Brazilian Teachers as Agents to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: An Intervention Assessment
Rachel de F. Brino and Lúcia C. A. Williams – Laboratory of Violence Analysis and Prevention, Department of Psychology, Universidade Federal de São Carlos, São Carlos, Brazil.

Overview

During the 1990s, there was a 39% decline in child sexual abuse cases (CSA) reported to child protective agencies in the United States (Jones, Finkelhor & Kopiec, 2001). Possibly, such data reflects that the investment in prevention programs during the 1980s and 1990s can effectively protect children from sexual abuse (Jones & Finkelhor, 2003).

According to Finkelhor’s model of sexual abuse, certain preconditions must be met before abuse can occur. The author’s model is useful in developing primary, secondary and tertiary prevention programs (Finkelhor, 1984). The present study developed an intervention program based on such a model. In addition to Finkelhor’s work, the program also draws on Benetti’s claims that the most effective prevention actions are educational interventions (Bennetti, 2002). These and other efforts suggest that mothers, if properly informed, can play an important role in protecting their children. Specifically, programs can train mothers in recognizing CSA symptoms, in evaluating risk situations and potential offenders, and in taking action when needed to protect their child. Children can be trained to recognize adult inappropriate behavior, act quickly, leave the situation and find help.

Brino and Williams (2003a; 2003b) have analysed child sexual abuse interventions from the point of view of secondary and tertiary prevention. The purpose of this paper is to apply these evaluation methods to an educational prevention program targeting early education teachers and their students. Specifically, the program seeks to equip early education teachers in instructing children in self-protective skills and to teach family members to recognize early signs of CSA, and adopt a number of safety measures.

Methods

The study enrolled 101 early-childhood educators (97 female and 4 male) from the public school system in the city of São Carlos, a mid size city in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. In addition to the teachers, 96 children ages 4-6 years and 101 family members of pre-school children also participated in the research.

The measures utilized in this study included the following:

- **Child Sexual Abuse Indicators** (Indicadores de Abuso Sexual – IAS) – (Flores et al., 2001). This instrument was developed in Brazil and includes 35 symptoms and signs which may be associated with CSA. IAS data were obtained from teachers at three different points in time – before the intervention with the teachers, after the sixth session and at the end of the full intervention. IAS data also were obtained from a sample of family members before and after the teachers presented the intervention.
- **Teachers Drill on Child Sexual Abuse Identification**. The drill consisted of a vignette in which a case of suspected CSA was presented, and teachers were instructed to write down how they would respond. Teacher responses were obtained both before and after the intervention for only those teachers assigned to Group 2, as described below.
- **Parental Drill on Child Sexual Abuse Identification**. The drill consisted of a vignette in which a case of suspected CSA was presented, and family members were instructed to write down how they would respond. Teachers colleted data from family members before and after providing them the intervention.
- **Drill on Self-Protective Skills Acquisition for Children**. The drill consisted of a vignette in which someone behaved inappropriately towards a child, and children were asked to tell the teachers what they would do under various circumstances (e.g., what to do in a situation that you don’t like, what to do when you are threatened, what to do when an adult asks you to keep a secret, and name one person who could help you). Teachers obtained data from the children before and after they provided them the intervention.

The University Ethic’s Committee approved the present study. Those teachers recruited for the study were divided into two groups (Group 1 = 52 teachers; Group 2 = 49 teachers), with each of the two groups further divided into three groups for purposes of obtaining the teacher training program. This program consisted of 12 weekly meetings, four hours each. Each session included lectures, group discussion, video presentations and role-play covering descriptive and theoretical aspects of CSA as outlined in the literature.
The intervention with family members consisted of workshops that were planned during the intervention with the teachers. As part of this intervention, family members had the opportunity to role-play various family activities with the first author. The intervention with the children was provided by the teachers during the school day and involved teaching students general protective measures (e.g., assertiveness, saying no) rather than specific information about CSA.

**Key Findings**

**Teachers:** The teachers’ IAS scores at the three data collection points are summarized below. Figure 1 presents the data for the three subgroups in Group 1 and Figure 2 presents the data for the three subgroups in Group 2. Total scores for the IAS can range from 23-115. As these figures indicate, the scores for both groups of teachers at all three points, including prior to the intervention, were at the high end of the scale.

*Figure 1: Teachers’ IAS Scores - Group 1*

*Figure 2: Teachers’ IAS Scores – Group 2*

Teachers’ performance in the Teacher Drill on Child Sexual Abuse Identification is summarized in Figure 3 below. As this figure indicates, the proportion of correct responses increased notably between the two data collection points.
Family Members: Family Members’ IAS scores are summarized in Figure 4 and their responses to the CAS vignettes are summarized in Figure 5. As with the teachers, family members generally scored at the high end of the IAS scale at both data collection points but provided a greater number of appropriate responses to the CAS vignettes only after receiving instruction.

Children: Children’s performance in the Drill on Self-Protective Skills Acquisition for Children is described in Figure 6 below. As this figure indicates, children in all groups demonstrated a sizable improvement in their response to these cases following the intervention.
Lessons Learned

Data analysis shows a significant increase in the IAS scores for teachers and family members following the intervention. There also was a significant increase in the percentage of appropriate answers and a decrease in the percentage of inappropriate answers from teachers, family members and children in response to the various vignettes after the intervention. In general, these results suggest that the intervention program has been successful. These types of educational methods may offer a promising strategy for reducing a child’s risk for CSA and for improving the response children at risk will receive from teachers and family members. These results are encouraging and the intervention has been well received by the educational system in Brazil.

For additional information: Those wishing additional information on the study’s methods or findings may contact Lucia Williams at lucawi@terra.com.br or refer to the following references.


The Lebanese Intersectoral Committee for Child Rights (LibanCAN)  
Bernard Gerbaka and Sana Awada, Higher Council for Childhood in Lebanon

Overview

Despite ongoing efforts by many organizations in Lebanon to address the problem of child abuse and neglect, children from different communities and diverse family settings continue to suffer maltreatment. Efforts to address the problem face a variety of social and professional barriers as well as a hectic social context in which sustainable democracy, safety and peace are continuously being sought but often not achieved.

Following the regional meeting of the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence Against Children in 2005, local professionals established the Lebanese Intersectoral Committee for Child Rights (LibanCAN). This brief reports on the efforts of this grassroots initiative to facilitate collaboration between health and educational professionals. The effort is based on the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) matrix that incorporates children’s rights, professional evidence, relevant social factors, and intersectoral responsibilities in a coordinated effort to prevent child abuse and neglect. The report illustrates how progress can made even within countries that lack a strong social service infrastructure and struggle with high levels of violence and unrest.