

"Mi Futuro"

Sexual Abstinence program (1999-2000)

for Laredo Independent School District Middle Schools

A summary report of the survey conducted by LISD

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Table of Contents

Project Background	3
Research Methodology	4
Analysis	4
Observations on Research Results	9
Recommendations	10

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Among the quality of life issues in the South Texas border region, rising teenage pregnancy trends is a prominent concern. It is linked to many other social, economic, health and public service issues particularly in light of the importance given to family and the family life value in the area. However, information is scarce on teen sexual behavior, pregnancy rates, and related issues.

Abstinence is increasingly viewed as possibly a better alternative to Safe Sex education programs that had long been promoted with a view to curtail teenage pregnancy rates. According to the Texas Education Code as passed by the 74th Texas Legislature, any course materials and instruction relating to human sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, or HIV/AIDS ... **must present abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred choice of behavior in relationship to all sexual activity for unmarried persons of school going age** (Section 28.004).

It is widely recognized that in the sunbelt states, birth rates generally exceed 40 births per thousand females ages 15-17, while in the upper New England and parts of the Midwest, teen birth rates are less than 20 per thousand. The geographic pattern is partly due also to the fact that teen fertility rates are substantially higher for Hispanic and black teens than far white, non-Hispanic teens (Wertheimer & Moore, 1998)¹. Teenage pregnancy rates {especially unmarried} in Laredo are on the rise according to informal estimates, but there exists scarce official data on the topic. Laredo Independent School District (LISD) is taking steps to organize this information gathering. Additionally, among other measures, LISD planned and adopted the abstinence educational strategy. Previous baseline research had revealed a need to introduce the abstinence program at the middle-school level. Consequently, the Mi Futuro Program was conducted during 1999-2000 at the four LISD middle schools. This was the first systematic abstinence program in LISD.

Mi Futuro is based on a pre-developed abstinence instructional program. Evaluative data of the program was collected also as per the instructional program package. This report is based upon the pre-structured data collection set. Yet, for Laredo, simply in terms of topicality, timeliness, and public service needs, LISD's abstinence program and its evaluation are significant. The results of the data collected would contribute significantly to a better understanding of several issues especially relating to the abstinence strategy -- as it pertains particularly to our borderland city. In particular, to begin with, information is needed as to the nature and level of teen knowledge, beliefs, and behavior with regards to sexual activities. This is the focus of this research report on the Mi Futuro data.

1. Childbearing by teens: Links to welfare reform. (1995). New Federalism: Issues and options for states. Series A, No. A-Z4. The Urban Institute Program to assess changing social policies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data used in this report was collected one time at the end of the Mi Futuro program for 1999-2000. No pre-intervention baseline data is available to compare results.

Data had already been collected by LISD at the end of the school year 1999-2000. The data collected was in a pre-constructed format provided by the creators of the abstinence education module, mainly testing for program content. As the educational program did not include scoring procedures and instructions, separate procedures were developed to quantify and study the information.

A pilot test data Entry process was conducted on 3 surveys that were subsequently discarded. The data entry was tested for validity at periodic intervals by the research assistant and randomly tested finally by the lead researcher. Within the available data format and structure, descriptive statistics are reported.

ANALYSIS

A random sample of 950 surveys were selected. A large number of the program participants were between 13 to 14 years old (nearly 65 percent), followed by 11 to 12 years old (26 percent). In terms of gender representation, girls constituted nearly 49 percent of the total respondents while boys constituted 51 percent. See Tables 1 to 4.

Table 1. Age of participant

	Percent	Valid Percent
11-12 > years old	26.5	26.0
13-14 > years old	64.6	64.8
15-16 > years old	8.4	8.4
17-18 > years old	.1	.1
Total	99.7	100.0
Don' t know	.3	
Total	100.0	

Table 2. Gender

	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	47.6	48.8
Male	50.0	51.2
Total	97.6	100.0
Don't know	2.4	
Total	100.0	

Table 3. Grade in school

	Percent	Valid Percent
6th grade	23.7	23.8
7th grade	32.7	32.8
8th grade	43.2	43.3
9th grade	.1	.1
Total	99.7	100.0
Don't know	.3	
Total	100.0	

Table 4. Residence of participants

	Percent	Valid Percent
Other	.3	.3
Lives with both parents	72.4	72.9
Lives with one parent	24.5	24.7
Lives with any other family member	2.0	2.0
Lives part-time with both parents	.1	.1
Total	99.4	100.0
Don't know	.6	
Total	100.0	

In terms of knowledge and behavior centering on social relationships and sexuality, Mi Futuro covered the topics of self-esteem, peer pressure, puberty, jealousy, love, dating, verbal and physical abuse, STDs, engaging in sex, and the abstinence option.

Self esteem

On the topic of self-esteem, almost 95 percent of the participants defined self-esteem as 'the way one felt about themselves'. In this group, 47 percent were female and a little over 48 percent were male. In terms of age grouping, nearly 24 percent were between 11-12 years old, over 61 percent were between 13-14 years old, and nearly eight percent was between 15-16 years of age.

Specifically in response to their individual self-perception, more than 35 percent of the participants really liked themselves most of the time. In this group, 16 percent were female and a little over 19 percent were male. In terms of age grouping, nearly 9 percent were between 11-12 years old, almost 23 percent were between 13-14 years old, more than three percent was between 15-16 years old, and one participant was between 17-18 years old. Nearly 49 percent of participants felt they were OK most of the time. In this group, 24 percent were female and nearly 25 percent were male. In terms of age, almost 13 percent were 11-12 years old, nearly 32 percent were between 13-14 years old, and over four percent was between 15 -16 years old. Among the 35 percent who really liked themselves, over 26 percent lived with both parents and almost eight percent lived with one parent. And among the 49 percent who felt they were OK most of the time, nearly 36 percent lived with both parents and over 12 percent lived with one parent.

With regards to behavior that could improve self esteem, nearly 54 percent of the participants correctly identified all required behaviors: hanging around people who really cared about you, staying away from people who make you feel bad, and believing that you are a good person. Among this group, more than 30 percent were female and nearly 24 percent were male. In terms of age, over 14 percent were 11-12 years old, more than 36 percent were 13-14 years old, and over 3 percent was 15-16 years old.

More than 76 percent of the participants felt that the Mi Futuro program helped them in improving their self-esteem. Among them, more than 41 percent were female and nearly 35 percent were male. In terms of age, nearly 50 percent were between 13 14 years old, over 19 percent were 11-12 years old, and almost 7 percent were 15-16 years old.

Peer pressure

Over 91 percent of the participants defined peer pressure as 'when your friends pressure you to do things you may not want'. In this group, more than 46 percent are female and 45 percent are male; nearly 67 percent lived with both parents while over 22 percent lived with one parent. In terms of age, over 23 percent are 11-12 years old, nearly 61 percent are 13-14 years old, and about 7 percent are 15-16 years old.

With regards to appropriate behavior to deal with peer pressure, more than 64 percent correctly identified the desirable behaviors: by choosing better friends and by believing that you deserve to be treated better. In this group, nearly 35 percent were female and 30 percent were male; nearly 49 percent lived with both parents and 15 percent lived with one parent. In terms of age, nearly 18 percent were 11-12 years old, almost 43 percent were 13-14 years old, and over 4 percent was 15-16 years old.

About 74 percent of the participants felt that the Mi Futuro program helped them to understand and deal with peer pressure. Among them, over 40 percent were female and some 34 percent were male. In terms of age, nearly 20 percent were 11-12 years old, over 47 percent were 13-14 years old, and almost 7 percent were 15-16 years old.

Puberty

Some 39 percent of the participants believed that puberty was 'when the body changes from child to adult' and more than 49 percent believed that puberty was both when the body changes from child to adult and also when it can make babies. Among the 39 percent, 19 percent were female and 20 percent were male. Among the 49 percent, over 26 percent were female and nearly 23 percent were male.

With regards to specific behaviors of sexuality, nearly 85 percent of the participants believed that 'a girl can get pregnant when she starts having her periods even if she is 9 years old'. Among this group, nearly 45 percent are female and some 40 percent are male. In terms of age, some 21 percent are 11-12 years old, over 56 percent are 13-14 years old, and more than 7 percent are 15-16 years old. On the other hand, more than 92 percent of the participants believed that's boy can get a girl pregnant when his body begins to make sperms even if he is only 11 years old'. Among this group, nearly 47 percent are female and some 46 percent are male. In terms of age, more than 23 percent are 11-12 years old, 61 percent are 13-14 years old, and nearly 8 percent are 15-16 years old.

Almost 91 percent of participants felt that the Mi Futuro program helped them to understand puberty. Of them, nearly 47 percent were female and over 44 percent were male. In terms of age, nearly 44 percent were 11-12 years old, almost 60 percent were 13-14 years old, and over 7 percent were 15-16 years old.

To contextualize abstinence, some information centering on emotions of jealousy and love, and dating behaviors were also conveyed in the Mi Futuro program.

Jealousy

Nearly 66 percent of the participants defined jealousy as: a strong feeling of insecurity, distrust, and something that would destroy any relationship. Among this group, some 38 percent were female and 28 percent were male; nearly 48 percent lived with both parents and more than 16 percent lived with one parent. In terms of age, nearly 44 percent were 13-14 years old, over 17 percent were 11-12 years old, and almost 5 percent were 15-16 years old.

Love

In defining love, over 90 percent believed that love is 'when you care about someone so much that you are happy just'. In this group, more than 47 percent were female and nearly 43 percent were male; more than 66 percent lived with both parents, some 22 percent lived with one parent, and almost 2 percent lived with a family relative. In terms of age, 23 percent were 11-12 years old, over 60 percent were 13-14 years old, and over 7 percent were 15-16 years old.

Dating

Regarding dating behavior, more than 94 percent believed that 'it is best to go around with somebody who respects you, your family, your friends, and your decisions'. Among this group, more than 48 percent were female and nearly 47 percent were male; more than 68 percent lived with both parents, 24 percent lived with one parent, and nearly 2 percent lived with a family relative.

Nearly 70 percent of participants are 'going around currently' or 'have gone around before'. In this group, almost 33 percent are female and 37 percent are male; about 51 percent live with both parents and over 17 percent live with one parent. In terms of age, more than 15 percent were 11-12 years old; some 48 percent were 13-14 years old; and six percent were 15-16 years old. Among the 30 percent who 'have never gone around before', about 11 percent are 11-12 years old, almost 17 percent are 12-13 years old, and 2 percent are 15-16 years old. In terms of gender, 16 percent are female and nearly 14 percent are male.

Nearly 71 percent of the participants said that they used Mi Futuro information to decide whom to go around with, more than 23 percent answered in the negative and nearly 6 percent did not respond to the question. Almost 90 percent of participants felt that the information will be useful in the future.

Within the context of dating and relationships, issues of verbal and physical abuse, and STD's were also addressed.

Verbal abuse

More than 74 percent of the participants could identify verbal abuse as: hurting someone's feelings with words, calling somebody hurtful names, yelling at somebody either in private or in front of others'. Among this group, over 41 percent were female and nearly 33 percent were male. In terms of age, more than 19 percent were 11-12 years old, nearly 49 percent were 13-14 years old, and over 5 percent were 15-16 years old.

Physical abuse

Nearly 75 percent of participants identified physical abuse as: hurting somebody's body, hair pulling, pushing, shoving, grabbing, and kicking. Among them, nearly 40 percent were female and over 35 percent were male. In terms of age, over 19 percent were 11-12 years old, more than 49 percent were 13-14 years old, and six percent were 15-16 years old.

STD's

Some 54 percent of participants defined STD's as 'Infections a person gets by having sex and Sexually Transmitted Diseases'; while over 33 percent defined it as 'Sexually Transmitted Diseases'.

Abstinence

Regarding knowledge of 'abstinence', over 72 percent of participants considered it as 'deciding to wait for sex only until marriage'; nearly seven percent considered it as 'anytime you are not having sex'; over eight percent believed it as 'having sex with somebody only if are really in love; and nearly seven percent considered it as 'choosing to not have sex with total strangers'. Responses were missing for almost five percent of participants.

About 42 percent of participants said that they 'to decide whether they were going to have sex or not'. In this group, 17 percent were female and almost 25 percent were male; 30 percent lived with both parents and nearly 11 percent lived with one parent. In terms of age, some 9 percent were 11-12 years old, nearly 28 percent were 13-14 years old, and almost five percent were 15-16 years old.

Regarding the overall impact of the program, almost 85 percent of participants felt that the Mi Futuro program helped them 'to decide that abstinence is the best idea for them'. Among them; about 45 percent were female and nearly 40 percent were male. In terms of age, over 23 percent were 11-12 years old, 55 percent were 13-14 years old, and nearly seven percent were 15-16 years old. More than 87 percent of participants said that they 'would like to see the Mi Futuro program continue in middle school. Over 80 percent felt that they 'feel more confident about relationships, their bodies, and themselves as individuals - since participating in the Mi Futuro program'.

OBSERVATIONS ON RESEARCH RESULTS

On the whole, Mi Futuro appeared to have made some impact on its participants. However, in the absence of baseline data, it is uncertain as to what kind of and to what degree change occurred.

Some questions seemed to have response bias and ambiguity. For example, on defining puberty, 39 percent of the participants selected the first response 'When the body changes from child to adult', and 49 percent selected the last-listed response 'When the body changes from child to adult and when the body can make babies'. Similarly, some 54 percent of participants defined STD's as 'Infections a person gets by having sex and Sexually Transmitted Diseases' while over 33 percent defined it as Sexually Transmitted Diseases'.

Over 79 percent of participants felt that the program helped them to decide that abstinence is the best idea for them. Nearly 71 percent of the participants said that they used Mi Futuro information to decide whom to go around with, more than 23 percent answered in the negative and nearly 6 percent did not respond to the question. Almost 48 percent had been in a situation where they had to decide if they were going to have sex or not. It is not known whether this was prior to their participation in the program or during, thus limiting possibilities to assess any correlation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Any educational strategy requires continuation and continuity of support. Mi Futuro seems to have made a good start in implanting the idea of abstinence as another choice in dating and relationship behaviors. The next level of abstinence education could include enhanced information on the same topics with an emphasis on application. This need becomes apparent in reviewing the responses to one hypothetical situation. The survey question was: If your partner says "I love you", "If you get pregnant, I swear I'll marry you", "But look at all the things I've done for you!", "Trust me, I know what I'm doing - you can't get pregnant", "What's the matter? Don't you like girls?" - Should you have sex? Nearly 80 percent replied in the negative, more than 10 percent replied in the positive, and more than 11 percent did not know or did not have an answer.