

Feasibility and Efficacy of ¡Cuídate!: A Sexual Risk Reduction Program for Mexican and Central American Youth

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Poverty, isolation from health services, and conservative attitudes of sexual issues characterize much of rural eastern North Carolina. The region is home to an increasing Latino immigrant population (*Brown & Lopez, 2013*). Latino adolescents in this region experience disproportionately high rates of sexually transmitted infections and early, unintended pregnancy. Community and societal level factors that influence these sexually-related health disparities include social policies, migration burden, and cultural norms (*Larson, 2009; Larson, Sandelowski, & McQuiston, 2012*). ¡Cuídate! – Take Care of Yourself – is the only evidence-based sexual risk reduction program for Latino youth supported by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. ¡Cuídate! had been validated in the U.S. with urban-dwelling Puerto Rican adolescents (*Villarruel, Gal, Eakin, Wilkes, & Herbst, 2010; Villarruel, Jemmott, & Jemmott, 2006*), but it had not been tested with adolescents from Mexico and Central America living in the rural South. The aims of this project were to examine: (a) the extent of feasibility of ¡Cuídate! with Mexican and Central American youth in a rural context using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach; (b) the impact of ¡Cuídate! on sexual knowledge, skills, and attitudes; and (c) the cultural relevance and applicability of program content.

A CBPR team comprised of a Latina community leader, two school nurses, and two university faculty received training in and delivered the ¡Cuídate! program between January and June, 2013. The setting was two rural school-based health centers serving the largest Latino population in eastern North Carolina. This descriptive study used pre-test and post-test assessments as well as post-program focus groups to determine the project aims. Key findings were that early adolescent boys and girls (ages 13-15) made the greatest gains in knowledge and self-efficacy and condom skills-building provided a context for shared partner responsibility. These findings support the need for community-based interventions that

ensure cultural respect and a safe environment in which to discuss sexual issues.

References

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