

Teen Promotoras for Teens: HIV and Violence Prevention

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Purpose: This study will contribute to health promotion research by exploring the use of teen promotoras in the prevention of HIV and violence among Latino teens in South Texas. The research methodology will differ from conventional peer counselor programs in that the teen promotoras will come from within the target community and will be known to the participants as someone from within their community.

Background: Half of all new HIV infections are in people under the age of 25 years, many of who were probably infected in adolescence. In the past decade an epidemic of youth violence, often involving lethal behavior, broke out in this country forcing millions of young people and their families to cope with injury, disability and death. Peers can serve as a credible source of information, role models of new social behaviors, sources of social reinforcement, and as a bridge to alternative lifestyles.

Methods: A sample of 50 teenagers (14 – 17 years old) will be recruited through the American Indians in Texas Spanish Colonial Missions (AIT-SCM), a community based agency providing services to high risk Latino youth in San Antonio, TX. Five teenagers will also be selected and trained as promotoras. The sample of 50 will be randomly assigned into two groups. The experimental group will be further randomized into groups of five and one promotora will be assigned to work with the small group over a three months period. The comparison group will be exposed to a didactic HIV and Violence Prevention Program that represents those programs normally found in school settings. A questionnaire containing both quantitative and qualitative items will be administered pre- and post-intervention to both groups.

Conclusion: The astronomical prevalence behaviors that put these vulnerable youth at risk for HIV and violence demands new and innovative approaches to intervention. If successful, this strategy may be instrumental in transforming teenagers' health beliefs and tendencies toward violence in other populations of high risk youth as well.