PONO CHOICES: Rigorous Evaluation of a Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy and STI Prevention Program for Hawai‘i Middle-Schoolers

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WHY PONO CHOICES

Youth in Hawai‘i had the lowest rate of condom use in the nation in 2011 – only 44% of high school students reported using a condom in their last intercourse, compared to 60% nationwide.

Hawai‘i had the 10th highest teen pregnancy rate in 2010 (7% of 15 through 19-year-old females, compared to 8% nationwide) and the 12th highest chlamydia rate.

Western culture-based strategies have failed to reduce educational disparities between Hawaiian students and their peers (Kani‘au laupa‘au, 2007). Students taught through introduction of a Native Hawaiian paradigm, also show an increased desire to learn (Kani‘au, 2005). No state-curriculum explicitly incorporated the unique values and perspectives of the Hawaiian host culture.

Teen pregnancy and STI prevention interventions should start early, with the onset of puberty (Moore and Sugland, 2001).

Responding to the need for effective teen pregnancy and STI prevention curriculum, the University of Hawai‘i, in partnership with Planned Parenthood of Hawai‘i and ALU‘LIKE, Inc. developed Pono Choices.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

The curriculum is culturally responsive and introduces students to Hawaiian cultural values, practices and concepts that stress positive character development, including making “pono” or “right” choices. It was designed as an intervention that could be implemented at any community setting where youth congregate, targeting middle school youth ages 11 through 13.

Cultural responsiveness is supported through:

• Introduction of Hawaiian cultural values
• An original cultural story
• Cultural practices
• Locally produced videos

Hawaiian cultural values were introduced in each lesson to reinforce lesson content and expanded through an original cultural story. The story served as an access point into the curriculum content from the viewpoint of two adolescents preparing for an important journey. Stories throughout the curriculum connected students to their community and homework engaged their families.

In the Hawaiian culture, the canoe is a metaphor for everything – it’s a metaphor for an island, for the earth, for the community for the classroom. The canoe represents the values of cooperation and shared responsibility and how they come into play when navigating uncharted waters. In Pono Choices, the canoe holds the children and keeps them safe while charting the unfamiliar waters of puberty and adulthood.

CONCLUSIONS

Pono Choices was more effective than current programs in increasing students' knowledge of pregnancy and STI prevention.

Pono Choices students had the same gains in skills, attitudes and intentions as other programs.

Pono Choices had no detectable impact on sexual behavior - not surprising, giving their young age (12 years old at baseline).

No Impact on Engagement in Unsafe Sex: Estimated probability of engaging in unprotected sex one year after baseline.

- 2% for program group
- 2% for control group

No Impact on Initiation of Sexual Activity: Estimated probability of ever having had sex:

- 10% for program group
- 10% for control group

Positive Impact on Knowledge of TPP/STI Prevention: Percentage of knowledge items answered correctly at 1-year follow-up:

- 73% for program group
- 53% for control group

Statically significant impact (estimated effect size of 0.70) on students’ knowledge of TPP/STI prevention.

FINDINGS

No Impact on Engagement in Unsafe Sex: Estimated probability of engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse among youth as measured one year after baseline.

Secondary Research Question: What was the impact of Pono Choices, relative to business as usual, on engagement in unprotected sexual intercourse among youth as measured one year after baseline?

Additional Outcomes: Knowledge of pregnancy and STI prevention; attitudes toward healthy sexual behavior; skills in managing relationships and choices, and intentions to engage in safe-sex behavior.

For this study, the curriculum was tested in middle schools throughout the state of Hawai‘i as part of regular 7th and 8th grade health classes, delivered by regular health teachers. Teachers received a two-day training, all teaching materials, and ongoing observation, feedback and coaching by the implementation team.

FINDINGS

Primary Research Question: What was the impact of Pono Choices, relative to business as usual, on engagement in unprotected sexual intercourse among youth as measured one year after baseline?

Counterfactual: Business-as-usual sexual health instruction in regular 7th and 8th grade health classes.

Implementation: IMPAQ observed 128 lessons (22% of the total lessons delivered across the three semesters). Pono Choices was delivered with high adherence to the intended intervention model:

- 94% of students completed at least 75% of the curriculum
- Average percentage of content received by each student was 94%
- Teachers completed 96% of planned activities
- Match between teachers’ and observers’ assessment of activities completed was 98%
- Average rating for quality of delivery was 4.3 (on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being “excellent”)
- Average rating for student engagement was 4.6 (on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being “excellent”)

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Pono Choices is a culturally responsive teen pregnancy and STI prevention program of 9.5 hour program with 10 modules delivered in sequential order for a total of approximately 600 minutes of instruction. The curriculum focused on:

- Personal goal setting
- Reproductive anatomy
- Reproduction
- Correct condom use
- Other birth control and methods to prevent of sexually transmitted infections
- Understanding healthy relationships
- Developing refusal skills

EVALUATION DESIGN

Primary Research Question: What was the impact of Pono Choices, relative to business as usual, on engagement in unprotected sexual intercourse among youth as measured one year after baseline?

Secondary Research Question: What was the impact of Pono Choices, relative to business as usual, on the initiation of sexual activity among youth as measured one year after baseline?

Additional Outcomes: Knowledge of pregnancy and STI prevention; attitudes toward healthy sexual behavior; skills in managing relationships and choices, and intentions to engage in safe-sex behavior.

For this study, the curriculum was tested in middle schools throughout the state of Hawai‘i as part of regular 7th and 8th grade health classes, delivered by regular health teachers. Teachers received a two-day training, all teaching materials, and ongoing observation, feedback and coaching by the implementation team.

Pono Choices is a culturally responsive teen pregnancy and STI prevention and Planning Parenthood of Hawai‘i.

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