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“Options” for youth in NYC

An NYPD Program for High School-Aged Youth

Agency: New York City Police Department

Project Duration: December 2021

Pracademics*:
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Context

The intent of Options is to encourage local youth to learn practical skills that will help them navigate the challenges of growing up in a modern urban environment. This pilot assesses participant change in knowledge and attitude, using surveys before and after participation in the Wellness component of Options.

Key Finding

Participating in the Options Wellness program is associated with significant increases in self-reported knowledge of what wellness means and how to find the local police station.

*BetaGov provides ongoing training to agency personnel to become research-savvy “Pracademics” who can lead trials.

Background

Options, an NYPD program supported by the NYC Police Foundation, offers youth the fundamental skills they need to thrive in a modern city. The Wellness component of the Options program provides an opportunity for youth to engage in a two-session life-skills course addressing mindfulness and wellness along several dimensions: emotional, social, cognitive, physical, and financial.

Design

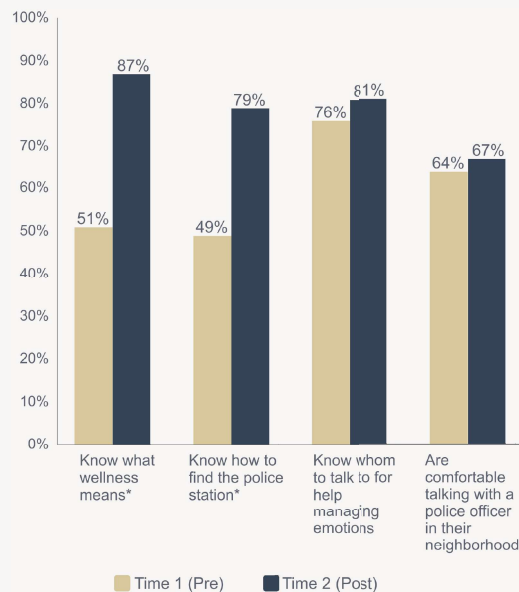
Youths in New York City were invited to apply, using social media and in-person recruitment methods. Eligibility requirements included being age 14–19, residence in participating areas, a sincere desire to participate, having access to necessary technology, and parental approval. Sessions were held December 1 and 8, with written surveys administered at the start of the first session (Time 1) and at the end of the second session (Time 2). The surveys included five equivalent items, allowing for comparison of responses across the two time periods. No names or other identifying information or demographic characteristics were collected, to ensure respondent anonymity and data confidentiality.

Lessons Learned

Surveys were received from 63 youths at Time 1 and 52 at Time 2 (83% of participants completed both sessions). There was a statistically significant increase in knowledge of what wellness means and how to find the local police station. More youths report feeling comfortable talking to a neighborhood police officer and in knowing whom to talk to for help managing emotions, but these differences were not statistically significant. Only 30% of the participants reported ever having taken a class on health and wellness prior to participating in the Options program, suggesting that for many, the program has provided a

first opportunity to be introduced to important issues.

Percent of Youth Who Reported That They:



*denotes statistical significance (p<0.01)

Next Steps

Assessing the benefits of a program through self-report is predicated on a valid and reliable instrument. This small pilot demonstrated the feasibility of administering a self-report survey instrument with participating youths, especially given the high rates of retention. In subsequent assessments, survey items should be expanded to include direct measures of changes in knowledge and more-nuanced measures of attitudes.

Why BetaGov Spark?

Sometimes a rigorous trial of an innovative idea just isn't possible, but with a Spark project a practitioner can learn important information about the idea, the agency, and the sample. What's more, a positive signal may inform a future randomized controlled trial and more definitive results. Spark projects meet Pracademics where they are comfortable—giving them the opportunity to learn about research and apply that learning to internal research projects.