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The Violence Intervention and Prevention Team (VIP): Results of an Action Research Evaluation

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What Is the Purpose of this Study?

- To assess the impact of a school-based gang membership and violence prevention program on outcomes of interest for students enrolled during the 2007–2008 school year, and to explore qualitatively program effects.

What Is the Problem?

- It is estimated that there are approximately 788,000 gang members in the United States. Of these, approximately 37% are estimated to be younger than 18 years old.
- Between 2001 and 2006, the percent of small cities in the United States with active youth gangs increased from 22.3% to 32.5%.
- Little research exists that describes the outcomes of school-based gang membership and violence prevention programs. The literature about school-based violence prevention programming in general includes few studies where the majority of student participants were non-white.

What Are the Findings?

- Participation in the Haverhill, Massachusetts–based Violence Intervention Program (VIP) was associated with a slight reduction in school absenteeism and an increase in employment readiness.
- VIP members expressed strong, positive feelings about the program. According to their reports, VIP fosters increased self-esteem, leadership skills, social connectedness, conflict resolution skills, and academic achievement.
- The program may need to focus more explicitly on particular violence-related attitudes and skills to produce additional behavior changes (i.e., reduced weapon carrying, reduced physical fighting) among participants.

Who Should Care Most?

- School-based wellness and violence prevention programs.
- City and town coalitions that organize to prevent violence.
- Legislators and other decision makers who need evidence regarding innovative school-based gang membership and violence prevention programming.

Recommendations for Action

- Continue to strengthen the VIP team program to produce behavior change, as well as knowledge and attitude change.
- Identify ways to facilitate data collection to improve the accuracy of the evaluation.
- Share information with other violence prevention practitioners who may have experiences with youth-directed programs.
- Provide funding for implementation and evaluation of innovative school-based gang violence prevention programs.