

The Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, Act Sexual Assault Resistance education program

Charlene Y. Senn, PhD
Psychology / Women's Studies

June 23, 2011

Provincial Initiative on Sexual
Violence Public Forum

thinking forward

Acknowledgements



- Graduate and undergraduate research assistants and work study students:

Stephanie Gee, Kristin Saunders, Carrie Hojnoski, Jennifer Thake, Sobia Ali, Jessica Portelli, Melissa St. Pierre, Joanna Kraft, Arug Khurshid, Holly Sweet, Laura Cayen, Ashley Hilliard-Anderson, Sheryl Walker, Chantal Thorn, Surbhi Bhanot, Ritu Kaushal, Natasha Gidak, Amal Mohamed

- The many women who participated in versions of the program and told me honestly what they thought

- **Sexual assault prevention** can only be accomplished:
 - By society (men and women together) changing norms and values that support sexual assault
 - By men stopping their coercive behaviour
- **Sexual assault resistance education** is designed for women to increase their emotional, intellectual, and physical resistance to coercive sexual behaviour.

Positioning Our Program

- Norris & Nurius' (1996) Cognitive Ecological Model explaining stages in women's process as they confront an acquaintance sexual assault situation.
- Rozee & Koss (2000) proposed a theoretically and empirically driven model (AAA: Assess, Acknowledge, Act) on which to base rape resistance education for women and rape prevention for men.
- Best practices and knowledge from other feminist activists and researchers (e.g., Breitenbecher; Ullman)

“Risk reduction” Versus “Rape resistance”

- Almost all U.S. programs for women are now being called “risk reduction” programs. We differ.
- Ours has coverage of “risk cues” and environmental “risk factors” in common with these programs.
- However, stress in ours is that risk is embodied in the coercive man/men – when he/they is/are not present, risk is gone.
- Calling the program “sexual assault resistance” makes it clear what and who are being resisted.

Basic AAA Program (9 hours)

- The goal of the program is to decrease the likelihood that women will experience completed sexual assault when they come in contact with coercive men by:
 - Decreasing the time needed for women to assess the situation as dangerous and take action
 - Reducing emotional obstacles to taking the action necessary to fend off the attack
 - Providing necessary verbal and self-defense knowledge and skills

ASSESS

Women and girls need familiarity with danger cues in situations and in men's behaviour. This is not necessarily common sense.

The party is really loud, do you want to go upstairs?

Sure, we can go to my room.

I am a biology major

Good, you will know how everything works!

The cues we teach have been identified by research on attempted/completed sexual assault. When these cues are present, risk of sexual coercion/assault is increased.

ACKNOWLEDGE

- Women and girls need to overcome socialization and emotional barriers to be able to acknowledge risk cues when they are present



ACT



- Women and girls need physical and emotional preparation and skills to defend sexual and physical rights
- Debunk beliefs/myths that impair women's ability to defend themselves
 - Women who fight back are more likely to be injured or killed - FALSE
 - Women's attempts at self-defense are likely to be ineffective - FALSE

Enhanced AAA Program (12 hrs)

- Adaptation with permission of units from *Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education* program (for Adults: Kimball, 2000; for grades 10-12: Goldfarb & Casparian, 2000)
 - “Sharing slang”
 - “Myths and facts about sex and masturbation”
 - “Having Sex”
 - “With whom would you do it?”
 - Sexual communication role plays
 - Negotiating condom/dental dam use with a sexual partner
 - Communication Role Play (negotiating sex you want)
 - “What makes a good relationship?”

Studies So Far

- Numerous pilot studies answering questions related to recruitment issues, incentives, and measures (total ns=441)
- Quasi-experiment (n=107): Funder CIHR Senn, Saunders, & Gee (2008)
 - original version of AAA program compared to non-random control (follow-up 1 week and unplanned 3 month).
 - Focus groups and interviews. (rolling revisions)
- Experiment (n=214): Funder OWHC Senn, Gee, & Thake (2011)
 - revised version of AAA program against Sexuality enhanced version and no-program control (follow-up to 6 months)
 - Interviews
- Extension to high schools (n=59) (pre- to post- with week follow-up). Focus groups. Plus n=40 focus groups to revise scenarios further.
- Refinement study using clicker technology to identify sections of program requiring revision (n=32)

BRIEF SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The AAA Program Is Effective

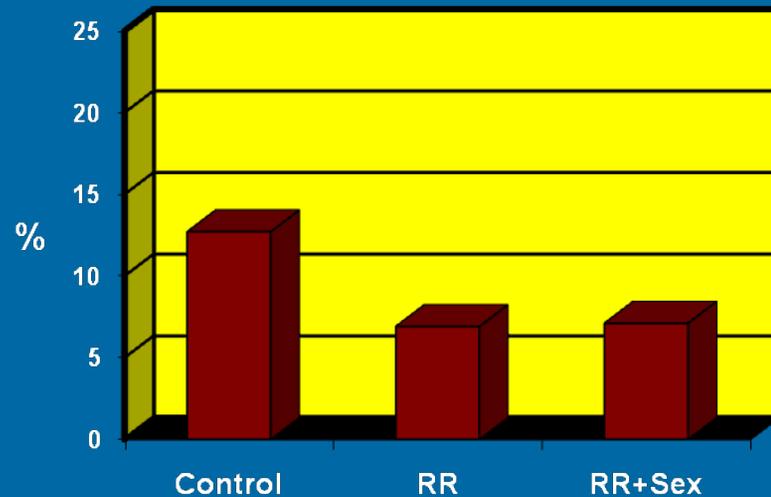
- Compared to women who did not take the program, women who did:
 - Hold fewer rape myths and believe less in female provocation or males' uncontrollable sexuality as causes of rape;
 - Perceive (more accurately) that they are at some risk of acquaintance sexual assault;
 - Express greater confidence that they could defend themselves against a sexual attack by a stranger or acquaintance and;
 - Know (say they would use) more effective methods of self-defense against a man (they know) who tried to sexually coerce or assault them.

The Enhanced Sexuality Unit Expands These Effects

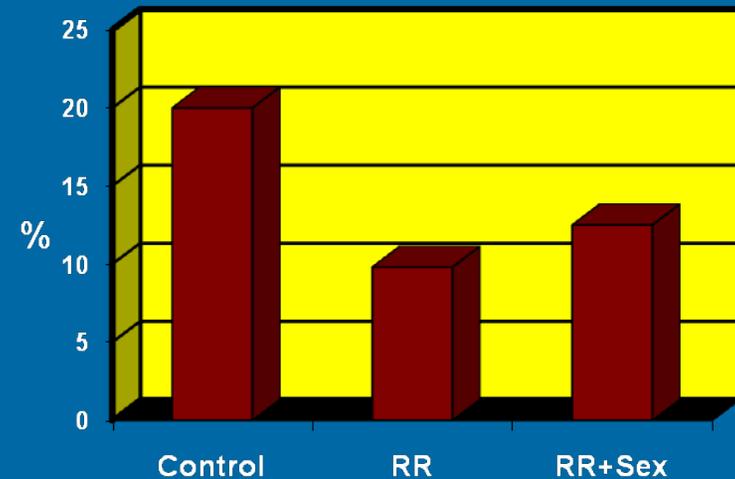
- To include:
 - Faster detection of risk (e.g., earlier discomfort) in both stranger and acquaintance situations
 - Increased confidence that they could initiate sexual activities they want
 - Some enhanced effects for verbal strategies for self-defense (e.g., yelling)

The Effect That Really Counts: Completed Sexual Assaults

- Approximately 50% reduction in follow-up period



3 Month follow-up



6 Month cumulative follow-up

Another Effect That Really Counts: Resistance

“Since you last completed the survey, have you had a dating situation where you believe you avoided sexual coercion by your actions?”

- Sexual Assault Resistance program produces an effect
 - In 6 month cumulative follow-up period:
 - Control 7.4%
 - Program 21.6%

Next 5 Years

- Conducting a randomized controlled trial study on three university campuses (Windsor, Guelph, Calgary – planned N = 1716) testing the Enhanced AAA program against a Brochure intervention



QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?