Methods to Prevent Youth Violence in Underserved Communities through Park-Based Holistic Health After School Programs

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Abstract

Previous reports document that ethnic minority adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at high risk for both engaging in, and the consequences of, risk-taking behavior. This behavior may be driven by mental health issues including (but undiagnosed) traumatic stress, aggression, anxiety, and depression. Park and recreation-based programs offer an underutilized yet ideal setting to promote holistic health approach to care that includes safe/ emotional wellness, physical activity, nutrition education, academic support, resilience-building strategies, and work life skills among at-risk youth. Fit2Lead can be a national model to help decrease youth violence as well as revitalize communities, promote individual success, and motivate adolescents to be better health advocates for their communities.

Objectives

1. Design an after school program that serves adolescent populations.
2. Target at-risk youth who either fail for offense with the Department of Juvenile Services or identified at risk by their school and/or community.
3. Program will provide academic assistance, mental health assessments, and structured activities such as sports and recreation.
4. 12-14 year olds
5. 15-17 year olds (Internship program)
6. To decrease juvenile delinquency by providing structure and stability to at least 400 at risk youth between the ages of 12-14 who are low level offenders referred by JSD.
7. Allow physicians in training to have a part in developing community intervention programs like Fit2Lead in order to develop field experience.
8. Physicians in Training’s importance: Working with this most at risk group allow physicians to understand the complexities of the social, medical, and economic burdens of youth violence and accidents.

Partnersing Physicians & Community

The current challenges in the community:
1. Need to recognize that social and community forces are large influences on an individual’s wellbeing and development alongside individual differences.
2. Lack of sustainability in community-based interventions and programs.
3. Little attention is in risk students who struggle academically and look social isolation and out devatation.
4. Little parental involvement, interventions, or households in which unhealthful behavioral patterns exist.
5. Not enough utilization of community resources as preventable enablers for larger national issues.
6. Importance of youth enrichment programs.
7. An after school intervention that would provide academic support while promoting social skills to youth.
8. An intervention that would seek to keep youth off the streets so as not to be expose to negative peer influence and violence or drugs.
9. Mentors who would support these peers as they transition into adulthood.
10. National attention to provide funding for community resources to better empower communities.

The Multidisciplinary Team

• Miami Dade Parks, Recreational and Open Spaces Department (MDPROS)
• Miami Dade County Juvenile Services Department (JSD)
• Miami Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS)
• University of Miami Miller School of Medicine (UMMSM)
• University of Miami Dade Community College Health Education.
• Florida International University School of Business (FIU)
• Florida introduces Physical Activity and Nutrition to Youth (FYNAM).

Methods

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Physicians in Training’s Importance:

1. Working with this most at risk student group allows physicians to understand the complexities of the social, medical, and economic burdens of youth violence and accidents.
2. Physicians can also gain valuable insight into how preventative programs can decrease the social, medical, and economic burdens of youth violence and accidents.

Preliminary Results

Descriptive Statistics for Internship Program (Ages 15-17)

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Insights Gained

1. There is a need to utilize resources already implemented in our local communities to better allocate funding.
2. There is a need for prevention methods in youth violence rather than targeting offenders.
3. Implementing programs that benefit the community can have positive social, medical, and economic benefits.
4. Non academic and academic partnerships can maximize efficient strategic planning.

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