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Evaluating Implementation Fidelity of a Research Based Drug Prevention Program
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INTRODUCTION

Expected program outcomes are dependant upon correct program implementation. Project ALERT (PA) is a substance use prevention program for students in grades 6, 7 and 8. It aims to teach skills and strategies for resisting peer pressure and establish non-drug use norms. Research has demonstrated that the Project ALERT curriculum is most effective when it is implemented with fidelity.

School district leaders of a Midwestern medium-sized town requested that evaluators determine the extent of implementation fidelity of the PA program. This poster describes the creation of an instrument that can be used to evaluate the implementation fidelity of the PA program in a classroom setting.

PARTICIPANTS

Four Prevention Specialists, four school counselors and four classroom teachers were observed teaching the Project Alert curriculum. They either co-taught (N=6) or presented the lesson alone (N=6).

Evaluators conducted nine observations for each of seven different Project Alert lessons (lessons 1 and 4-9) in nine 6th grade classrooms in nine different elementary schools.

INSTRUMENT

The evaluation team reviewed the PA curriculum and existing tools to develop a plan for conducting the fidelity checks. The curriculum consists of 11 lessons, each with two components: 1) lesson activities and 2) steps within each activity.

Existing fidelity tools utilize a global approach by examining only the broad lesson activities. However, the evaluators believed that including the steps within each activity would provide for *more specificity in measuring fidelity* and would provide *useful information for formative feedback*. Under this framework, the team developed an observation scoring system based directly on the curriculum given to program implementers.

Observers scored all steps listed in the curriculum for each lesson on a 0/1/2 scale. A score of 0 indicated that the program implementer did not include the step, a score of 1 indicated minor changes/modifications to the step, and a score of 2 indicated the step was implemented exactly as described in the curriculum. This system allowed the evaluators to better identify minor changes to steps within lesson activities that sometimes must occur due to logistical constraints within a classroom setting.

RESULTS

The 0/1/ 2 rating system resulted in less than acceptable inter-rater reliability. Therefore, the scoring was reduced to a 0 (not observed) or 1 (observed with or without modifications) system, which yielded high inter-rater reliability (78% to 91%; different lessons yielded different rates) . This system still allowed evaluators to measure fidelity by considering each step within an activity, even though the rating system was not as specific as had originally been desired.

CONCLUSIONS

Standard prevention curricula have sometimes been proven effective only with their recommended method of implementation. Often the classroom environment does not allow for implementation exactly as described in the curriculum. This may be due to time, physical space, general classroom management, and numerous other constraints. It is important for evaluators to determine whether less than perfect implementation can also lead to changes in desired outcomes. Therefore, it is useful to consider ways to evaluate fidelity in terms of partial implementation, as well as implementation of important steps within activity lessons.

We created an instrument which allowed us to evaluate implementation in many different classroom settings. It also allowed us to provide the program teachers with detailed formative feedback.

One important benefit of this scoring system is that it is simple, and yields high inter-rater reliability. It is therefore easy for district employees to use without evaluators.

REFERENCES

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