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YOUTH 1

Mental Health and Latinx Empowerment Workshop for Youth

Rachel Mejia

Watsonville Police Activities League and Carmen Pichardo
Collaborative Health & Human Services
Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy
California State University Monterey Bay
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Author Note

Rachel Mejia, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State
University Monterey Bay. This research was supported by Watsonville Police Activities League.
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rachel Mejia, California State
University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA, 93955. Contact:
rmejia@csumb.edu.

Abstract

Juvenile delinquency is a serious threat in at-risk cities such as Watsonville, California. Watsonville Police Activities League is a non-profit organization committed to preventing youth criminality. Poor mental health can lead to risk-taking and bad decision making in developing teens and pre-teens. The project was a week-long mental health workshop focused on advocating for the normalization of mental health and Latinx empowerment discussion among youth. The workshop took place throughout five days and reached eight middle school and high school students. The workshop focused on self care, stress management, mood disorders, self image, self esteem, and ethnic identity among other themes. It was expected that the participants familiarize themselves with these terms and that they develop positive coping methods when experiencing stress, a mental health crisis, or self doubt. The mental health and Latinx empowerment workshop was successful and is recommended for future implementation based on how well it was received by its participants.

Keywords: Latino/a teens, mental health, empowerment, crime prevention

Agency & Communities Served

The first Police Activities League (PAL) began in New York City in the 1930's by NYPD officer Ed Flynn. It began as a baseball league for inner city youth at a time and place where few recreational options were available for the youth and gang activity was on the rise. Similarly, Watsonville Police Activities (WPAL) was founded in 1998 by Police Sergeant Montes, and was initially a boxing gym. What began as a baseball league in New York City, expanded to a national nonprofit organization focused on educational, athletic, and other recreational activities to prevent crime and create a bond between police officers, youth, and their parents. Police Activities Leagues have opened up in various states across the nation, with over a hundred PAL organizations in California alone (California PAL's Mission, n.d.). PAL has expanded to include a myriad of different program activities for children and youth of various ages. PAL programs include sports training, arts and crafts, leadership conferences, holiday festivals, community fundraisers, educational field trips, community service projects, tutoring, and college prep among many other activities.

Watsonville PAL works with the Watsonville Police Department and the City of Watsonville. Watsonville PAL also collaborates with other community organizations such as Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA), Watsonville Neighborhood Services, Teen Peer Court, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Girl Scouts, The YMCA, and MTNS2SEA. Through their services provided, community outreach, and neighborhood events, Watsonville PAL has succeeded in creating a bond among police officers, community leaders, program leaders, youth, and the families of the youth. It has created and maintained a positive relationship with the residents of Watsonville, and continues to adapt to better serve more youth in the community.

Problem Description

Juvenile delinquency is the issue that this agency is dedicated to stopping. Watsonville Police Activities League exists as a youth diversion organization that offers deviation from crime and recidivism. Juvenile delinquency is a serious threat in at-risk communities. The crime rate in Watsonville is 12 percent higher than the national average, with the rate for violent crime at 17 percent higher than the national average. The rate of daily crimes in the city of Watsonville is calculated as 1.12 times more than the national average and 1.02 times higher than California's average (Watsonville, CA Crime, n.d.). 31 percent of the city's population is aged 18 and under, compared to 21 percent in the state of California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Because a great portion of the population is young, and because crime rates are higher in this area, it is critical for organizations that specialize in youth diversion from crime to operate in Watsonville.

Contributing Factors

Certain risk factors exist that are relevant to youth delinquency. Although these factors alone do not cause delinquency, they are variables that affect an individual's likelihood to be involved in antisocial behavior. To prevent delinquency, it is important to fully understand the contributing factors to it. Key risk factors that can predict the probability of a person's involvement in delinquent behavior are individual factors, family background, and peer influences.

Individual Factors

Studies have shown that individual factors contribute to youth crime. Delinquency has been reported at higher frequencies for individuals that possess the following qualities:

hyperactivity, impulsivity, aggression, mental health issues, physical health problems, low self-esteem, and a lower than average IQ (O'Mahony, 2009, p.101). It is believed that hyperactivity, impulsivity, and low-self esteem can be attributed to risk taking and poor decision making, especially for children and teens. Mental and physical health problems, especially those left untreated, can leave children and youth with increasingly underlying internal distress that can cause a child to act out. These factors may also lead to social outcasting and bullying, and an inclination for antisocial behavior. Low performance in school can indicate a likelihood to later be involved in criminal behavior. Herrenkohl and colleagues (2001) noted that "children with low academic performance, low commitment to school, and low educational aspirations during the elementary and middle school grades are at higher risk for child delinquency than are other children." In addition, aggression seen in children has been a strong indicator of future involvement in antisocial behavior. In fact, in a 2001 study, researchers claimed childhood and pre-teen aggression were the behaviors that could best predict future delinquency (Tremblay & LeMarquand, 2001, p.141).

Family Background

An individual's family dynamics contribute to their probability of being involved in delinquent behavior. Poor parenting, low household income, and dysfunctional family structures can lead to juvenile crime and adult recidivism. Criminality, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and other antisocial behaviors are some examples of patterns that may be normalized in households and passed on generationally. Poor parental supervision, parental conflict, harsh punishment, and parental aggression were strong indicators of future convictions of violent offenses in a 1979 study of young males (Shader, 2001, p.6). A lack of parental monitoring, child

maltreatment, and home discord pose a threat to a child's development and wellbeing. Unhealthy development of a child can lead to their development of antisocial habits. Family poverty further intensifies this unhealthy development. Instability at home can also force children and teens to look for a sense of connection and belonging outside their homes, in places and people that are not always beneficial to their development.

Peer Influences

Negative peer influences contribute to youth delinquency. The more time spent with these peers and the greater the attachment and allegiance to these peers, the more likely an individual will mirror their negative behaviors. Time spent with peers who disapprove delinquent behavior helps reduce the likelihood of an individual's future delinquency. On the contrary, acceptance of deviant behavior among friend groups influences delinquency (McCord, Widon, & Crowell, 2001, p.80). In addition, disorganized neighborhoods with weak social control can result in isolation among residents and unmonitored criminal activity (Herrenkohl, et al., 2001, p.221). When youth observe the peers in their schools and neighborhoods engage in antisocial behavior, whether it be gang involvement, drug and alcohol use, assault, vandalism, theft, or any other behavior, and these behaviors go ignored by adults and unpunished by authorities, they become common activities among youth across the neighborhood. The normalization of these antisocial behaviors in certain neighborhoods, and the pressure among peers to partake in these acts increases an individual's tendency to commit a crime.

Consequences

Youth delinquency may result in many different outcomes. While many young offenders will desist criminal behavior after their first offense, for some this will not be likely. Youth that engage in crime from an early age are prone to experience negative consequences. These consequences include incarceration, economic instability, and health reduction.

Incarceration

The most known outcome to youth delinquency is incarceration. An underage offender may receive a light sentence upon conviction, especially if he or she has committed a first time offense. But if the contributing factors and root problems are not addressed, it is likely that the youth offender will continue to engage in criminal delinquency. In addition, young offenders may internalize a criminal label and take on the identity (Gillman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2015, p.35). Continual offenses and an increased severity of offenses will increase the punishment given upon conviction. An offender will no longer receive probation or court-mandated community sanctions, but will instead receive jail and prison sentences.

Economic Instability

Youth delinquency may also lead to economic instability. Incarceration during adolescents results in a lower likelihood to graduate highschool, and former felons are exempt from receiving financial aid for higher education. In addition, delinquency can result in the inability to retain a job since many employers refuse to hire anyone with a criminal record. An individual is pushed further into the criminal lifestyle when a reduction in education and employment opportunities exists (Gillman et al., 2015, p.35). The financial status of entire communities may also be affected in neighborhoods where high volumes of criminal offenders

reside, since little to no income from these offenders does not contribute much for the economic growth of these communities.

Health Reduction

Delinquency can lead to the reduction of an individual's health. A study of both juvenile and adult convicts found that "more than one fifth of former juvenile detainees had significant impairment in functioning 3 years post incarceration" (Gillman et al., 2015, p.36). In a similar study, depression in an individual's late 20's was correlated to the individual's juvenile institutionalization. Other mental illnesses can also arise while the individual is incarcerated. Drug and alcohol use have also been attributed to youth engaged in delinquent behavior, in some cases escalating to a dependency of these substances in adulthood. Incarceration resulting from delinquent behavior can prompt an early deterioration of an inmate's physical and psychological health.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Individual factors	Juvenile delinquency is a	Incarceration
Family background	serious threat in at-risk communities.	Economic instability
Peer influences		Health reduction

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

A mental health workshop for teens and pre-teens was conducted for this Capstone Project. Since the majority of the agency's members are Latinx, this workshop was formulated specifically for Latinx youth, ages 12 through 18. The workshop was conducted online via Zoom with assistance from a Watsonville PAL staff member. The participating members and staff were present at WPAL's youth center, while I facilitated the workshop from home via Zoom.

Project Purpose

Mental health issues are included in the individual factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency. It is simply one of the many individual factors that may affect the likelihood of youth delinquency, yet it is a very important risk factor. It is a topic that is not frequently addressed in teen and pre-teen social environments, and there have been very few events administered by Watsonville PAL that have specifically addressed mental health. A mental health workshop for Latinx youth can promote positive changes and a healthy lifestyle that abstain from youth delinquency, therefore addressing the key issue the agency seeks to resolve.

Project Justification

Workshops are favored in educational and professional settings because they are thought to flow freely, create lighthearted and inspiring environments, and teach participants new and exciting content (Ferreria, 2019). Workshops operate in smaller groups, allowing for more personalized experiences and better focus, and leaving more room for questions and discussion from all participating members. Active engagement is conducted in workshop settings, and has been deemed a highly effective way people can learn new ideas. Workshops provide a balance

where participants learn from the facilitator and from each other's perspectives and experiences equally. A workshop focused on mental health discussion is suitable for the agency and the population it serves.

Project Implementation

A week-long mental health workshop for Latinx teens and pre-teens was held.

The workshop was initially planned for a group of 10-12 participants, but because of COVID pandemic restrictions, the group included 6-8 members instead, while I maintained my social distance and facilitated the group from home via Zoom. The group of WPAL participants and staff were already meeting in person for other program activities within the agency and Santa Cruz County's guidelines for in-person gatherings. Because they were already meeting in-person, it was viable for this workshop to happen while the participants were present at the center, but this workshop could have been done entirely virtual under different circumstances. The group met for 5 days, Monday through Friday, to discuss mental health and Latinx empowerment. The participants were given a pre- and post-survey to analyze their knowledge of topics involving self care, mood disorders, stress, self-image, and identity. The purpose of this workshop was to identify the stigmas attached to mental health, discuss mental health treatment options and healthy ways to cope with stress, recognize ways we can improve self-esteem and overall wellness, and acknowledge the ways ethnic and cultural identities make us special.

Once the topics for each day were established, additional resources were searched for in order to keep the participants engaged. Videos, activities, arts and crafts, worksheets, and Google Slide presentations were used to aid the discussion of the given topic of each day. Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA), another agency in Watsonville that serves school

aged children, held a similar workshop in the past and was contacted for tips on what worked well in their workshop. PVPSA advised that the workshop topics include anxiety, stress, substance abuse, self harm, and empowerment. It was also advised that a list of additional resources be provided for the participants to follow up with or seek professional help. All of their advice was taken into consideration as I created the workshop curriculum.

On most days, the workshop schedule began with an icebreaker activity, followed by a discussion on the topic that involved asking the group various open ended questions to encourage participation, followed by an activity, and ending with a list of additional resources given to the group for further exploration on the topics or future aid. Day 1 of the mental health workshop focused on stress management and self care. The goal was to familiarize the group with these terms and for them to identify healthy versus unhealthy ways of managing stress. The participants were then asked to brainstorm different self care methods, dedicate 15 to 30 minutes practicing a new form of self care at home, and were given a list of social media accounts to subscribe to that promoted self care and overall wellness. Day 2 of the workshop was focused on mood disorders. The goal on this day was to teach participants about the stigmas associated with mental health, discuss the different ways anxiety and depression can look and feel like, discuss mental health treatment options, familiarize them with the warnings signs for self-harm and suicide ideation, and have them create a contact list of people they could reach out to if they or someone they knew was ever experiencing a mental health crisis. Day 3 of the workshop was focused on self image and self esteem. The goal on this day was for participants to recognize what external and internal factors can affect their self esteem, discuss ways social media can both negatively and positively impact their self image, and for them to recognize the importance of

positive affirmations by creating a gift box full of positive affirmations written by themselves and their peers. Day 4 of the workshop was focused on Latinx empowerment. The goal was to identify gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes that exist, and acknowledge how these stereotypes can harm our confidence and self image. The participants were then asked to research a public figure of Latinx background (i.e. A.O.C., Roberto Clemente, Selena Quintanilla, etc.) and present their findings to the group highlighting the public figure's accomplishments and how the public figure's life story can relate to their own. The participants were then asked to write a journal entry on the following prompt: If someone were to Google you in 50 years, what are you hoping they will find? What do you hope to accomplish by then? Day 5 of the workshop was a closeout session. There was a brief review on all the topics that were discussed on the previous days, followed by a movie and snacks. The movie All Together Now was shown since it discusses mental health throughout the film. A detailed implementation plan and project timeline can be found in the Appendix under Scope of Work.

Assessment Plan

The effectiveness of this project was measured via pre-and post-surveys. These pre- and post-surveys were completed by all participants at the beginning and end of the workshop. The surveys were formulated to assess participants' recognition of stress, stress management methods, mood disorders, who they can talk to if they ever feel like self-harming or suicidal, self esteem levels, and pride in their etnic identity. These pre- and post-surveys were analyzed to determine if the expected outcomes for the program were met.

Expected Outcomes

It was hoped that my project would create a safe environment for participants to have an open and honest conversation about mental health. For some participants it may have been the first time they have this conversation, for others it may not have been the first time they discussed this subject. Regardless, it was my hope that by having this conversation throughout the workshop and in future conversation in other educational and social spheres, the topic of mental health will be normalized. By normalizing mental health, the likelihood of someone reaching out, informing others, seeking treatment, and simply acknowledging the importance of it can be amplified.

The most expected outcome was an increase of knowledge in information regarding mental health. It was also expected for participants to complete the workshop understanding how mental health affects their community specifically and how it is still stigmatized. It was also expected for participants to have a definition and better understanding of the following terms: self care, depression, anxiety, counseling, stress management, mental health stigmas, stereotypes, and self-esteem, and self-image. It was expected for participants to be able to differentiate between

healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms and the variety of emotions someone can have in response to different life experiences. Upon completion of the workshop, participants should be aware of the professional help and counseling that is available for them.

Project Results

As mentioned previously, pre- and post-surveys were used to measure the effectiveness of the workshop. On Day 1 of the workshop, 6 of the 8 total participants reported that they could tell when they were feeling stressed out. By the end of the workshop, all 8 participants said they could tell when they are feeling stressed out. On the first day of the workshop, 5 participants said they knew of ways to destress. By the end of the workshop the results remained the same, however it is important to note that 2 participants joined the workshop late, took the pre-survey on the second day, and missed the discussion on stress management and self care. In the pre-survey, 6 participants said they could detect what mood disorders like depression and anxiety could look like for themselves and others. All 8 participants said they could detect what mood disorders like depression and anxiety could look like for themselves and others in the post-survey. On Day 1 of the workshop, 6 participants said they knew who they could talk to if they ever felt anxious, depressed, or thinking of self harming. By the end of the workshop, this number rose to include 7 participants. In the pre-survey, 2 participants said they had positive self-esteem. In the post-survey 3 participants said they have positive self-esteem. At the start of the workshop, 3 participants said they knew of ways to improve their self-esteem. By the end of the workshop 2 participants said they knew of ways to improve their self-esteem. It is important to note that this question was left unanswered/blank by one of the participants. In the pre-survey,

6 participants said that their identity as a young Latino or Latina makes them unique and special.

The post-survey showed the same results for this statement.

Based on the results on the pre- and post-surveys, overall I would say that the workshop was effective because the amount of participants' agreement on the given statements increased. The statements were written to be reflective of the workshop topics discussed. Not all participants' agreement on all statements improved and some statement agreements showed slight change or no change at all. Although I expected better results, overall I believe the workshop was effective in the following topics: stress, stress management, discernment of mood disorders, and recognizing who to talk to if ever in a mental health crisis. The workshop was not effective in showing any changes in participants' attitude towards the following topics: positive self-esteem and recognizing resources to improve self-esteem. The participants' view on ethnic/cultural pride remained the same throughout the workshop. A table chart of participants' results in the pre- and post-surveys is shown below.

Figure 1: Table Chart of Pre- Survey and Post-Survey Answers

Survey Responses	Strongly Disagree or Disagree		Ne	Neutral		Strongly Agree or Agree	
	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Pre-survey	Post-survey	
Statement 1: I can tell when I am stressed out.	0	0	2	0	6	8	
Statement 2: I know what to do to make myself feel less stressed.	3	2	0	1	5	5	
Statement 3: I understand what mood	0	0	2	0	6	8	

disorders (i.e. depression, anxiety) can look like for myself or others.						
Statement 4: I know who I can talk to if I ever feel anxious, depressed, or thinking of self-harming.	2	1	0	0	6	7
Statement 5: I have positive self-esteem.	4	3	2	2	2	3
Statement 6: I know what resources I can use to improve my self-esteem.	2	3	3	2	3	2
Statement 7: My identity as a young Latina/Latino makes me unique and special.	1	0	1	2	6	6

Conclusion & Recommendations

It is possible that little to no change was seen in participants' agreement of the given statements in the pre- and post-surveys due to the fact that the workshop included such a small group of participants. A small group of participants means there were few responses, little data to work with, and fewer changes in responses seen. It is also possible that the participants already participated in a mental health program at school or in their communities, and were already familiar with the topics discussed and reported little change in their responses throughout the

workshop. Regardless of the results in the pre- and post-surveys, I believe a mental health and Latinx empowerment workshop like this one should continue to exist. Based on the engagement and interactions with the participants, they appeared to have enjoyed it and truly learned throughout the workshop. A participant said they enjoyed making a positive affirmation gift box and learning about Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. Another participant said they learned a lot about mood disorders, and two others said their major take-aways from the workshop were the importance of self care. Mental health can be a hard topic for teens and pre-teens to discuss, therefore the continuation of workshops such as these is crucial. It is recommended that once COVID pandemic restrictions are lifted, the workshop be expanded to include more participants. Discussions on lighter topics such as self care and Latinx empowerment fostered engagement and active participation, while more serious topics such as mood disorders and self-esteem made participants less willing to talk and engage. It is recommended that additional activities, videos, and worksheets be used to keep participants better engaged during the more serious topics. In addition, it was alarming to see that very few participants said they had positive self-esteem in both pre- and post-surveys. Self-esteem seems to be something that the majority of the participants struggle with, and it may be reflective of what most youth at the agency and most vouth nation wide struggle with. It is recommended that self-esteem should be given more emphasis throughout the workshop and in other agency programs. Finding ways to empower the youth to build up their self-esteem is incredibly necessary. More focus should be given to improving the youth's self-esteem levels.

Personal Reflection

In planning and implementing this workshop, I was reminded of the importance of mental health awareness. Our society is doing a better job at promoting mental health, and it seems that there is less stigma attached to mental health treatment than there was 20 years ago, but there is still more work to be done. It is hoped that my project aid in normalizing mental health discussion in our current age. Mental health is not a topic the Watsonville Police Activities

League has explicitly addressed before, therefore a mental health workshop seemed like a much needed program. The workshop included a mix of icebreaker activities, open-ended discussion questions, arts and crafts, group activities, and additional resources to keep the participants engaged and informed through different methods of learning. Initially I was worried that it would be challenging for me to facilitate this workshop via Zoom, and although not being there in-person had some limitations, overall the workshop implementation went better than expected. However, it was unfortunate that only a small group of participants was allowed to participate because of the pandemic restrictions.

Mental health was an individual factor that a 2009 study reported had an effect on a youth's probability to be involved in delinquent and criminal behavior. Low self esteem was also listed as an individual and contributing factor to youth crime (O'Mahony, 2009, p.101). Because self esteem is a contributing factor to youth crime, and because many participants reported low self esteem levels throughout this workshop, it is advised that the agency increase focus on creating programs and activities that address the improvement of the self esteem levels of its members.

Youth in "at-risk" areas like Watsonville need diversion from juvenile delinquency and youth crime. Agencies such as Watsonville PAL exist to provide different options for youth, specializing in recreational, educational, and athletic programs to promote crime abstinence and community development. Providing the youth different options other than gang involvement, drug and alcohol use, and juvenile delinquency will promote healthy living and overall wellness for children and teenagers in these "at-risk" areas.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables (flyers, brochures, worksheets, PPT)	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Create Workshop Schedule	Workshop Schedule	10/13/2020	Carmen Pichardo
Create Workshop Pre- and Post-Surveys	Day 1:pre-workshop survey Day 5:post-workshop survey	10/13/2020	Carmen Pichardo
Create Workshop Shopping List	Shopping List	10/13/2020	Carmen Pichardo
Day 1: Self Care & Stress Management	Day 1:pre-workshop survey Day 1: Stress Management & Self-Care Day 1:What's your self-love language?	11/2/2020 6pm-7pm	Carmen Pichardo, Andrea Rodriguez
Day 2: Mood Disorders	Day 2: Mood Disorders	11/3/2020 6pm-7pm	Carmen Pichardo, Andrea Rodriguez
Day 3: Self Image & Self Esteem	Day 3: Self Image & Self-Esteem Day 3: Something About Me Worksheet	11/4/2020 6pm-7pm	Carmen Pichardo, Andrea Rodriguez
Day 4: Latinx Empowerment	Day 4: Latinx Empowerment	11/5/2020 6pm-7pm	Carmen Pichardo, Andrea Rodriguez
Day 5: Review & Closeout Session	Day 5:post-workshop survey All Together Now (film link)	11/6/2020 6pm-7pm	Carmen Pichardo, Andrea Rodriguez