community level, workshops on the same aforementioned topics were delivered to a total of **131 parents, school personnel,** and **community members** with the goal of increasing participants' self-efficacy to promote healthy relational norms and intervene in boundary-violating situations among children. At the societal level, collaborative partnerships with project stakeholders and professional organizations support the ongoing promotion of cultural norms related to healthy relationships in the rural communities served by this program.

Recommendations

Health and Safety Resources

"To many people, health is 'what do you eat, what is your blood pressure, what disease do you have or not have?' How can we parcel out health to have a holistic view of healthy boundaries and relationships?" **- Community Stakeholder (Social Services)**

Recommendations:
- Broaden definition of "health" to communities and schools
- Educate and provide resources to community stakeholders and teachers to include healthy relationships, digital safety, and boundaries as a part of health curricula

Social Media

"We have thrust children into a world of technology without a conversation about boundaries for being online." **- Community Stakeholder (Social Services)**

Recommendations:
- Increase availability of social media / cybersafety resources in training materials
- Integrate digital etiquette skills with conversations about interpersonal relationships

Earlier Intervention

"I think that we have grossly overestimated the age where we can start having these conversations" **- Program Participant (Afterschool Staff)**

Recommendations:
- Have open conversations with children about interpersonal safety and boundaries early and often
- When having conversations, model comfort and security

Intervention Approaches

"Not just educate on 'don't do this' but help them understand why and what to do if it happens. We often leave it at the 'don't do's'." **- Community Stakeholder (School Personnel)**

Recommendations:
- Educate parents and youth-serving professionals on *why* actions are needed and *how* to respond to and care for those in need
- Shift from punitive responses to a restorative justice approach when addressing behavior

Methods & Results

To prevent sexual violence, HRRYI programming focuses on **boundary setting**, **consent**, **empathetic communication**, and **strategies to enhance the safety of youth** when using technology. The effectiveness of these methods is being evaluated by:

Quantitative pre-test and post-test surveys for parents and community leaders (N=10)

Results on pre-tests and post-tests completed by parents and community leaders found participants reporting increased confidence in talking to their kids about the risks of online bullying (p=.02) after attending the program.

Quantitative pre-test and post-test surveys for school personnel (N=14)

Results on the pre-tests and post-tests completed by school personnel showed that program participants experienced an increased sense of responsibility and confidence to intervene when witnessing boundary violations among students (ps<.05).

Qualitative semi-structured interviews with program participants and community stakeholders (N=3)

- ❑ Interviews were conducted via Zoom, audio recorded, and transcribed. Data were manually coded to identify emergent themes
- ❑ **Four major themes** related to training needs were identified:
    1. *Health and Safety resources*
    2. *Effects of social media*
    3. *Interventions for younger ages*
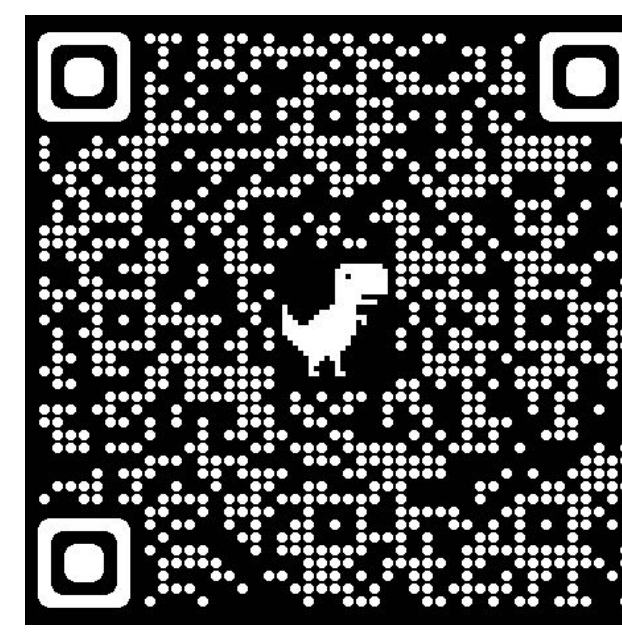   4. *Alternative intervention approaches*

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Student Research Team

Database of Resources

References & Contact Information