

ABSTRACT

The Fourth R Healthy Relationships Plus Program (HRPP), an evidenced-informed prevention program, was piloted across four diverse Canadian provinces. The participants included 79 facilitators from 81 schools and community agencies. This study sought to evaluate the feasibility of the program and identify necessary revisions in program or implementation strategies. Results indicate that overall, facilitators positively rated the program. They also reported implementation challenges, most notably time constraints. Based on the findings, revisions were made to the HRPP. This study provides relevant implementation information for program facilitators and those developing youth programs.

BACKGROUND

The HRPP is a 15-session evidence-informed universal program that promotes healthy relationships and addresses risky behaviours among youth. During one-hour sessions, students discuss and participate in interactive activities covering topics such as peer pressure, help seeking, substance use, healthy versus unhealthy peer and dating relationships, and media literacy.

During the 2014-2015 school year, we piloted our multi-site implementation of the HRPP across four diverse provinces. Program facilitators, including teachers and community leaders, received formal training and program materials. Over the school year, the facilitators reached over 1200 youth from Alberta, Northwest Territories, Ontario, and Saskatchewan.

The objective of the study was to evaluate the feasibility of the program and identify necessary revisions in program or implementation strategies.

RESEARCH QUESTION

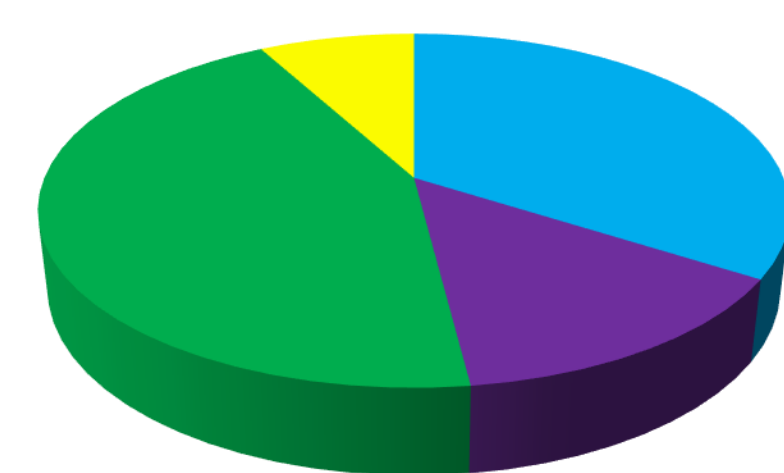
What are the specific challenges and successes in implementing the HRPP across four provinces/territories with diverse populations?

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

- The HRPP groups represented a diverse collection of facilitators and youth
- 79 facilitators from 81 school and community agencies across four Canadian provinces

Provinces/Territories



- 77% of facilitators were female, 19% male
- Educational Background: 15% of participants had less than Bachelor level, 29% had a Teaching degree, 24% had a Bachelor, 17% had a Master's, and 7% had a Ph.D.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUTH GROUPS

- HRPP was delivered in:
 - 9 schools and 7 community groups in Alberta
 - 10 school in the Northwest Territories
 - 1 health unit, 10 schools, and 20 alternative education sites in Ontario
 - 3 schools and 1 residential youth program in Saskatchewan
- Group Composition:
 - 84% of groups were comprised of male and female youth, 5% were male only, and 9% female only
- Facilitators had the ability to decide on the delivery format
 - 48% of groups were delivered by one adult facilitator, 48% were delivered by a facilitator and an adult co-facilitator, and 1% were delivered by a facilitator and a youth co-facilitator
 - Mean participant age: 15 years
 - Mean group size: 20 youth

MEASURE

- The Fourth R HRPP Facilitator Implementation Survey
- Facilitators completed a 15 minute online survey at the end of implementation
- The survey was designed to evaluate the HRPP and consisted of questions about:
 - the facilitators' experience delivering the program
 - challenges and successes facilitators experienced during implementation
 - observations made about the youth participants during the program

FINDINGS

Overall, facilitators indicated a high degree of program satisfaction. Results revealed that 94% of facilitators rated their HRPP implementation experience as positive, 90% reported they would recommend the HRPP to colleagues, and 96% indicated that the program was beneficial for their youth.

CHALLENGES

Difficulties implementing the program included:

- 54% Time frames difficult to meet
- 40% External influences (e.g. disruptions, assemblies)
- 40% Many youth were absent
- 32% Youth required extra time to debrief sensitive topics
- 23% Youth resisted role play exercises
- 22% Role plays difficult to carry out
- 17% Some activities triggered distress among some participants

MODIFICATIONS

57 (72%) participants made modifications to the program.

Modifications made:

- 52% Shortened sessions by dropping activities
- 29% Added supplementary resources
- 13% Added new activities
- 9% Shortened program by dropping sessions

Primary reasons for modifications:

- Time constraints
- Meeting student needs/interests
- Changed activity/presentation content

SUCCESSSES

Observed benefits and changes in youth as a result of the HRPP:

- Engaged youth participation**

"My group LOVED this program. They often said to me that 'This is the first time anyone ever listened to me' and 'I don't want this group to end'."
- Developed a sense of community**

"The bond formed within the group was exciting to witness. It appeared that the teens in the group made some connections and the group was a safe place for them to be themselves."
- Program content changed youth's thoughts and behaviours**

"Students seemed to change their thinking when it came to acceptable norms in relationships, mainly, how friends and partners dealt with conflict."

LESSONS LEARNED

Participants' advice for someone implementing the HRPP for the first time:

- Prepare, read materials, and plan ahead**

"It was an amazing and rewarding program to facilitate! Plan ahead by pre-reading sessions."
- Modify according to student needs**

"I would encourage them to adapt it to suit their students' learning styles. Also, take extra time to debrief if necessary."
- Allow important discussions to continue**

"Don't overlook the importance of letting conversations take over if that is where the kids go with it. Those conversations often led to the most insights, highest levels of relationship building, and where you could really see challenges and growth in youth."
- Get enough training, practise, and feedback**

"I would advise someone new to implementing the HRPP to watch the training modules online. Seeing the strategies demonstrated gives the facilitator confidence and a model to work from."

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Overall, the 2014-2015 HRPP multi-site implementation pilot was successful in a wide range of settings. The biggest challenge reported by facilitators was time constraints. They also commented on the importance of being flexible and allowing good conversations to flow uninterrupted. Based on the facilitator feedback received from the pilot year, several revisions have been made for the 2015-2016 HRPP.

- Total number of sessions reduced from 15 to 14 to eliminate repetition of content
- As requested by facilitators, a supported literacy version of the HRPP was developed to meet the needs of students with low literacy levels
- A French version of the HRPP was developed

It is important to note the tension between adaptation and fit, versus fidelity to the program. In order to maintain the integrity of the program, facilitators need to understand what are the critical components of the HRPP and what can be modified for the group.

In September 2015 we began the second phase of the multi-site implementation. During the 2015-2016 school year, a multi-method, multi-stakeholder approach will be utilised to evaluate implementation fidelity and assess program impact. Specifically, youth pre- and post-intervention surveys will be used to measure program impact upon the intended outcomes. In addition, facilitators will complete a tracking sheet following each session, as well as an implementation survey upon program completion. This evaluation will allow us to examine program effectiveness in relation to intended outcomes.