Connections:
Families and Schools
Supporting Our Youth

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The Connections program is a school-based, family focused intervention developed for low-income, ethnic minority and immigrant children living in South Florida. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the Connections program could enhance the family and school support available to these children, and in this way, bolster their quality of life.
It is expected that the Connections program will produce significant, meaningful changes in the targeted protective factors, and in turn, children will exhibit improvements in their academic and mental health outcomes.
Participants

56 families participated in pre-test interviews, and attendance in the program varied by family (as will be discussed).

Due to the focus on program evaluation results, this presentation focuses on the 29 families for whom we have complete data from both pre- and post-intervention interviews.

29 mothers or mother figures
32 children

Children were 3rd to 5th graders in our four partner schools. They ranged from 6 to 12 years old ($M = 9.45, SD = 1.35$).

66% of participating children were boys.
Participants

Parent Ethnicity

- Haitian (52%)
- Latino (24%)
- African American (14%)
- ESC (10%)
Results

Participation & Attendance—Year 1

- Active Participants: 47%
- Brief Participants: 20%
- Participated in One Session: 10%
- Pre-Test Assessment Only: 23%
Participation & Attendance—Year 2

- Active Participants: 45%
- Partial Participants: 25%
- Brief Participants: 15%
- One Session Only: 10%
- Pre Test Assessment Only: 5%
FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

• Mothers reported
  • being more consistent in their discipline
  • less harsh parenting (less yelling, name-calling, threatening to spank, threatening to send child away or kick them out of the house)

• Children reported
  • feeling more accepted by their mothers
  • less harsh parenting by mothers (less yelling and name-calling)
Results

YOUTH COPING SKILLS AND SUPPORT SEEKING

Children reported

- increased use of emotion-focused coping skills (thinking positively, using distraction and religious coping)

- no increased use of problem-focused coping

- increase in seeking support from their parents, but not other adults, siblings or peers

- increase in asking for help with problem-solving, but not help with feelings
CHILD MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

According to mothers, children exhibited

• decreases in internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints)

• decreases in externalizing symptoms (e.g., rule breaking and aggressive behavior)
PARENT SATISFACTION WITH INTERVENTION:
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

Parents indicated that:

• the parenting strategies were very helpful to them.

• they learned a lot and their parenting improved.

• they felt Connections would be helpful to other parents from their culture or community.
Future Directions: Analyses

- Families from different ethnic backgrounds responded differently to the intervention. Future analyses will try to understand why this might be the case (e.g., cultural beliefs, exposure to stressors, acculturation levels, etc.).

- Fathers (n = 8) responded differently to the intervention than mothers. Future analyses, involving statistical techniques appropriate for small sample research, will document results for fathers.

- Future analyses will also examine what factors might impact who benefits from the intervention (e.g., exposure to stress, availability of social support, symptom severity before the intervention, acculturation).

- Year 3: We are proposing to interview teachers, parents, and religious leaders to better understand the family lives of immigrant families.
Future Directions: Program

- To identify sources of grant funding to conduct a wider scale evaluation of the program

- To identify community partners that might be interested in implementing such services in their work with low-income, immigrant families from Latin America, Haiti, and the English Speaking Caribbean

- To write papers (e.g., using interviews with families at pre-test) to address the risk and protective factors that might impact low-income Latino and Haitian children; share proven intervention strategies that school counselors can implement in diverse schools).

- To provide additional training to professionals and NSU students on culturally competent, evidence-based interventions for ethnically diverse families in South Florida
Thank you for your generous support of the Connections project!

Questions?