

Evaluation Findings from the HEARTS Program for Black/African American High School Youth in West Central Florida

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INTRODUCTION

- High school aged youth in Florida have higher rates of teen pregnancies (Arpaia et al., 2017), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US, 2018), and engage in riskier behavior (CDC, 2022) compared to national averages.
- Black/African American youth in Florida are at increased risk for poor outcomes related to sexual behavior given the negative impact of racism on health (Gale et al., 2020).
- Therefore, sexuality education programs targeting Black/African American teens are needed.

METHODS

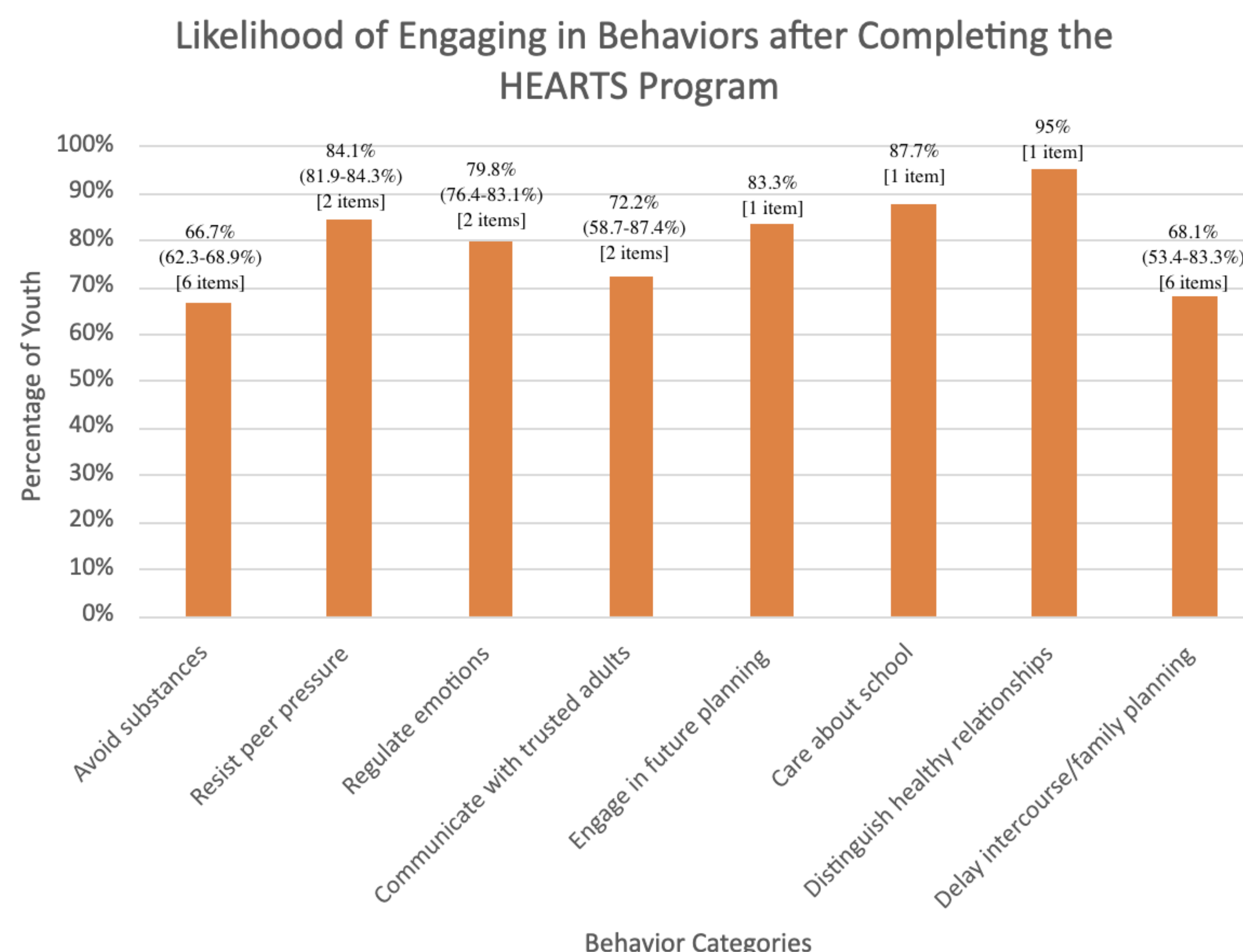
Participants

- Participants were 298 predominantly Black/African American high school aged youth who completed the HEARTS program in two counties in west central Florida in 2022.

Procedures

- The HEARTS program, which uses the evidence-based Love Notes curriculum (Barbee, 2022) was delivered “camp style” on two days to youth who were recruited from local faith-based institutions and community organizations in predominantly Black neighborhoods in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties.
- Youth voluntarily completed:
 - Entry and exit surveys assessing substance use, peer-pressure, emotional regulation, future planning, relationship dynamics, sexual behavior, and program satisfaction.
 - Satisfaction surveys at the end of the program.
- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze existing anonymous data from completed exit surveys.

Findings reveal satisfaction with, and potential benefits from, a community-based relationship education program targeting Black/African American high schoolers in west central Florida.



Note: For behavior categories with multiple items, the mean percentage is reported with the range of percentages across items in parentheses.

RESULTS

- Among the 298 high school aged youth who completed the HEARTS program, 182 (61%) completed exit surveys and were predominantly Black/African American (n=126; 69.2%) females (n=93; 52%) ranging in age from 15 to 19 (M= 15.67, SD=1.2).
- After completing the HEARTS program, youth reported they were more likely to (see Figure):
 - avoid substances (62.3-68.9%)
 - resist peer pressure (81.9-84.3%)
 - regulate emotions (76.4-83.1%)
 - communicate with parents/trusted adults (58.7-87.4%)
 - engage in future planning (83.3%)
 - care about school (87.7%)
 - distinguish healthy from unhealthy relationships (95%)
 - delay sexual intercourse/family planning (53.4-83.3%)
- Among the 68% of youth who planned to delay sexual intercourse after participating in HEARTS, the following were cited as important factors:
 - impact on future (87.9%)
 - emotional/social consequences (85.2%)
 - STI risk (97.2%)
 - pregnancy risk (93.7%)
- Youth rated the program as interesting (73.1%) and clear (83.8%), noting that:
 - discussions and activities facilitated learning (86.7%)
 - they were able to ask questions (76%)
 - they felt respected (90.5%)
- Findings also revealed high levels of satisfaction and a strong likelihood of recommending the HEARTS program to others (97.4%).

CONCLUSIONS

- Findings suggest Black/African American high schoolers may exhibit fewer risk behaviors and more prosocial behaviors after completing the HEARTS program.
- However, use of existing program evaluation data limits results.
- Future research using experimental designs are needed to further assess the impact of the HEARTS program on health outcomes for Black/African American teens.

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