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Effect of a School-Based Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program: Bridging the Gap in Parent-Teen Communication about Sex



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Introduction

Teen Sexual Activity in the United States

- Data from the 2011 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey show nearly half (47%) of all high school students have had sexual intercourse.¹
- Early sexual activity is associated with various risks including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and teen pregnancy.^{2,3}
- Teens may reduce the adverse outcomes associated with early sexual activity by delaying sexual intercourse or using contraception if sexually active.

Parent-Teen Communication

- Parents play an important role in preventing teens' sexual risk taking behaviors.
- General parent-teen communication and communication about sexual health, have been associated with preventing teens' sexual risk taking behaviors.^{4,5,6,7}
- Communication regarding sexual health has been associated with increased use of condoms, contraception, and condoms and contraception together and is protective against the initiation of sex, number of sex partners, pregnancy, and childbearing.^{5,6,7}



Healthy Futures (HF) Program

- A multi-factorial teen pregnancy prevention program targeting following levels:
 - Individual** - 24 sessions of classroom-based relationship education in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades
 - Interpersonal** - parent connection forms.
 - Organizational** - classroom, after-school, and parent components offered at 7 schools.

Methods

Study Design: Group cluster (schools) randomized (treatment-control) longitudinal (6th–9th grade) study
Sample: 1,005 students received either the HF 8-day classroom-based relationships education (n=463) or a 2-day control curriculum (n=542) in public middle schools (N=14) in northeastern Massachusetts.

- Students who completed a pre-test and immediate posttest in 6th grade and a posttest in 7th grade were analyzed.
- Only HF students (n=463) were included in the secondary analyses of parent connection form data.

Analysis: Chi-squared tests and *t*-tests were used to examine the effects of parent connection return rates on parent-teen communication. Results were considered significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

Results

Results on the parent-teen communication measures from year 1 (2011-2012) and year 2 (2012-2013) of the 3-year program are reported.

Demographics: Across HF and control schools, mean age was 12 in year 1 (2011-2012) and 13 in year 2 (2012-2013). Approximately half of the students were male and half were female. The majority of students lived in a two parent household (73%) or a single-mother household (21%). Students identified their race/ethnicity as:

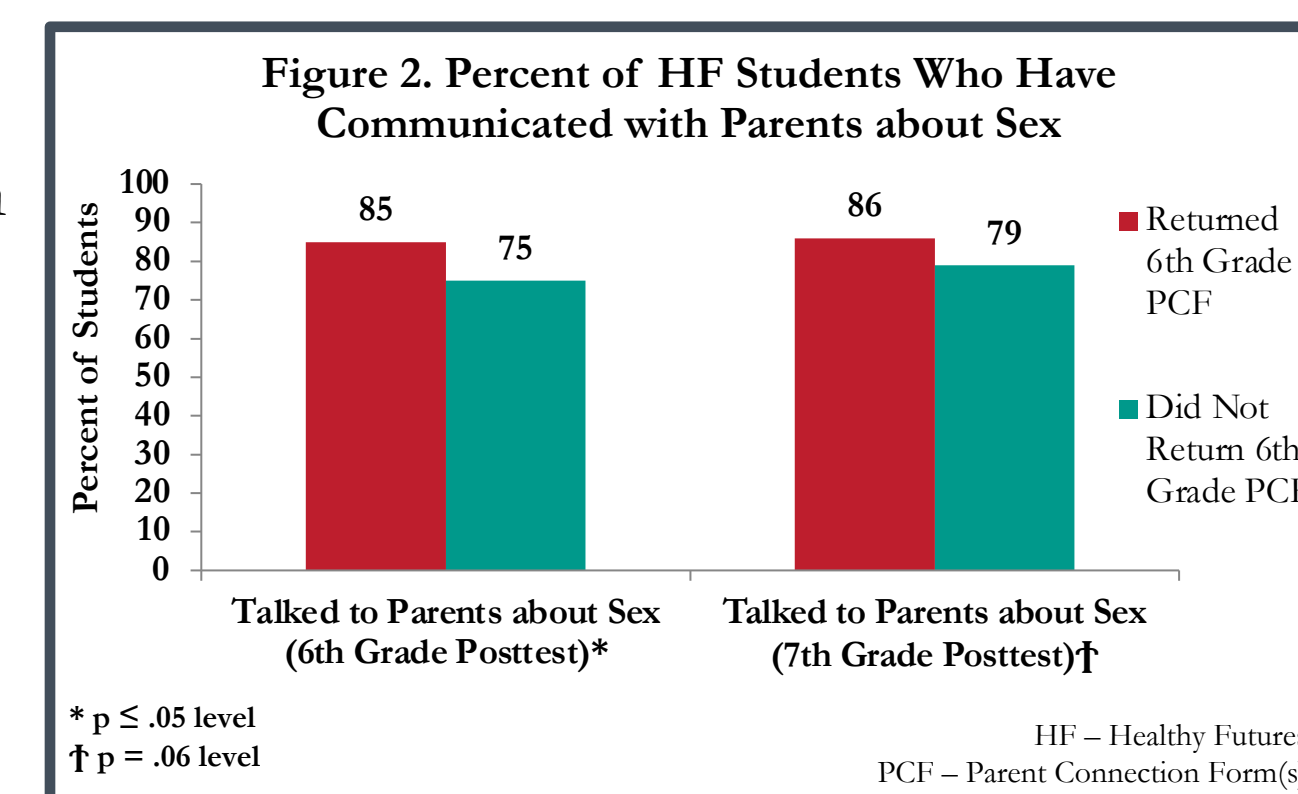
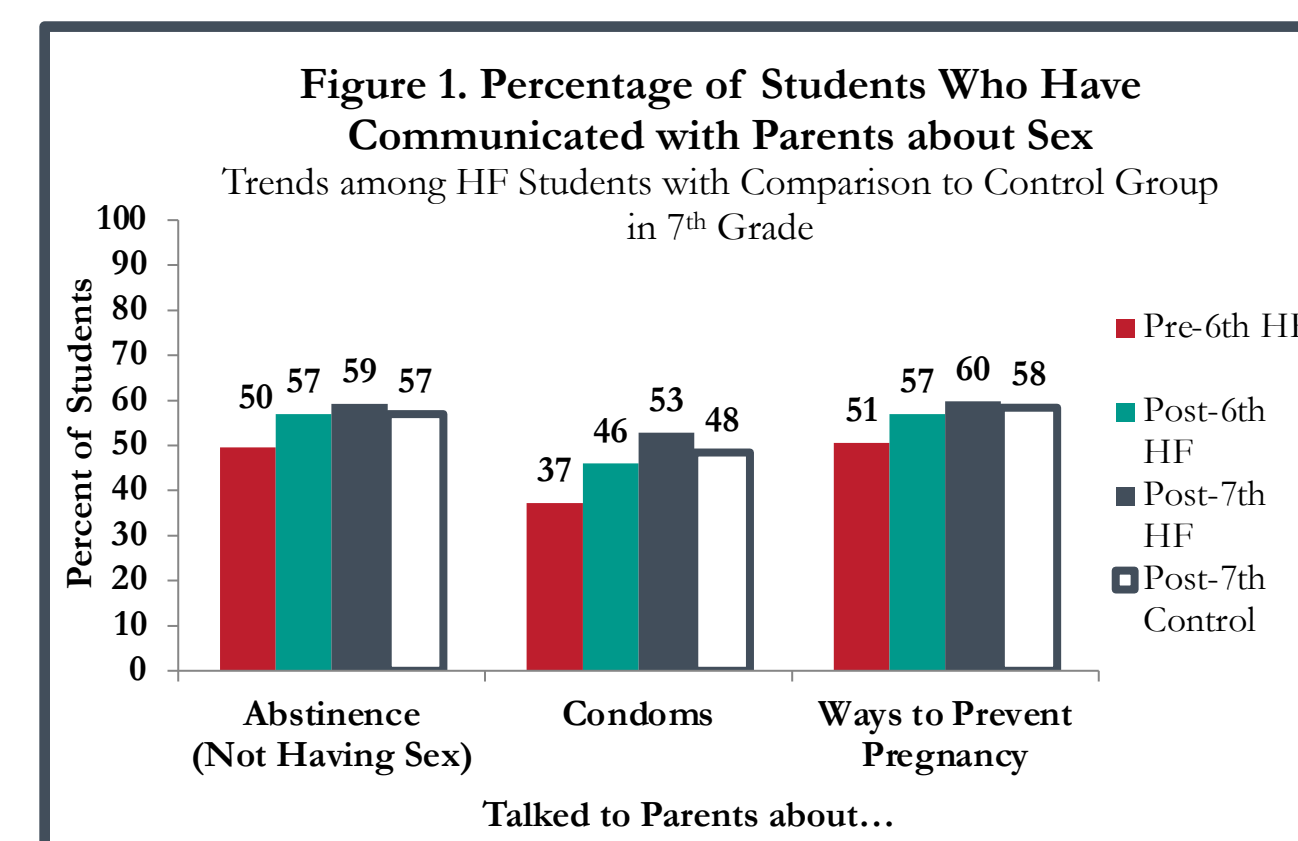
- White - 36% (HF), 29% (control)
- Hispanic - 39% (HF/control)
- Asian - 13% (HF), 19% (control)
- Multiracial - 11% (HF), 13% (control)
- Black/African American - 7% (HF), 8% (control)

Communication with Parents & Parent Connection Forms

- Pre-test showed similar parent-teen communication rates between HF and control students.
- HF students who returned 6th grade parent connection forms reported significantly greater communication with parents about sex than who did not return any 6th grade forms (*Figure 2*).
- HF students were more likely to return parent connection forms in 7th grade if they had returned any forms during 6th grade than if they had not returned any (*Figure 2*).

Communication with Parents about Sex

- HF students were increasingly more likely to have reported communicating with parents about sexual health topics after each 6th grade and 7th grade curriculum than students in the control group (*Figure 1*).
- Communication about specific sexual health topics increased between 6th grade pre-test and 7th grade posttest for:
 - abstinence** - 50% to 59% (HF) vs. 49% to 57% (control);
 - condoms** - 37% to 53% (HF) vs. 35% to 48% (control); and
 - ways to prevent pregnancy** - 51% to 60% (HF) vs. 50% to 58% (control).



Discussion

Healthy Futures significantly increased parent-teen communications about sex.

- Research suggests a teen pregnancy prevention program with a parent connection form component can increase parent-teen communication about sexual health such topics, especially when implemented in early adolescence (e.g., 6th grade).
- While behavioral data will not be collected until year 3 (2013-2014) and year 4 (2014-2015), these findings are promising in laying the foundation for reducing teen sexual risk-taking behaviors.
- Additional research exploring these findings is warranted.

Topic-specific parent connection forms provide the opportunity for parents to start possibly difficult and uncomfortable conversations with their child.

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