



Educators' Perceptions of Fourth R Benefits for Youth and the Relationship with Implementation Quality

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Overview

Fourth R programs are considered evidence-based on the basis of more than 15 years of rigorous research. Although this research background provides an important context for selecting effective programs, it is still important to collect monitoring data to ensure that programs continue to be beneficial and that they are beneficial in different contexts. It is not feasible to continuously undertake expensive randomized controlled trials to demonstrate program effectiveness; however, collecting data from program implementers in an ongoing manner can contribute to this monitoring process. It is also important to collect data on implementation quality because we know that implementation quality plays an important role in determining the success and impact of a program.

The purpose of this report is to share educators' views on specific benefits for youth who have participated in the Fourth R program in the two year period between June 2016 and June 2018. We begin by explaining how the data were obtained. We then provide an overview of the educators who completed the survey. We describe our findings with respect to themes that emerged from our qualitative data, results of our quantitative findings, and the relationship of perceived benefits to implementation quality.

Measurement Approach

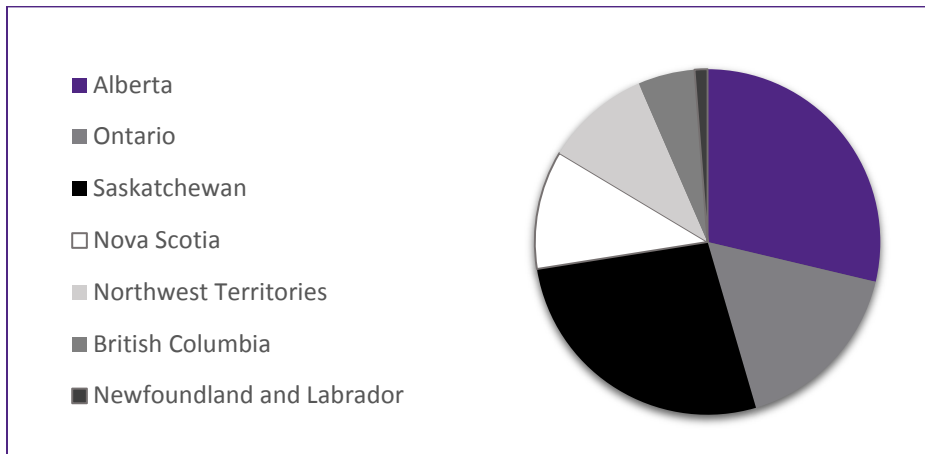
The data presented in this report were collected through implementation surveys completed by educators as they finished implementing a Fourth R program. Surveys were completed online and included questions about their overall implementation experience, as well as benefits that they observed in youth in their class or group. The surveys included both quantitative ratings and also open-ended answers. Participants were also asked demographic questions to provide a description of the overall group.

Facilitators and their Implementation Experience

In total, 292 teachers from seven provinces and territories completed the implementation survey (see Figure 1). The facilitators were 73.3% female, 23.9% male, and 2.8% chose not to say. Most of the facilitators had been teaching for more than five years, with 34% reporting more than 15 years of experience. For the majority, this was their first time delivering the Fourth R program, but approximately 20% were implementing the program for the second, third, or even fourth time.

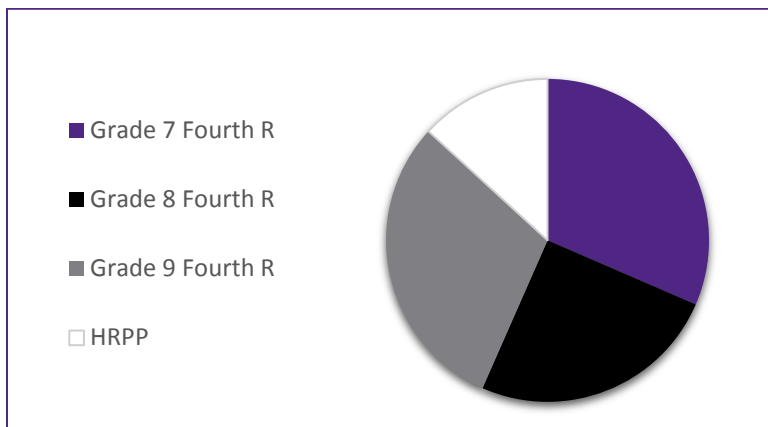


Figure 1. Distribution of implementation sites across different provinces and territories



Educators implemented one of the Fourth R programs, including the Grade 7 Fourth R curriculum, the Grade 8 Fourth R curriculum, the Grade 9 Fourth R curriculum, or the HRPP (see Figure 2). It was reported that on average, the classroom/group consisted of 22 youth. The majority of facilitators (71.1%) reported using an updated version of the curriculum, while 2% reported using an older version and 6.5% reported using a combination of the two versions (pre- and post-2015 curriculums). Overall, 93% of facilitators indicated that implementing the program was a positive experience, and over half of the facilitators (68.1%) indicated that they would recommend the Fourth R to their colleagues. Lastly, approximately 80% of the facilitators reported that the Fourth R was *somewhat* or *very* beneficial to their students.

Figure 2. Program implemented



Findings

We coded answers to open-ended questions and identified key themes. Below we discuss specific benefits or changes in youth that were reported by educators, followed by our quantitative results.

Specific Benefits or Changes in Youth

Facilitators were asked to describe specific benefits or changes they observed as a result of the Fourth R. Three main themes emerged from this data. First, facilitators noted that students became more comfortable engaging in open discussion over time and enjoyed the interactive nature of the activities. Second, students were able to connect and engage with the materials as the content was relevant to their lives. Third, facilitators recognized an increase in knowledge, confidence, and skills in their students over time. The following section will outline each of the three themes with specific quotes from facilitators.

Some of the facilitators reported either no observed change or indicated that it was too soon to tell. There was no observed pattern as to the implementation level among these facilitators. Interestingly, many of them were identified as being high implementers.

Increase in willingness to participate

Facilitators noted that the students became more willing to engage in open discussion over time, which allowed for a more in depth exploration of issues.

“I saw students come out of their shell and contribute to class, or small group conversations. Encouraged students who would usually not interact work well together in group settings.”

“I found that after the first few sessions the students started to share their thoughts and ideas more. As well they started to ask more questions.”

Students found materials relevant and engaging

Facilitators felt that the students were able to engage with the materials because they incorporated current statistics and the examples used were relevant to the youths' lives. For example, one facilitator noted that the students appreciated that the digital videos were current and featured students that were the same age and covered issues that they could relate to. The relevant materials were thought to facilitate youth engagement during the activities and discussions.

“Students loved being able to talk about relevant issues in a safe space, outside of the classroom. They were much more willing to talk and open up about current issues facing their age group.”

“I think they were more confident about applying their skills learned in class in their lives. They saw relevance.”

Increased knowledge/confidence/skills

Facilitators noted that as a result of the program, students were better able to identify risk behaviours and could name specific strategies. Other mentions included observed increases in empathy, conflict resolution skills, positive coping strategies, and increased knowledge and awareness about healthy relationships.

“Students analyzed their relationships to a much greater, more critical degree. They developed empathy and realistic expectations. Conflict resolution was vastly improved as a result.”

“Students were able to identify risky situations and seemed more prepared to use assertive communication with the skills of delay, negotiation and refusal due to the amount of practice that we did.”

Impact of the Fourth R

Facilitators provided ratings for 15 items on the extent to which they felt their students experienced particular outcomes. For example, facilitators rated to what extent they felt students demonstrated specific skills and strategies, such as problem solving. Responses ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*. The 15-item scale was divided into three sub-scales: (1) Knowledge learned, (2) Engagement and enjoyment of the program, and (3) Skills and behaviours observed. Means and standard deviations for each item and subscale are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Educators’ mean ratings on the perceived impacts scale.

Subscale	Items	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
To what extent did students...				
Knowledge		227	4.27	0.52
	...learn about healthy relationships?	227	4.48	.57
	...learn about the connections between relationships and substance use/addiction?	224	4.29	.70
	...learn about the connections between relationships and mental health?	222	4.35	.65
	...learn about the dangers of misusing prescription drugs?	223	4.09	.78
	...learn about the dangers of using illicit drugs?	223	4.21	.75
	...develop a better sense of where to seek help for themselves or a friend?	224	4.20	.72
	...learn strategies for seeking help for themselves or a friend?	224	4.22	.71
Engagement		228	4.10	0.62
	...enjoy the program?	228	4.14	.71
	...participate in the group activities?	227	4.17	.78
	...provide support to each other around difficult issues?	221	3.99	.78
Skills and Behaviour		224	3.99	0.64
	...develop healthy coping strategies?	224	4.17	.66
	...improve strategies for helping a friend with mental health challenges?	223	4.04	.72
	...demonstrate improved communication skills in their skills practice?	223	4.03	.79
	...demonstrate improved problem solving in their group discussions?	223	3.94	.83
	...demonstrate skills in making an apology?	223	3.78	.84

Measuring Implementation Quality

Implementation quality has been conceptualized in different ways and can include aspects such as dosage, following the program closely, and level of student engagement. For the purposes of

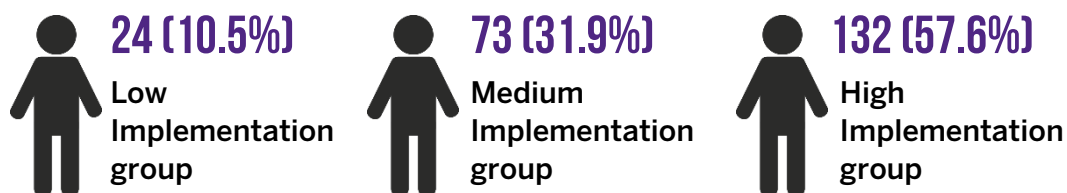
this report, we decided to focus on the extent to which educators reported delivering the skills practice activities of the program. Skills practice is an integral part of the Fourth R where students are given the opportunity to practice a number of skills using real life scenarios. It is considered one of the essential core components that make the programs effective.

Facilitators were asked to indicate the extent to which they completed the skills practice activities with their students related to attentive listening, assertive communication, and specific peer resistance skills (i.e., delay, negotiation, and refusal). For each of the three skills, facilitators indicated whether they did not attempt the skill (1 point), attempted but did not complete the skill (2 points), or completed the skill (3 points). Scores were added across the three skills areas for a maximum total of 9. The average implementation score for the total sample was 7.36 (*SD* = 1.88; See Table 2)

Table 2: Self-rated completion of skills practice

Skill	Response (%)			
	Missing data	Did not attempt	Attempted but did not complete	Completed
Attentive Listening	22.3	11.6	21.1	44.9
Assertive Communication	21.9	9.6	18.8	49.7
Peer Resistance Skills	22.3	10.6	19.5	47.6

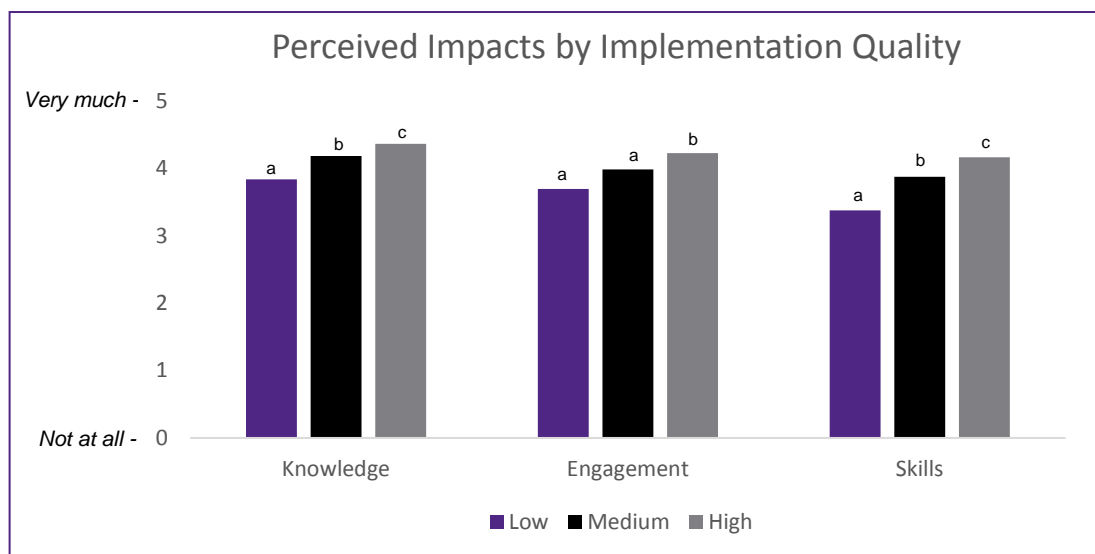
Based on their individual responses, educators were categorized into low, medium, or high implementation groups. The distribution of educators in each group are indicated in Figure 3 below.



Quality of Implementation was Related to Observed Benefits

We compared the facilitators' scores on the three subscales (knowledge, engagement, and skills/behaviour) based on their implementation level. Statistically significant differences were found across the three implementation quality groups on the extent to which educators thought students gained knowledge, were engaged, and demonstrated improved skills and behaviours. In addition, the average scores on each subscale increased as the implementation level increased (i.e., the high implementers had the highest average scores). We used post hoc analyses to identify specific group differences, and these are shown in Figure 4. In all three areas the high implementation group report significantly higher impact than the other two implementation groups. Low and medium implementation groups differed on knowledge and skills, but not on engagement.

Figure 4: Comparison of knowledge, engagement and skills impacts by implementation quality



Superscript letters denote statistically significant differences at the $p < 0.5$ level

It is important to note that these findings do not prove that the quality of program implementation *caused* improvements in knowledge, engagement, and skills. It is possible that a third variable (such as level of disruptive behaviour in the classroom) could influence both the implementation quality and the outcomes. In addition, we looked at only one indicator of implementation quality. Nonetheless, the findings provided are consistent with a wide body of literature showing that higher implementation is associated with improved outcomes.

Summary

This report presented monitoring data provided by educators who implemented Fourth R programs between June 2016 and June 2018. Our findings indicated that the majority of educators continue to see the program as valuable for their youth and are able to identify clear benefits. Furthermore, educators who report implementing the program with the highest quality implementation also reported significantly more benefits for the youth in their groups.