

The Impact of an Athletic Mentoring Program Using Strength and Conditioning on At-Risk High School Females

Caitie Mayo

Exercise Science, Gardner-Webb University

Abstract

Youth are determined as at-risk when they live in environments which negatively impact their lives or have not yet acquired the skills and values which help them become adults that can positively impact society (Lubans et al., 2011). There is a prevalence for these youth to become isolated, troublesome, and engaged in criminal activities. To help combat this statistic, positive youth development (PYD) programs have been created to connect youth with a mentor. Studies have been conducted which assess the effectiveness of positive youth development programs. However, these studies do not encourage PYD through strength and conditioning. Therefore, this study was designed to assess the impact of an athletic mentoring program using strength and conditioning on at-risk high school females. There were five tools used to assess this program: fidelity checklists, attendance logs, retrospective pre- and post-surveys, informal focus groups, and individual risk assessment (IRA) scores. At the end of the 9 weeks, these athletes were given retrospective pre- and post- surveys, IRA assessments, and an informal focus group.



Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of using strength and conditioning in an athletic mentoring program to positively impact at-risk female youth.

Methods

This research study was modeled after a mixed-methods study conducted by the Institute for Community Health (ICH) and Shining Light Ministries which assessed the Athletic Mentoring Program at Fitchburg High School (AMP@FHS). The purpose of AMP@FHS was to reduce youth and gang violence in Fitchburg, MA, through a nine-week athletic mentoring program. The target sample for this study was 8 at-risk high school females.

This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to strengthen trustworthiness. There were five tools used to assess this program: fidelity checklists, attendance logs, retrospective pre- and post-surveys, informal focus groups, and individual risk assessment (IRA) scores. This method is effective because it utilizes multiple avenues of data collection which establish triangulation. Through quantitative attendance logs, retrospective pre/post surveys, and individual risk assessment scores, numerical data was found. Through fidelity checklists and informal focus groups qualitative informational data was found. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of a strength and conditioning PYD program on at-risk female youth.

There were several limitations to this study. This study was also done with a convenient sample, as well as with a small sample size. Therefore, this study cannot provide sufficient data which reflects a large population. Further research should include a larger sample size with a more randomized sample. Also, future research may benefit from using a population that is not at-risk as a comparison to understand the full impact of this program on at-risk females.

Introduction

According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), **9,182,848** children aged 5-17 years old **are in poverty** in the United States. Children who are living in low-income environments are more **at-risk to struggle in academic performance, health, and mental stability** (Robbins et al., 2012).

These youth are responsible for overcoming many mental and physical obstacles, while carrying a high load of responsibility. One approach to serving youth in this population is the Positive Youth Development (PYD) Theory. **PYD programs are focused on developing emotional, social, and cognitive skills** through meaningful relationships with a mentor. This empowers the youth to be successful in any situation that they are faced with (Sanders et al., 2015).

Sports programs have been highly successful in fostering positive youth development, which is most beneficial for youth of low SES (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). As they are highly successful, there is a **need for increased numbers of physical activity PYD programs which target at-risk youth**.

With **females**, it is also particularly important to **build self-confidence** through **body image** (Bean et al., 2014). There is a need for more PYD programs which target at-risk females as many are created solely for males.

Review of Literature

Children affected by poverty and other risk factors are more likely to struggle with:

- normal cognitive and social development
- academic performance
- maintaining their health

11.4 million children are of low-income families, with over **4.7 million** children affected by at least 3 risk factors (households without English speakers, large family with four or more children, low parental education, residential mobility, single-parent, teen mother, or non-employed parent) (Robbins et al., 2012).

Key aspects of a PYD program include:

- strong mentor-mentee relationships
- emotional, social, and cognitive development
- focus on youths' strengths

This theory requires a **perspective shift** of at-risk youth being acknowledged as **problems that need to be fixed** to **resources that can be positively developed** in order to build sustainable and meaningful relationships (Sanders et al., 2015).

Sports mentoring programs impact:

- academic success
- psychological and emotional development
- health

Sports programs **increase quality of life** while increasing self-esteem and **decreasing stress levels** (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

With females, it is important to build:

- positive body image
- self-esteem
- motivation for physical activity

With females, it is also very important to build a **positive outlook** towards **physical activity** (Bean et al., 2014)

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to both Gardner-Webb University and Shining Light Ministries for their contribution to this project.

References

- Bean, C., N., Forneris, T., & Halsall, T. (2014). Girls just wanna have fun: a process evaluation of a female youth-driven physical activity-based life skills program. *Springerplus*, 3(401), 1-16. <https://springerplus.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/2193-1801-3-401>
- Fraser-Thomas, J., L., Cote, J., & Deakin, J. (2005). Youth sports programs: An avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 10(1), 19-22. <http://areas.fimh.utl.pt/~aroado/Repositorio/ficheiros/LONGTERM/Ref11.pdf>
- Lubans, D., R., Plotnikoff, R., C., & Lubans, N., J. (2012). Review: A systematic review of the impact of physical activity programmes on social and emotional well-being in at-risk youth. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 17, 2-13. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-3588.2011.00623.x>
- Robbins, T., Stagman, S., & Smith, S. (2012). Young children at risk: National and state prevalence of risk factors. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1073.pdf
- Sanders, J., Munford, R., Thimasarn-Anwar, T., Liebenberg, L., & Ungar, M. (2015). The role of positive youth development practices in building resilience and enhancing wellbeing for at-risk youth. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 42, 40-53. <https://www-science-direct-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/science/article/pii/S0145213415000514?via%3Dihub>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). SAIPE school district estimates for 2018. <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2018/demo/saipe/2018-school-districts.html>