

High Impact

A Project from the First 10 Years of NORA



Evaluating Teen Farmworker Education: An Evaluation of a High School ESL Health and Safety Curriculum

The Challenge:

While childhood agricultural injury prevention has long been recognized as an important public health issue, most research has focused on family farms and there have not been many interventions or studies targeting hired youth. In addition, there are few points of easy access to young farmworkers, and the specific health and safety needs of this worker population are often neglected by traditional agricultural youth development programs as well as by general health and safety training targeting adults. California agriculture depends heavily on a hired workforce. Statistics on the number of hired farmworkers under 18 are limited, though NAWs estimates that 3% of farmworkers are under 18 (1998). 🍓

Approach:

The project targeted young farmworkers enrolled in high school ESL classes in several counties of California's San Joaquin Valley. Using a quasi-experimental design, the research consisted of three study groups and included over 2,000 students. One intervention group included students receiving the curriculum, and the second group included students who received the curriculum and whose parents/guardians attended community-based workshops on health and safety. A comparison group consisted of students enrolled in ESL classes but who did not receive any intervention. Changes in knowledge and attitudes were measured through pre- and post-tests. Knowledge retention and behavior change were measured via a follow-up survey with students who worked in the fields the summer following the curriculum. These quantitative data were complemented with qualitative data from focus groups and interviews with students, parents and teachers.

Results:

The study found that a school-based ESL curriculum is an effective intervention to reach and educate teen farmworkers and that the curriculum has had a number of impacts with respect to the three principal outcomes (knowledge, attitudes and behaviors). Nearly half of the intervention group reported implementing new behaviors to protect their health and safety, compared with 33% of those in the comparison group. With respect to the study's second aim of assessing the impact of community workshops for parents, the research findings reveal virtually no associations between parent participation in health and safety workshops and student outcomes. Parents, however, responded to the community workshops with enthusiasm. Teachers were willing to teach the curriculum, and were enthusiastic about providing teens with this information. In addition, 73% of follow-up survey respondents in the intervention group reported sharing information learned in the classes with others. More extensive evaluation of other community-based outreach methods is needed, especially to reach youth who are not in school.

Impact:

This study is unique in that it targeted hired teen farmworkers, and found that a school-based ESL curriculum is a successful intervention for reaching these workers and teaching them about occupational safety and health. The demographic findings will also contribute to creating a picture of hired youth in the fields. Presentations of the evaluation findings have met with enthusiastic response among farmworker advocates, who have expressed interest in adopting this curriculum in schools in their regions. Over 40 ESL teachers in California have received training and/or materials for use in their classrooms, and have demonstrated that this is a feasible approach that warrants further dissemination to the ESL instructor community. ■

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For complete description of this project and others see the CD Rom "A Compendium of NORA Research Projects and Impacts, 1996-2005" located at www.cdc.gov/niosh.

The findings and conclusions in this report have not been formally disseminated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health should not be construed to represent any agency determination or policy.