Evaluation of an After-School Program Affiliated with the Central Blair County Recreation and Park Commission

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of an after school program in increasing resilience among youth. The hypotheses of this study were that, compared to those who didn't attend an after school program, participants' scores would increase in the areas of (a) knowing about neighborhood resources, b) feeling there were interested and caring adults in their lives, (c) feeling a sense of acceptance and belonging, (d) reporting high controls against deviant behavior, (e) recognizing models for conventional behavior, (f) having positive attitudes toward the future/future expectations, (g) placing a value on achievement, (h) perceiving an ability to work with others, and (i) perceiving an ability to workout conflict. A post-test only design with a comparison group provided evidence that adolescents who participated in the after-school program had a greater awareness of neighborhood resources than their comparison group counterparts. Focus group data with parents and youth suggested that there were a number of positive effects realized as a function of participation in the after-school program.

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Evaluation of an After-School Program Affiliated with the Central Blair County Recreation and Park Commission

This study evaluated a new after school program that was developed by two graduate students of Penn State University. At the time of the study, programming sponsored by the Central Blair County Recreation and Park Commission (CBRC) consisted largely of sports programming. In consultation with the director of the commission, Rearick and a colleague developed an after-school program to meet the needs of those youth not well served by the sports programs. In particular, the program was developed to meet the needs of youth who lived in the central city area of Altoona and who lived in a rather impoverished environment. The after school program was designed specifically to increase resiliency among these youth. About 50,000 people live in Altoona, and they are predominantly of European descent.

The program was evaluated using quantitative and qualitative methods. Prior to developing the program, focus groups were conducted with two groups of youth (one male and one female) to enable the programmers to understand the issues important to the youth and better meet their needs. What follows is a description of the program, a discussion of the methods, and finally the results of the evaluation and a discussion with recommendations.

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of an after school program in increasing resilience among youth. The hypotheses of this study were that, compared to those who didn't attend an after school program, participants' scores would increase in the areas of (a) knowing about neighborhood resources, b) feeling there were interested and caring adults in their lives, (c) feeling a sense of acceptance and belonging, (d) reporting high controls against deviant behavior, (e) recognizing models for conventional behavior, (f) having positive attitudes toward the future/future expectations, (g) placing a value on achievement, (h) perceiving an ability to work with others, and (i) perceiving an ability to workout conflict.

The Program

The after school program began the first week of March, 1998 and finished June 3, 1998. It ran on Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:30. Participants ranged in age from 11 to 16 and were primarily from similar socio-economic and racial backgrounds. The after school program was offered at the Booker T. Washington building, located in central city, Altoona. There was no cost for the program, therefore there was no formal registration period. As a drop-in program, there was a core of about 9 youth who regularly attended. Many who attended came for a month or so and then moved on to other things. The program consisted of sports, crafts and expressive arts, and special events. Youth helped plan, and participated in, a camping outing and a rock climbing outing. This program was the first of its kind in Altoona.

The after school program was designed specifically to increase resiliency among participants. Therefore, the goals of the program were as follows:

(1) To increase an awareness of neighborhood resources.
(2) To develop an awareness that there are interested and caring adults in the participants social environment.
(3) To develop a sense of acceptance and belonging in the participants perceived environment.
(4) To develop an understanding of the high controls against deviant behavior in the participants perceived environment.
(5) To develop an appreciation of models for conventional behavior.
(6) To develop a positive attitude toward the future.
(7) To increase the value on achievement.
(8) To develop an appreciation of the ability to work with others.
(9) To develop the positive ability to work out conflicts.

Methods

The evaluation of the after school program was based on a quasi-experimental design using a non-equivalent comparison group of convenience. As well, a series of focus groups conducted with parents and youth (separately) of participants in the program. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to adolescents who participated in the after school program (the experimental group). Because of the difficulty in acquiring a comparison group in a timely manner, only posttests were given to the comparison group. The experimental group consisted of those who attended the after school program. The comparison group consisted of approximately 30 adolescents ranging in age from 12 to 15 who attended either Roosevelt Junior High School or were members of the Buddy Club. The school, the Buddy Club, and the after-school program were in the same neighborhood and therefore experienced the same socio-economic and environmental factors.

Parental letters and permission slips were given to both the experimental and comparison groups prior to the pre-test. Parents were notified of the study's intentions and their child's rights to participate voluntarily or withdrawal from the study at any time. Adolescents in the experimental group were given the incentive of a free t-shirt with the CBRC logo on it if they returned the parent permission form. Adolescents in the Roosevelt Junior High School comparison group were given the incentive of being entered into a raffle for a $15 gift certificate, per grade, to the local mall if they returned the parent permission form. Adolescents in the Buddy Club control group were given the incentive of being entered into a raffle for a $20 gift certificate to Toys R Us if they returned the parent permission form. Following is a detailed description of the procedures for the experimental and comparison groups.

Procedures

Experimental Group. The after-school program began February 9, 1998, yet due to poor advertising, participants did not start attending regularly until the first week of March. The after school program design allowed adolescents to drop in and out of the program at will. Therefore, as youth registered for the program and had a signed parental consent form, they were asked to complete a pre-test. Pre-tests were administered to new participants until the end of April.

The after-school program lasted for approximately 16 weeks. A post-test was administered during the first week in June. Due to the drop-in nature of the program, participants taking the post-test were not necessarily the same as the participants who took the pre-test, although there were nine youth who complete both pre- and posttests.

Comparison Group. The comparison group consisted of two sets of adolescents from with in the surrounding neighborhood of the Booker T. Washington area. As mentioned previously, students from the Roosevelt Junior High School and participants in the Buddy Club, were recruited to the study as the comparison group.

The Altoona school board met on March 17th and approved the use of three Roosevelt Junior High School classrooms to be used as a post-test comparison group at the end of May. This comparison group consisted of three homeroom classrooms (one seventh, eighth, and ninth grade homeroom). On May 28th permission slips and letters explaining the purpose of the study were sent home with students to be returned by June 1st. The post-test occurred Monday, June 1st. Comparison group members who had already participated in the experimental group pre-test were excluded from participating, although they were allowed to take the test. Students who had previously completed a pre-test (due to their involvement in the after school program) were allowed to retake the questionnaire if they wished, but only their responses from the first pre-test were used.

The second control group came from the Buddy Club. Sponsored by the Altoona Kawanis Club, the Buddy Club is a recreation-focused program which provided two hours of swimming and games to under privileged children in 4^{th}, 5^{th}, and 6^{th} grades every Wednesday night from February 18, 1998 to April 29, 1998 at the Altoona Area Field House. The Buddy Club comparison group consisted of only 6^{th} graders because they met the age requirement for the study. Parent permission slips were given to 6^{th} graders in the Buddy Club on March 11. On the last evening of the program, April 29^{th}, the post-test was administered to those 6^{th} graders who had been given parental consent.

Focus Group Evaluation

Following the experimental post-test, participants and their parents were asked to partake in separate focus groups to clarify further evaluation outcomes. Selection of focus group members was based on participant's or parent's willingness to volunteer for the interviews. Focus groups sizes ranged from 5 to 10 participants within each individual group. Focus group discussions were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

The interview format created the opportunity for focus group participants to provide casual program feedback to the interviewer and among themselves. Focus group questions for the adolescents resembled the following, "What did you like/dislike about the after-school program?," "How have the activities you do in your free time changed?," "What did you learn about your self/peers/community from the after-school program?."

Parent's of program participants were asked questions such as, "Did you notice any benefit the after-school program had on your child?," "Have your child's free-time activities changed?," "What would you like to see happen for youth during the non-school hours in Altoona?."

Instrumentation

A self-report questionnaire was used to measure program outcomes. The primary instrument on the questionnaire was the Protective Factors Scale (PFS) developed by Witt, Baker and Scott (1996). This instrument consisted of a forty-item index, divided into 10 subscales, each of which contains four questions. For the purposes of this study the 10th subscale, Liking/Perceived Competence, was eliminated. This measure examined one's feelings toward a particular activity (e.g., I want to keep playing [this activity]) and therefore was not appropriate in the examination of one's attitudes and feelings toward the after-school program as a whole. Therefore, the PFS was shortened to 9 subscales for a total of 36 questions. Each question used a seven point ("Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") Likert scale response format.

In this study, the comparison group, due to its larger sample (n=33), was used to measure the reliability of the PFS. The reliability of the entire PFS was considered acceptable for hypothesis testing (Cronbach's alpha=.95, see Table 3). Each of the PFS subscales will be described in the following section.

Neighborhood Resources. To assess an adolescent's awareness of neighborhood resources a subscale consisting of a four item index was used. The measure of reliability for the neighborhood resources scale revealed a level which was considered acceptable to test the hypotheses (Cronbach's alpha=.71). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the neighborhood resources subscale.

Interested and Caring Adults. A four item index was used to assess an adolescent's perception that there are adults who care about and are interested in him/her. The measure of reliability for the interested and caring adults subscale was shown to be acceptable for comparing the differences in test scores (Cronbach's alpha=.79). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the interested and caring adults subscale.

Sense of Acceptance and Belonging. If an adolescent perceives that family and friends not only like him/her but also are accepting of him or her, then it can be said that the adolescent feels a sense of acceptance and belonging. A four item index which measured the subscale sense of acceptance and belonging provided adequately reliable results to test the hypotheses (Cronbach's alpha=.71). Table 3 provides the descriptive

statistics for the sense of acceptance and belonging subscale.

High Controls Against Deviant Behavior. A four item index was used to assess an adolescent's understanding that is important to follow the rules and stay out of trouble. The four item subscale high controls against deviant behavior was determined to be an acceptable measure based on its reliability (Cronbach's alpha=.85). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the high controls against deviant behavior subscale.

Models for Conventional Behavior. In order for adolescents to display appropriate behavior, it must first be modeled and reinforced by peers, family and institutions within the adolescent's environment. The four item subscale models for conventional behavior provided adequately reliable results to test the hypotheses (Cronbach's alpha=.90). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the models for conventional behavior subscale.

Positive Attitude Toward the Future/Future Expectations. To assess an adolescent's attitude/expectations for the future a four item subscale was used. This subscale was determined to be reliable for the purposes of testing the research hypotheses (Cronbach's alpha=.76) Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for positive attitude toward the future/future expectations subscale.

Value on Achievement. A four item index was used to determine an adolescent's value on achievement. The measure of reliability for the subscale value on achievement was shown to be acceptable for comparing the differences in test scores (Cronbach's alpha=.76). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the value on achievement subscale.

Ability to Work With Others. An adolescent's ability to get along well with others was measured using a four-item index. The subscale ability to work with others was determined to be an acceptable measure based on its reliability (Cronbach's alpha=.74). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the ability to work with others subscale.

Ability to Workout Conflict. A four item index was used to determine an adolescent's ability to deal with conflict. The measure of reliability for the subscale ability to workout conflict was shown to be acceptable for comparing the differences in test scores (Cronbach's alpha=.87). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the ability to workout conflict subscale.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of Subscales of the Protective Factors Scale

#	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Corrected Item-Total Correlation*	Alpha if Item Deleted*
Neighborhood Resources					
1	I know lots of safe places to play/hangout	4.76	1.56	.43	.69
2	I know lots of activities to do in my community	4.70	1.57	.52	.64
3	I am interested in participating in programs in my community	5.12	1.54	.58	.60
4	I am interested in programs that take place after school	4.94	1.60	.48	.66
	Sub-scale alpha = .7134				
Interested and Caring Adults					
5	There are adults who are interested in me	5.27	1.31	.63	.74
6	I can turn to adults for help	5.79	1.39	.70	.70
7	There are adults who will look out for me	6.39	0.79	.73	.72
8	Adults are willing to help me with my problems	6.27	0.88	.48	.80
	Sub-scale alpha = .7937				
Sense of Acceptance and Belonging					
9	I am able to get along with friends	6.06	1.14	.50	.64
10	There are other children who like me	5.97	1.33	.68	.51
11	I am an O.K. person	6.12	0.96	.38	.68
12	I am wanted by the people around me	5.76	1.28	.45	.68
	Sub-scale alpha = . 7080				

*For subscale

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of the Protective Factors Scale, (con't.)

#	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Corrected Item-Total Correlation*	Alpha if Item Deleted*
High Controls Against Deviant Behavior					
13	I must stay out of trouble	5.91	1.26	.70	.80
14	I must obey the rules	6.21	1.17	.78	.76
15	I will be punished if I break the rules	6.15	0.87	.49	.88
16	I must follow the rules if I want to participate	5.97	1.24	.79	.76
	Sub-scale alpha = .8459				
Models for Conventional Behavior					
17	I respect authority figures	6.15	1.44	.84	.85
18	I respect adults	6.36	1.11	.72	.90
19	I respect people in charge	5.97	1.55	.82	.86
20	I respect children who stay out of trouble	5.79	1.22	.78	.87
	Sub-scale alpha = .9011				
Positive Attitude Toward the Future/Future Expectations					
21	I am creative	5.58	1.06	.43	.78
22	I can set goals	6.18	1.01	.71	.62
23	I can deal with problems that might come up in the future	6.15	1.03	.46	.76
24	I like to try new things	6.27	0.91	.67	.65
	Sub-scale alpha = .7600				

*For subscale

Table 3: Reliability Analysis Subscales of the Protective Factors Scale, (con't.)

	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Corrected Item-Total Correlation*	Alpha if Item # Deleted*
Value on Achievement					
25	I can succeed in life	6.39	0.90	.57	.71
26	It is important for me to always do my best	6.39	0.97	.65	.67
27	It is important for me to do well at school	6.64	0.60	.59	.71
28	It is important for me to stay in school	6.76	0.56	.53	.73
	Sub-scale alpha = .7625				
Ability to Work With Others					
29	I try to treat other children with respect	6.00	1.06	.58	.65
30	Teamwork is important	5.94	1.25	.75	.52
31	Cooperation is important	6.27	0.88	.50	.70
32	All players need a chance to play	6.36	0.74	.34	.77
	Sub-scale alpha = .7364				
Ability to Workout Conflict					
33	I try to solve problems in a positive manner	5.88	0.93	.53	.91
34	I try to control my anger	5.70	1.38	.87	.76
35	I try to listen to the opinions of others	5.97	1.21	.77	.82
36	I can settle arguments without fighting	5.61	1.68	.82	.81
	Sub-scale alpha = .8727				

Overall Protective Factors Scale alpha = .9450
*For subscale

Results

Sample Description

Twenty-one adolescents participated in the pre-test. At the time of the post-test only 11 adolescents remained, for a loss of 10 subjects between the pre-test and post-test. There are several reasons for the high mortality rate: the most obvious being the program's drop-in nature, which allowed participants to come and go in the program at will. Membership levels fluctuated throughout the length of the program. Furthermore, the post-tests were collected the week of May 27 through June 3, which coincided with the end of the school year. Therefore, participation levels in the program dropped as adolescents began to participate in summertime sports and recreation activities. Thirty-three youths provided data for the comparison group. Overall, the sample was evenly split by gender. The mean age of the overall sample was 13.09, with ages in range from 11 to 16. Descriptive statistics for the program and comparison group can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Program	Mean age	N of males	N of females	Total n
Pre-Test	12.47	12	9	21
Post-Test	13.36	5	6	11*
Comparison	13.45	17	16	33
Total	13.09	34	31	56

***** 9 participants were involved in both tests

In order to examine the differences between pre- and posttest means for the experimental group, a paired t-test was used. This procedure tested whether or not youth's resiliency scores changed significantly between pre and post testing, although it did not allow us to conclude that, in the event of a difference, the program was the cause of the change. An independent means t-test on posttest scores was conducted for that purpose.

Testing of Study Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study were that, compared to the comparison group, the experimental group participants' scores would increase in the areas of (a) neighborhood resources, b) interested and caring adults, (c) sense of acceptance and belonging, (d) high controls against deviant behavior, (e) models for conventional behavior, (f) positive attitude toward the future/future expectations, (g) value on achievement, (h) ability to work with others, and (i) ability to workout conflict.

Paired t-test results. Although there were 21 participants in the pre-test and 11 in the post-test sample, only 9 participants were involved in both tests. Therefore the pre-test and post-test sub-sample consists of only 9 youth. Their mean age was 12.88, and

there were 5 females.

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics on the Protective Factors Scale for the pre-test, post-test and the comparison group. Table 3 breaks the experimental group into two sub-samples: the entire program group, pre and post-test, and the sub-sample of nine participants, pre and post-test. The paired t-test analysis was conducted using the means from the pre-post test sub-sample columns. Table 4 provides the data for the t-test for independent means, which tested for differences in scores between the experimental group and the comparison group.

The results of the paired t-test indicate no differences in the program participants' test scores from the pre-test to the post-test measurement (Table 3). Examination of the t-test for independent sample means between the post-test experimental group participants and the comparison group showed only one significant relationship in the subscale of neighborhood resources ($t=4.40$, $p \leq .000$, Table 4) Thus, we can tentatively conclude there is a difference between experimental group participants' awareness of neighborhood resources and the comparison group's awareness. This analysis suggests that the comparison group had less knowledge about community resources than did the experimental group.

Based on the post-test only design used to compare the scores between the experimental group participants and the comparison group, it is difficult to tell whether the changes are due to treatment effects or to selection differences between the groups. Without the scores of the comparison group at the pre-test date it is difficult to say with absolute certainty that the program caused the participants to have significantly higher awareness of neighborhood resources than individuals in the comparison group.

Furthermore, although not a significant difference, it is important to note the mean score for knowledge of neighborhood resources did increase between pre and post-tests for the experimental group (means= 5.79 and 6.07, respectively). It is possible that lack of statistical significance in this measure, and possibly other measures, was due to the small sample size and resultant lack of power.

The next section provides the results of the focus groups conducted with experimental group participants and their parents. The focus groups provided additional qualitative information necessary to the assessment of the program evaluation.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Protective Factors Scale by Test Time and Experimental Condition

Measured Variable	Pre-Test (N=21)		Post-Test (N=11)		Comparison (N=33)		Reliability Based on Comparison Group
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	
Neighborhood Resources	5.79	1.21	6.07	0.60	4.88	1.15	0.713
Interested & Caring Adults	5.94	0.97	6.30	0.53	5.93	0.88	0.793
Sense of Acceptance & Belong	6.15	0.92	6.30	0.53	5.98	0.87	0.708
Control Against Deviant Behavior	5.92	1.27	5.84	0.86	6.06	0.95	0.846
Model for Conventional Behavior	6.10	1.12	5.95	0.56	6.06	1.18	0.901
Future Expectations	5.93	1.21	6.41	0.42	6.11	0.77	0.760
Value on Achievement	6.30	1.06	6.23	0.71	6.55	0.59	0.763
Ability to Work With Others	6.36	1.11	6.34	0.44	6.14	0.75	0.736
Ability to Workout Conflict	5.64	1.07	5.91	1.00	5.79	1.13	0.873
Total PFS	6.01	0.93	6.15	0.37	5.95	0.69	0.945

Table 3: Paired T-Test to Test for Differences Between Experimental Group Participants' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for the Protective Factors Scale

Measured Variable	Pre-Test				Post-Test				Paired t Value	Significance Level
	Entire Sub-Sample (N=11)		Pre-Post Test Sub-Sample (N=9)		Entire Sub-Sample (N=11)		Pre-Post Test Sub-Sample (N=9)			
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
Neighborhood Resources	5.79	1.21	5.50	1.59	6.07	0.60	6.11	0.58	-1.02	0.336
Interested & Caring Adults	5.94	0.97	5.72	1.24	6.30	0.53	6.25	0.57	-1.13	0.291
Sense of Acceptance & Belong	6.15	0.92	6.11	1.02	6.30	0.53	6.28	0.59	-0.38	0.715
Control Against Deviant Behavior	5.92	1.27	6.00	1.24	5.84	0.86	5.89	0.77	0.25	0.807
Model for Conventional Behavior	6.10	1.12	6.02	1.30	5.95	0.56	5.92	0.61	0.23	0.826
Future Expectations	5.93	1.21	5.58	1.53	6.41	0.42	6.44	0.39	-1.16	0.278
Value on Achievement	6.30	1.06	6.36	1.36	6.23	0.71	6.28	0.74	0.14	0.890
Ability to Work With Others	6.36	1.11	6.08	1.67	6.34	0.44	6.25	0.41	-0.27	0.791
Ability to Workout Conflict	5.64	1.07	5.36	1.01	5.91	1.00	5.75	1.02	-1.58	0.154
Total PFS	NS	NS	5.88	1.17	NS	NS	6.12	0.39	-0.57	0.583

Table 4: T-Test for Independent Means to Test for Differences Between Experimental Group Participants and the Comparison Group for the Protective Factors Scale

Measured Variable	Post-Test (N=11)		Comparison (N=33)			
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	t- value	Sig. Level
Neighborhood Resources	6.07	0.60	4.88	1.15	4.40	0.000
Interested & Caring Adults	6.30	0.53	5.93	0.88	1.29	0.205
Sense of Acceptance & Belong	6.30	0.53	5.97	0.87	1.14	0.260
Control Against Deviant Behavior	5.84	0.86	6.06	0.95	-0.68	0.499
Model for Conventional Behavior	5.95	0.56	6.07	1.18	-0.31	0.760
Future Expectations	6.41	0.42	6.11	0.77	1.21	0.233
Value on Achievement	6.23	0.71	6.55	0.59	-1.46	0.151
Ability to Work With Others	6.34	0.44	6.14	0.75	0.82	0.414
Ability to Workout Conflict	5.91	1.00	5.79	1.13	0.31	0.753
Total PFS	6.15	0.37	5.95	0.69	0.93	0.358

Focus Group Evaluation

The evaluation of program outcomes involved the primary quantitative instrument, the Protective Factors Scale, as well as a series of focus groups, which complimented the research findings. Focus groups were used for the purposes of providing follow-up data to understand the findings of hypothesis testing (Morgan, 1997). The focus group questions were designed to answer two guiding research questions:

Research Question One: What impressions and reactions did parents and participants have about the after-school program?

Research Question Two: In what way did the after-school program contribute to increasing resilience among the program participants?

Participants from the after-school program and several parents of program participants volunteered their time during the last two weeks of the program to participate in the focus group interviews. A focus group for the adolescents occurred following participation in a regularly scheduled after-school program on May 27th, the week before the program ended. A focus group for the parents of program participants occurred at the site of the after-school program on June 2nd, the day before the program ended.

In order to understand the attitudes and values of the focus group participants, the data were reviewed in an organized and systematic fashion. The suggested analysis of focus group material required that the researcher audio record all of the information provided by the participants and then transcribe, verbatim, everything that was said by the participants (Bertrand, Brown & Ward, 1992). Thus, all the focus group data were transcribed into text and were analyzed using a qualitative method known as content analysis. This method of analysis examines data for meaning within the text (Henderson, 1991). The idea behind content analysis is that statements made by participants will emerge with enough frequency to create general themes or categories (Byers & Wilcox, 1991). Themes or categories develop as the text is interpreted and these themes are coded accordingly. Code words consider the context, consistency and specificity of responses (Byers & Wilcox, 1991). The code words provide a pattern of responses that can then be organized into the bigger picture of content analysis. This leads to the final product, the focus group results.

Content analysis was used to answer the first research question. In this case, no preconceived ideas were formed prior to analysis. To answer the second research question, focus group discussion questions were generated based on the need to gather specific information about the PFS in order to compliment the quantitative data that would "clarify why central hypotheses were supported or not" (Morgan, 1997, p. 9). Therefore, a priori themes, which paralleled the PFS, were used and the data were examined to see which statements offered supporting (or contrary) evidence that the after-school program increased resilience among the program participants.

Results of the Focus Groups

An analysis of the focus group data provided several themes which have been placed into categories. The themes were first divided into two major categories: those that described

the reaction to the program in general, and those that provided evidence of the program's enhancement of the Protective Factors. The general program themes are as follows: (a) benefits of the program, (b) adolescents' achievements, and (c) parents' approval of instructors. The themes that related to the Protective Factors Scale were divided according to the subscales used in the PFS: (a) neighborhood resources, (b) interested and caring adults, (c) sense of acceptance and belonging, (d) high controls against deviant behavior, (e) positive attitude toward the future/future expectations, (f) value on achievement, (g) ability to work with others, and (h) ability to workout conflict. The next section presents the results of the focus group data grouped according to category and theme, and is presented in conjunction with supporting quotations taken directly from the text.

Benefits of the Program

Many of the themes that resulted from data analysis revealed a pattern of benefits for those individuals involved in or associated with the after-school program. Four sub-themes were supported by both adolescents and parents of program participants as being beneficial: (a) something to do, (b) adolescent stays out of trouble, (c) recreation opportunities, and (d) adolescent enjoys the program. The following quotes provide some examples which support the identified sub-themes.

Sub-Theme 1: Something to Do

Parent – " I think (child) would still want to stay cause it is something to do and there is a lot of athletic type things. She likes to play basketball."

Parent – "I think, even today (child) he was asking about what to do, he said, are you going to go to the program. It gives them something to do."

Adolescent – "I would (come again) because it's like, I had a lot of fun here and it was like really fun and it gives you something to do."

Adolescent – "To do something besides baseball after school."

Sub-Theme 2: Adolescent Stays out of Trouble

Parent – "Something to do so he didn't get in trouble"

Parent – "Honestly I'd rather him coming here than, cause, and have him caught in trouble down there."

Adolescent – "Cause I needed, um, I needed to do something fun or…before I got in trouble."

Adolescent – "It keeps me out of trouble with the law"

Sub-Theme 3: Recreation Opportunities

Parent – "No, not really, it was more than I thought it would be. It's good. The rock climbing, the trip to Garfield, the ice cream thing tomorrow night, those types a things."

Parent – "It's worthwhile, the things you's do, and the types of games you play. I was shocked a couple times I came in here and you's guys was playing trivia."

Adolescent – "It's cool…like, all the stuff we do. Like, uh tye-dying, going to the summit. Camping, yeah, that was definitely cool. Those little bead things we made."

Adolescent – "Because there were like all different kinds of things to do and like, like you never knew what you were going to do and its like exciting, cause you get to do all kinds of stuff. You don't do the same thing like, day after day, like in school you do the same thing day after day. It got your mind off things."

Sub-Theme 4: Adolescent Enjoys Program

Parent – "Yeah, (child) seems to enjoy it a lot. He reminds me everyday of the after-school program today, so he doesn't mind."

Parent – "They just enjoy coming, they enjoy going just to have a place to go to, and having fun for more than an hour. You know most places you drop them off and they are there an hour, it doesn't give you enough time to even get home and start dinner, and come back but, um, they like what you do."

Adolescent – "Um, cuz my friend (youth's name) wanted to start coming here, cuz she said it was cool, and I came here and liked it so that's why I came."

Furthermore, the program may have provided benefits specifically to the parents that were not important to the adolescent participants. For example one parent noted,

> "He seemed more pleasant when he came home you know after being in school all day and then coming here and playing. He was exhausted but calmed down. It was like a way of unwinding. I was able to cope with him better."

Although there was not enough focus group data to support this idea as an independent theme, it is worthwhile to note.

Adolescents' Accomplishments

Many of the adolescents who attended the focus group reported having a preference for certain recreation activities because they felt a sense of competence. The accomplishment of learning something was a strong theme for all of the adolescents in the focus group. Adolescents reported a sense of achievement in the areas of basketball, rock climbing, conflict resolution, camping and arts and crafts. The following quotes support learning and accomplishment as a theme.

> Parent – "(child) says to me I know how to play basketball now."
>
> Adolescent – "Yeah, I learned how to make like, those little fun little beads, their like really cool. My mom even likes to do them. We are going to get like, get some and do them over the summer, because I am going to be at my dad's all summer, and its going to be like really boring, so I'm going to teach my baby brother how to do that."
>
> Adolescent – "I liked camping because I learned how to set up a tent."
>
> Adolescent – "I learned that um, like, you can talk to people and try to talk out your problems, instead of like going and like hitting them and starting a fight with them cause like if you hit somebody your just going to get in trouble for it but if you talk about it then you can get your problems worked out."
>
> Adolescent – "Cause I knew how to rock climb when I went out there [referring to a temporary probation program] to rock climb….yeah no one else knew how to tie the knots."

Parents' Approval of Instructors

An analysis of the focus group data revealed that parents, in particular, had favorable views of the after-school program instructors. Specifically, parents approved of the instructors' willingness to accept all children into the program. Parents also approved of the way misbehaved children were disciplined. The quotes provided below support the sub-themes associated with parents' approval of instructors.

> Sub-Theme 1: Discipline
>
> Parent – "I liked the idea that um, ah what's the word, the way you disciplined children who were bad um, children that misbehaved ah, (youth's name) got punched in the face at one time, that was handled in a very nice way. He literally took me and told me not to worry because (youth's name) knew that I would jump. He said mom, (program instructor's name) taken care of it. He told me not to worry about it and I didn't."
>
> Parent – "I think that is something that (youth's name) said, too. He got into it

> with one of the older ones that came here… don't worry about it Mom, taken care of."
>
> Parent – "You have to deal with the ones that were troublemakers."
>
> Sub-Theme 2: Accept all Children
>
> Parent – "You accept all children instead of just the athletic ones or the gifted ones or the musically inclined ones."
>
> Parent – "You two both remind me of the ones at (a different program) those instructors, I guess it is the personality, very kind-hearted, interested, um, caring, you know just, I think it is what the kids need. Where some of the instructors are they have their favorite, and then they shy away from other kids I don't think that's right. I mean it's not right.

Protective Factors Scale Categories

Neighborhood Resources. An adolescent's knowledge of neighborhood resources was defined by his or her awareness of safe places to play and activities to do in the community, as well as by his or her interest in programs that took place in the community or after-school. During the focus group interviews parents and adolescents alike acknowledged an awareness and interest in neighborhood resources.

> Parent – "Yeah, (child) seems to enjoy it a lot. He reminds me everyday of the after-school program today, so he doesn't mind."
>
> Adolescent – "[I learned] like all those activities and um, recreational programs that the Summit has to offer."
>
> Adolescent – "[If I ran the program] we could like go to the museums and like art galleries and stuff like that you know so you could like, actually like, not that you don't learn stuff here but, you could learn about what the community has to offer like art and stuff like that."

Interested and Caring Adults. An adolescent's perception that adults cared about them was defined by their awareness of available adults who were interested in them, and were willing look out for them, as well as adults who were willing to help them out with their problems. Themes related to the subscale of interested and caring adults were revealed to be important to parents and participants who both felt that there were adults in the program and in the community who showed an interest in adolescents.

> Parent – "You two remind me of the ones at [a different community program] those instructors. I guess it is the personality, very kind-hearted, interested, um, caring, you know just, I think it is what the kids need."

> Parent – "He (child) literally took me and told me not to worry (about an incident that occurred during the program) because (child) knew that I would jump. He said, Mom (program instructor) has taken care of it. He told me not to worry about it and I didn't."
>
> Adolescent –"You guys." (program instructors) [answer to the question – Because of the after-school program have you learned of any other adults in the community who you think care about you?]
>
> Adolescent – "The um, the people at the Summit, they were like really nice, they helped us out."

Sense of Acceptance and Belonging. A sense of acceptance and belonging was defined by the adolescent's ability to get along with friends and their sense that other children liked them, as well as the sense that they were an O.K. person who was wanted by other people. Focus group data analysis provided some evidence that adolescents and their parents perceived a sense of acceptance and belonging from involvement with the after-school program.

> Parent – "You accept all children instead of just the athletic ones or the gifted ones or the musically inclined ones."
>
> Parent – "When my children come to a place and they feel like they get cut out of something they get hurt." [referring to another program, as compared to the after-school program]
>
> Adolescent – "I like camping the best…because we just like really enjoyed ourselves. Like, (program participant) we were laughing at her snoring and like [laughing] it was really funny, and like, (another participant) was always making these funny faces."
>
> Adolescent – "We all got along camping."

High Controls Against Deviant Behavior. Themes that related to the subscale high controls against deviant behavior were revealed to be important. The adolescent's willingness to follow rules and stay out of trouble, as well as, their understanding of consequences if they break the rules, defined this theme.

> Adolescent – "You get like punished and stuff and then you can't do things you want to do like, like if I don't follow rules at home, well you're not going to the after-school program."
>
> Adolescent – "Cause you have to follow rules and the laws."

> Adolescent – [I would come to the after-school program next year because] "It kept me out of more trouble than I…. it kept me out of some trouble but not all of it."

Models for Conventional Behavior. An adolescent's appreciation of models for conventional behavior was defined by the adolescent's respect for authority figures and people in charge, as well as their respect for children who stay out of trouble. Adolescents and parents alike were supportive of individuals in authority positions in the after-school program and otherwise.

> Parent – "I liked the idea that um, ah what's the word, the way you disciplined children who were bad, um, children that misbehaved. (Child) got punched in the face at one time, that was handled in a very nice way."
>
> Parent – "You have to deal with the ones that were troublemakers."
>
> Adolescent – [I respect people in authority positions] "Cause they help us out…they give us good advice."
>
> Adolescent - [I respect people in authority positions] "Cause your always supposed to respect them."

Positive Attitude Toward the Future/Future Expectations. Focus group data analysis provided some evidence that adolescents and their parents perceived the future as being positive for the adolescent. An adolescent's perception of the future as positive was defined by their willingness to be creative, try new things and set goals, as well as their ability to deal with problems that may come up in the future.

> Parent – "So does (child), same way with (child), (child) likes it too. When he comes home after-school on Mondays and Wednesday he says, don't forget, Mom, I won't be home."
>
> Parent – "She said I should be ungrounded. She said about this thing there [the after-school program] tomorrow night and there would be face painting. So she got ungrounded for a couple of hours." (laugh)
>
> Adolescent – "I worked with little kids and all the little kids in the program and they were like really cool and everything and they really inspired me. I just want to be like a lawyer, maybe I can like be a lawyer that defends little kids rights or something. I don't know."
>
> Adolescent – "I want to, I want to learn how to work on cars or either that, or I want to be a carpenter."

Value on Achievement. The adolescent's interest in doing well in any area of involvement is revealed in the theme value on achievement. This theme is defined by the adolescent's interest in succeeding in life, as well as the value they place on school. The

following quotes support the success that were achieved through participation in the after-school program

> Parent – "That's what I said, he was really into things he was participating."
>
> Adolescent – "Yeah, I went camping and catching more fish in one night than my dad did all season."
>
> Adolescent – [when asked if they felt they had achieved anything special] "Yeah, rock climbing…cause I knew how to rock climb when I went out there [referring to temporary probation program] to rock climb."

Ability to Work with Others. Themes related to the subscale ability to work with others were revealed to be important. This theme was defined by the adolescent's interest in treating other children with respect and giving others a chance to play, as well as the value they placed on teamwork and cooperation.

> Parent – "There are times when they play sports at school and they are not the best so they don't get to play and that's not fair. If the child enjoys it I can't sit on the bench and watch my kid sit on the bench." [Referring to a school program as compared to the after-school program]
>
> Adolescent – "If you get along with others you get things done faster when you work in a group….when we were painting the um, those pet rocks and stuff like that. When we had to work as a group with the paint because there was only so much."
>
> Adolescent – "I thought when we worked with others was like, when we um, ah, was like when we cooked that one night, we had that special night, it was like girls night. When like, we were all in the kitchen cooking, and when like, we were playing basketball cause like, we all worked as a team right."
>
> Adolescent – "The wood project…they sawed and then we cut."

Ability to Workout Conflicts. During the focus group interviews several adolescents disclosed that they had learned how to deal with conflict in a positive manner. This theme was defined by an adolescent's ability to solve problems by controlling their anger and listening to the opinions of others, in turn, settling their arguments without fighting.

> Adolescent – "I learned how to handle things with out fighting…like either talk it over or walk away, and talk to someone else. Just talk about it."
>
> Adolescent – "I learned that um, like you can talk to people and try to talk out your problems, instead of like going, and like hitting them and starting a fight with them cause like, if you hit somebody your just going to get in trouble for it, but if you talk about it then you can get your problems worked out."

Summary of Results

The results of the study hypotheses reveal one significant relationship in the subscale of neighborhood resources. The program group's awareness of neighborhood resources is higher than the comparison group. This analysis suggests that the comparison group had less knowledge about community resources than did the program group. The results of the other subscales within the program group, and between the program group and the comparison group, show that there were no differences in the scores on the Protective Factors Scale.

The focus group data were used as a compliment to the Protective Factors Scale. This information provided additional insight into the program evaluation process. There were two different categories within the focus groups: those that fell under general program related themes, and those that provided evidence of the program's enhancement of Protective Factors. Within the general program related themes there were three categories: benefits of the program, adolescent achievements, and parent's approval of instructors. These categories and themes were developed through the use of content analysis and were supported using quotations transcribed directly from the focus group interviews. The themes that related to the protective factors scale were divided according to the subscales: neighborhood resources, interested and caring adults, sense of acceptance and belonging, high controls against deviant behavior, models for conventional behavior, positive attitude toward the future/future expectations, value on achievement, ability to work with others, and ability to workout conflict. These categories were supported using quotations transcribed directly from the focus group interviews.

Discussion

The most striking finding from this study revealed that adolescents who participated in the after-school program had a greater awareness of neighborhood resources than their comparison group counterparts. Yet, it must be noted that the post-test only comparison makes it difficult to know for certain whether the change is due to treatment effects or to selection differences between the groups. Program participant's scores were initially higher than the comparison group. This difference may have occurred because participants to the after school program revealed their interest in neighborhood resources just by joining the program. Therefore, program participant's scores would obviously be higher in the subscale of neighborhood resources. Conversely, program participants scores increased (although, not significantly) between the pre-test and post-test. Thus, the program may have caused the statistically significant difference between the program group and the comparison group in the area of neighborhood resources. It is, however, impossible to know if the statistically significant difference between the program group and comparison group is a result of the program or the selection of study participants.

Comments made by parents and youth in the focus groups, however, did provide support for the statistical significance in the subscale of neighborhood resources. Parents and adolescents alike acknowledged an awareness and interest in community programs. This is

an important finding because the literature supports the notion that schools and community institutions have been shown to play an important role in the protective arena of risk. In a longitudinal study done by Werner and Smith (1982) of at-risk children from birth through adulthood, the relationship between support and resilience was evident. Youth who participated in extracurricular activities outside of school, such as 4-H or the YMCA/YWCA, showed a greater resiliency due to the support of such community institutions. It is, therefore, plausible that an adolescent's knowledge of and interest in community resources, including participation in programs that take place after-school, may provide increased resiliency against risk factors.

It is not surprising that of all the protective factors, knowledge of neighborhood resources was higher among program participants. This is because one of the main program goals and activities focused on increasing awareness of community resources. This was done because in a pre-program focus group (George & Rearick, 1998) these same adolescents indicated there was "nothing to do in Altoona." Therefore, it was the objective of the program developers to expose the adolescents to neighborhood resources through the use of field trips in order to maximize the potential for increased awareness of neighborhood resources on the Protective Factors Scale. Careful planning by the programmers during the implementation of the program in the area of neighborhood resources allowed for the successful outcome of this measure. In this study, the adolescent's awareness of community resources stemmed from the program's ability to expose the adolescents to activities and resources they were not familiar with or had not utilized in some time, such as: the Summit (a local gymnasium with rock climbing facilities and a swimming pool), Garfield park and, Prince Gallitizin State Park. The program goals were developed by the researcher and were based specifically upon the Protective Factors Scale.

Focus group data also revealed that participants attributed a change in their attitudes and behaviors to the after-school program, specifically, to the goals that were created based on the PFS. Focus group data revealed support for the statistically significant difference between program participants' awareness of neighborhood resources and the comparison group. Focus group data showed that individuals in the program had an interest in community resources, including participation in programs that take place after-school. Additionally, program participants demonstrated an interest in programs outside of the community, including the Pittsburgh Zoo, theme parks, museums and art galleries.

> Adolescent – "[If I ran the program] we could like go to the museums and like art galleries and stuff like that you know so you could like, actually like, not that you don't learn stuff here but, you could learn about what the community has to offer like art and stuff like that."

Focus group data indicated that participant's were interested in the resources that the community of Altoona had to offer as well as programs that take place after-school.

Evaluation Challenges

The lack of statistical significance provides a platform from which to explore the evaluation efforts, both the strengths and weaknesses, of the program, which was delimited by short-term duration and low participant numbers. In addition, the lack of statistical significance in most of the other subscales did not necessarily indicate that the program failed to meet stated goals and outcomes.

The results of the paired t-tests showed no differences in scores among program participants. Although this was discouraging, the pattern of scores, which all moved in the right direction, suggested that it was likely the low N that led to nonsignificant results. Practically speaking, it was difficult for the researcher to control for the morbidity rates within the study due to the drop-in nature of the after-school program. Throughout the existence of the program attendance numbers fluctuated. During the last month of the program the attendance dropped considerably for several reasons. A couple of youth had problems with the law; these children were placed in probationary programs or foster care. Other children left due to the start of summer league sports programs. Finally, other children stopped coming because the nicer weather afforded more recreational opportunities outside; they no longer wanted to or needed to be inside, at the after-school program, away from the cold.

In addition, the lack of statistical significance may have been the result of a "dose effect." This means that the stronger the "dose" of recreation and leisure services the individual received the greater the "cure" (Mobily, 1996). Recreation researchers have been working on models to establish guidelines for at-risk youth programming, including the means to measure outcomes (Witt & Crompton, in press) Yet, none of the models currently offered describes a specific timeline for anticipated outcomes. Mobily (1996) stated "leisure does not lend itself to specific and straight-forward prescriptive formulations" (p. 60). For example, program participants who experienced a greater awareness of neighborhood resources may have experienced some degree of resiliency or transferred that learning into other subscales of resiliency. Yet, a lag may have occurred making it impossible to know the amount of time or participation required before noticeable outcomes resulted. Even though some adolescents may have been experiencing changes in attitude and/or behavior due to the after-school program, other adolescents may have required a stronger "dose" of the program. Therefore, it is difficult to assume the necessary timeline required in order to measure outcomes.

The lack of statistical significance may also be explained by the "mis" fit of the evaluation model chosen to examine outcomes. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs' Report on the Consultation on Evaluation of Youth Development Programs, stated that evaluation "design choices are contingent upon the stage of program development" (1992a, p. 4). The after school program ran for approximately 12 weeks; a seemingly short amount of time to allow the program to be implemented and achieve any degree of stability. It is most likely that the after-school program was still functioning within the implementation stage of programming and, therefore, it was premature to measure the program for outcomes (Carnegie Council on

Adolescent Development, 1992a). It is possible that the after-school program was on its way to achieving the stated goals and outcomes, yet the evaluation measure occurred too early within the program to achieve significance.

The relatively short duration of the program and unexpectedly low numbers of participants delimited the after school program. Researchers are not unaware of the difficulties encountered when measuring programs with these limitations. Cohen and Wilson-Brewer (1991) reported that participants at a Conference on Violence Prevention for Young Adolescents, the State of the Art of Program Evaluation, felt that with short term evaluation efforts "expected effects would not be great, available statistical measures may not be sensitive enough, and target populations may be too small" (p.31). They suggested "intermediate objectives" which would allow for measurable changes to occur. In order to measure an increase in resiliency as an outcome it is necessary to "specify the intermediate, intervening, targeted objectives that are theoretically connected to the outcome" (Cohen & Wilson-Brewer , 1991, p. 31). The use of intermediate objectives would have allowed the researchers to measure objectives which were associated with a specific protective factor. For example the PFS subscale high controls against deviant behavior could be measured with intermediate objectives by taking the program participants on a field trip to a police station where officers discuss rules and the laws. Immediately following the field trip a measure of the participant's understanding would assessed by a written or oral question and answer session examining the adolescent's understanding of rules and consequences. Thus, the adolescent's immediate understanding of rules and consequences could be assessed for the evaluation of a short-term intermediate objective.

Finally, it is possible that the program objectives, although clearly stated as part of the Protective Factors Scale, were not implemented so as to achieve the stated outcomes. Realistically speaking, time, financial resources and community support limited the after-school program. The program ran twice a week for approximately 12 weeks, and had little financial support from Central Blair Recreation and Park Commission (CBRC) and involvement from the community of Altoona. This researcher believes that because the program was new, CBRC and other supporting community institutions (e.g., schools, volunteer organizations and other recreation programs) were unwilling to risk either the time or money to support a program that was not established. Thus, due to these limitations the environment of the after-school program may not have been an appropriate catalyst for change.

The richness of the focus group data helped to provide further insight towards the questions left unanswered by the quantitative analysis of Protective Factor Scale results. Information from the focus groups revealed support for not only the Protective Factors Scale but also the after-school program as a whole. Due to their involvement with the after school program, adolescent participants and their parents both stated that they received a multitude of benefits based on the outcomes of the program. Several themes emerged from the focus group data such as: something to do, adolescent stays out of trouble, recreation opportunities and adolescent enjoys the program.

Recreation researchers and practitioners have been interested for some time now to

reposition Park and Recreation Departments (PARD's) as a community resource to help alleviate the at-risk youth dilemma (Witt & Crompton, 1997). This has been a challenge for PARD's because recreation is considered to be a "soft alternative" which provides little in the way of ameliorating the problems of at-risk youth, short of diverting their attention for a few hours (Witt & Crompton, 1997, p. 55). The focus group themes reinforce recreation as diversional, yet it is important to note why adolescents come to these programs in the first place. PARD's have an advantage in attracting youth because recreation is a "hook," and diversional recreation is valuable in the sense that it "gets them in the door." The evaluation revealed that adolescents and their parents valued the program because program participants experienced freedom from boredom, new and different recreation opportunities and because they simply enjoyed themselves. Consequently, adolescents and their parents stated that because the program participant was at the after-school program it helped to keep him/her out of trouble with the law.

In addition, adolescent participants stated that beyond having fun and staying out of trouble they experienced a sense of achievement and accomplishment. Program participants felt that through their involvement with the after-school program they experienced the accomplishment of learning something. Adolescents reported a sense of achievement in the areas of basketball, rock climbing, conflict resolution, camping and arts and crafts. This is important because other research has shown that at-risk adolescents who display a more achievement-oriented attitude toward life have a greater resiliency against risk than do their high-risk peers (Werner, 1993). The focus group data seem to support this notion of achievement on the part of adolescent participants.

Furthermore, the experiences of the participants did not go unnoticed by their parents. The parent focus group revealed that due to their child's involvement with the program they felt their children received the benefits of instructors who were willing to accept all children into the program as well to discipline those who misbehaved. Instructors who act as role models of conventional behavior provide adolescents reinforcement for following rules and give them a sense of respect for other peers, adults, and institutions which merit appropriate behavior (Witt et al., 1996). Thus, the focus group data suggested that parent's felt that the instructors of the after-school program acted as role models by accepting all children and reinforcing appropriate behavior.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following recommendations for future research are made.

- This study used a comparison group of individuals from the local Altoona school system and a community recreation program. It is recommended that an equivalent control group be drawn from a list of participants waiting to get into the program.
- It is recommended that one-on-one in-depth interviews be used in place of focus groups for the adolescent participants. Some adolescents felt uncomfortable answering questions in the presence of their peers and, therefore, provided lackadaisical answers. Structured individual interviews may help to alleviate this issue while still meeting the need for qualitative support for the hypotheses.

- It is recommended that the evaluation model fit the stage of the program. Rather than prematurely measuring for outcomes, evaluators must consider the stage at which the program is functioning before adequate evaluation can occur.
- It is recommended that the evaluation instrument account for changes over time, thus allowing researchers to determine a "dose-effect." It is suggested that information which allows researchers to answer the question, "how much is enough?," be asked so as to provide the foundation for at-risk youth programming.

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