



r+a

RESEARCH & ACTION REPORT



Investigating *the*
Economic Implications
of Women's Realities

FEATURING:

Creating Equitable Schools with
Teachers at the Forefront

Women Leading Change
in the Muslim World

Early Findings from Sex-Education
Curriculum Evaluation

Social-Emotional Learning
in Turnaround Schools

...and more!

r+a | contents

2 ■ SPOTLIGHT ON NEW
FUNDING & PROJECTS

*New funding moves research
and training programs forward*

6 ■ COMMENTARY

*Creating Equitable Schools with
Teachers at the Forefront*

10 ■ Q&A

*Investigating the
Economic Implications of
Women's Realities*

14 ■ EVEN ONE YEAR
OF COMPREHENSIVE SEX
EDUCATION HAS A
PROTECTIVE EFFECT

*Early findings show promis-
ing benefits of sex-education
curriculum*

16 ■ SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN
TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

*Open Circle implemented in two
Boston Public Schools*

18 ■ NEW PUBLICATIONS

*New papers, articles, and book
chapters address a broad range of
social issues for women, children,
and families*

20 ■ SHORT TAKES

*Updates on findings, collabora-
tions, and outreach from WCW
scholars and projects*

26 ■ GLOBAL
CONNECTIONS

*WCW organizes roundtable
for Muslim women leaders*

Research & Action Report is published in the spring and fall by the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW).

Since 1974, WCW has been a driving force—behind the scenes and in the spotlight—promoting positive change for women, children, and families. Women's perspectives and experiences are at the core of the Wellesley Centers for Women's social science research projects and training programs. By sharing our work with policymakers, educators, practitioners, and the media, we help to shape a more just and equitable society.

Work at the Wellesley Centers for Women addresses three major areas:

- The social and economic status of women and girls and the advancement of their human rights both in the United States and around the globe;
- The education, care, and development of children and youth; and
- The emotional well-being of families and individuals.

Issues of diversity and equity are central across all the work as are the experiences and perspectives of women from a variety of backgrounds and cultures.

WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN

Wellesley College
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481-8203
U.S.A.

www.wcwonline.org

781.283.2500

Questions/comments:

News-WCW@wellesley.edu

EDITORS:

Rebecca Mongeon
Donna Tambascio

CONTRIBUTOR:


Susan Lowry Rardin

DESIGN:

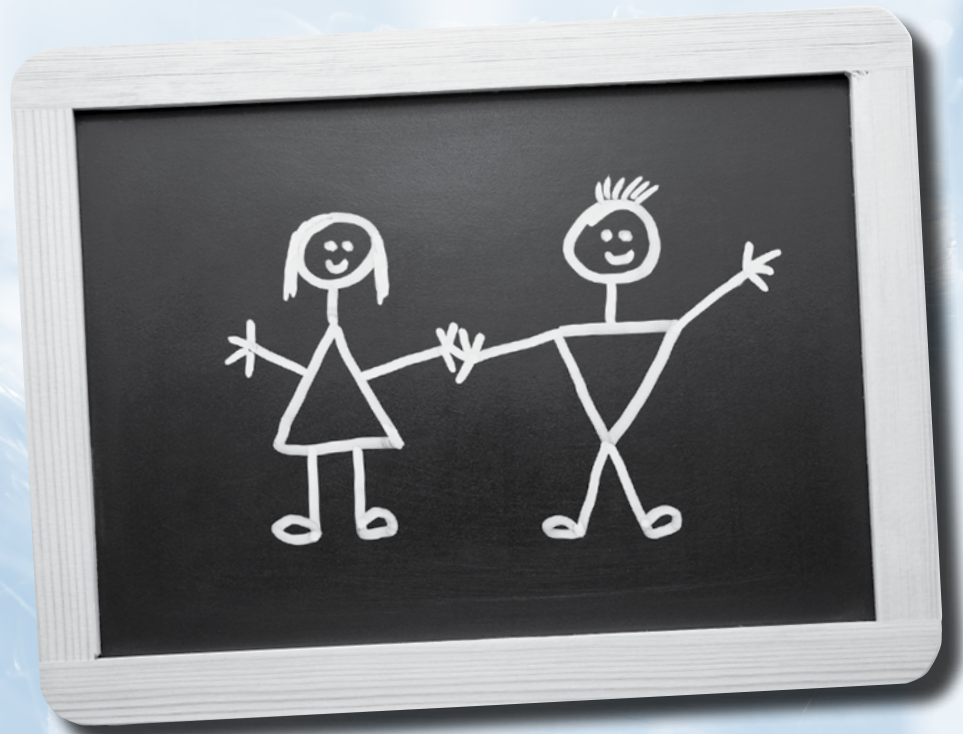
LIMA Design

PRINTING:

Shawmut Printing

 Visit us on Facebook!

 Follow us on Twitter!



Even One Year of Comprehensive Sex Education Has a Protective Effect

DECIDING WHAT TO TEACH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY IS NOT A CASUAL PROCESS. Parents, health teachers, school nurses and administrators, and students can differ in their opinions about what should be taught and when. Considering research results on program efficacy is a good standard of practice when choosing a curriculum. When Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts (PPLM) wrote its middle school sex education curriculum *Get Real: Comprehensive Sex Education that Works*, they wanted to make sure that what they included would pass the most stringent test: to be recognized in the scientific community and by the Department of Health and Human Services as being “evidence-based.” PPLM contracted with researchers at the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW) to evaluate the effectiveness of their comprehensive curriculum.

The evaluation uses a cluster random assignment design, in which 24 participating middle schools were randomly assigned to intervention and control conditions. In the intervention schools, students are exposed to the curriculum, while in the control schools they are not. A random assignment design is the gold standard in evaluation because it makes it possible to attribute change over time in intervention students’ self-reported sexual activity to their exposure to *Get Real*. If the results show that students in intervention schools who are exposed to *Get Real* have greater improvement in sexual health outcomes than students in control schools who receive sex education “as usual,” the curriculum will be among the select few that are recommended to middle schools across the country as being “evidence-based.” For middle school students, improved sexual health is defined by PPLM as a delay in becoming sexually active and an increase in correct and consistent use of protection among students who do become sexually active.



The evaluation in a nutshell:

In intervention schools, PPLM educators teach the 27 lessons of *Get Real* to a group of students over a three-year period, from sixth through eighth grade, and WCW researchers collect data from these students before the intervention starts, then in each year of middle school. Students will be contacted for the final time one year after they complete eighth grade to participate in an online follow-up survey to measure the long-term impact of the curriculum. **In control schools**, sex education is taught as it was taught in each school before the evaluation started, and WCW researchers again collect the same data from a group of students at the same intervals as in intervention schools.

To date, students in both **intervention** and **control** conditions were administered a confidential survey at the beginning of sixth grade to obtain a baseline measure and were given a follow-up survey in the beginning of seventh grade. The questions asked were on topics that are shown in prior research to have a positive or negative influence on teen sexual behavior, including family dynamics and attitudes on sexual risk-taking, communication with trusted adults about sex, peer attitudes and behavior, dating patterns, and social and emotional health.

In addition to gathering data from the youth directly, parent/guardian volunteers from some participating schools were invited separately to take part in individual interviews about relationships. A small group of student volunteers have also taken part in a project in which they took photographs that represent their understanding of relationships in a broad sense. These qualitative components of the evaluation were designed to provide greater in-depth understanding of the impact of the curriculum. The results of the photography project will be reported in a paper entitled, "Urban early adolescent narratives on sexuality: Accidental and intentional influences of family, peers, and the media," authored by team members Linda Charmaraman and Corinne McKamey; the article will be published in the journal *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* this year.

The preliminary results:

Students participated in the in-class survey with parent/guardian approval and student assent. The baseline survey was administered to 1,872 students at the beginning of sixth grade in 24 middle schools. The sample was 52 percent female and composed primarily of students from diverse backgrounds. About 68 percent of all students participating in the evaluation qualified for reduced or free lunch.

At baseline (in sixth grade before the intervention started) four percent of the sixth graders reported having had sex. A larger percentage of male (ten percent) than female students (three percent) reported being sexually active. The survey was re-administered at the beginning of seventh grade to 1,733 students in 23 schools.* In the seventh grade sample eight percent of the students reported having had sex—17 percent of the male students and seven percent of the female students. This is a pattern researchers expected because more adolescents become sexually active with age. **The important finding is that fewer adolescents in intervention schools became sexually active compared to those in the control school:** students in intervention schools were 40 percent less likely to report being sexually active in seventh grade than students in control schools. Even though more boys than girls reported being sexually active, the results showed that the protective effect of the intervention applied to both boys and girls.

Considering that students may not be telling the truth even in a confidential survey, researchers included standardized questions to measure students' tendency to give socially desirable answers (the tendency of giving responses they think adults would like to hear). The

finding that exposure to one year of *Get Real* is associated with delaying sexual debut was obtained after controlling for students' social desirability tendencies.

A first glance offers good news:

One year of exposure to *Get Real* is one-third of the full dose of the curriculum, which is designed to be delivered through nine lessons in each grade of middle school. The seventh grade data were collected four to eight months after intervention students' exposure to the sixth grade sessions of *Get Real* instruction, spanning over the months of summer vacation. These circumstances surrounding the follow-up results suggest that *Get Real's* protective impact is already present at a relatively low dose of instruction and is detectable even after several months.

The impact of full exposure to *Get Real* (all 27 lessons) will become clear after intervention students have been exposed to three years of lesson plans at the end of eighth grade. The assessment of the curriculum's long-term effectiveness will await the results of the planned online survey when students are in ninth grade. Only with these two planned assessments will *Get Real* become a candidate for the list of evidence-based sex education curricula. Stay tuned to find out more! ■

*One of the original schools discontinued participation due to its probationary status and the associated mandate of having to drop all programs unrelated to students' test performance. Data related to this school have been removed from the study.

The Wellesley Centers for Women team conducting the evaluation of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts' middle school sex education curriculum includes: Sumru Erkut, Ph.D. project director, Jennifer Grossman, Ph.D., co-director; Alice Frye, Ph.D., methodologist; Linda Charmaraman, Ph.D., in charge of qualitative data collection and analyses; Ineke Ceder, project manager; Erica Plunkett, field coordinator; Lorraine Cordeiro, Ph.D. and Corinne McKamey, Ph.D., postdoctoral scholars; and May Chen, Megan Budge, Alice Lee, and Sarah Parmelee, Wellesley College student assistants and interns.

