

Assessing Risk in Young Adolescents and their Caregivers Living in NYC Family Shelters



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What is HOPE?

- HIV Outreach to Homeless Parents and Early Adolescents
- 4 year grant funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse to provide HIV/AIDS and alcohol abuse prevention programming to families living in NYC shelters with youth between the ages of 11 to 14
- Families receive \$20 for parents and \$10 for youth for each session they attend and every questionnaire they fill out
- Assessments are conducted at baseline, post-test, at 6 mo., and 12 mo
- Intent to treat model

HOPE Health

- 3 week program
- Parents and youth are apart during the sessions to foster open discussion among their peers
- Provides up-to-date health information on HIV/AIDS and alcohol and drug abuse

HOPE Family

- 8 week program
- Parents and youth separate during session, then come back together to discuss as a family
- Aims to strengthen protective family processes (e.g. family communication around HIV/AIDS and alcohol and drug abuse)

Demographics - Youth

- Gender: 47% girls, 53% boys
- Race/Ethnicity:
 - 45% Black
 - 43% Hispanic
 - 9% Both
 - 3% Other
- 85% were born in the U.S.
- Average age: 12.4 years
- Average grade: 6th



Demographics – Primary Caregiver

- Gender: 89% female, 11% male
- Race/Ethnicity:
 - 48% Black
 - 42% Hispanic
 - 8% Both
 - 2% Other
- 68% were born in the U.S.
- Average age: 37.7 years
- Education: 8th grade or less to post college. (Average was less than high school grad)
- Currently employed: 16%
- Currently married: 24%



Shelter Experience

- Time in shelter system ranged from less than a month to over a year with an average stay of around 6 months.
- For almost half (45%) this was not their first stay in a shelter.
- Although most (children 87%, parents 81%) reported feeling safe at the shelter, 13% of children and 19% of parents did not.

| Life Event Item | % Children Reporting* | % Parents Reporting |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| A family member was attacked or beaten | 43 (44) | 36 |
| A family member was stabbed or shot | 33 (35) | 24 |
| A friend was stabbed or shot | 31 (31) | 32 |
| A family member was stopped and question by the police | 56 (58) | 55 |
| Someone threatened to hurt a member of my family | 36 (37) | 36 |
| A family member was robbed or mugged | 31 (33) | 31 |
| Saw people dealing drugs in the neighborhood | 58 (56) | 61 |
| Parent lost job | 41 (41) | 40 |
| Death of a family member | 62 (63) | 62 |
| Family member having a drug problem | 44 (47) | 46 |
| Were physically attacked | 35 (37) | 34 |
| Witnessed a fight in which a weapon was used | 41 (44) | 33 |
| Saw drug deals | 53 (54) | 57 |

*All children with baseline (target children only)

School Performance

| Item | Youth | Parents |
|--|-------|---------|
| Getting in trouble at school for too many absences | 34% | 14% |
| School work had deteriorated | 22% | 22% |
| Changed to a new school during the past year | 72% | 54% |
| Repeated a grade during the past year | 50% | 40% |

Youth Mental Health

Youth report

- Have suicidal thoughts – 21%
- Worried that bad things will happen to them – 47%

Caregiver report

- Similarly, 49% of caregivers reported that it was somewhat or certainly true that their children had many worries or often seemed worried
- 27% reported that it was somewhat or certainly true that their child was often unhappy, depressed or tearful and 30% that their child had many fears

Youth Mental Health, continued

- 43% of caregivers reported that their child had at least minor difficulties in emotions, concentration, behavior, or getting along with others (20% reported definite or severe difficulties)
- Of those who reported difficulties, close to half (43%) reported that difficulties had been present for less than 6 months

Parent Mental Health

- 37% scored above the clinical cut off (BSI)
- Mean = 0.56 (s.d.= 1.58, range 0 – 3.04)



Youth Substance Use

These results seem positive and comparable to a community based sample

- Cigarette smoking: 12% reported having tried cigarettes and only 4% reported having smoked at all in the past month.
- Alcohol use: 22% reported having tried alcohol and 7% reported having used alcohol one or more time per week in the past month.
- Marijuana use: 7% reported having tried marijuana, 5% in the past month

Parent Substance Use

- Parents reported normative or less than normative lifetime use or experimentation with drugs and alcohol (for example, 58% reported having ever drunk alcohol and 39% reported having ever used marijuana)
- Reported current use was also low: mean number of days of alcohol use over past month was less than 1-2 days and mean number of days of marijuana use was close to zero

Sexual Possibility/Activity

- 27% experienced a sexual possibility situation (in comparison with a comparable community sample which was 12% ($X^2 (1, N = 128) = 10.18, p < .001$))
- 7% reported having had sex
- 69% felt they were too young to have sex (20% disagreed, 11% were in the middle)
- Close to half reported that they would feel comfortable talking to a boyfriend or girlfriend about:
 - Concerns of getting infected with HIV/STIs (41%)
 - Ways to prevent getting infected with HIV/STIs (50%)

Relationship Between mental health of Caregiver and Youth

- There was a significant correlation between parental report of child's difficulties and strengths and child's self report of depression ($r = 0.21$; $p < 0.05$)
- There was a significant correlation between parental mental health and child mental health ($r = 0.21$; $p < 0.05$)
- There was also a significant correlation between parental mental health and parent report of child's strengths and difficulties ($r = 0.40$; $p < 0.01$)

Conclusion

- This is a population heavily affected by traumatic and potentially risky events (e.g. changing school, repeating grade, viewing drug dealing etc.)
- Environmental stressors could be impacting school performance
- Families are experiencing great stressors in their lives but have been fairly resilient (i.e. no high report of drug use)

Conclusion (cont.)

- Youth in family shelters are at greater risk of engaging in sexual and drug activity as they reported being in sexual possibility situations more often than youth in general population
- Programming in family shelters should target the entire family, not be exclusive to youth