

Evaluating a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program for Middle School Boys

Nationwide, boys report higher rates of sexual risk behaviors than girls do. In addition, early fatherhood can have negative effects on the outcomes of young men. Becoming a father as a teenager is associated with completing fewer years of schooling and being less likely to graduate from high school.

Recognizing the need for research on programs designed to support adolescent males, the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded Mathematica to evaluate the *Wise Guys Male Responsibility Curriculum*. The evaluation involved 736 boys recruited from seven middle schools in and around the city of Davenport, Iowa. Funding for the program came from a Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) grant to the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Key findings

Wise Guys was well implemented and provided a meaningful supplement to the sexuality and reproductive health education typically offered in study schools. A team of two trained facilitators from a local social service provider, Bethany for Families and Children, delivered *Wise Guys* as a voluntary elective class for 7th-grade boys. Offering the program during the regular school day helped ensure that boys could regularly attend the program sessions. On average, boys attended 77 percent of the sessions offered.

Wise Guys had longer-term impacts on several targeted outcomes. It increased boys' knowledge of contraception and sexually transmitted infections, and increased boys' support for the view that sexually active youth should use condoms. The study team measured these impacts both one and two years after boys enrolled in the study. Two years after study enrollment, boys also reported greater motivation to avoid getting someone pregnant.

Compared with the standard school curriculum, *Wise Guys* did not change boys' likelihood of sexual initiation after two years. On the two-year follow-up survey, only 1 in 10 boys reported ever having had sexual intercourse. The low overall rate of



Program Impacts After Two Years Compared with the standard school curriculum, *Wise Guys*:

- Did not change the likelihood of sexual initiation
- Increased boys' knowledge of contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Increased boys' support for the view that sexually active youth should use condoms
- Strengthened boys' motivation to avoid getting someone pregnant
- Did not change boys' intentions to have sex, relationship attitudes, goal-setting ability, or communication skills
- Had a cost of \$488 per student served

sexual activity limited the effect the program could have during the study period, a common challenge for assessing the effects of teen pregnancy prevention programs serving a young population.

The study team estimated the per-participant cost as \$488 per student served. Labor expenses associated with the two facilitators and other program staff represented almost 80 percent of these costs. Other costs included program supplies, office equipment, local travel costs, and shared administration and indirect resources required to operate and implement the program.

About the program

Wise Guys is a long-standing, widely implemented curriculum designed to help adolescent males make responsible decisions about their sexual behavior and avoid early fatherhood. The current version of the curriculum includes 10 sessions covering such topics as setting goals, communication skills, healthy relationships, and identifying personal values and beliefs. In addressing these topics, the curriculum emphasizes the theme of male responsibility and encourages boys to view male strength as resulting from personal character, values, and wise decision making rather than physical traits.

In Iowa, to meet federal grant requirements for the PREP funding, the Iowa Department of Public Health added three supplemental sessions on healthy life skills, adolescent development, and healthy relationships to the standard curriculum. Although not required by the grant, the program facilitators also added a celebration session to the end of the program to recap key messages and recognize boys for completing the program.

Two staff members from Bethany for Families and Children co-facilitated the *Wise Guys* sessions, on average, once a week for 14 weeks. This schedule enabled them to deliver the full program in each study school up to twice per year—once in the fall semester and again in the spring. Some schools offered *Wise Guys* during an elective or free period, whereas others pulled students from their regularly scheduled classes to attend. According to classroom logs completed by the two Bethany facilitators, the facilitators offered 95 percent of planned sessions during the three years of implementing the program. The program facilitators worked with school staff to identify and invite a mix of higher- and lower-risk boys to participate in the voluntary program.

Evaluation methods

Recruitment for the study started in fall 2013 and continued for three consecutive school years. To participate, boys had to receive written permission from a parent or guardian and complete a baseline survey. The study team worked with the program facilitators and school staff to distribute and collect permission forms at the beginning of each semester. Across the seven study schools, 736 boys received permission.

Boys' characteristics at study enrollment

Characteristic	Percentage
Age	
12 or younger	80
13 or older	20
Race and ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	51
African American, non-Hispanic	14
Hispanic	22
Other	13
Lives with biological mother and father	48
Currently in a dating relationship	26
Ever had sexual intercourse	5
Sample size	736

Source: Baseline survey conducted by Mathematica.

The study team randomly assigned participating boys to one of two research groups. Boys assigned to the treatment group were invited to attend the *Wise Guys* sessions as an elective supplement to the school's regular curriculum. Boys assigned to the control group could not attend *Wise Guys* but continued to receive the sexuality and reproductive health education provided as part of the school's regular curriculum.

The study team measured outcomes by administering surveys to boys in both research groups one and two years after enrollment. For the one-year follow-up, 94 percent of boys in the treatment group and 95 percent of boys in the control group completed the survey. For the two-year follow-up, 89 percent of boys in the treatment group and 91 percent of boys in the control group completed the survey.

The PREP Multi-Component Evaluation

This brief is part of a series of products from the PREP multi-component evaluation. Learn more about the evaluation at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/personal-responsibility-education-program-prep-multi-component>. Learn more about the PREP initiative at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/programs/adolescent-pregnancy-prevention>.

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