Promoting Protection Community Wide: Effects of the Communities That Care Prevention System

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Community-wide preventive interventions target both risk and protective factors to reduce problem behaviors and promote healthy youth development. Previous research has shown that the Communities That Care (CTC) prevention planning system reduces elevated risk factors and prevents adolescent problem behaviors.

Communities That Care does not focus exclusively on risk, however. At the heart of CTC implementation is the Social Development Strategy (SDS). The SDS seeks to provide youth with opportunities, skills, and recognition for prosocial (positive social) involvements and interactions in order to strengthen bonding. Bonding is hypothesized to promote acceptance of social standards, which in turn leads to prosocial behavior. These factors, which promote positive behaviors and protect against the development of problem behaviors, are called protective factors.

In CTC, all community members are encouraged to use the Social Development Strategy in their daily interactions with young people. Yet, to date, no study has examined CTC's effect on protective factors.

Researchers at the Social Development Research Group wanted to know whether CTC could significantly promote positive development among youth by:

1. Creating opportunities and recognition for prosocial involvement and interaction in youth’s daily lives, and
2. Ensuring that youth learn the skills needed to succeed in these involvements and interactions.

**Methods**

Data for this study came from the Community Youth Development Study (CYDS), a community-randomized trial of CTC in 12 experimental communities compared to 12 control communities.

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**Key Messages**

... The Communities That Care (CTC) prevention planning system promotes positive development among youth by creating opportunities, developing skills, and providing recognition for prosocial involvement.

... Analyses across all protective factors found significantly higher levels of overall protection among youth in CTC communities compared to youth in control communities.

... Analyses across domains of influence found significantly higher levels of protection among CTC youth in their communities and schools and in peer/individual interactions, but not in their families.
As part of the randomized trial, a longitudinal panel of 4,407 fifth graders was followed (starting in 2004) using the Youth Development Survey (YDS), a self-administered paper survey. The YDS measured fifteen specific protective factors divided into four domains of influence: peer/individual, family, school, and community. This research used global test statistics (GTS) to examine the overall difference in protective factor scores in Grade 8 (2007), controlling for Grade 5 (2004) protective levels. The same technique was used to examine the level of protection in each domain. For each individual protective factor, mean-level differences were examined.

**Results**

The GTS across all protective factors indicated that the overall level of protection was significantly higher among youth in CTC communities than for youth in control communities at the end of Grade 8. This overall effect appears to be due to increases in protection in every domain except one: family. The CTC communities showed higher protection in the community, school, and peer-individual domains. The adjusted mean-level differences of the fifteen protective factors are shown in Figure 1 above.

**Conclusion**

Using the SDS within the CTC planning system had a positive effect in increasing the overall levels of protection community wide. As communities consider prevention strategies, it important to enhance protective factors while reducing risk factors. CTC is a helpful way of incorporating protection into community planning efforts.

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**For additional information on this topic, please refer to the original article:**


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