Integrating Healthy Relationship Education in High School and College

Webinar Question and Answer (Q&A)

February 11, 2016

Question: Why did you choose to use the term “sexual coercion,” and what is the difference between using that term and saying “sexual assault” or “rape?”

Answer: Evin Richardson, Doctoral Candidate and Research Assistant, University of Georgia:

Thank you for your question. So the reason we chose sexual coercion is because the measure that we used in our study measures sexual coercion and not rape or sexual assault. It does measure that but not only that. Some of the questions that were used in the survey were asking things that didn’t necessarily lead to sexual intercourse, but other sexual contact. It was using verbal things like threatening to terminate their relationship, that sort of thing. So it wasn’t always sexual assault or rape, so that’s why we used the term sexual coercion. It’s more of an umbrella term for the questions that we asked.

Question: Have you seen teen pregnancy prevention strategies change with social media?

Answer: Shannon Lindsay, Training Coordinator, South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:

That’s a great question. Actually, I was sitting here as Evin was talking, thinking through how social media actually might even impact her work. I definitely think that some of the teen pregnancy prevention efforts have changed. There are a lot more resources available online and available through social media. We, in a previous project when we conceived of and developed our youth-focused website, http://www.notrightnowsc.org/, we did a lot of our advertising through social media and continue to do that.

We’ve seen some great results out of North Carolina for a project that they have using a text line to provide information to young people. I definitely think there’s been a change, and I honestly think that we can use social media to our advantage. We can leverage it to provide information to young people in new and novel ways and ways that they access more readily, because there’s a level of anonymity to it, which obviously comes with social media.

So I hope that answers your question. I do think it’s changed -- I think it’s changed the way young people relate to one another, and I certainly think that we’ll continue to see that impact on our work as we move forward. Young people today, much to my chagrin and dismay, are not at all like young people were when I was young. I have a 13-year-old daughter, and she’s growing up in a very different world than I did. Social media is responsible for that in many, many ways.
Question: In addition to educating parents, can healthy relationship education be incorporated on college campuses for students who may already be experiencing feelings of entitlement, and do you think it would be helpful for them?

Answer: **Evin Richardson, Doctoral Candidate and Research Assistant, University of Georgia:**

Absolutely. I am a firm believer that healthy relationship can make a huge difference in someone’s life and the way that they think or the way that they behave. I think that might be a good way to maybe prevent some of these occurrences of sexual coercion. I actually haven’t thought about that in detail, but I think that providing healthy relationship education and providing the strategies to dealing with these feelings of entitlement and what that actually means and changing how we behave, can make a huge difference on college campuses, yes.

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Question: What is the best way to approach a local public high school about relationship education for youth?

Answer: **Shannon Lindsay, Training Coordinator, South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:**

My hope is that, depending on what state you’re in, that you have laws or state standards for health education that mandate, in some way, that young people are receiving comprehensive sex education. Certainly from my perspective, the approach should be through whoever the coordinator is in the district, of the health and wellness education in the district, to ask, are you using the curricula? Is it evidence-based, and does it integrate a healthy relationship information? Here in South Carolina, our domestic violence and sexual assault organizations provide healthy relationship training in our school district, so there’s already a mechanism for an inroad into some of these organizations and some of these districts, but that might be a place to start. Evin, I don’t know if you or Robyn have any other suggestions for that.

**Evin Richardson, Doctoral Candidate and Research Assistant, University of Georgia:**

Well, for the next week while we’re grant-funded, all our participants must be a parent of Based on another project that I’ve worked on here at the university, here in Georgia they are implementing relationship education with sex education in some of the school districts. We know in a lot of states that sex education is happening in the high schools and in the middle schools, but I think that’s the perfect place for relationship education to be included. Robyn, I don’t know if you have anything else to add, but I think that maybe approaching a school or a school district with the suggestion of integrating it with the sex education -- there’s a lot of research that shows that that’s helpful, and that students’ well-being is increased and their strategies for having healthy relationships increase.

**Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:**

I would just add that there are a number of states who have integrated healthy relationship education skills into their high schools. For example, Utah has integrated it and they have a specific curriculum that is taught consistently throughout the high schools. In terms of how to approach, each school district and each state are slightly different. What I have heard from some is that the best place to start is to start with the
principal at the school, but that works in school districts where principals have a little more flexibility in terms of how things are done. In other districts, it’s more important that you start with the school board, for example, and get the school superintendent on board with what you’re trying to offer.

In some states, we’ve found that family life education, what used to be called “home ec.,” those classes are another venue for offering healthy relationship education skills versus just the health classes. Some of the challenges in some states is that healthy relationship education may be offered, but it’s often offered as an elective, and it’s not always seen as the “cool” class, so it doesn’t always get as much interest from some of the young people. So marketing is a big piece of how are you going to sell the idea, first to the schools, but also to engage the young people and get them interested in participating. We do have some resources in the Virtual Library that talk about Utah and also the p.a.p.a Curriculum, which has been integrated into high schools in Texas, so you might want to check those out.

Question: How do you sign up for the Third Thursday webinar series?
Answer: Shannon Lindsay, Training Coordinator, South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:
Great question and obviously, as the Training Coordinator, I’d love to have you join us next week. You can visit our Web page, and our corporate Web page is http://www.teenpregnancysc.org/. If you go to our Events and Trainings page, you can scroll down there and find next week’s webinar. Click on Register, register, and join us next week. We’d love to have you.

Question: How does South Carolina share information about their youth website, and what information do they find is the most popular?
Answer: Shannon Lindsay, Training Coordinator, South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:
Okay. So we have done a lot of marketing. The website was a byproduct generated from our most recent Center for Disease Control grant that just wrapped up at the end of September of 2015. We developed and tested the website in two communities, and then shared that information through youth leadership teams in both communities. We’ve been very fortunate to be the recipient of two new federal grants that began on October 1st. In both grants, we have youth leadership teams as a component of the local organizations that are partnering with us. We share the website with those young people.

We actually are in the initial stages of planning a youth summit this summer. We will be bringing in representatives from all of those youth teams, and I suspect -- I can’t promise, but I suspect a good bit of that will include publicizing the availability of notrightnowsc.org.
We have tons and tons and tons of what we call, here at the Campaign, “swag.” We give away a lot of stuff that has our website address on it and lots of information that’s been published and created in youth-friendly ways. Every year in May, we do what we call a road show. We take our work on the road and spend time in local communities and in local school districts. Last year we had some fantastic presenters, and their goal was to work with young people around our notrightnowsc.org website. We use social media. We use Twitter. We use iHeartRadio and Spotify. We do ads on a lot of those platforms as well as a way to generate knowledge and draw folks to the website.

To tell you which parts of it are the most popular, honestly I can’t tell you that. I’m not responsible for the website, but I know it gets lots and lots of hits. I suspect that we’d have a clinic locator on that website. I suspect that might be a fairly popular option on the website, but it doesn’t tell me when I look and see who’s been -- I can’t tell if it was a young person or an adult. I certainly visit it quite regularly. Every time I go, it counts me again. There’s tons of information there. There’s information there for parents as well, so we send the parents there, too. Our goal is to help parents have open, honest conversations about relationships, love and sex with their young people, and the best way to do that is to initiate a conversation. Not have a talk, but actually have a conversation.

We’ve done a lot of public awareness campaigns across the state as well with that “Not Right Now” logo, so hopefully it’s been fairly well saturated and people know it. If they don’t, that work will continue.

Question: Could you say more about the integration of adverse childhood experiences into training? How did it come about, and what has been the response?

Answer: Shannon Lindsay, Training Coordinator, South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:

I talked a little bit about the training that we’ve done with foster parents and with youth service providers. We call that training “Askable Adult.” We’ve modified the training and now have two versions of it based off some work that came out of New York, and we’ve adapted it and modified it for South Carolina. We’ve done this -- it’s a full day. It’s six hours. We’ve done it so many times, and every time we’ve done it we’ve changed it a little bit.

When we started working with foster parents, what we realized was that foster parents are foster parents for a reason. They want to provide love and safety to a young person who has maybe not had that. What we heard from those foster parents was that they didn’t understand why kids were so isolated or cold or rude, especially teenagers. Part of what we did was we stepped back and said, “Okay, well, why might that be? Why might you be seeing resistance or anger?” And so we came back to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and adverse childhood experiences. That study, gosh, I don’t even know how old it is, but it’s been around a good long while from Kaiser Permanente out in California.

We’ve had David Walsh here to talk about parent-child connectedness, and he talked about adverse childhood experiences, and that piqued my interest. I have a wonderful
coworker, Dana Bancroft, who was also interested in this information and she and I delved in a little bit, learned a little bit more, and then thought, you know it makes sense when we talk to folks about why you might see resistance in a young person, in a teenager, particularly if that young person is in the foster care system. They may be trying to meet a particular need in that hierarchy, and they have been exposed to some level of trauma, so our understanding of them may not be fully well-developed.

The last time we did the training and we presented those two pieces together, we got the best results we've ever gotten, and it will be something we continue to do. It has helped us, too, all of us here at the Campaign, develop a better understanding of why young people may seek love and acceptance through sexual behavior. There's so much about it that just sets the light bulb on in my mind when I think about some of the reasons that young people find themselves in sexual relationships at young ages and either pregnant or parenting at young ages.

Question: Do you know of any evaluations of marriage and relationship education programs for youth that specifically look at the impact of avoiding violence in future relationships?

Answer: Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:

I believe that Healthy Relationship California just recently did some analysis of data on early interventions and healthy relationship education for youth. I am not sure if it specifically talks about the research as it relates to preventing violence, but I would imagine that that's probably in there. They have been a healthy marriage grantee and if anyone is interested in their contact info, if you'll email me, I'll be happy to get it for you. I know they just recently did a really nice piece on analysis of data as it relates to healthy relationship education and youth.

Question: Where can I find the slides from this webinar?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/events-archive to download a copy of the slides, recording, transcript, and a Q&A document from this webinar.

Question: Who should I contact if I have more questions about this webinar?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org or email us at info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org.